

Ideological Clashes in Bharathi Mukherjee's 'WIFE'

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ABSTRACT

The life of an Indian Women surrounded in Diasporic atmosphere takes numerous twists and always things may not go as expected. The protagonist in Bharathi Mukherjee's Wife undergoes psychological stress in foreign world, where she is not amidst of her blood relations nor friends from the same culture. Before going to U.S.A, she looks up at that country as a land of freedom - a place where women enjoy liberty and equality. Having being suppressed from her childhood in the name of tradition and culture in India, she tries to fulfill all her unfulfilled desires after getting married to an engineer who works in U.S.A. She has a dream of settling in the land of opportunity and her husband has similar aspirations to settle in U.S.A, but faces financial crises in the insecure and temporary jobs. In her disillusionment she restrains herself to watching T.V and gets rid of pregnancy viewing it as an obstacle of her freedom. Ultimately with the psychological depression she views her husband as a person who has failed and kills him.

The basic flaw in Dimple is that she always expected freedom and happiness. She wanted to be loved by others but she does not love herself and the person who does not love oneself can never love anyone. Dimple lacks the self-efficiency and self actualization which comes from within oneself. The present paper focuses on her Illusion and Disillusion due to East – West Encounter.

Key words ; - Diaspora, Illusion, disillusion, nostalgia, twilight, enticing

The paradigms of literature are determined with the consistent shift of psycho –cultural dynamics operating within the social system. The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a drastic change in the social set up which encouraged the phenomenon of mass migration and immigration. This led to the rise of the concept of multiculturalism. In search of respectable and lucrative jobs coupled with the thoughts of liberation from conventional orthodoxy fascinated the third World Immigrants to take shelter in 'The silver pavement and golden roof'. At the same time the immigrants confronted with ideas of discrimination, segregation, nostalgia, racism. This clash of East – West ideologies, paved the way for a unique group of feminine writers. They often wrote about the concept of marginality and inferiority. Their characters represented the twilight view of life and these writers were often called as 'Diasporic writers'.

The East-West encounter gave rise to a hybrid culture and melting pot theory. This multiculturalism attracted immigrants from all corners of the world. The developed nations of the West showed signs of reconciliations of differences. In spite of the open bosom of western countries, the nostalgia for homeland and inability to cope up with complexity of high technology created a sense of alienation, loneliness and inferiority complex. Due to this East-West encounter, the immigrants found themselves caught in the web of Old World Values and the New World Promises. This alienated feelings of 'Identity atrophy' arises out of the fact that the West is considered superior when compared to the submissive ideology of the East. This cultural transaction gives rise to the emergence of new hybrid culture which gives space to escape from the shadows of homelessness and feeling alienated.

There is a distinctive contradiction in the ideologies of Eastern feminism and Western feminism. It is strongly accepted that female identity has an innate kinship with national boundaries and native religion and cultural ideology and in the process of migration, this innate sensibility tries to make continuous struggle against relentless cultural hostility existing in the land of immigration.

Feminine ideology in India offers a vital and lively portrait of Indian woman, the idealized image of Indian womanhood. A woman survives in two spaces simultaneously, one as a woman sharing her private world of

feminine experiences – a notion of ‘Universal womanhood’ and in the second place she defines her status and identity in various contexts of social commitments and cultural practices. This clash of ideologies due to East-West encounter paved the way for a class of women writers who contextualizes the experiences of immigration not in the context of geographical dislocation only but also they design the plots of their novels in the background of magical dreams, conflict of moral values, fantasy and illusion of migration.

Bharathi Mukherjee, with the publication of her six novels and three collections of short stories, has occupied a distinctive position among Indian English women novelists. Through her creative genius she analyses and evaluates the trauma in the transcultural influences of East and West ideologies. Bharathi Mukherjee constantly exposes the clash of traditions, culture, familial relationships. In the novel *Wife* (1975) she exposes the complex nature of feminine psyche where the protagonist tries to make desperate efforts to carve a space within her native cultural space by escaping to an alien culture. Scenario's may change but the theme of patriarchy domination remains firmly rooted. Dimple - the female protagonist in the novel ‘*Wife*’, represents the burden of patriarchy in addition to being subjected to the torture of immigration. She dreams of immigration as a method of emancipation from cultural bondages but the adversities and disillusionment thrusts her into the pitfall of oblivion in which she loses her identity, belongingness and self respect.

