

Self and Other: A Psycho– Analytical Study of Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's Wife

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee occupies a prominent place among the Indian Women Novelists. Her heroines are modern, educated, young women, crushed under the clutches of patriarchal and tradition bound society. Her smart attempt to present a true picture of their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations makes her novels realistic and appreciable. Her writings, give voice to the long silent Indian brides and explores the feminine sensibilities unique to Indian settings. Her novels advocate the issues of married woman and analyse the relationship within families and marriages. She depicts women in myriad roles- wife, mother, daughter and above all an individual in her own rights. Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife* is a simple story of Amit and his wife Dimple. Like the heroines Tara, Dimple and Jasmine she also undergoes the travails of expatriation. The novel analyses the psychic development of Dimple in the land of fortunes. She gets trapped between the two cultures. Her expectations fail in the unknown land. She experiences psychic breakdown.

Keywords: Patriarchal, tradition bound, feminine sensibilities, expatriation, psychic breakdown

Bharathi Mukherjee's novels are different from the novels of other diasporic writers. As a woman novelist, she usually focuses on female protagonists. Female Protagonists are quite powerful and dominant in her novels. She presents their conflicts while adapting to foreign land. Her novels usually depict the voyage of the protagonist from expatriation to immigration which involves acculturation and assimilation. In the initial stage, the protagonist naturally faces the trauma of uprootedness and displacement. But they struggle hard to overcome that sense of unhousement and making genuine efforts for rerooting and rehousement. Tara, Dimple and Jasmine are the protagonists who undergo the travails of expatriation but at the end, they accept foreign land as their own home.

Bharathi Mukherjee's *Wife* falls into the category of the modern novel as it presents an intense inner world of neurotic and solipsistic individual. Rootlessness and unreal existence are the main concerns of this expatriate novelist who has set out to make a deliberate distortion of Indian womanhood. Her woman characters are tantalized by the possibility of passion, which they mistake for love and self-expression. America which appears to be a free land, a veritable dreamland is the enigma of existence for all Indian girls.

Wife is a simple story of Amit and his wife Dimple, newly married Bengali immigrants to the U.S.A. Dimple's ill-concealed compulsions are soon precipitated by the violence ridden and individualistic American life and culminate in her killing of her husband. This psychic development in Dimple has been variously but uncritically viewed as her desperate efforts to "forget" her Indian roots as necessitated by the demands of American life and her assertion of independence from her overbearing husband.



Dimple, the protagonist in *Wife* is an extremely immature girl who constantly dreams of marriage as she hopes that it would bring freedom and love. At the same time she is not clear about the concepts of freedom and love. This ambiguity underlying her mental make-up defines the incompleteness of her. After her waiting, her father finds a suitable match to her. Amit Basu, an ambitious engineer, whose dreams of making a fortune in America and on retiring to Calcutta to lead a comfortable rich life. After marriage, she has gone to Amit's home. At the beginning she does not feel comfortable there. She does not like her mother-in-law, her mother-in-law dislikes the name "Dimple" and wants to call her "Nandhini". She feels that they do not capable of feeding her fantasy, Amit fails to meet out the requirements of her imaginative world. "It was this passive resistance, this withholding of niggardly affection from Amit, this burying of one's head among dusty, lace doilies that she found so degrading" (W30).

Dimple always lives in a fantasy world, a world which is created by her. But when she confronts the hard realities of life the feathers of her imagination are clipped. All her dreams are crumbling one by one and she is deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for marriage is better than getting married. She starts hated everything. "She hated the gray cotton with red roses inside yellow circles that her mother-in-law had hung on sagging tapes against the metal bars of the windows" (W 20).

Dimple's friend Pixie gave some magazines to her in the days of waiting marriage. In that magazine she read only how the "young couples" decorate their rooms and selecting colours for their bed rooms. Dimple thinks that marriage has robbed her all romantic yearnings. Amit is not the man that she imagined as her husband. At the stage, she creates an ideal man, "she borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a bodybuilder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad, and put the ideal man" (W23).

