

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

CULTURAL SHOCK IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *WIFE*

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ABSTRACT

The germ of the novel lay in the medieval romance of fantastic tale of the love and adventure, itself derived from the ballads and fragments of epic poems sung by wandering minstrel. A novel like a play has a plot and to a great extent its characters reveal themselves and their intention in dialogue. The research paper is thus branched into two parts. The first part speaks about Bharati Mukherjee and second part about the cultural shock in the novel *Wife*.

Key Words: Cultural Shock, Bharati Mukherjee, Manhattan.

INTRODUCTION

The germ of the novel lay in the medieval romance of fantastic tale of the love and adventure, itself derived from the ballads and fragments of epic poems sung by the wandering minstrel. In 1350 Boccaccio wrote a world famous collection of love stories in prose, entitled *Decameron*. Such short stories are called in Italian 'novella'.

Bharati Mukherjee's female protagonists are immigrants and suffer cultural shock but they are anxious to establish their identity by undertaking their heroic journeys that is why Bharati Mukherjee received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short period of just twenty five years. Even though she has been acknowledged as a voice of expatriate immigrants, sensibility, and a close observation of her novels reveals that she has written all the novels with predominantly feminist views. Mukherjee's depiction of women and their different relationships portray the dominance of practical practices in traditional society, as well as the forms of liberation and empowerment which are available to women in their Diaspora's situation.

Wife:

In her second novel *Wife* the protagonist Dimple wants to break through the traditional

taboos of a wife. This novel tells the story of Dimple a seemingly docile young Bengali girl who, as any other normal girl is full of dreams about her married life and so she eagerly and impatiently waiting for marriage.

In India, a marriage is not simply a union of two individuals; it is a coming together of two families as well. But in western countries like America, a marriage is simply a contract between two individuals.

Mukherjee's second novel, *Wife*, opens in Calcutta with Dimple Dasgupta's father in search of a suitable mate to her, an appropriate caste, an engineer, by securing matrimonial advertisements. When we first meet Dimple she is fantasizing about marriage, not an engineer, but a neurosurgeon. She imagines it will bring her freedom, love, and a more desirable life. Life has so far been simply a rehearsal for real life, the kind of real life that comes with marriage; for marriage brings opportunities that single women are denied in Indian culture, and Dimple longs for those freedoms more for anything. Dimple is subjected to the desires and whims of others and has been socialized to be unaware of her own desire for an independent identity but does not know it. She believes she wants to be a wife, but her longing is confused with her desire for freedom. She

is also unaware that such a role grants her those desires.

Dimple's husband, Amit Basu, is eventually found in the papers: Dimple is not, however, the Basu family's first choice. While the wedding is first of Dimple's series of disappointments comes in learning that Basu is a short prince charming rather a tall one. Her marriage does not turn out her hope and dream. Rather than emerging by gaining a firmer identity as a married woman. She finds that with each day she becomes less enthused. First her mother-in-law takes away her name, preferring instead Nandini. Then the newlyweds move into Dimple's mother-in-law, where they live a fearless and glamorous life. And Amit wants Dimple to act robotically, knowing simply what to do and say to please him.

Wife ends with Dimple committing murder after all. She kills Amit by stabbing at the mole on his face, her realities so confused that she is not fully aware of her own actions. Again it is depicted like a dream. She is symbolically freed from the power Amit and their marriage had over her through this violent act and seems to hope to embrace such freedom since he believes women on television get away with murder. It is ironic that with a name like Dimple, she chooses to kill Amit by stabbing at his mole. Her identity might simply be described as the slight indentation for which she is named, and in vengeance she has sought Amit's much more identifiable facial features as the target for her frustrations.

Conclusion

Bharathi Mukherjee's *Wife* concerned on the cultural conflict of the East and the West. It has a heroine of Indian origin, who suffers a cultural shock by going to America. The character, Dimple are the inheritors of the Indian American alienated identity and have come to terms with the strange phenomenon of having too many roots, too many locations. It contained encouraged Mukherjee to tap it to provide a much needed novelty to the unimaginative well mannered American fiction.

The novel is written in three sections, the first taking place in Calcutta, and the second in America while Amit and Dimple are living with sense and the third when they are subletting an apartment in

Manhattan. *Wife* develops many of the themes for which Mukherjee's work is celebrated in her depiction of the life on woman's exile from her country and herself.

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