

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.5.39>

Shattered Dreams and Identity Crisis: A Critical Analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*

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Abstract

The Earth is a place to live in for all the creatures. Human beings have controlled on many natural activities due to his advance of science and technology. Going from one place to another place has been made very easy. Bharati Mukherjee has been in the news recently because her demise on 28th January, 2017 has given a big shock to her fans, students, colleagues and even critics. She has taken the theme of gender discrimination, cultural clash and identity crisis in her novels. Her novels deal with the issues of the dreams which shattered on an alien land. People go to a foreign land with so many colourful dreams in their minds but they do not think about the challenges of a foreign land where culture, language, eating habits etc. are totally different. Present chapter is an analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife*. This novel has emerged as a saga of unfulfilled dreams of a wife Dimple Das Gupta who is a very ambitious woman. She lives in an imaginary world beyond her limitations and above the reality of the earthly life. The works results as a tragedy when she murders her own husband and thinks that nobody will surrender her like the TV serials. Thus, this paper explores the whims of Dimple and her broken dreams in this novel.

Keywords- *Diaspora, Identity Crisis, Shattered Dreams, Tragedy, Destructive Impulse*

Bharati Mukherjee was a very influences contemporary diasporic woman writer whose works reflect the dilemmas and problems of the migrants. She is widely known as an Indo-American writer. She was born in a Bengali family on July 27, 1940 in Kolkata, West Bengal. Her family migrated to Europe after independence. Her education has been both from India and Europe. She died on 28th January, 2017 and her death is a big loss to all the literary people which cannot be compensated. She had worked as a professor emeritus in the Department of English in the University of California, Berkeley which is a big achievement for any Indian citizen. She has taken the theme of exile, placelessness and cultural clash in

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her works. She has personally faced many problems in her life. A noted biographer Fakrul Alam writes about her. Her own struggle with identity, first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada and finally as an immigrant in the United States has led to her current state of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants (Alam 10). Kellie Holzer observes:

Mukherjee's fiction is infused with references to Hinduism, reflecting her inherited religion. The protagonists of the novels are frequently likened to or associated with Hindu goddesses. Jasmine metamorphoses into goddess Kali to avenge herself of rape by the disfigured Vietnam veteran Half-face who accompanied her on the last leg of her voyage to America. Dimple struggles with the traditional notion of ideal Indian wifehood as portrayed by Sita in 'The Ramayana', and Hannah reconfigures the mythic Sita in order to more closely identify herself with Sita's story. (172)

Bharti Mukherjee's second novel *Wife* was published in 1975. This novel deals with the trauma of expatriation. She is not able to complete her degree due to general strike in Calcutta. The opening of the novel is this way, "Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads". (*Wife* 3) Amit works as an electrical engineer in Calcutta electric supply company. Both Amit and Dimple get their life partner not of their choice. Amit also wanted to get a tall and fat girl with a good fluency in English while Dimple also wanted to marry a neurosurgeon. After her marriage, her husband emerges as a domineering man to change Dimple's self. Amit has applied for US, Canada and Kenya for his immigration and he was waiting for his offer. He does not want to lose any offer and he thinks that he will pick the first offer he gets.

She wants to get married with a neurosurgeon but her parents marry her with an engineer with a limited income. She does not like to live in the dingy apartment in Calcutta and her mother-in-law seems to her a big tension. She dreams to take an escape route from her first stage of married life and longs to go to the United States with her husband. She thinks that the United States will give her happiness and contentment. Her husband, Amit Basu is not a cruel husband and he co-operates her. He wants to see her happy. He takes her to America to see happiness on her face.

Dimple tries to please every member of the joint family of her husband at India. Dimple's mother-in-law does not like Dimple's name and she changes her name Nadini which means a "holy cow". Dimple loses her privacy in the joint family. She is not given the liberty to change the colour of her bedroom.

Dimple's problems start at US when they have to stay in Jyoti Sen's apartment at New York who had been Amit's former roommate at IIT, Kharagpur. Jyoti has to build a new relationship with the other expatriate Bengali women in US. They went to US with a dream to earn much money and to live in India comfortably. She was happy to see herself in the new

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environment of US but her happiness remains short-lived. She seeks guidance from Jyoti Sen's wife Meena Sen. Gradually Dimple also starts shopping alone.

