

The Cynical Attitude of Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*

Dr. S. Karthik Kumar

Research Advisor

Asst. Prof. of English

Annamalai University

Annamalai Nagar

drskarthikkumar@gmail.com

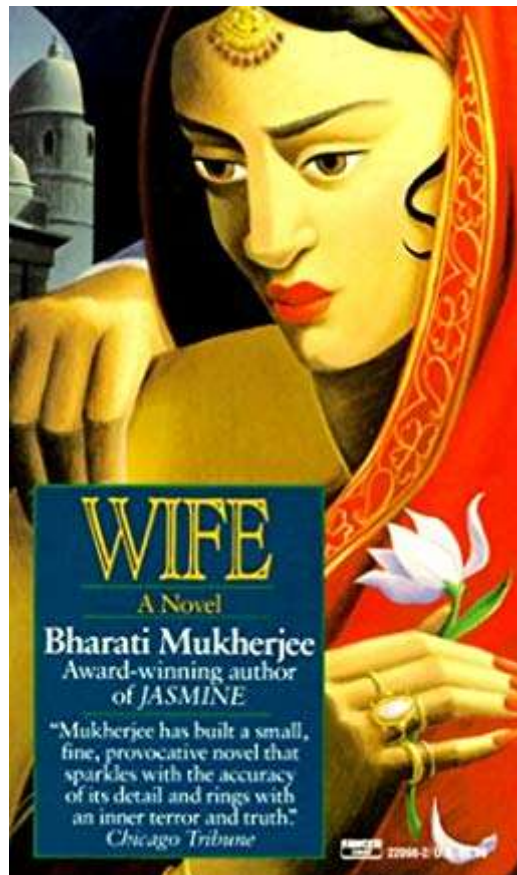
A. Raja

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Annamalai University

Annamalai Nagar

rajaappavu@gmail.com



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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee, an India-born American novelist, has received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short period of just twenty five years. She does not like to be called an Indian migrant author and very firmly positions herself as an American author writing American literature. Her forte is her power packed diction penned in consortium with Indian and American cultures. This paper deals with her novel *Wife* in which the cynical attitude of the protagonist Dimple is portrayed. She starts hallucinating

and conjures up variety of fantasies, a pathetic experience, yet a reality encountered by every female.

Keywords: Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, Sensuality, Fantasy, Insomniac, Rootlessness, Depression, Sensibility, Skeptical, Contemptuous, Disdainful, Scornful, Enigma, Dissociated.

Introduction

In the U.S.A. Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as an immigrant American writer. In her works, which were either completed or fully written in USA, she explores the immigrant sensibility, recognizing its duality and flexibility besides taking into cognizance alternate realities. Mukherjee is her own theorist and exemplar since her novels illustrate the credo of immigrant writing as a “Minimalist” act. She foregrounds the experience of a woman forced to confront her marginalization within her own Indian culture. In *Wife*, Dimple, the female protagonist, has been named Dimple ironically. Dimple is described as ‘slight surface depression’, and the author uses this meaning to portray her character. In Indian context, *dimple* is more a symbol of physical beauty. The author uses it as a characteristic flaw in Dimple.

The present research paper examines the cynical attitude of the female character in the novel *Wife*. We see Mukherjee constructing the identity as a psychological imbalance which causes neurosis. Throughout the novel the protagonist Dimple is portrayed as a free-minded and rebellious wife. She has no inhibition in expressing whatever she feels. Thus, we observe the female character in various dimensions.

Dilemmas and Rootlessness

The novel *Wife* depicts the plight of the female protagonist - torn between being the ideal wife like ‘Sita’ and the need for self-expression. Once she gets to U.S.A with her husband, Dimple is quite shocked at the violence, frankness and permissive environment there. She faces the cultural difference between Indian and American attitudes and finally becomes a woman living in dilemmas and rootlessness.

Madness

Dimple is ensnared with this conflict when she does not get an outlet for her pent up feelings, desires and whims. When she cannot come out of the web of her fears and inhibitions, she gets depressed, becomes almost an insomniac on the verge of madness. Eventually she turns into a murderer of her husband whom she feels responsible for her condition.

“Dimple commits murder when she aborts her child. It’s like an act of freedom and she does not regret it, to the extent that she justifies it as a hurdle from old world. Early pregnancy in her case seems to enchain her freedom. Marriage to her is a road to freedom, and intermediary, through which she can have a new life, new beginning. It’s not like murder”, Dimple said one afternoon in June, “I could never commit murder”. (*Wife*, 42)

Dimple’s Dreams

The cynical attitude in Dimple for her husband is evident as she becomes aware of the fact that instead of gaining freedom, marriage becomes an institution which bonds a wife to function around the peripheries, the center being the husband. The demolishing of her dreams and the effort to break free weakens Dimple and leads her to worry about unfulfilled desire. This provokes her to think in a negative way. She desires for recognition for herself and for the fulfillment of her dream. But Basu behaves in a different way. He wants her to be a docile and submissive wife. So, the heroine hates Basu and his disdainful attitude towards her. He needs her only to satisfy his sexual desires. Finally, in a state of scornful mood, she kills Basu as an act of self-liberation and then commits suicide.

Refrain and Restrain

The fight to control 'self' to refrain and restrain the natural instincts of sensuality, dreams and expectations from marriage, would not have been so difficult for Dimple, if she had remained in India. But when faced with the "other", that is to say America and its open society, hunger in Dimple to refashion her "Self" is not easy to quench. To give voice to her suppressed feeling is not so easy for her because her society considers such act as abhorring. She considers the way to gain freedom from this flight of duality is by stabbing Amit.

"It was only the per-infidelity stage that was difficult, she'd learned because there were no rules for that phase. Individual initiative, that's what came down to, and her life had been devoted only to pleasing others, not herself. Amit had no idea how close she had come to betraying him completely and not just paying the price for too much fear and loneliness". (*Wife*, 11)

Self-Identity

Dimple Dasgupta in *Wife* gets entangled in a web of her own making. She gets totally lost when she tries to be a perfect Hindu wife, but her egoistic attitude, her desire for freedom and her quest for self-identity all get entangled in multiple knots, forcing her to cross the border of gender and experiment with American doctrines. The misplaced beliefs encourage Dimple to kill her husband. The motive behind Dimple's action is not the same as Devi's, another character in the novel. Instead of saving humanity, it is more of an act to save herself. Her self-preserving characteristics drive her to self-assert. Dimple is far removed from Devi, who changes her name and identity like a chameleon.

Conclusion

In *Wife*, Mukherjee reiterates the concept of marginalization of woman by explaining and exploring the way in which culture and ideology construct feminine identity.

The immigrant woman in the new world tries to get out of the oppression of enclosed atmosphere of the past culture, tries to balance the values and traditions of past culture with the present one. Their continuous struggle to absorb the culture of the United States changes them, which is not recognized by the male spouses, who are interested in realizing their own "American dream". Dimple refuses to be a daughter to her father and a wife to her husband in her attempt at submersion in the New World.

To sum up, the cynical attitude of Dimple and her abnormal temperament do not belong to anywhere. She loses her sense of security. Her real self is pushed in the background initially after marriage when living in Calcutta. She tried to see herself as a “different” being. In the USA she tries never to be Americanized. Instead, she engages herself in search for glory by promoting her Indianness. But she always dreams of being someone different. Thus, increasingly she becomes a dissociated personality. Ultimately, she murders Basu and creates tragedy as a result of unfulfilled dreams.

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