

Bharati Mukherjee's Dimple in *Wife* and the Power of Subconscious Mind

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Abstract: Bharati Mukherjee's female protagonist Dimple in *Wife* appears as a person who lives in an imaginary world, beyond reality. Failing to make a transition from one world to another she oscillates between fear and fantasy and finally kills her husband. The novel thus presents the dilemmas (internal or psychological and external) of a modern woman created because of her inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. The present paper is an attempt to study Bharati Mukherjee's female protagonist Dimple in *Wife* from this aspect.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Our epics, vedas and puranas envisage marriage not as a mere social instrument, but also as a moral weapon to both stabilize and elevate the moral stature of an individual. But unfortunately, it is an irony of fate that in a post-modernistic world, such esteemed institutions are currently subject to doubt, cynicism and erosion. People enter into arranged marriages with unrealistic notions of life, love and marriage. Their sense of individualism is strong to the extent that they feel trapped in it. Similar is the situation with Bharati Mukherjee's female protagonist, Dimple, from the novel *Wife*. In *Wife* Mukherjee presents the expectations, dreams and desires of an Indian woman regarding marriage and married life and describes how her illusions of married life get shattered, and how she becomes embittered, estranged and morbid. The inner void and existential anguish transform her into a neurotic with homicidal violence. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* falls into the category of the modern novel as it presents an intense inner world of neurotic and solipsistic individual. Instead of trying to combine the freedom of the individual with tolerance for fellow beings, Bharati Mukherjee in this novel chooses to glorify the alienated self. She significantly concentrates on the female protagonist's disillusionment in her life because of the cultural conflict that leads her to psychic disorder. The sick mind contemplates only death and destruction and blames her husband Amit to thwart the promise of a fanciful world. And finally her splintered self finds solution to her problems only in murdering her husband.

The main concern or objective of this paper is an attempt to study the problem with Dimple for taking such an extreme step or the reason for such a behavior and the justification given by her for this act. What appears is the problem of hyperreality or aesthetic illusion that is the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from the unreal. Aesthetic illusion is a type of mental absorption which describes a generally pleasurable cognitive state that is frequently triggered by various media or other artifacts. The recipients can be drawn into a represented world imaginatively, emotionally or, to some extent, rationally and experience the world, the characters and the story in a lifelike way. The first known occurrence of the concept of aesthetic illusion was traced back by Ernst Gombrich in 1960. Later Plato and Aristotle argued over the value of mimesis in the sense of the representation of nature.

What we find is Dimple's own tendency to fantasize, as Jasbir Jain observes "it is difficult to treat the novel as a study of cultural shock for even while in Calcutta, Dimple is an escapist and lost in her private world of fantasy". Dimple the protagonist in *Wife* is an extremely immature girl who constantly dreams of marriage as she hopes that it would bring freedom and love. However, at the same time she is not clear about the concepts of freedom and love. This ambiguity underlying her mental makeup defines the incompleteness of her very being. Dimple as a young woman has an inordinate hurry to get married to her dream man and has been brought up to believe that her romantic illusions will somehow be made a reality through liberation into wifedom of an arranged marriage and so she lands airy dimensions to a very realistic thing like marriage. Even in imagining her husband, she pictures a man from different ads made complete by borrowing various qualities from a variety of advertisements put together. In marriage, she looks forward to a magical change of life like that of Cinderella, through the fairy's magic wand and also expects marriage to lead her to new dimensions of self expression:

"That was supposed to be the best part of getting married- being free and expressing yourself".

According to Freud an individual turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demands of renunciation of instinctual desires while the fantasy life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. The novel as a whole is full of what Frederick J. Hoffman calls crime passionnel or sentimental violence which lies in excess of expectation. Dimple expects everything from marriage- love, glamour, cocktail parties etc. and ultimately because of her inflated demands upon life ruins herself. Thus she has laid down too great expectations from marriage, only to discover afterwards that it, instead of delivering her into a life of promises, makes things more difficult for her. In place of her fantasies of affluence and plentitude she faces the dire reality in the shape of indulgence and scarcity. She declines to steer the normal path of life and longs for "a different kind of life (3)". But very soon, she understands the discrepancy between the premarital dreams and the marital realities. She realizes that her marriage with Amit is a total failure of her American dream and finds that her dream world is shattered. She gets totally cut off from the outside world and fails to communicate with

others and with her own self. Lack of communication stifles and chokes her voice and disintegrates her sensibility. She is thus excluded from any activity which can define her identity by her own passivity. This isolation and emotional starvation starts the process of her psychological disintegration.

