

## **Psychograph of the Married Women - A Study in Bharati**

### **Mukherjee's *Wife***

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#### **Abstract**

Relationships are formed with the explicit purpose of providing Companionship to each other. For centuries, the crux of the problem is that of man-woman relationship along with a typical attitude of male dominance: man to rule and woman to obey, man the master and woman the slave, and above all, man for the field and woman for the hearth. One of the most basic patterns of the Indian society is the role assigned to man and to woman. For ages, woman and her images have been moulded, reshaped and reorientated by man and for man. This old, mutely flowing relationship is now under challenge.

Bharati Mukherjee defines Feminism as a constructive force which in the patriarchal social set-up should emancipate women from their subordinate position without destabilising human relationships and family Bonds. Her feministic ideology not only advocates the social emancipation of women by repudiating to submit to patriarchal oppression, but also suggests that women should realize their potential and assert their self-identity. In her stories she has projected the modern, middle-class Indian women who are struggling to overcome their subordinate position in the male-dominated society. Her women have an optimistic attitude towards life and hence solve the predicament of their lives with a hope for a better future. They do not negate the family life. Retaining their identities as wives, mothers and daughters they finally restore their individually and assert their true selves. The system of traditional marriages subjugates women and leaves them unprotected to their husband's tyranny. This paper aims to study the psychological conflict of the married women protagonist Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife*

**Keywords :** Patriarchy, Marriage, feminine mystique, feministic ideology, Culture-shock, Self-identity.

“The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman”.

- D.H.Lawrence.

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Psychologists have made an in-depth study of inter personal relationship of man and woman, in and outside marriage. The contemporary social scenario speaks of a world where atomistic family resigns. The family patterns and individual roles have also undergone a drastic change. The determination to stay married is no longer an important goal; instead happiness has taken its place. A stressful life, changes in social setting and women's role are the factors responsible for bringing about the sea-change in the man-woman relationships.

Marriage has been considered a sacred bond and an important social institution, since times immemorial. The institution of family also grew out of this bond. But we, of today, witness a vast transformation in the traditional views and beliefs attached to the bond of marriage. Many reasons have been put forth to justify the same, the major one being changing role of women in the society. In marriage a person seeks primary biological and social needs for finding security, dependence, sexual fulfilment and self-affirmation.

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subordinate position in the male-dominated society. Her women have an optimistic attitude towards life and hence solve the predicament of their lives with a hope for a better future. They do not negate the family life. Retaining their identities as wives, mothers and daughters they finally restore their individually and assert their true selves. The system of traditional marriages subjugates women and leaves them unprotected to their husband's tyranny. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

“Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism; the temptation to dominate is the most truly universal, the most irresistible one there is; to surrender the child to its mother, the wife to husband, is to promote tyranny in the World”<sup>1</sup>

Indian society upholds marriage as its backbone and treats it as the most honoured institution that provides women and men with a phase in which they can become complete. Bharati Mukherjee, with zeal to change the Indian male perception, describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish in for their triumph. Marriage, from times immemorial had always been a sacred institution in India, whatever had been its states in the West. There was a certain religiosity about marriage since this bond was upheld as the most sanctified of all human relationships. The role and duty of the wives had ever been to protect this bond from disruption, it was for this and due to this a woman recognizes and given a status. Even when the man falters, neglects or is unfaithful to the wife, it was her duty to bear with him, tolerate his infirmities and give him solace and bliss. It was her sole duty to save the marriage from dissolution or disintegration.

The Post-war society in India is marked by the emerging new patterns in marriage relations. It foresees a crisis in relationships and the institution of marriage. They are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world along with men on terms of perfect equality. One reason for this could be attributed to the emergence of women writers who have considerably influenced Indian life and society. Through writing she can liberate herself- it will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history. Writing is an act which will not only “realize” the decensored relation of women to her sexuality, to her womanly being, but also will give her access to her native strength. Her appeal is for creating a “New Woman” by liberating the old woman from labyrinths, ladders and trampled spaces, through writing. She flouts the self-admiring, self stimulating and self-

congratulatory men and abhors the position of women as servants and shadow to the militant male.

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1. Simone De Beauvoir, , *The Second Sex*. 1960. Trans. and Ed. H. M. Parsley. London: Four Square Books, 1961.) pg.483

Women's writing has a touch of mother's milk. She writes in white ink. The theory of psychoanalysis is also repressive as it supports masculine sexuality. She argues that women have been riveted between the myths of Medusa to the abyss. There are very few feminine texts because very few women have won back their body so far. Women should have choices of their own in matters like having children or not. They should not be taken over or threatened by others, with the fear of solitude or isolation.

As far as the women writers and women writing is concerned a lot has been doubted and debated. Allegations have been made against male writing and writers of subjugating women here too. It is as Anuradha Roy writes in *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers*:

“Marital relationships have almost inevitably be on the point of novels written by women. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels, which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces, which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning along fixed parameters, marriage becomes an arid formality, devoid of contact.”<sup>2</sup>

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* stands out as a unique fictional work by virtue of its insightful probing into its heroine's psyche and its indubitable technical excellence. Dimple ill-concealed sado-masochistic compulsions are soon precipitated by the violence-ridden and individualistic American life and culminate in her killing of her husband. This psychic development in Dimple has been variously but uncritically viewed as her desperate effort to “forget” her Indian roots necessitated by the demands of American life and as her assertion of independence from her overbearing husband. Dimple suffers from the neurotic compulsion of indulging in sado-masochistic acts in order to conceal her own sense of intrinsic weakness and failure.

