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Bharti Mukherjee's Narrative wife: A study of psyche and cultural shock

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Abstract

Bharti Mukherjee was a well-known Diasporic writer. She was the writer of the Indian origin in the United States of America. She was the one who explored the contemporary theme and expressed her concerns of the suffering women in the alien soil. Her narratives are known for her depiction of cross-cultural conflicts blend with the destinies of her heroines. Bharti Mukherjee explored the immigrant sensibility recognizing its duality and flexible uniqueness besides taking into awareness alternate realists. She displayed her own experiences for being an emigrant through the protagonist of her narratives. Her novel 'Wife' is a sincere portrayal of a modern Indian woman, Dimple, who dreams of marrying a neurosurgeon but has to marry an engineer due to her family background and starts suffocating her life in New York due to heavy financial crisis, which makes her an unsteady, helpless woman in an unfamiliar land. The reader could find after reading the novel that the protagonist is driven from a kind of madness or a mania for the new culture which puts her into the hard reality instead of her obsession for the 'brave new world'. The proposed paper attempts to analyze Dimple as an individual whose psychological demands and reactions to them ruled by her experience of life and how her different psyche and unfulfilled dreams create a tragedy.

Keywords: Cultural displacement, individualism, schizophrenic, escapist

Introduction

Bharti Mukherjee, the emigrant of the Indian origin who spent her life of fifteen years in Canada and later in the U.S.A., stood as a landmark known as a voice of expatriate immigrant sensibility. Mukherjee's works focus on the circumstances of migration, the position of new immigrants and the feeling of isolation often experienced by non-natives as well as on Indian women and their struggle. Mukherjee was at her best in portraying cross-cultural clashes and how her female protagonists take control over their destinies. Bharti Mukherjee didn't impose off self-solutions to the problems facing emigrant Asian women. She preferred showing them the way to obtain the power in order to control their fates. Bharti Mukherjee depicted the sense of loneliness and solitude which challenges the psychology of the immigrants. The non-natives are socially, psychologically, politically, economically groundless in the new world which welcomes them with bitterness, which makes them separated and helpless in the country of adoption. The readers, who have dreams of settling in a foreign land which has become a buzzword in the mind of every middle class now a days, after reading the novels of Bharti Mukherjee have gone into a puzzled situation, as the suffering of Mukherjee's characters gives warning to them against the corruption of thought and attitude in the unfamiliar land. All these experiences have been displayed as the major theme in Mukherjee's novel with the special reference to her 1975 novel 'Wife'.

The novel starts with the protagonist Dimple's family about marriage. Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. Dimple, the protagonist of the novel 'Wife' wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. Dimple is as an apparently obedient young Bengali girl who, as other normal girl, is full of life and dreams about her marriage and so eagerly waits for it. She visions of her prince charming whose passionate glance would her soul with supreme pleasure. There is no place for temporal responsibilities, struggle with day to day existence, like- water-shortage, electricity failure and adjustment with in-laws, in Dimple's imagination.

Dimple is an escapist who lost in her personal world of fantasy. In the first place, Dimple dreams about marrying anybody but preferably she wants to marry with a neurosurgeon. Her father is combing the matrimonial ads for an engineer. She is just twenty years old and already troubled with sign of passive aggression. The stress between her actual helplessness and forms of liberty suggested to her by the changing Indian culture have made her out of

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sorts. At last a matrimonial candidate is chosen, Amit Basu, a consulting engineer, who is perfect in that he has already applied for emigration.

Amit is a dedicated young man, even a compassionate one by the standard of Indian masculinity, but Dimple has lived so long in her world of fantasy of advertising and advice columns, that she is emotionally incapable to understand the feelings of another human beings. That's why she cannot understand Amit or even try to.

She gets marry with Amit Basu, who her parents find suitable for her. She imagines a new life for herself in America where her husband, Amit, is expecting to immigrate. Dimple is expected to play the role of a perfect Indian wife who stays at home, do daily chaos and keeps the house for husband. As this quite evident from the very beginning of the novel that Dimple is highly ambitious woman. The tedium of marriage seems a burden to Dimple. She couldn't convinced herself to live dark and dingy apartment with her mother-in-law. Dimple is clueless to see any joy in her married home in Calcutta and yearns to go to the U.S.A.