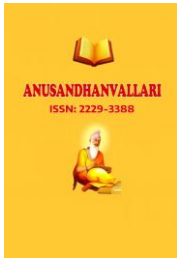
With the passing of time, the excitement of marriage diminishes and she becomes pregnant. She vomits day and night, she feels a strange sensation. "The vomit fascinated her, it was hers. She was locked in the bathroom expelling brownish liquid from her body. She took pride in brownish blossoms" (W30). Pregnancy is a boon for Indian women because they are supposed to maintain the continuity of the clan. She treats it as an outrage on her body and induces an abortion, disposing of that "tyrannical and vile" thing deposited in her body. She justifies herself by arguing that she cannot afford to take any relics from her old life to America where she hopes to begin life afresh and become a more exciting person. Dimple has lived so long in a fantasy world of advertising and advice columns that she is emotionally capable understanding others but not Amit.

Dimple's vision of sacrifice and responsibility is a flag with many colours. She wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. She aspires for freedom and love in marriage. This aim brings her indignation, grief, resentment, peevishness, spite and sterile anger. Dimple wants to do away with traditional taboos of a wife and hence she becomes an escapist, lost her world of fantasy.

After she has gone to America, her hopes are belied. She tries hard to adjust with Amit's wishes and be a dutiful wife. She is never quite unaware of the fact that he is not the man of dreams. Life with him, both in India and America, is naturally a big disappointment for her. Marriage has not "provided all the glittery things she had imagined had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies" (W101). In a word he appears to be an almost a personification of Ego in the Freudian sense.

Amit fails Dimple on all planes, physical, mental and emotional "on her very first day in the H.Y.V. apartment, she felt like a star collapsing inwardly" (W69). She tries to convey her fears and forebodings to Amit but neither does he try to understand her nor is he capable of rising above a mundane understanding. Dimple's psychological imbalances, her immoderate daytime sleeping, her nightmares, her indecisiveness remains unknown to him up to his dead.

Dimple has to cope up with her traumatic mental condition all alone. "She had expected pain was a part of any new beginning, and the sweet structures of that new life had allotted pain a special place" (W 109). She



sinks into a world of isolation, unable to welcome the bright prospect of setting up a new home even after Amit gets a job. Torn by the conflict between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation, she allows her mind to be totally conditioned by the commercials on T.V. and magazines so much. So she does not have the ability to distinguish them from the world of reality. She is caught in a whirlwind of traumatic emotions, her tradition questioning her outrageous adultery and her present confused self-wishing to become an American.

Dimple's extra-marital affair gives a growing feeling of guilt. She has been torn apart by the psychic and emotional tensions: she takes the drastic step of murdering her husband that she cannot bear this sort of life forever. In a calm manner, she takes out the knife from the kitchen drawer and drives it down on a spot near his hairline repeatedly hitting at the same place seven times. Thus she punishes her inattentive husband for his lapses and unceremoniously ends up her disharmonious marital life. Finally, she kills Amit to suppress her guilty conscience and to feel very American, almost like a character in a T.V. serial.

In *Wife*, Dimple is trapped between two cultures, and aspires to a third, imagined world. Dimple is not unlike hundreds of American men and women who believe and are betrayed by the promise of fulfilment offered by the media, and who chooses the solution suggested by a violent experience. Violence is her fundamental experience of New York and thus despair sets in her life. She thinks "her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice an instance desire to hurt, Yet weightless, almost airborne" (W 117). Television introduces her to love, middle-American style. Her habit of T.V. watching stuns her by the incredible violence. It becomes a diabolical trap, a torment without hope of either release or relief. Dimple has been portrayed as free and rebelling person throughout the novel. She has no inhibition in expressing whatever she feels. The murder of Amit is an assertion of her American identify.

The novel, *Wife*, traces the enigma of existence, the psychic breakdown of an Indian nature nor an American. She is trying to attain a distinct identity in America. Neither does she belong to the T.V. world nor to the world of reality but keeps on shuttling between the two. She is yet to release her 'self from the hallucinatory world; she is yet to get out of her schizophrenic self. A waylaid traveller, she is yet to reach her destination and carve out a niche for herself. This is the personal space in which she lives.

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