Bharathi Mukherjee asserts that woman's liberation has been prevalent from earlier times and is not a twentieth century phenomenon. The central plot of the novel ‘*Wife*’ revolves around the continuous urge of Dimple to seek liberty through the concept of marriage and immigration. The novel has three parts. The first part is about Dimple's craving for freedom through the romantic quest for marriage and immigration. The second part narrates Dimple's horrific experience as an immigrant subjecting to isolation in life. The third section exposes the pathetic condition of failure to adjust to the alien culture leading to the perverted mental condition of Dimple. Here we notice that in the entire novel, Dimple lives in illusion and is frustrated due to her inefficiency in fulfilling her dreams. Shyam M. Asnani evaluates Dimple's problem as ‘dilemma’ of cultural conflict:

“Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tension between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between feminist desire to be assertive and indecent and the Indian need to be submissive and self effacing”.

The novel starts with the romantic vision of marriage of the protagonist - Dimple. She looks forward to the new role of a wife, expecting that marriage will liberate her from patriarchal bondage. She believes that marriage will free her from pre established social norms and traditions. She fantasies of her husband as a young romantic macho. She lives in sexual fantasies. She cultivates the dream that marriage would bring her love, marriage would liberate her from social dogmas, Life would be lavish with cocktail parties, charities and fund raising dinners with elite people. All these hallucinations convey the protagonist's dependence on male support for liberation and she is not aware of her own self dignity and independent status as a woman. It reflects the feminist desire to be assertive instead of submissive and self effacing.

Dimple is engaged with Amit kumar Basu an NRI. Later Dimple realises that Amit was not the man she has imagined. Dimple finds everything in contrast to her romantic dream. She does not feel easy in Amit's house. – the large joint family, absolute dependence on the family, no decision making power, no private bedroom. Dimple is educated but her horizon is restricted only to romantic illusionary of freedom, love jewellery and cosmetics. Dimple imagined that marriage would be a blessing in disguise. It would bring her freedom, fortune and happiness. She couldn't mingle with her in-laws. She couldn't digest her mother-in-law calling her ‘Nandini’ instead of Dimple. Dimple has always lived in imaginative world, a utopian world created by herself. That's why she couldn't confront the hard realities of life. She feels that her feathers of freedom are clipped. Dimple has her first convulsion of regret about her academics, in spite of being educated she is financially dependent. She innocently confesses. That she was too stupid about the mechanical life. The protagonist – Dimple, expresses her keen sensibility to typical female experiences and demonstrates that a woman has her own distinctive life different from a male.

Amit is dominating and accuses Dimple for every trivial issue. He is easily annoyed and blames Dimple for each and every thing. He expects her to be like the mythological character – ‘Sita’ who can jump into fire if necessary. He believes that woman is born to serve and please men. As soon as Dimple discovers that she has conceived, instead of the excitement of motherhood, she feels a serious loss to herself. Panic grips her mind and she regards pregnancy a hurdle in her fantasy of ‘freedom and immigration.’ Dimple thinks of the ways to get rid of

undesired pregnancy. Her helplessness transforms into rebellion. The intensity of her restlessness is exposed by her idea of skipping, using a rope and arranging slips in the bathroom to terminate her pregnancy. These ideas suggest the fact that Dimple craves for a life beyond the myths of motherhood. As soon as the abortion takes place, she feels no pain and thinks about the baby as unfinished business. This extreme step of self-abortion tells us of the frustration and disillusionment of the protagonist. As Dimple was always lost in her world of fantasy she wanted to escape with the traditional taboos of a housewife. The name 'Dimple' literally means a slight surface depression. This physical depression is symbolic with her psychic depression, which has erupted out of her hallucinations of the life around her.

