

BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S ITALIES: AN EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

Most of the female writers have women narrators or the story is narrated through 'feminine consciousness'. Protagonists are presented as integral selves, struggling to define their identities in an environment that is either hostile to, or at least not in harmony with their sensibility. Bharati Mukherjee portrays the power of women, the deviousness of women, the helplessness of women. In seeing to dispel the myths and popular beliefs about what provides fulfillment to women, Bharati Mukherjee portrays women who aspire, attempt and strive to be their selves.

Keywords: *Identity, self-expression submissiveness, immigration escapist, Transforming.*

Sometimes women are given high place of a Devi or goddess and sometimes they are given the lowest place of a pros. But they are no where treated as a person or as an individual. This is the main problem of the existing gulf between man and woman. Exploration of female identity means to refuse to be treated as an object and to affirm the dignity of personal being in this absurd world. To assert one's identity, however frail it may be one has to demonstrate considerable amount of grit and courage in the face of overwhelming oddities.

Bharati Mukherjee's second novel *Wife* has as its major theme the plight of an Indian wife torn between the need to play the role society expects of her and her need for self expression. Another theme of the novel is her predicament as Indian immigrant's wife in North America, since she can neither connect with the people around her nor give expression to her feeling of rage at her old life. Moreover, the novel points the violence building up inside and all around her in the North American landscape until she is driven to murder her husband.

The first part of the novel begins with Dimple Das Gupta's attainment of marriageable age and therefore, her family has started searching a suitable groom for her. Every girl before marriage takes marriage as the world of romance, love, freedom and liberation, Dimple too waits for a bridegroom to come and woo her. Far from such

expectations she takes marriage as the portals of self-expression. Very soon her parents search ends and she is married to Amit Basu, an engineer by profession. After her marriage Dimple has been allotted a new name. 'Nandini' which indicates loss of her identity. She is unable to get herself identified with this new name. This is a very common practice of bridegroom's family members that they try to mould the girl according to their own conventions within a few days. They don't pay least attention to such issues, as the girl has been brought up in a different family with different modes, customs and conventions and they are least bothered about the will of the girl whether she would like to be recognized by a new name.

The title 'Wife' indicates Dimple's category and the tag through which she is identified in the society. Dimple wants an independent identity rather than to be known as Amit Das Gupta's wife only. She realizes: how hard it was for her to keep quiet and smile though she was falling apart like a very old toy that had been played with, sometimes quite roughly, by children who claimed to love her. (wife. 212).

Unfortunately, Dimple's dreams about happiness were soon shattered. There were conflicts with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. All her dreams crumble one by one and she is deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for marriage was better than getting married. Dimple resents being wife in the Basu family and shows rebellious spirit against wifedom in many ways. After sometime, she begins to expect a child, which is quite unwanted for her and decides to get rid of the child by skipping ropes, since the baby would get in the way of the life full of possibilities that she thinks is awaiting her in North America. She had "picked a skipping rope as her weapon (p. 41) against motherhood.

This act is criticized on the scale that it is the height of violence smouldering inside Dimple. For Indian women pregnancy is a boon and they are the very source of 'creation'. A failure to this power of creation is subjected to hatred in society. Despite that Dimple has shown the courage of aborting her child. However the act is worth criticizing but Bharati Mukherjee showed the courage to portray such a strange action of her heroine of the novel. The purpose of the writer is to highlight that the act is the consequence of the accumulation of painful experiences, which a woman passes through in her life. As woman, whenever feels hurt, inflicts pain on herself first and this process turns her to be psychic. This happens because women have been tagged with submissiveness, meekness, silence, and dependence for centuries. Under this cover

she hesitates to take a decision and makes herself suffer a long. And when she discovers herself, she shows herself in many ways, however destructive or worth criticizing they may be. But this incident emphasizes the terrible strength, which Dimple possesses submerged inside her, under the apparent docile and domestic personality. Being completely disappointed with this loveless bond of marriage, Dimple begins to pine for something new in her life that she finds out in her immigration with her husband. At this point Dimple seems to be an escapist who is lost in her private world of fantasy.

America, Dimple's land of promises too falls short before her expectations. 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 independent and the Indian need to be submissive and self-effacing. One major obstacle in Dimple's quest for identity is her husband. Basically well meaning but too absorbed initially in his search for economic security and later in adopting the mannerism that will allow him to survive in the marketplace, Amit does not have the time or the sensitivity to understand the complicated changes going on inside Dimple with the passage of time, Dimple starts breaking after the realization that she is deceived in marriage and a good-for-nothing husband like Amit will not cater her dream world. She can not tolerate his snores any more and insomnia becomes her accustomed habit. Amit's unemployment was the root cause of all troubles.

Dimple started transforming herself into American style. Although Amit is happy at one point that his wife is becoming American, he is quite certain about one thing: he does not want her to be "too American" (p. 112). He cannot think of letting her work, even though she is bored and restless throughout the day and has nothing to do but her daydreams and the television set to occupy her then. The gulf between Amit and Dimple widens. By refusing emotional support to Dimple, Amit proves the complex of male superiority. She always starves for motivation, and later, due to absolute emotional starvation, she faces complete neurotic breakdown. Therefore, communication gap between Amit and Dimple over-swaps them.

Dimple's life is a typical wife's predicament "exploited by housework and afraid of self expression and about avoiding confrontation" (p. 149). The dull monotonous, routine life gets on her nerves more and more. In silence she observes her life falling apart and sadly discovers that Amit remained 'a chimera'. Ironically, it is the USA that

encourages her into designs of avenging herself through destructive means. Finally in her mentally upset state she kills Amit in an act of self-liberation from the stifling, smothering and monotonous life offered to her.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* is the story of a woman, who craves for making her husband and his family understand her as an individual. The act of murdering her husband is rightly the effect of American Culture. Under the influence of Americanization, Dimple had just killed the enemy, the major obstacle in her progress towards self expression, and she had done so by utilizing the tools at hand.

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