Dimple remains engrossed in the domestic chores but she finishes this shortly. She keeps on watching TV or reading newspapers. TV has a big role in shaping her new destructive tendencies. She watches the stories of murder, smuggling and crime. She remains in constant fear. Dimple's life in America had some new challenges for her. Her husband was jobless there at the initial stage but he tries to keep her happy somehow. Due to bread and butter, he remains out of the door for many hours and could not devote much time to his wife. Dimple does not think the positive aspect of this situation. She starts thinking negatively. She does not think that her husband is working hard to make their life better instead she thinks that her husband is not paying any attention to her. She finds TV as her friend for most of the time and she keeps watching serial and films on TV for many hours.

When she goes at Mullick's party she meets both Indians and Native Americans. She meets Ina, a notorious wife of Bijoy Mullick. She comes to know that violence is prevalent in America. She feels jealous of Ina's life. In fact, she likes her lifestyle silently and thinks to live like her. She falls in love with an American man, Mitt Glesser under Ina's indictment. She likes their company but when Ina and Glesser do not meet her, she starts feel very lonely. She thinks about her loveless life with her husband Amit Basu who remains busy in his job. Amit remains worried to get a good job and earn some money to run his family while Dimple remains busy in attending and conducting parties so that she may have the impression in front of others that she is a well-settled woman.

Her life in the apartment in Manhattan becomes worse. She keeps on watching TV there throughout the day. She is haunted from some unknown fear and she is not able to sleep properly at night. Bharati Mukherjee feels that, 'women on television got away with murder'. (Mukherjee 213)

Thus, Dimple's marriage lands her in a more complex situation as she feels like a caged bird in her Dimple has to hear few sarcastic remarks about her when Amit's family comes to see her for the first time. Amit's mother did not like Dimple's name as she took it frolicsome and unbengali. Amit's sister Mrs. Ghose finds dimple a bit more darker than the photograph has suggested. Amit was a bit short in height and had dark complexion that's why Dimple's friend Pixie calls him "short dark prince charming". Dimple has imagined her husband a handsome man with a high earning, "She wanted Amit to be infallible, intractable, godlike, but with boyish charm" (88-89). But she does not find anything good neither in Amit nor in his family.

Dimple develops some destructive feelings also. She becomes cruel. She considers her pregnancy a burden to him. She induces miscarriage because she wants to get rid of her pregnancy.

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Dimple thinks that the child in the womb is a deterrent or a problem in her immigration to America. Maya Manju Sharma observes that Dimple “is a sacrament of liberation from the traditional roles and constraints of womanhood” (Sharma 1993: 15). Amit has habit of killing the crows and he has killed two hundred and fifty crows. Alam holds the views that Amit, Dimple’s husband was the main obstacle in her identity (Alam 41)

Dimple’s life can be compared with the life of Sita who follows her husband in the exile. But she emerges as a bad woman. She wants to live an independent life in the United States. She gets fed up with her life there and takes some steps which do not allow an ideal Hindu woman. She does not love and regard her husband’s hard work, hardships and his unspoken love. Amit brings Dimple to US in order to free her from all kinds of tensions. He is not a money-minded person and he cares for the safety of his wife. He does not allow her for any job for some money. He wants to see her safe. Though he has low income, yet he is neither miser nor narrow-minded. He allows Dimple for everything but it is Dimple who ignores the silent love of her husband. She does not share her problems with her husband and want to live in the world of fancy and dreams. She aspires to see herself an established US woman and she wants to show her off rich in front of other women.

In fact, Dimple dreams beyond her limitation which leaves her heart-broken. She murders her husband in the kitchen with the knife. She thinks that she will not get caught like other clever criminals. She imitates the life of the criminals while living in America and forgets the image of an ideal Indian wife who sacrifices everything for her husband. Thus, Dimple get nothing but a shock from her step of murdering her husband. She loses everything after this step and lands her into a ditch herself. Their expatriation becomes a complex phenomenon for Dimple and her husband, Amit Basu and their story ultimately becomes a tragedy. Christine Gomez comments on the expatriation:

Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion, which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly surroundings, an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forced on one by the environment. The expatriate builds a cocoon around herself/himself as a refuge from cultural dilemmas and from the experienced hostility or unfriendliness in the new country. (72)

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