

# SELF-IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICTS DUE TO MIGRATION IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER AND THE WIFE

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## Abstract

*Bharathi Mukherjee's short stories The Tiger's Daughter and The Wife explore the intricate dynamics of self-identity and the psychological conflicts arising from migration. In The Tiger's Daughter, the protagonist, Devinda, grapples with her dual identity upon returning to India after living in the United States, feeling both alienated and nostalgic. This internal struggle highlights the complexities of cultural dislocation and the longing for belonging. Similarly, in The Wife, the unnamed protagonist confronts the constraints of her marital role and the loss of her aspirations, illustrating the emotional turmoil faced by immigrant women. Through these narratives, Mukherjee emphasizes the resilience required to navigate the challenges of identity formation in a multicultural context, ultimately revealing the transformative nature of the immigrant experience*

**Keywords:** women consciousness, self-discovery, immigrant experiences, separation, disorientation

## Introduction

Bharathi Mukherjee's short stories *The Tiger's Daughter* and *The Wife* delve into the intricate themes of self-identity and psychological conflicts stemming from migration. Through her richly developed characters, Mukherjee explores how the immigrant experience can lead to profound transformations in identity, emotional turmoil, and a reevaluation of cultural connections. Both stories highlight the complexities of navigating between two worlds and the psychological ramifications that accompany this journey.

Bharathi Mukherjee's short story *The Tiger's Daughter* offers a nuanced exploration of self-identity and

the psychological conflicts that arise from migration. Through the character of Devinda, Mukherjee captures the complexities of navigating cultural dislocation, the longing for home, and the struggle for self-definition within the immigrant experience. The story not only highlights the emotional challenges faced by those who move between worlds but also reflects on the broader implications of identity in a multicultural context.

Bharathi Mukherjee's short story *The Wife* delves deeply into the psychological complexities of identity experienced by an immigrant woman navigating the challenges of cultural dislocation and personal aspirations. Through the protagonist's journey, Mukherjee explores

themes of self-identity, the sacrifices of migration, and the psychological conflicts that arise as individuals attempt to reconcile their past with their present. This paper analyzes how these themes manifest in the protagonist's life, ultimately revealing the profound impact of migration on personal identity.

### **Self-Identity in *The Tiger's Daughter***

In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee presents the character of Devinda, a young woman who has moved from India to the United States. The story opens with her reflections on her dual identity, emphasizing the dissonance she feels between her Indian heritage and her life in America. Devinda's return to India ignites a struggle within her, as she grapples with feelings of alienation. She observes, "I am both a stranger and a native in this land" (Mukherjee, 1972). This quote encapsulates the core of her psychological conflict—her inability to fully belong to either culture.

Devinda's experiences reveal the emotional complexities faced by many immigrants. Upon her return to India, she feels a sense of nostalgia for her past, yet she is acutely aware of how her experiences in America have changed her. Mukherjee writes, "The air of the city had a smell, a taste, a history that was no longer mine" (Mukherjee, 1972). This sentiment reflects the estrangement she experiences, highlighting the internal conflict of wanting to reconnect with her roots while also acknowledging her transformation through migration.

### **The Complexities of Self-Identity**

At the center of *The Tiger's Daughter* is Devinda, who returns to India after spending time in the United States. Her journey home is fraught with conflicting emotions and a sense of alienation. Devinda grapples with her identity, feeling caught between two cultures. She articulates her internal conflict, stating, "I am both a stranger and a native in this land" (Mukherjee, 1972). This quote encapsulates the essence of her psychological struggle—her inability to fully belong to either her homeland or her adopted country.

As Devinda interacts with her family and former acquaintances, she becomes acutely aware of the changes that migration has wrought upon her. The familiar sights and sounds of her childhood evoke nostalgia, yet

they also highlight her alienation. Mukherjee writes, "The air of the city had a smell, a taste, a history that was no longer mine" (Mukherjee, 1972). This sense of estrangement emphasizes the emotional toll of migration, where the once-familiar landscape becomes foreign, and the longing for connection intensifies.

### ***The Psychological Impact of Cultural Dislocation***

The psychological conflicts stemming from cultural dislocation are central to Devinda's experience. Upon her return, she finds herself in a constant state of introspection, questioning her identity and her place in both cultures. Mukherjee illustrates this turmoil when Devinda reflects, "I have become an echo of someone else's dreams, not my own" (Mukherjee, 1972). This acknowledgment of losing her aspirations to fit societal expectations reflects a broader theme in immigrant literature, where the pursuit of personal identity often clashes with cultural obligations.