In the U.S., she faces new challenges. Amit, her husband tries hard to keep her happy despite her own struggle to get a job. Amit has to remain out of house for long hours to earn their two ends meal and for this he cannot devote all his time to his wife. Due to this Dimple starts to feel that he does not care for her. Gradually she adapts a habit watching television for hours together. She starts killing her maximum time in watching films and serials which have murder as a part of their content. The circumstances builds up frustration in her gradually. She dislikes being wife in the Basu family and takes up arms against wifedom in many ways. Due to her psyche she miscarriages by skipping herself free from pregnancy because she views it as a Basu's property in her womb. She feels as her self-identity is avoided by marriage. She is self-recognition and dream fulfillment. Her husband, Amit behaves in a different manner. He wants her to be docile and mild. Dimple her husband for his behavior. According to her, he needs her only for sexual harassment. She finds it's a sort of guilty. Finally, in her upset mental state, she murders her husband, Amit, in an act of self-liberation and eventually commit suicide.

The story of the novel reveals that it is a tragedy resulted by broken dreams of a highly ambitious person. We find various themes in this novel like as adjustment to a new society, job seeking, frustration and shattering of dreams. For Indians, America is like a dream land, but once they discover unimaginable difficulties, the dreams shatters. The difficulties like to find a job, to feed the family is for Amit as he is the man of the family and according to Amit, Dimple should feel herself lucky as she is free from all these worries.

Bharti Mukherjee portrayed the world of Dimple as a fairyland and nightmares and her death-obsessed psyche through a series of grotesque images. Dimple's morbidity is noticeable while she is still living in her parental home in the way she allows her conscious mind to be completely influenced by the colorful romance presented in the advertisements and stories of different magazines. Indulging herself in sexual imagination with cricket stars, young cabinet ministers and heroes from novels, Dimple sets out on a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. As she projected herself as a "sweet and docile"

(14) girl in her parental home, even her parents were unaware about her schizophrenic nature. Her parents remain as monotonous characters, never encroaching into the inner resonance of their daughter's mind.

Dimple suffers from a terrible perturbation. The anxiety of living disturbs her. She loses her balance of mind. Mentally deranged, she begins to develop a repulsion for things around her.

The novel focus on how cultural displacement and dislocation cause new identities but of course, through a meticulous path. In *Wife*, Bharti Mukherjee shows the pictures of hardships of multicultural society of an immigrant. The novel is set in the United States to disclose both the nations' limitations in multiculturalism and divergences between a policy of cultural differences and American dream of individualism and opportunity. In *Wife*, the experiences of a young Indian immigrant wife, are used for narrating the difficulty of cultural dislocation and loss of identity. It can be noticed by the readers that 'Dimple', the protagonist of the novel 'Wife' is unprotected to new environment and though she feels ignorant, she readily accepts or fall a prey to the adapted society and its style. The cultural shock which she experiences in the migrated land not only changes her perspective but also corrupts her outlook of life.

On the other hand, the novel deals with the innermost thoughts and pains of a young wife, who she dreamt of her marriage with a handsome neurosurgeon who could keep her happy and satisfied and she could lead a luxurious life.

Being a typical Indian daughter, she could not deny her father's choice, as every Indian daughter expected to do, and accepts the marriage with Amit Basu, with whom her life becomes miserable as she thinks.

After marriage, Dimple does not adjust at her husband's house at Dr. Sarat Banarjee Road. She doesn't like her mother-in-law and her daughter also. However, Dimple thinks get she will get rid of all these problems when they migrate to America. The violent outburst of Dimple show her increased frustrations. She is suffering from inferiority complex and thinks that she can never win her husband's love and concern. Amit may also be blamed for his ignorance of female psychology. In this point of view, providing comfort to someone is enough.

We feel from the very beginning that Dimple is a sort of psyche. "The lake reminds her of death." She doesn't like her new name 'Nandini' either. "The name doesn't suit me". Her flat is horrid. She purposely drops "bits of newspapers, hair balls, nail clapping on men just to note the angry reactions of them". She purposely remains a foreigner wherever she is to go. The isolation is rooted in her not merely in loneliness or in cultural difference but in her own inner estrangement from her own past and own inner being.

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