The second part of the novel presents the life of Dimple as an immigrant. She lives in an illusion that immigration to U.S.A – the land of freedom will break the chains of social and cultural restrictions. But she feels more isolated and alienated in America. She couldn't adopt or adjust to the alien culture. Dimple's initial bitter encounter with American society was from the perspective of her own cultural shock when she was rudely treated at a sweet shop where she wanted to buy a cheesecake. In Calcutta she'd buy from Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis. She was used to many races; she'd never been a communalist.. She failed to overcome the cultural divide by her inability to articulate the language of the locals. Dimple was unable to secure a personal "space" within an alien culture. She couldn't negotiate with the cultural barrier. She couldn't even raise her voice. This proves her inability to adopt and adapt to multicultural society. She also lacks intellectual strength which makes her weak, nervous and frustrated. This leads to a crisis in the marital life. Her illusion was shattered and marriage didn't fulfill her dream of liberty and freedom.

The crisis in Dimple's marital life reaches the peaks in the final part of the novel. The disappointed fantasy of immigration shattered the reality of life affecting the personal relationship between Amit and Dimple. There is a disastrous failure of the need for emotional bond between husband and wife relationship. The couple never have a common point of interest and always make fuss about trivial things dress code, cooking, living and social interaction. The protagonist confesses:

*"I feel a sort of dead inside and all you can do is read the news paper and talk to me about food, you never listen; you have never listened to me, you hate me .Don't deny it ;I know you do. You hate me because I am not fat and fair."*2

The illusion of a happy colorful and unrestricted lifestyle in U.S.A is shattered. The daily household drudgery like sweeping the floor, arranging the kitchen and waiting for Amit's order without any choice of her own becomes unbearable. The frustration increases her bitterness towards Amit. She starts thinking of her life and it is the root cause of all her sufferings. Dimple's female expectations, the confinement to household responsibility, indifference of Amit, unfulfilled dream of freedom renders her nervous and emotional. She loses control of rational thinking and violence creeps in her mind. This frustration leads to the murder of her husband.

However, through the emotional crisis of Dimple – the protagonist tears the veil of that extreme state of human psyche where the control of morality, rational thinking, ideology of customs and traditions cease to function. Dimple's loss of rational control on thinking and an irresistible urge to take revenge upon Amit mounting to the idea of murder is obviously shocking to all and especially to the Indian code of morality. The murder of Amit is the peak stage of disillusion in Dimple. Dimple's insanity is the manifestation of violent reactions of cultural indifferences haunting the mind consciousness of women immigrants. However the essential human nature pursues its own course of action and this action is beyond all rational justification and philosophical arguments. The basic flaw in Dimple is that she always expected freedom and happiness. She wanted to be loved by others but she does not love herself and the person who does not love oneself can never love anyone. Dimple lacks the self-efficiency and self actualization which comes from within oneself. Dimple's character is the anatomy of a psychic study of a bizarre woman. The lexico graphic meaning of 'Dimple' is symbolic of the depression within her psyche, which has emerged out of her irritable stimulus to the circumstances around her.

In the novel 'Wife', Dimple symbolizes the predicament of a voice that is forced to live a dual fractured life. Indian are superficially westernized. The feminine sensibility of a woman is expressed through her frantic desire to communicate within as well as with the society. Eventually Dimple couldn't succeed the concept of cultural transplantation thus leading to a disastrous ending.

Bio Note

Dr. B.Sreekanth Reddy is presently working as an freelancer. He lends professional services as a consultant to M.Tech and Research scholars and guides them in their thesis and research work. He previously worked as an EFL trainer for TVTC College of Technology – Adham Branch – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Previously and was also associated with Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies – R.K.Valley. He has 15 years of experience in teaching English at various levels. Contributed research articles in nearly 20 National and International journals. His areas of interest are – Diasporic studies, ESP EFL, TBL and multidisciplinary studies.

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