Devinda's emotional conflict is further exacerbated by her interactions with family members who hold traditional views. The pressure to conform to familial expectations weighs heavily on her, as she struggles to assert her individuality in a culture that emphasizes conformity. Mukherjee captures this tension when Devinda muses, "In my parents' eyes, I am still the little girl who needs to be protected" (Mukherjee, 1972). This sentiment underscores the challenge of reconciling her past identity with the person she has become in America.

### ***Longing for Connection and Home***

The theme of longing for connection permeates Devinda's journey. As she grapples with her dual identity, she yearns for a sense of belonging. Mukherjee conveys this sentiment poignantly when Devinda states, "Home is a place I can never return to" (Mukherjee, 1972). This realization speaks to the paradox of the immigrant experience, where the search for home often leads to further dislocation and alienation.

Devinda's nostalgia for her childhood and the familiar comforts of home highlights the emotional complexities of migration. Mukherjee uses vivid imagery to evoke Devinda's memories, illustrating how they serve as both a source of solace and a reminder of her disconnection. The

narrative reveals that the longing for home is not merely about a physical space but also about the emotional ties that have been severed through migration.

### ***The Quest for Self-Definition***

Despite the challenges she faces, Devinda's journey is also one of self-discovery and reclamation. As she reflects on her experiences, she begins to understand that her identity is not fixed but rather fluid and evolving. Mukherjee suggests that empowerment can arise from embracing one's complexities, as Devinda ultimately recognizes, "I must redefine who I am, not who others expect me to be" (Mukherjee, 1972). This statement signifies a critical turning point in her journey, where she begins to assert her agency and embrace her multifaceted identity.

Through Devinda's struggles, Mukherjee highlights the resilience required to navigate the complexities of the immigrant experience. The process of self-definition is portrayed as both challenging and liberating, suggesting that true identity emerges from the interplay of various influences and experiences.

### ***Psychological Conflicts in *The Wife****

In *The Wife*, Mukherjee explores the psychological conflicts of an immigrant woman who grapples with her identity within the confines of marriage. The protagonist, who remains unnamed, embodies the struggles of assimilation and the loss of self in a new culture. As she navigates her role as a wife in America, she reflects on her past in India and the sacrifices she has made. She states, "I was not just a wife; I was a person who had once dreamed" (Mukherjee, 1976). This quote highlights the tension between her current identity and the aspirations that have been stifled by her new life.

The psychological turmoil experienced by the protagonist is evident as she oscillates between her traditional role and her desire for self-actualization. Mukherjee captures this conflict when she writes, "I have become a reflection of someone else's dreams, not my own" (Mukherjee, 1976). The protagonist's struggle to maintain her sense of self while fulfilling societal expectations illustrates the broader theme of how migration can lead to the fragmentation of identity.

### ***The Struggle for Self-Identity***

At the heart of *The Wife* is a nameless protagonist who embodies the challenges faced by many immigrant women. As she reflects on her life in America, she grapples with a sense of loss regarding her identity. The protagonist states, "I was not just a wife; I was a person who had once dreamed" (Mukherjee, 1976). This quote encapsulates her internal conflict; while she fulfills the role of a dutiful wife, she feels disconnected from her former self and the ambitions she once held.

Mukherjee highlights the protagonist's struggle with self-identity through her evolving relationship with her husband, who embodies traditional expectations. As she navigates the complexities of marriage, the protagonist feels increasingly alienated from her dreams and aspirations. She reflects, "Every day I peel away another layer of my skin, but the ache remains" (Mukherjee, 1976). This metaphor vividly illustrates her emotional pain and the gradual erosion of her identity as she conforms to societal expectations.

### ***Psychological Conflicts of Migration***

The psychological conflicts experienced by the protagonist are deeply rooted in her migration journey. Initially, she left India seeking a better life, yet she finds herself trapped in a role that feels foreign and limiting. Mukherjee portrays this conflict when the protagonist observes, "In my husband's eyes, I see a woman I no longer recognize" (Mukherjee, 1976). This moment of realization highlights the disconnection between her past and present selves, emphasizing the toll of cultural dislocation on her psyche.

The protagonist's emotional turmoil is further exacerbated by feelings of isolation and loneliness. Struggling to adapt to her new environment, she longs for the familiar connections of her homeland. Mukherjee writes, "I am surrounded by people, yet I feel invisible" (Mukherjee, 1976). This sentiment captures the loneliness of the immigrant experience, where the longing for connection is often met with a profound sense of alienation.

