

Masochistic Woman in Migration: Bharati Mukherjee's Dimple

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Abstract

Mukherjee's Dimple in **Wife** also undergoes a psychological crisis called masochism – a tendency related enjoyment of receiving pain. Mukherjee's **Wife** relates the life of a middle-class married Bengali woman, who migrates from Calcutta and immigrates into New York. Dimple has nothing to do except the vague idea about marrying a neurosurgeon because she thinks that marriage is a blessing in disguise. It will bring her freedom, fortune and perfect happiness. At last, Dimple marries Amit Basu, a consultant Engineer. He has already applied for immigration to Canada and the USA and the job application is pending in Kenya too. She begins to think that waiting for marriage is better than getting married. She starts hating everything. Amit is not the man Dimple had imagined. When he is out of the house, she starts creating the man of her dream with the help of advertisements.

Later, Dimple gets a feeling that she is cheated in and bored of married life with Amit as he fails to cater her emotional and physical needs. She cannot tolerate his snores and falls a victim to insomnia. She thinks that her marriage with Amit is a failure one. It is a failure of her dreams. So she thinks of committing suicide. Finally, Dimple becomes a victim of neurosis. However, her sado-masochist drives further compel her to inflict the same kind of punishment upon Amit, which she wishes him to do her. She goes astray by her own neurosis, which lays within her and leads her to kill her own husband. Slowly she has become a masochistic woman, who takes delight in pain. She is a victim of her own expectations, dreams, and hallucinations. Hers is a silent suffering. Hence, it is masochistic in nature.

Key Words: Alienation, emotion, Fantasy, isolation, masochistic.

Introduction:

Bharati Mukherjee's Dimple in **Wife** undergoes a psychological crisis called masochism a tendency related to the enjoyment of receiving pain. It is a disorder. In it, the neurotic instead of indulging in hallucinations, he/she wounds himself/herself and enjoys the pain on his/her body. It is a kind of volition. Dimple is an extremely immature girl, who constantly dreams of marriage. She hopes that marriage would offer her a different kind of life. Dimple's morbidity is evident while she is at her parental home and in the way she allows her conscious mind to be completely dominated by the colourful romance projected in the advertisements and stories of magazines. Later, Dimple feels gloomy and rejected and dejected. "She seemed to be waiting for events that failed to occur or

occurred unnoticed. Her life was slow, full of miscalculations” (178). And as a result, she starts contemplating on killing her husband, who in her opinion, is the root-cause of all evil-displacement, failures, dissatisfied dreams, alienation, hallucination, masochism, and so on.

Dimple’s Dream of Marriage:

Mukherjee’s Wife relates the life of a middle-class married Bengali woman, who migrates from Calcutta and immigrates into New York. After a ten year sojourn in Calcutta, Dimple has got an idea to marry a neurosurgeon. This desire indicates something unnatural in her. Even Mukherjee’s choice of the name Dimple suggests any slight surface depression. Dimple has nothing to do except the vague idea about marrying a neurosurgeon because she thinks that marriage is a blessing in disguise. It will bring her freedom, fortune and perfect happiness. At last, Dimple marries AmitBasu, a consultant Engineer. He has already applied for immigration to Canada and the USA and the job application is pending in Kenya too. Dimple is delighted and she does a lot of shopping for her marriage. Basus are good people but their house is not that spacious and attractive. She does not feel easy with them and particularly she begins to hate Amit’s mother and sister. Her mother-in-law also dislikes her daughter-in-law’s name, Dimple, and wants to call her Nandini. Dimple thinks that all these problems are temporary and with the confirmation of immigration they will eventually come to an end. She frequently talks with her husband about the anticipated immigration either into Canada or into the USA; though “Thought of living in Africa or North America terrified her” (17). Later, as she was used to live in her fantastic world, a world created by her, she begins to think that waiting for marriage is better than getting married. She starts hating everything.

