



Diasporic Consciousness in Bharati Mukherjee's Wife

PROF. KAMAL H. JOSHI

Arts, Sci. & Comm. College, Lunawada.
Gujarat (India)

Abstract:

This paper tries to show how a text written in English by an Indian writer could serve as a Diasporic text. An attempt has been made to analyze Bharati Mukherjee's 'Wife' as a novel of Indian Diaspora in U.S.A. Diasporic Consciousness is a complex term as it encompasses ideas including exilic existence, a sense of loss, consciousness of being an outsider, yearning for home, burden of exile, dispossession and relocation. This paper also tries to look at the feeling of Diasporic people, their identities, their alienation among the unknown, the attachment with homeland and alienated homeland and so on.

Keywords: *Consciousness, Diasporic Consciousness, Diasporic people, Indian Diaspora*

To understand the Diasporic novel, one should understand the concept of Diaspora. In fact, the world 'Diaspora' firstly applied for the Jewish migration from their homeland, is now associated with a metaphoric title for expatriates, exiles, immigrants, refugees, emigrants, homeless individual, rootless persona etc. Diaspora refers to the work of exile and expatriates and all such people who have experienced unsettlement and uprooting at the religious, existential, political or metaphorical levels. Surprisingly it is significant that the Diasporic Indian writing in English encircles every continent and part of the world. Moreover the Diasporic literatures focus on the unsettlement or dislocation of an individual or race and consequent alienation. Alienation leads a sense of loss but life consists not in losing but in rediscovery of self which is a part of Diasporic experience. And Bharati Mukherjee has this discovery as her recent theme in the novel 'Wife'.

Bharati Mukherjee's 'Wife' takes up a more complex dimension of the theme of immigrant experience. It centers round the life of a middle class married Bengali woman who migrates from Calcutta to New York. From the very beginning we feel that Dimple is far from normal girls. Dimple has nothing to do expect thinking about marriage because she thinks that marriage is a blessing in disguise. It will bring her freedom, fortune and perfect happiness:

"Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love" (P.3).

Nothing pleases her more than the imagination about marrying a fellow who provides her all comforts.

At last a day came when she got married to Amit Basu, a consultant Engineer, who has already applied for immigration to Canada and U.S. But from the very beginning of their married life, Dimple does not feel easy there only because their house is not that spacious and attractive. Dimple thinks that all these problems are temporary and with the confirmation for immigration they will eventually come to an end.

Dimple Basu has always lived in a fantastic world, a world which is created by her. But when she confronts the harsh realities of life the feathers of her imagination are clipped. All her dreams crumble one by one and she is deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for marriage was better than getting married. She starts hating everything.

“She hated the gray cotton with red roses inside yellow circles that her mother-in-law had hung on sagging tapes against the metal bars of the windows”. (P.20).

Amit was not the man Dimple has imagined for her husband. When he is out of the house, she starts creating the man of her dream:

“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.”(P.23).

With the passing of time, Dimple becomes pregnant. Pregnancy is a boon for Indian women because they are supposed to maintain the continuity of the clan. If a woman fails to reproduce a child, she is condemned and becomes an object of hatred in society. But in the case of Dimple, it is totally different. Her killing of the mice which looked pregnant also suggests that she does not feel at ease with her pregnancy. She becomes almost hysteric in killing that tiny creature without any rhyme and reason;

“She pounded and pounded the baby clothes until a tiny gray creature run out of the pile, leaving a faint trickle of blood on the linen. She chased it to the bathroom. She shut the door so it would not escape from her this time... I’ll get you she screamed. “There is no way out of this, my friend... “And in an outburst of hatred, her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury, she mashed the top of a small gray head”. (P.35)

This act of killing is a manifestation of violence is smoldering inside her. Her repulsion with her own pregnancy is born out of her hatred for Amit who fails to feed her fantasy world.

When Amit’s confirmation for migration for migration to U.S. comes Dimple’s happiness is inexpressible. The long awaited day of migration comes and Mr. & Mrs. Amit Basu set their feet at the Kennedy Airport where Jyoti Sen, Amit’s former classmate at the IIT, receives them. Dimple feels excited and a little scared as well. She has never been to a city bigger than Calcutta and the magnificence of the city of New York terrifies her:

“She had never seen such bigness before; the bigness was thrilling and a little scary as well. She could not imagine the kind of people who had conceived it and who controlled it”. (P.52)

The sens have strong repugnance for Americans and English language because of the feeling of insecurity in an expatriate. For an Indian, it is a very tough task to get a job in America. And if anyone get it, it is very difficult to sustain it. He has to bear all sorts of humiliation and exploitation. Jyoti Sen teaches Amit all tricks of the trade, the codes of conduct for an Indian professional in America to thrive:

“Work twice as hard, keep your mouth shut and you’ll be a millionaire in fifteen years.”(P.56).

When Dimple goes to market with Meena sen to buy a cheese cake, she is so afraid and he thinks that the shopkeeper is taking out his gun and she is left with no option but to be killed without crying. Here she realizes the difference between Calcutta and New York. This very first experience to America leaves a traumatic effect on her mind.

Amit’s frustration is now obvious because he finds himself still jobless. On the other hand, Dimple helps Meena Sen in domestic works and spends her time in watching T.V. or reading news papers. Dimple always lives under fear – everything terrifies her. She starts breaking after the realization that she is deceived in marriage and her husband like Amit will not cater for her dream world. He was not the man Dimple had wanted as husband :

“She wanted Amit to be infallible intractable, godlike, but with boyish charm; wanted him to find a job so that after a decent number of years he could take his savings and retire with her to a three-storey house in Ballygunge park.” (P.89).

She is suffering from inferiority complex and thinks that she is not able to win her husband's love and affection. Amit may also be blamed for his ignorance of female psychology. Dimple finds life impossible with the people who didn't understand about Durga Pujah. An expatriate is conscious of preserving his identity even in most trying moments of life. In America, she realizes how easy it was to live, to communicate, to share with people in Calcutta.

When loneliness becomes unbearable, Dimple contemplates as many as seven ways of committing suicide. It seems as if she is in love with whatever is dark, evil, sinister, gruesome murder, suicide, mugging - these are also fascinating words for her.

As the novel advance to its end, Dimple's gloom deepens with every passing day. Amit could only see the external changes in Dimple and he explains it as a case of 'Culture-shock'. He even promises to take her to Calcutta. This does not prove helpful. Dimple starts contemplating the murder of her husband. She now fails to differentiate between what she sees on television and what she thinks. The idea of slaughtering her husband fascinates her. She thinks:

“She would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her, made her feel very American some how, almost like a character in a T.V. series”. (P.195).

The problem with Dimple is that she loses touch with reality. She loses her sleep and becomes a sleep walker like Lady Macbeth and ultimately kills Amit without actually thinking about its consequences.

Bharati Mukherjee invariably focuses upon sensitive protagonists who lack a firm sense of cultural identity and are natural victims of racism, sexism and numerous forms of social oppression. Dimple, brought up to be passive and dependent as per Indian standards of womanhood, lacks the inner resources to cope with the fear and challenging situation and ultimately descends into unexpected violence. It is to the credit of her creator that Dimple wins out attention and sympathy in spite of herself and her circumstances. Thus the novel traces the Diasporic experience of an Indian wife in America and the concomitant deep culture shock leading to neurosis.

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