



Isolated Self in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee, an adaptable immigrant writer, was a penetrating observant of the social and political conditions of India. She has often been applauded for her discreet prose style and her ironic plot developments and drooling observation. The essence of the Indian immigrants is the predominant concern of Bharati Mukherjee, who herself falls in this class. She has persistently dealt with the dark depths of phobia by creating delicate characters in their moments of extreme mental struggle leading to anxiety.

From the start of the novel, Dimple, the main character of Wife is seen as a person who thrives on imagination and lives in an imaginary world, far from reality, she dreams of a perfect husband and a life free from worries but when her dreams remain unfulfilled, she murders her husband and thinks that no one will come to know that she killed her husband as she saw in most of the TV soaps. Like other writers Bharati Mukherjee's works also reflect some experiences of her own life. Her works have autobiographical overtones. She through her novels refers to the occurrence of migration and the issues like isolation, identity crisis, racism, and its manifestations. Therefore, this paper will try to trace the

isolation of self, hiding in its main character's demeanor.

Keywords: Isolation, Identity Crisis, Imagination, Phobia, etc.

Modern times in literature asks for a growing discovery of the inner aspect of characters as contemporary age focuses the restless, questing spirit of man. Bharati Mukherjee, an emigrant novelist of the recent times, showcases her themes in an entirely different manner. She very deftly depicts the problems faced by Indian and third world migrants who try to get absorbed in their host country's lifestyle. Mukherjee believes that literature is the expression through 'voice'. Her novels are the reproduction of this voice. She gives voice to her characters that breed and strive for the enunciation of their repressed and shocked voice in order to create a vision of their life. Mukherjee has gone in detail to study the inner fears of her characters and she is able to bring to surface the reasons and wishes of her characters in a promising manner.

The novel *Wife* opens with Dimple's childish fantasy about marriage. She is curious to see her prince charming whose ardent look and touch would fill her with supreme joy. In her imaginative world there is no place for



commonplace responsibilities, scuffles, and adjustment with in-laws. It is only after her marriage with Amit, a young engineer that she finds marriage a burden. She fails to see any happiness in her married home in Calcutta, which is dark and dingy and yearns to go to America. In America new worries engulf her. Amit tries to provide her with every possible joy despite his own struggle to get a new job. Unable to give time to her, Amit remains out of house for long hours. This hints Dimple to think that he does not love her. She begins to pass much of her time in watching TV soaps, which contain murder as a part of their substance. Unable to handle her depression, one night as Amit returns home from his work, she stabs him on the neck with kitchen knife and after the gruesome murder she sits self-righteous, thinking that like TV soaps she will never be caught. She is unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong. Foucault remarks:

To entrust madness and its empty world directly to the plenitude of a nature which does not deceive because its immediacy does not acknowledge non-being, is to deliver madness both to its own truth (since madness, as a disease, is after all only a natural being), and to its closest contradiction (since delirium, as appearance without content, is the very contrary of the often secret and invisible wealth of nature). This contradiction thus appears as the

reason of unreason, in a double sense: it withholds unreason's causes, and at the same time conceals the principle of its suppression. (191)

This incident shows that the novel is abounding with tragedy resulted from the isolation that Dimple feels in her husband's absence as well as in his presence. She is known as a person of an unstable demeanor who lacks elegance and dutifulness of a wife. Dimple is the analysis of an anomalous woman. She appears shallow and does not even impress as a victim. All she expects from her husband is parties and unconditional love but fails to give from her side. Therefore, her approach to life is surreal. In a patriarchal society like India, a woman has her identity in close empathy with the tasks and responsibilities given to her by the society. Gradually, it give rise to isolation which ultimately affects inter-personal relations where an individual is not able to associate oneself with the others which finally leads to psychological disorders like depression and anxiety.

Dimple always painted a colourful picture of life as a result of which she succumbed to the harsh reality which life threw at her. She constantly imagined her future husband to be the very symbol of the virtues of a utopic society. Mukherjee expressed her desires in these words:

She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eye and chin from the body builder and



shoulder ad, the stomach and legs from the trouser ad and put the ideal man by herself in a restaurant on a Park Street or by the side of a pool at a five star hotel. He wore blue bathing trunks, there was no ugly black hair on his back and shoulder blades as he leaped first into the pool while she stood on the edge in a scarlet sari with a gold border, behind wraparound sunglasses, and trailed her toes in the water. (23) Dimple's another cause of disillusionment after the marriage was the new name Nandini, given to her by her mother-in-law. She begins to give vent to her anger and frustration by hurting herself. On one occasion she caused her miscarriage by rope skipping in order to get rid of her pregnancy, which she considered as a Basu asset in her womb. Another incident of her destructive tendency is when she kills a goldfish in a glass bowl, besides destroying her own fetus.

Dimple's problems are self-created and lie inside her. She would always remain an isolated body wherever she would go. Her isolation is not merely in loneliness, or cultural shock, but her distancing from her own past as well as her inner self. She does not interact with the past and the present and forever remained an escapist. Marriage, which should have brought her freedom, parties, and love, becomes a tale of obstruction for she is devoid of wealth and inclination for higher living. In this neurotic frame of mind, she gets into an illicit

relationship with Milt Glasser, as he becomes her America. In *Wife*, Mukherjee unmasks and confronts the adversities of a multicultural society placed on an emigrant. In her portrayal of Dimple, Mukherjee showcases a fixed American culture that invalidates individual identity in favour of communal identities set in foreign land. Dimple's violent behaviour arises from the rage she feels in a society that prevents her from reflecting her past in India and her present in America.

In the end, Dimple kills her husband and the reader is left with an image of her talking to herself and to the knife she used to stab him. She gives no hope for a new beginning. Dimple clearly shows grave signs of dilemma of cultures, which is an outcome of her psychotic condition in the end.

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