Dimple’s Marriage Journey With Amit:

When one evening Amit takes her to Kwality’s bay by taxi and orders chilli chicken, chicken fried rice and chicken spring rolls, she feels uneasy in handling the chicken pieces with fork and knife and thinks that Amit should have taken her to Trinca’s instead of Kwality’s. “He should have taken her to Trinca’s on Park Street, where she could have listened to a Goan band play American music, to prepare her for the trip to New York or Toronto. Or to the discotheque in the Park Hotel, to teach her to dance and wriggle” (21). Amit is not the man Dimple had imagined. When he is out of the house, she starts creating the man of her dream with the help of advertisements. “She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a bodybuilder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad and put the ideal man” (23). When she becomes pregnant, she begins to vomit deliberately. “The vomit fascinated her. It was her’s, she was locked in the bathroom expelling brownish liquid from her body. She took pride in brownish blossoms” (30). She also begins to think “of ways to get rid of ... whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes” (31). Her killing of the mouse which looked pregnant also suggests that she does not feel at ease with her pregnancy. She becomes almost hysteric in killing that tiny creature. This act of killing is a manifestation of violence that is smouldering in her. Her repulsion with her own pregnancy is born out of her hatred for Amit, who fails to feed her fantasy world. Even she decides to terminate her pregnancy by skipping ropes. She wants to self-abort the baby inside her. “She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned, then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed” (42). After terminating her pregnancy, she remains poised and very cool. When

Amit asks her "How could it happen to us?", Dimple says very casually : "He would have been deformed" [...]. I had this bad dream last week... he had no arms and legs. I didn't want to tell you, I didn't want to tell anyone so it wouldn't happen" (42-3). She remains poised and dispassionate.

When Amit's confirmation for migration to United States comes, Dimple feels elated. She feels like being freed from the enclosures / the fetters of servile domesticity. When Dimple and Amit arrive at the Kennedy Airport, they are received by Jyoti Sen, Amit's former classmate at the IIT, Kharagpur. On the way, he talks about the triple-murder case, which is the talk of the town. He details "Some guy came in and asked for a chocolate ice-cream cone and the guy said he only had vanilla and strawberry, so he took out a gun and shot him and two other customers!" (51-2). Even Jyoti Sen horrifies her by saying : "if you honk your horn at some guy; he's likely to blow your head off" (52). Contrary, on the way to Sens, when Amit asks Sen about the salary and job opportunities in the States, Dimple feels excited and little scared of the bigness of a foreign city / an alien city. "She had never seen such bigness before; the bigness was thrilling and a little scary as well. She couldn't imagine the kind of people who had conceived it and who controlled it" (52). On reaching Sen's apartment, Dimple can see once again a mini India in the hall of Sen's apartment. Sens are very conscious of their Bengali identity.

Dimple's Fear in Shopping:

One day, Dimple goes to the market with Meena Sen and wishes to buy a cheesecake. She is afraid to go to the shop alone but when Meena encourages her, she goes to the shop. She is taut with fears when she gets into the shop. She notices cakes, pickles, salads, hanging salamis, pink roast beef, roast duck and turkey and others inside the glass. When she asks for a cheesecake, the shopkeeper starts staring at her to her great embarrassment. Everywhere there is stench of blood and it is intolerable to her. Instantly, she fails to understand what the shopkeeper has said and repeats her sentence : "I mean one pound of cheesecake" (59). When the shopkeeper says that he does not want to break the law, she is too muddled and replies: "No, I don't know the law" (59). When he searches for something under the counter, she starts fearing that she would be killed: "I've insulted him, I will stand here numbly and be shot" (59). Then only it is clear to her that the shopkeeper is not selling cheesecakes.

Dimple's Meeting with Indian and Native American:

Dimple feels some relief at the party at Vinod Khanna's place. There Dimple happens to see Indian-Americans. She realizes that a little India has come alive for her. People like the Sens, Mehtas, Khannas and Bhattacharyas, and Miss Chakravorty all talk in familiar language. Everybody seems to praise Indian food, culture, habits and so on. Everyone shows disgust for America and things American. For them, Americans are dirty people. When Amit becomes restless as he has no job of his own, Dimple helps Jyoti Sen in domestic works and keeps herself busy. She spends her time in watching Television or reading newspapers. However, she always lives under fear. All she hears in America is murder, smuggling and rape in the basement and so on. Even she is scared of the police men. "Negro Policemen with dogs walked around the building and playground. Dimple said she was so scared of the Policemen; they just did not look inoffensive, like the ones back home" (74).

Later, as is the case with the party at Vinod Khanna's place, the second party that Dimple attends at Mullicks (Ina and Bijoy) gives Dimple an opportunity to meet Indians and native Americans. Later, Dimple gets a feeling that she is cheated in and bored of married life with Amit as he fails to cater her emotional and physical needs. She cannot tolerate his snores and falls a victim to insomnia. She thinks that her marriage with Amit is a failure one. It is a failure of her dreams. However, she is also equally happy because of the compliments from Milt Glasser, Jyoti Sen and Ina Mullik. Later, Dimple starts going out with Ina Mullik and Milt Glasser and she begins to wear Marsha's pants and keeps them away from Amit as a secret. This outing makes her a disturbed immigrant. She turns more and more neurotic as she fails to understand what she sees in the television and in real life. The existence panics her and lures her as is her hallucination. She undergoes the suppressed effects of alienation .