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2. Anuradha Roy, *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999. Print

Psychoanalytically speaking this defence strategy is known to be ubiquitously employed by masochists. And if they also have an added disadvantage of a clear predisposition to neurosis like Dimple, the problem is further confounded. The masochist-neurotic seems to convert even chance occurrences into painful experiences. He seems to ever deeply submerge himself in misery. The aim of all such masochistic suffering is satisfaction although it is hardly ever attained except in sexual fantasies and perversions of masochistic nature. Other forms of masochistic suffering serve only the purpose of narcotising the lesser forms of pain which we all encounter every day and deal with rationally.

Dimple appears to indulge in masochistic suffering in order to lull the pain of disappointment with life, especially with married life. She happened to set a high store on marriage: "Marriage, she was sure, would free her, fill her with passion. Discreet and virgin, she waited for real life to begin."<sup>3</sup> She hoped that marriage would offer her different kind of life- "an apartment in Chowinghee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon saris"<sup>4</sup> She longed so intensely for it that the years of waiting made her "nervous...prone to colds, coughs and headaches"<sup>5</sup> She constantly imagined her future husband to be the very embodiment of the virtues of the commercial society.

"She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes, and chin from a body-builder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad and put the ideal man by herself in a restaurant on Park Street or by the side of a pool at a five- star hotel. He wore blue bathing trunks, there was no ugly black hair on his back and shoulder blades as he leaped feet first into the pool while she stood on the edge in a scarlet sari with a gold border, behind wraparound sunglasses, and trailed her toes in the water"<sup>6</sup>.

We could see her obsessively measuring her husband against her ideal man and her life against her dream and finding both of them wanting in many respects and despairing as a result. While on one hand she tries to adjust to Amit's wishes and be a dutiful wife, she is never quite unaware of the fact that he is not the man of her dreams.

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3. Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife* – pg –1
  4. Ibid –pg-3
  5. Ibid.pg.3
  6. Ibid .pg.23

“She wanted to dream of Amit but she knew she would not. Amit did feed her fantasy life; he merely the provider of small material comforts. In bitter moments she ranked husband, blender, colour TV, cassette tape recorder, stereo, in their order of convenience “. <sup>7</sup>

Her knowledge of the possibility of greater happiness with a different man ruins her attainable happiness with Amit within the marital relationship. Life with him, both in India and America, is naturally a big disappointment for her. In her moments of feverish introspection she thinks that life has been cruel to her:

“Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera. Amit was no more than that. He did not feed her reveries: he was unreal. She was furious, desperate; she felt sick” <sup>8</sup>

Marriage has not “provided all the glittery things she had imagined, had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies and three A.M. drives to dingy restaurants where they sold divine Kababs rolled in roti”. <sup>9</sup> The cumulative effect of all these experiences or rather the lack of them renders her “incapable of love”. <sup>10</sup> and leaves her a neurotic.

It is interesting to note why Amit is what he is. Like anybody who has made pragmatism a way of life he is unsentimental, quick and decisive in gestures, cautious in approach and meticulous in planning for future. Like any traditionally brought up Indian husband, he does not know how to pay a compliment to his wife. He would like her to stay at home and attend to the household chores rather than go out, work and earn. In a word, he appears to be almost a personification of ego in the Freudian sense. He constantly strives to achieve its ideals. The culture he is born in requires of him to earn and provide for future whatever be the cost and he withdraws his love and other emotional attachments from his wife in pursuit of the cultural aims.

7. Ibid .pg.113.
8. Ibid .pg.156
9. Ibid .pg..101-2
10. Ibid .pg..131

Freud has interesting things to say about this:

“This work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations...since a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychical energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido. What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it”.<sup>11</sup>

The immigrant’s experience of the clash of cultures and the question of identity the immigrant must face continue to be Bharati Mukherjee’s major preoccupations. She draws upon multiple cultural traditions, combining ancient Indian philosophy with the modern mythology of the American Dream and the oral folktales of India with the speech rhythms and cultural iconography of contemporary California. She uses violence, frequent feature of her fiction, as a metaphor for cultural conflict. Her immigrant protagonists undergo changes of identity, metamorphosing according to the demands of the unfamiliar environments in which they find themselves. Fluid identities, name changes, altered personalities- through insistent repetition; these motifs in Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction come to represent not only modes of personal survival for Asian immigrants but also their ways of altering the American reality of which they seek to become a part.

In the novel *Wife*, the institution of marriage is considered the root cause of all the dilemmas and frustrations. Thus the study analysis the inner life of the character Dimple who never forgets her social and familial ties. She suffers because of her supposedly bondage to a person whom she marries. Bharati Mukherjee tried very hard to give the touch of ferocious assaults on male dominated existence by making her women character to be highly sensitive

to the point of distortion and solidity and to the point of being neurotic. It deals with the inner trauma of poor women who blatantly lambaste the male for her miserable plight.

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11. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.p.293.

**Reference:**

1. Beauvoir, Simone De, *The Second Sex*. 1960. Trans. and Ed. H. M. Parsley. London: Four Square Books, 1961.
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