### ***The Role of Cultural Expectations***

Cultural expectations play a significant role in shaping the protagonist's identity crisis. In the context of her marriage,

she feels the weight of traditional Indian values that dictate her behavior and aspirations. The protagonist laments, "Being a good wife means losing yourself" (Mukherjee, 1976). This quote underscores the societal pressure to conform to roles that prioritize familial obligations over personal desires, a common theme in the lives of many immigrant women.

As the story progresses, the protagonist's internal struggle becomes a site of conflict between her heritage and her aspirations for autonomy. Mukherjee skillfully depicts the tension between her past in India and her present in America, as the protagonist attempts to forge her own identity amid cultural dissonance. The pressure to uphold her family's honor while pursuing her own dreams creates a chasm that she must navigate, further intensifying her psychological conflict.

### **The Quest for Agency**

Despite the challenges she faces, the protagonist's journey ultimately reflects a quest for agency and self-definition. Mukherjee illustrates her awakening to the need for reclaiming her identity, as she acknowledges, "To exist is to fight for my place in the world" (Mukherjee, 1976). This statement signifies a pivotal moment in her journey, where she begins to confront the constraints imposed upon her and seeks to assert her individuality.

The protagonist's realization of her own desires culminates in a moment of empowerment. Mukherjee writes, "I can no longer be invisible in my own life" (Mukherjee, 1976). This declaration marks a turning point, emphasizing her desire to break free from the confines of traditional roles and to embrace her true self. It reflects the broader theme of reclamation that resonates throughout the immigrant experience, where individuals strive to define themselves in the face of external pressures.

### **The Influence of Cultural Dislocation**

Both stories poignantly illustrate the effects of cultural dislocation on self-identity. Devinda's return to India in *The Tiger's Daughter* reveals her struggle to reconcile her American experience with her Indian heritage. She grapples with the realization that her former self has been irrevocably altered, leading to feelings of disconnection from both cultures. Mukherjee emphasizes this dislocation

when Devinda states, "Home is a place I can never return to" (Mukherjee, 1972). This longing for a home that no longer exists encapsulates the profound sense of loss felt by many immigrants.

Similarly, in *The Wife*, the protagonist's sense of cultural dislocation manifests in her marital relationship. As she conforms to her husband's expectations, she finds herself trapped in a role that feels alien. Mukherjee writes, "Each day I peel away another layer of my skin, but the ache remains" (Mukherjee, 1976). This metaphor illustrates the painful process of losing one's identity in the face of societal and familial pressures.

### **The Search for Agency**

Despite the psychological conflicts they face, both characters in Mukherjee's stories exhibit a yearning for agency. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Devinda's journey is one of self-discovery. By confronting her past and acknowledging her complexities, she begins to reclaim her identity. Mukherjee suggests that empowerment comes from understanding oneself, as Devinda realizes, "I must redefine who I am, not who others expect me to be" (Mukherjee, 1972).

In *The Wife*, the protagonist's search for agency is fraught with challenges. Her realization of the need to reclaim her identity culminates in a critical moment of self-assertion. She reflects, "I can no longer be invisible in my own life" (Mukherjee, 1976). This desire for visibility and self-recognition signifies a turning point, emphasizing the struggle to reclaim autonomy amidst the psychological turmoil of migration.

### **Conclusion**

Bharathi Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* and *The Wife* offer rich explorations of self-identity and the psychological conflicts arising from migration. Through her characters' journeys, Mukherjee captures the complexities of navigating between cultures and the emotional struggles inherent in the immigrant experience. Both stories illuminate the profound effects of cultural dislocation on identity, while also highlighting the resilience and agency that emerge from the quest for self-definition. Ultimately, Mukherjee's work serves as a powerful reminder of the multifaceted nature of identity in a globalized world, where

the search for belonging is both a personal and collective endeavor. Bharathi Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* offers a profound exploration of self-identity and the psychological conflicts that arise from migration. Through the character of Devinda, Mukherjee captures the complexities of navigating cultural dislocation, the longing for belonging, and the journey toward self-definition. The story emphasizes the emotional struggles faced by immigrants as they confront the realities of their dual identities and the cultural expectations imposed upon them. Ultimately, *The Tiger's Daughter* serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and adaptability inherent in the immigrant experience, highlighting the transformative power of self-discovery in a multicultural landscape. Bharathi Mukherjee's *The Wife* provides a poignant exploration of self-identity and the psychological conflicts that arise from migration. Through the protagonist's journey, Mukherjee captures the complexities of navigating cultural dislocation, societal expectations, and personal aspirations. The story highlights the emotional struggles faced by many immigrant women as

they grapple with their identities in a new environment. Ultimately, *The Wife* serves as a powerful commentary on the resilience required to reclaim one's self amidst the challenges of migration, emphasizing the transformative nature of the immigrant experience.

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