Dimple appears to be an individual whose psychological demand and reactions to them are governed by her experience of life and her unique individual psyche and her unfulfilled dreams that create a tragedy. As Kalpana Wandrekar writes, "Dimple's mental distortions are unable to bridge the gaps between the dream world of imagination and the drab-world of reality"(44). And so she passes her maximum time in watching the films and the television serials which have murder as a part of their content. Unable to cope with her psyche one night as Amit comes home from his job, she stabs him on the neck with kitchen knife and after the horrid act she sits smug, secure in the knowledge that in the television serials the murders are never caught. She is so much possessed by the hyperreal world that to justify such a heinous act she takes support of absurd reasoning faculties. The description reveals that the novel is a tragedy resulted by unfulfilled dreams of an unbalanced personality of a person who lacks grace and dutifulness and who fails to grow out of juvenile fantasy.

Dimple is somebody who is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire as shown in television to be assertive and the Indian need as in reality to be submissive. But the unreal world of television takes over the reality where she gets entrapped between two cultures and aspires for a third one, her imaginative world. The result is that she is uprooted from her world and projected into a social vacuum where the media becomes her surrogate community, her global village. Indulging herself in sexual fantasies with cricket stars, young cabinet ministers and heroes from novels, Dimple sets out on a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence and loses hold on herself. Most of the times she dreams because they feed her fantasy and dreaming becomes an escape from reality and fulfillment of unsatisfied wishes. This hinders the expansiveness of life and the alienated mind is strained beyond endurance. It is no wonder then that the un-lived life of Dimple's fantasy gives rise to destructive tendencies.

Dimple's experimentation with the complexity of inner experience in creating a new self-hood speaks of estrangement from society and dissociation from reality. The problem with Dimple is that her dreamworld becomes more real for her and never takes her out of her fantasies and so the actual reality becomes difficult for her to accept. Infact it is the unreal world that she views in television that becomes the reality for her. It makes sense whatever one can and does accept on a conscious level has to be accepted by his subconscious as well. That is the subconscious mind is subject to the conscious mind and one can train his subconscious mind to believe what he can accept on a conscious level. Mysticism is the belief that something outside you controls your life. Recognising that one is in control and can rely upon his subconscious mind for the answers one seek is empowering. Right or wrong is not something one can check against a book. Right or wrong is embedded deep within us already, and to try to fit one into someone else's ideas or image is to try to put a square peg in a round hole. According to Horney,

The reaction to the deteriorating process can also be stark and, considering the formidable danger of self-destructiveness, this reaction is completely adequate as long as one continues to feel a helpless pray to these merciless forces. In Dimple's case she loses her hold on herself and appears superficial. Her real self is pushed in the background. She dreams of becoming any other person and thus, increasingly becomes a dissociated personality. Murphy suggests that "science" means knowledge that is coordinated, arranged and systematized so that we can cooperate with our subconscious minds. That is to say that the subconscious minds work as fantastic tools to help us achieve ends that we desire to see in our lives. But what stands true here is the fact that we need to present positive thoughts and images to our subconscious minds as we can't force things. What goes into your mind is hugely important. If you choose poorly, you'll assimilate bad attitudes, behaviour and thoughts. If you choose well, you'll begin to see positive changes within yourself. The other major question lies is what world do you want to live in and how do you want to live it? If you aren't sure what you want to achieve in your lifetime, it makes it much harder to select input that will assist you on your journey. If you are fully in alignment with your objectives, choosing the right input becomes much easier. And so though the novelist has at the very outset made the reader aware of Dimple's madness, the way she has frolicked with the concept of Indian womanhood under her thematic garb is utterly unfair. Neither the cultural conflict, a feminine need for freedom, nor any inner cravings for unfulfilled desires can account for Dimple's bizarre, blasphemous responses.

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