
INDIAN WIFE IN AMERICAN KITCHEN: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

DR.R.ANNIE VIDHYA

Abstract: There are number of Women writers in Indian Diaspora who write from the context of family, and explore all the problems faced by woman in a patriarchal society. Most of them show the difficult situation in which the middle class women in India are put into a tug of war between their own desire and the roles carved out to them by the society. Unable to break away from the traditional roles, most of them live a resentful life. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the major novelist of Indian Diaspora who has achieved enviable positions within a comparatively short creative span. This paper focus on the struggles, pains and joys of the immigrants trying to realize their dreams in America, with special reference to the work of Bharati Mukherjee. This paper also attempts to explore the delination of diasporic factors such as cultural conflict, alienation and Identity crisis. In an Interview, Mukherjee says "I am bicultural, but my biculturality is that I'm not at home in either of the place". Bharati Mukherjee chooses to glorify the alienated individual as she has experienced the physical, social and psychological isolation from the American society and the immigrant community.

In analyzing Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, one explore that it is the study in women's madness due to culture shock and loneliness. Some compare it with other texts where women's violence leads them either to suicide or murder. My aim in this paper is to study Dimple as an individual whose psychological demands and the reactions to them are governed by her experiences of life and her unique individual psyche. As an expatriate she experiences the dilemma of her identity, but that should not imply that she kill her husband. Dimple's aggressiveness and neurosis are compared to Maya's neurosis in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*. Agreed that her irrational fear and anger can be compared to Maya's irrational exasperation and resentment but the psychological implications of Dimple's intra-physic and interpersonal demands are not like those of Maya.

According to Horney, neurotics make secret claim towards life and want that their life should be as they visualize it. They cannot face facts. Their grandiose notions about themselves wish to be honored by people as well as by fate. When Dimple realizes that life does not honor her claims, that we do not get everything as we want, she feels shattered. She realizes that after all she is not someone special; she is not from the glittering world of silver screen. She is ordinary. To live the life of an ordinary human is beyond the scope of her neurotic claims.

Wife as the name suggests is the story of Dimple Mukherjee, a wife. The novel centers on the character Dimple, who grows, matures, rebels, kills and finally dies in this novel. Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and the Indian need to be submissive. Though married to an educated and liberated husband, Dimple is not able to strike a balance between the two juxtaposed worlds: the one she left behind and the other she has come to live in. She is frustrated with life; she starts

fantasizing the act of murdering her husband. Away from home in India she already has been in a sick state of mind, but the alienation from her husband, the environment, and the glitter of American life drives her to fits of psychic depression and ultimate insanity.

Dimple Dasgupta is married off to a young engineer, and soon immigrates to America. She finds her life impossible to adjust to, and her attempts to become American-to learn to speak American-English by watching the television, for example-cause her to question her own cultural values, and even her own happiness. Dimple is fascinated by the American Kitchen because of its materialistic manifestations like white sugar, cake mixes and ultra modern kitchen appliances. The American kitchen which seemed like a promising space with creative possibilities stifles her eventually and she could not extract the full potential of her kitchen as a restorative site because of her neurosis. Dimple slavishly follows instead of leading, be it cooking or shopping for food. She confesses to her Americanized Bengali friend Ina, "I can't keep up with you people. I haven't read the same kinds of books or anything... I just like to cook and watch T.V and embroider"(*Wife* p169).

As the novel progresses, Dimple's hidden unstable personality reveals, as her dreams get dissolved. The protagonist Dimple is characterized as a young, Indian woman, who tries to reconcile the Bengali ideal of the perfect, passive wife with the demands of a new American lifestyle. In this story Dimple lacks the inner strength and resources it takes to cope in a city like New York. Mukherjee deals with the complications that come from being thrown between two worlds and the strength and courage it takes to survive and in the end live. This story reflects the author's mental status in many parts. At the end of the story being suppressed by such men and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife she becomes frustrated

and out of fear and personal instability she ultimately murders her husband and eventually commits suicide.

Dimple's confusion accelerates further compounded when she finds her inability to articulate the language either of the "Americanized Indians" or the Americans. Ina Mullick tells her that talking to her is like "talking to a... porpoise," Dimple says, "I like porpoises... They're so nearly human, aren't they?" (*Wife* p136). She says that they are like human but, she has seen only one porpoise in her life and that too was on television: "When Ina spoke in English, her words were predatory, Dimple realized" (*Wife* p136-37). Later one finds her talking to Amit, she tries to imagine how Ina would have pronounced the word supportive. Amit takes out a scribbling pad out of his pajama pocket and writes it down. She imagines that he would show off this new word to his colleagues in his work place. The language was inadequate to express her thoughts and she remains silenced. She is denied expression and is unable either to validate her experience or her identity. So she forsakes the real world and retrieves into a world of her own an imaginary world. Feeling left out by her own people, afraid to vent out, hesitate to meet people, Dimple spends most of her time isolated from the real world and spends her time reading *Better Homes and Gardens* and watching television:

Daytime shows with inspiring names like 'Guiding Light' and 'Love of Life.' The women on television led complicated lives, became pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances ... murdered or were murdered, were brought to trial and released; they suffered through the Ping-Pong volley of their fates with courage. (*Wife* p72-73)

It is from television that Dimple learns the American home life in detail. Dimple is denied the right to personal feelings and desires and finally her own identity. In her frustration of losing all her dreams of a glittered life in America she allows herself to be seduced by Milt Glasser and her isolation and despair become even more acute. Dimple has committed an ultimate sin that is the betrayal of her gendered Indian culture: "She was so much worse off than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises ... [living] like a shadow without feelings" (*Wife* p200). She is isolated from the world outside and is disappointed with Amit who is unable to find a proper profession. Dimple muses, "Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted indifferent proportions so that she was not left with a chimera" (*Wife* p156). For Dimple, television becomes a reality and starts to imagine that Amit is stabbed when he is eating a bowl of Wheaties. Significantly, this act comes after her strenuous attempt to give voice to

her feelings in a language that is alien to her. Dimple makes feeble attempt to safeguard her identity but sadly it has met with a wall of indifference. Her husband does not understand even her language.

The novel *Wife* ends with Dimple imagining Amit's severed head. It is on the dining table and her imagination is induced by her watching television. She imagines whether his head would look better mounted and she wants Leni to make a base for it, as she is an expert in it. Dimple's mind rehearses the violent act. Madness is nothing but a movement reason to unreason. Dimple's murder of Amit is moment of dissolution. Dimple's shattering of dreams explodes into an act of violence. Madness is an error because the madman is unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong. It is a result of suppression. Dimple's marginalization within her own patriarchal culture, and her subsequent encounter with American society leaves her confused about her identity. Her act of madness can ironically be seen as a liberating one. She is ignored by Amit when she is most in need of his support, since "her life had been devoted only to pleasing others, not herself" (*Wife* p211). Her long felt silence is not understood by Amit and insanity takes over that ends the long silence by the killing.

The inability to come to terms with reality is the key problem of Dimple. Her dreams are merely materialistic who wants to lead a life of luxury. When Amit after a brief struggle successfully migrates Dimple finds it difficult to do so. Life is an uphill struggle and Dimple could not withstand it causing her dreams to shatter. She is an escapist lost in her world of fantasy. Her mind is tuned by the newspaper advertisement and advice columns and is incapable of understanding another human being Amit.

Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. She wishes for freedom and love in marriage. She is entrapped between two cultures and aspires for a third one, her imaginative world. She is uprooted from her world and projected into a social vacuum where the media becomes her surrogate community, her global village. She declines to steer the normal path of life that has a tendency for diversions. She is unhappy and uncared and engages in dialogue with herself. She tries to find vision in her life by voicing the voiceless. Thus based on Psychological Perception, it is clear that the kitchen becomes the space which enables the protagonist to steer her life, and although shortly, mould her identity in America. However, her neurosis prevents her from enducing the full empowering and restorative potential of food and cookery. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* reveals that it is a tragedy of an unbalanced personality, of a person who lacks grace and self-possession and who fails to grow out of juvenile fantasy.

Being uprooted from their home culture and trying to adapt to the new culture takes massive time and energy and during this struggle, the immigrant learn to adjust, to adopt and assimilate which by itself is an experience in itself. Mukherjee's attempt has all along been to illustrate this in her novels.

Hence, Mukherjee says where immigrants do not merely assimilate, they change the land much as the

land changes them. She says the difference between two ways of life leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration which is called culture shock. They struggle mutely to survive. And their psyche is torn between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. When they overcome such feeling they get a new personality.

References:

1. Suhaib VP, Arundhati Roy: the Voice of Downtrodden; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 1 Issue 1 (2013), Pg 13-17
2. Freud, Sigmund. *"Beyond the pleasure principle"*, trans. James strachey London:
3. Ekta Chakravarty, Superstition, "The Cause of Malfeasance" "Women Empowerment in Context to Embark Education to Rural Women of North East India" ; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 1 Issue 1 (2013), Pg 6-12
4. Hogarth, 1974. Print.
5. Mukherjee, Bharati: *Wife*. New Delhi: Penguin Books(India)Ltd., 1976. Print.
6. Girija K.S, Dr. Basavaraja G, Imperialism & War: A Threat to Global Peace; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 1 Issue 2 (2013), Pg 377-384
7. Peter Brooks, *"Freud's Master plot"*, Literature and Psychoanalysis: The question of Reading Otherwise, ed. Shoshama Felman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) p280-300
8. Dr. Amrita Sharma, Ms. Pallavi, Apartheid and Hidden-Apartheid: A Study of Kaffir Boy and Dalits in India; Human Rights international Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 2 Issue 2 (2014), Pg 632-642

Dr.R.Annie Vidhya, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D
Assistant Professor, Dept Of English
Voorhees College, Vellore-1., Cell No: 9487047866