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THE CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVEL: 'WIFE'

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Introduction: Work of Indian women writers is a great contribution in Indian English fiction. The women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee a significant roles to play on the stage of literature, Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American novelist. Her fictions are 'The Tiger Daughter' (1972), 'Wife' (1975), 'Jasmine' (1989), 'The Holder of the World' (1993), 'Leave it to Me' (1997), and 'Desirable Daughters' (2002). All this work has given popularity to Bharati Mukherjee not only in India but also abroad. In 'Wife' she tries to show how woman becomes the victim of cross-cultural experience. Bharati Mukherjee attempts to evaporate how woman is compelled to tackle marginalization with her home. She deals with Dimple's life from girlhood to wifehood. After marriage she has to move from Calcutta to New York i.e. From familiar atmosphere to the unfamiliar land. Her nature of obedience from the childhood indicates respect to the social norms. She happily has accepted the house of the husband which is decided by her father and has to play an ideal role of a wife thereafter. Her transformation is from traditional Indian life to modern Western life. Dimple is under the impression that marriage would bring her love. (1990:4) Dimple belongs to the upper-middle class family. She is busy in preparation for the great event and her father is in search of the 'ideal boy' (1990:10). Dimple is not smart but a figureless girl. Dimple knows the very fact that appearance may decide her fate and future life. Thus she is worried and takes care of it. She makes use of external appliances like chicken soup, homeopathic pills, exercise and massages. But they do not bring any

change in her appearance. Her efforts are futile. In Indian society two things are mainly focused on for marriage. They are beauty and education. She worries about delay of the examination because it affects her life. In order to get a decent and well-educated husband the girl must be at least graduate. She is under the tension to know that 'the handsome young engineers would be married by the time she got her degree. (1975:10) In India, by tradition choice of bride-groom depends mainly on parents. Her father's choice is Amit Basu who is an engineer. He is coming to Canada and USA for settling in the life. Mrs Basu and Mrs. Ghose know that marriage between Amit and Dimple would be a right match. But she is not their first choice. Mrs. Basu has objections regarding her name because she does not feel it as 'Bengoli. (1975:15) Hence, Dimple has been renamed as Nandini in her father-in-laws family. The status of woman in Indian family changes when a woman remains pregnant. Basu thinks that the baby in Dimple's womb is the heir of the family and communal property. So they are earnestly anxious about her health. The members of Basu's family are of the view that Dimple is the source of their next generation i. e. the lamp of the heir. In order to keep her healthy and sound they tell her "Do not carry heavy pails of water to the bathroom or kitchen; do not trip on dark staircase" (1975:34). It shows that they do not want to treat her as daughter in law but their own daughter. They try to see their own daughter in the character of Dimple. But Dimple and member of her father in law's house are very unfortunate who cannot enjoy pleasure of the coming generation. While leaving for America she suffers from miscarriage due to skipping rope. Dimple says it is not like murder 'I could never commit murder' (1975:35). In Dimple's change in married life and changed life in the United States the writer wants to suggest dilemma of the Indian woman whose role and behavior are decided by the culture. Now Dimple's self is directed by male ideals and thoughts. Dimple has to go through the experience of her own and new cultures. 'The self contained domestic world of Indians and Americanized Indians in Manhattan". (1975:60-61) There are Indian women in America. The experience which Dimple has enjoyed with them leave effect on her mind. It has made Dimple unfriendly with them. They are imbued with Hindu tradition and

culture. Their attitude is based on social purposes. In the beginning Dimple tries to be acquainted with their views. She has taken into consideration their attitudes and views on the basis of gender. Dimple does all this because she has been unknown to the American society. She has to defend social codes and emigrant placement. The novelist, Bharati Mukherjee presented Dimple to show she feel differentiated on the experiences with other women in America. The liberated wife, Ina Mullick is more American than Americans (1975:68). She is felt fear mingled with respect by her sophistication and command over English when Ina offers her a mild gin. Dimple is caught in the thought conflict and says, 'if she took a drink she knew Amit would write it to his mother and his mother would call the Das Guptas and accuse them of raising an immoral and drunken daughter'. (1975:78) Brinda Bose tells her the difference between an Indian and Western women. In the traditional time Indians looked at the women community as the goddesses but women in the Indian families are given inferior status as compare to men beings. Many feel that it is the only way to keep them happy. In contrast to this situation Western people believe that women would be educated and must be allowed to work with men. Dimple very soon understands that everything is possible in America. In India Amit is the boss. She cannot do anything without his permission and in New York she does not need to trust Amit. Like Ina she begins to expect new life in the free land. She feels Amit is the impediment in her new life style. Amit tells her to go out of the four walls to make friends instead of staying at home and thinking about life in Calcutta. But at the same time he imposes up on Dimple his traditional Indian thoughts. Her husband, Amit desires Dimple to cease thinking about the home town. But he does not want Dimple to behave like Mrs Mullick. It indicates that Amit is a source of creating confusion in Dimple's mind. She is caught in the whirlwind of what to do? and what to speak? Dimple finds it very difficult to establish relationship between experiences she has been going through and language which is used for expressions at various stages. So she is unable to bridge a big distance of cultural and linguistic approach. Being born and brought up in traditional bound society Dimple has interaction with American people from the angles of her traditional

perspectives. She cannot create space for her in the foreign culture which is not familiar to her. The change in her life from traditional culture to the modern is responsible for her transformations. Even the dress she wants to put on in the different situations reflects her attitude. The simple and usual experiences in Dimple's life lead her to think more and more. The use of American white sweater and pant by the women is usual dress from Ina's life style. The woman like Dimple who wishes to wear sari feel comfortable and normal; which stands for the traditional dress. The variety of T.V. programmes have significant place in the American life. Because of T.V. programmes she begins to lose ability to relate what she visualizes on the television and what she thinks. All these things are the obstacles to her in the task of expanding her identity and confirm her experiences. Being cut off from her own traditional life she is afraid of to expose to danger and to speak boldly. She has no confidence about meeting people. Love of life is a day time show and the life of women is shown very complicated on television in the programmes. They conceive frequently. Due to suspicious mind the husbands kill them. The complaints are lodged against them but they are released. Dimple has no more option except spending most of the life time in isolation, away from the world outside and television. Learning lot about American home from different T.V. programmes Dimple has also become very friendly to the T.V. set. Because of Television she "learned the details of American home life". (1975:73) Violating all morals and codes of Indian womanhood Dimple starts taking interest in going out with Ina and Milt and enjoy freedom. Her mind strongly desires to settle with America. To find her identity in America Dimple develops immoral relationships with Milt Glasser. Consequently, she loses sleep and her mental peace and happiness disappears forever. She begins to extend distance from her husband, Amit. She starts thinking about killing her husband. Dimple has stabbed Amit seventeen times and kills him. The act of Dimple shows that she wants to make her free from the marriage bondage.

Conclusion: The character of Dimple has been presented in the cross-cultural situations by the novelist Bharati Mukheerji. Dimple's sinful acts and violent behavior do not allow

her mental peace. She has been portrayed as an unhappy and unsatisfied woman from the beginning till the end of the novel. Her inability of right way of communication with Arjun Basu is the cause of her tragic life.

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