

Quest for Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's Wife

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Abstract

A few selected thinkers and artists are found in every age that focus on the central preoccupation of the times in their own style and convey their exceptional ideas of reality. They appear to form the passions of the time in their writings and thus give new instruction to our thoughts and emotions. Bharati Mukherjee is one of them. Her novels probe the depths of absolute human vacuum, where time and space lose their identity. This paper talks about Bharati Mukherjee's novel named Wife in which how Mukherjee describes the dilemma of an Indian wife who migrate to America and her inability to perform and transformation into an American life lead Dimple's life into isolation and at the end it leads her into murder.

Keywords: alienation, conflict, identity, immigrant, isolation

Indian writing in English valued in the hands of women writers. They basically dealt with female subjectivity, domestic space and sufferings. These women writers made productive endeavors in investigating with several genres in the recent times building them stand tall and distinctive. A number of distinguished writers made efforts to contribute novel ideas in literature to the present status. At present women's writing is considered as a prevailing and effective medium of modernism. These female writers deal with the most burning issues, delicate aspects of life, like quest for identity and feminine sensibility and modernity etc.

Bharati Mukherjee's writing career started in 1971. The published works of Mukherjee include novels and short stories. Some of her important works are:

1) The Tiger's Daughter 2) Wife, 3) Darkness 4) The Middleman and other stories 5) Jasmine and 6) The Holder of the world, out of which The Middlemen and Other stories won her the National Book Critics Circle Award. No doubt her work like Tiger's Daughter, Wife, Darkness deal with sensibility of immigration in America.

The present novel Wife is divided into three parts, each dealing with specific phase in Dimple's life. The initial one is about her premarital wishes and expectations, her marriage with a mechanical engineer, Amit Basu. The second section describes at length her estimated journey

of a new life in America. The third and the final phase deal with her total cynicism of married life and a complete deterioration into neurotic psyche and murder of her husband. Mukherjee opens her novel in a true Indian tradition of story-telling. The simple opening line - "Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon" (Wife 3). is fairly telling and at once sets the sight that forestalls something unnatural. For Dimple Dasgupta, neuro-surgeon is a quite strange choice. Mukherjee's choice of the name of the heroine as Dimple is a considered one and her aims are quite clear from the cover page of the novel where she quotes about "Dimple" as - "any slight surface depression".

Initially, we feel that Dimple is far from common girls. Dimple has nothing to do except thinking about marriage because she ponders that marriage is a blessing in camouflage. It will give her freedom, prosperity and happiness, "Marriage would bring her freedom, Cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love" (Wife 3). Dimple is twenty but she complains for wasted years. Nothing delights her more than the fancy about espousing a fellow who offers her all comforts. She has a desire to study for university examinations but books infuriate her. At last Mr. Dasgupta discovers a perfect match for Dimple. Amit Basu, a Consultant Engineer is the perfect match for Dimple. He has already applied for immigration to Canada and U.S. and his job request is also awaiting in Kenya. Dimple is all thrilled about her marriage and does a lot of shopping becoming the event. She approaches to Amit's home at Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road after her marriage. They are good people but their home is not that airy and eye-catching. Initially, Dimple does not feel relaxed there. She even does not like Amit's mother and sister too. Her mother-in-law also dislikes her name "Dimple" and likes to call her "Nandini" instead which just annoys the bride. However, Dimple ponders that all these issues are quite normal and with the approval for immigration they will finally come to an end. She regularly talks with her husband about the expected foreign trip though "Thoughts of living in Africa or North America terrified her" (Wife17).

Dimple Basu has always lived in a fantastic world, a world

that is created by herself. But when she confronts the hard realities of life the feathers of her imagination are clipped. All her dreams crumble one by one and she is deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for marriage was better than getting married.

Once Amit takes her to Kwality's by cab and orders chili chicken, chicken fried rice and chicken spring rolls etc. She feels uncomfortable taking the chicken pieces with fork and knife and considers that it would have been quite better that Amit had taken her to Trinca's instead:

He should have taken her to Trinca's on Park Street, where she could have listened to a Goan band play American music, to prepare her for the trip to New York or Toronto. Or to the discotheque in the Part Hotel, to teach her to dance and wriggle. (Wife 21)

Amit was not a perfect one as Dimple had fancied for her husband. As he is out of the home, she always starts thinking the man of her dream.

Mukherjee describes Dimple as an unhappy isolated thinker, probing for ethical importance in minute things besieged for searching identity with race or class or group. Slowly she starts doing in a manner that advises that she would like to pause but for educated, middle-class Bengali wives like her if she only knows how. She hates being wife in the Basu family and objects to as a housewife in many ways. When she knows that she is pregnant she ponders of getting rid of whatever it was that blocked her tubes & pipes and is hated against her husband and his family. Despite that Mukherjee write down the remarkable character of Dimple displaying new identity and having courage of aborting her own baby. After dismissing her pregnancy, she barely thinks any afterthought to it. She never regrets for the cruel cause she has done by killing a human life.

Many critics of feminist concern conclude that women wherever feel hurt causes pain on her first and this process can make them almost to be emotional. This happens because for centuries women have been labeled with meekness, quietness, calm, and dependence. One major problem in Dimple's quest for identity is her husband. Mainly well-meaning but too engrossed primarily in his search for economic security and later in accepting the mannerisms that will permit him to live in the marketplace, her husband does not have enough time or the compassion to understand the intricate changes going on inside Dimple. She cannot bear his snores anymore and insomnia becomes her habituated habit.

Amit's unemployment was the main cause of all worries. He was not the perfect match Dimple had wanted as her

husband:

She wanted Amit to be infallible, intractable, godlike, but with boyish charm; anted him to find a job so that after a decent number of years he could take his saving and retire with her to a three-story house in Ballygunge Park. (Wife89)

Even though fairly tolerant and thoughtful in some ways, he is too self-absorbed and customary to support his wife to achieve selfhood. Husband and wife, it is quite clear, are roaming in opposite directions in North America, and the gulf between them, just visible in Calcutta, opens up vividly in New York. The third and ultimate movement is the climax noticeable by deep dramatic scenes interrupted with the third part of Wife instigates, hence, with a Dimple who is badly unfortunate. She notices no one to talk or share her feelings throughout the day. She had looked forward to an apartment of her own, but how could she have acknowledged that when all by herself her mind would be worried.

With the passage of time, Dimple's progress in America, the conclusion of Wife is unavoidable, she must alternate to some intense and life-threatening action to get out of the dilemma that expatriation to America has grown her into. Still, her direction to resolve her problem is appalling even as she had watched on television shows many a time, she sneaks up behind Amit then stabs him to death. The main focus of the present paper is on the issues, which we face while making our identities, however if we fail, there is a profound crisis in identifying ourselves. Dimple has a same crisis in identifying her identity becomes lonely in a foreign country with no caring base, no traditional beliefs to hold onto and no handy rules of leading culture. The meaningless, violent act of the main character in killing her husband Amit may be observed as a frantic act on the part of Dimple in searching for a new identity in a new place.

Works Cited

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