

Bharati Mukherjee's Wife-A Tragedy of Unfulfilled Dreams

Nidhi Joshi

Research Scholar
D.A.V.V.Indore, India
nidhijoshi2503@gmail.com

Dr. Akhilesh Barche

Professor English Literature
D.A.V.V.Indore
Indore

Abstract: *Here is the study of Bharati Mukherjee's novel 'Wife' as a tragedy resulted by unfulfilled dreams. From the very beginning Dimple, the protagonist of 'wife' appears as a person who lives in an imaginary world, beyond reality, she dreams of a perfect husband and perfect life but when her dreams remain unfulfilled, she murders her husband and thinks that no one will catch her for murder as she saw in most of the serials. So 'Wife' can be read as a tragedy resulted by unfulfilled dreams of an unbalanced personality.*

Keywords: *Fancy, Americanization, Destructive Impulse, Identity, Dissociated Personality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Here is an effort to analyze the character named Dimple in the novel 'Wife' by Bharati Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee is a well known novelist of recent decades. She depicts female psyche, cross-cultural elements and search for identity very well in her novels.

In the novel 'Wife' the protagonist Dimple is the wife of Amit, a young engineer, and this protagonist has to face many problems in her life.

The aim of writing this paper is to study Dimple as an individual whose psychological demands and reactions to them governed by her experience of life and her unique individual psyche and how her unfulfilled dreams create a tragedy.

2. DIMPLE'S UNFULFILLED DREAMS

The novel opens with Dimple's girlish fantasy about marriage. She is eager to get married and visions of her prince charming whose amorous advances and glances would drench her with supreme bliss. In Dimple's imagination there is no place for mundane responsibilities, struggle with day-to-day existence like water shortage, electricity failure and adjustment with in-laws. Her husband, Amit an upcoming young man who her parents find suitable for her, fails to feed her fancy. Dimple finds the tedium of marriage a burden. She had not bargained to live in the dark and dingy apartment with her mother-in-law. Dimple cannot see any joy in her married home in Calcutta and longs to go to the U.S.

In the U.S. fresh troubles start for her. Amit tries to keep her happy by all possible means despite his own struggle to get a job. The reality of life here is that he cannot devote all his time to his wife as he has to remain out of house for long hours. This leads Dimple to feel that he does not care for her. She used to watch television for hours together. 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. This is her final act of Americanization.

This 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. In this novel we find several themes such as adjustment to a new society, job hunting, frustrations and the shattering of dreams. America appears to Indian as the land of Golden Fleece but once there, they encounter unimaginable difficulties, the dreams shattered. These difficulties and the struggle to find a job is for Amit to tackle since he is the bread winner, Dimple is free from all these worries and she should feel herself lucky, according to Amit.

Then what is the Dimple's problem? It 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 is a study of an abnormal woman. Her character has two pronounced traits: an apparent helpless of a dependent person coupled with a desire of an aggressive personality to revolt and to master, the person who comes in contact with her. Anyone can find treads of complaining in her temperament.

We see Dimple as a young woman who has an inordinate hurry to get married to her dream man. She appears superficial and fails to impress. All she demands from life is parties, glamour and love. Thus her approach to life is unreal.

Dimple's parents were worried for her marriage; mother helping her with solving her beauty problems, father searching for an ideal match for her. But hidden from this world is a world of fantasy Dimple has created for herself.

Dimple's sole aim in life is marriage. She sets her total self to- this would be miraculous happening, liberating and so: "Discreet and virgin, she waited for real life to begin".

The waiting period, while her parents are hunting for a suitable groom seems to remote her. It makes her nervous, sick and anxious. Her anxieties are also related to the inadequacies of her figure and complexion, as she wants desperately to fit into the slot of an eligible match.

Like so many Bengali girls, Dimple Dasgupta 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 therefore she waits for a bridegroom to come and woo her.

Her pre-marital waiting state disturbs her:

Years of waiting have already made her nervous, unnaturally prone to colds, coughs and headaches. Wasted years-she was twenty-lay like a chill weight in her body, giving her eyes a watchful squirrel and her spine a slight curve (Wife)

She dreams about herself to be the prettiest woman so she writes to Mrs. Problemwala to provide solutions for her physical problems. But this dream of her remains unfulfilled as she did not deserve to be the prettiest due to her average beauty.

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. Dimple also expects marriage to lead her to a new dimension of self-expression:

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

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 indigence and scarcity:

Dimple wanted a different kind of life- an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon saris-so she placed her faith in neurosurgeons and architects.

But when she actually faces the man in Amit, all her fantasies are brought down to earth with a thud. Marriage, instead of liberating her lands her into a more complex bondage where she feels imprisoned and stifled. All her desires are as if smothered.

Dimple's gradual resentment with marriage begins when, for prospective match-making she is displayed as a chattel at several occasions. The condescending discussions regarding her physical features are discussed before her, which is very agonizing. When Amit Basu's family comes to inspect her:

There were two early hitches: Mrs. Basu objected to the name Dimple, which she considered too frivolous and unbengali, and the candidate's sister, Mrs. Ghose, felt that Dimple was a little darker than the photograph had suggested.

When Dimple's friend Pixie remarks about Amit: "Your short dark prince charming", she gets a jolt. She had imagined Amit to be a fantastic tall handsome man.

Other subsequent disillusionments confront her in the form of daily hardships. For instance, she discovers that at her in-law's she will have to fill the water from down below, the flat is quite small and the staircase has no light. The demands of the post-marital role fill her with anxieties which include pleasing everybody around.

Dimple had looked forward to her role as wife, considering it a type of freedom but later realizes:

...how hard it was for her to keep quite 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.

As a part of her wifedom, she admires the models of ideal wife like Seeta but she resents being wife in the Basu family and rebels against wifedom in many ways. One such way is her inducing a miscarriage by skipping herself free from her pregnancy, which she views as a Basu property even in her womb. This incident emphasizes the terrible strength which she possesses submerged inside her, under the apparent docile and domestic personality. She gives vent to her pent up frustrations through such violent outbreaks. The motif of pregnancy connects Dimple and the mouse:

It had a strangely swollen body. A very small creature with a fat belly. To Dimple the dead mouse looked pregnant.

The killing of the rat is a savage act, symbolizing her anger, frustration and depression embodying life of a pest. Her destructive tendency is displayed in her killing "a goldfish in a glass bowl", besides destroying the rat and her own foetus. Dimple feigns happiness but the bitter post-marital experiences start telling on her mentally and are witnessed in her becoming a neurotic:

Happy people did not talk to themselves and happy people did not pretend, that they had not been talking to themselves. "Dimple Basu", she repeated, "Dimple Basu is a happy woman".

Dimple is fast losing her hold on her real self. 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 prey to these merciless forces.

To give her life a meaning and to save herself from self-hate, Dimple takes recourse to escape. Her favorite pastime is to dream of America. Probably, that country would give her life a meaning and vouchsafe her identity. But even in the U.S.A. she fills unhappy and likes to escape.

3. CONCLUSION

Due to her abnormal temperament Dimple does not belong to anywhere. She loses her sense of security. Her real self is pushed in the background. Initially after marriage when living in Calcutta she tried to see herself as a "different" being. Not like the Basu's, her in laws, just to keep her identity as a separate and unique being. In the USA she tries never to be Americanized. Instead, she engages herself in search for glory by promoting her Indianness. She always dreams of being any other personality. Thus, increasingly she becomes a dissociated personality. Ultimately she murders Amit and creates tragedy as a result of her unfulfilled dreams.

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