The title of the novel, **Wife**, is significant and can be read in irony. The protagonist struggles hard in the social role assigned to her. Temperamentally, she is ill suited to play that role. Her pseudo intellectual approach to life, her immature views on marriage coupled with a psychic fragility play havoc on her performance as a wife. In trying alternatives, she does something which appears abnormal in her behaviour but her traits should be viewed from the angle of her innate bid to live a life on her own terms.

Dimple's schizophrenic nature :

Mukherjee's novel sketches out the character Dimple, who is presented as an intense neurotic and solipsistic individual. Dimple's world is a world of day dreams and nightmares. Dimple refashions her old life to her own purpose. She blunders her way towards liberation by having an affair with a white American man but ends up in madness. Dimple is highly sensitive like Maya of Desai's **Peacock**. She lacks a suitable sense of personal and cultural identity and is victimized by racism, sexism and other forms of social oppressions in America. She breaks away from her confining tradition and finds her own way in the new world. She decides : "She would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her, made her feel very American somehow, almost like a character in a TV series. Amit's tragedy was that he lacked extravagance; he preserved it in the immigrant virtues of caution and cunning" (195).

Indulging herself in sexual fantasies. Dimple sets out on the long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. Even her parents are not aware of her schizophrenic nature. They just remain as flat characters. They never inquire the inner reverberations of their daughter's mind. She is finally married to Amit, an average middle class, young engineer, who dreams of making a fortune in America and returning to India, after retirement, to lead a comfortable, rich life in Calcutta. At first, Dimple does not have any liking for Amit but her father compels her to marry Amit, like Maya, who is married to her father's friend. She accepts him but she is not fully satisfied with the fact that he was handsome in the way the movie stars were. She constantly imagines him to be the very embodiment of the virtues of the commercial society. She feels disillusioned and cheated immediately after her marriage to Amit because her romantic adolescent mind cannot grasp the hard realities of practical life. So, she always lives in the world of imagination and often compares her husband with an ideal man and her life with her dream. She finds both of them are failing in many respects and is desperate as a result. While on the one hand, she tries hard to adjust with Amit's

wishes and be a dutiful wife, on the other hand, she is aware of the fact that he is not the man of her dreams. In fact, "Amit did not feed her fantasy life; he was merely the provider of small material comforts" (W113). Her knowledge of the possibility of greater happiness with a different man ruins her attainable happiness with Amit within the marital relationship. To Dimple, marriage has not: "provided all the glittering things she had imagined [...] (102). As a result, she begins to resent her new home, her-in-laws', her new name "Nandini" given to her by her mother in law and even her husband who does not seem to be capable of feeding her fantasy life. Sometimes, Dimple wants to be a dutiful wife and takes care of her husband. She tries her level best to please her husband.

In New York, Dimple does not have anybody to share her feelings. She tries to convey her fears and forebodings to Amit but neither does he try to understand her nor he is capable of rising above a mundane understanding like Gautama of Desai's **Peacock** who also fails to understand the turbulent psyche of his wife Maya. So, she has to come up with her traumatic mental condition all alone. Dimple expects the apartments in America to resemble the sets in a Raj Kapoor's movie. To her sheer disgust, she finds nothing of that sort in Sen's apartment, where they have to stay until Amit gets a job. When, Amit fails to get an immediate job, instead of giving an emotional support, she sneers at him. Her frustration with Amit raises manifolds. Amit too collapses inwardly because of her continuous torture.

Dimple indulges herself in masochistic suffering in order to ease the pain of disappointment with life, especially with married life. As the masochist neurotic seems to convert every chance occurrence into painful dreaming, hallucinations and nightmarish experiences, it is primarily used by her to narcotize the pain. In the end of the novel, she admits: "provided all the glittery things she had imagined," marriage "had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies" (W 101). She experiences a total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. She finds a wide gulf between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation. She sinks into the world of isolation. Her morbid imagination and the growing frustration have a deep impact on her marital life. She starts having a feeling of revulsion for Amit. She becomes a psychically disturbed woman. She undergoes a mental trauma. She is increasingly rejecting her husband as she is in the process of absorbing American culture. Seema Sunil says in *Man-Woman Relationship in Indian Fiction*, "prone to the world of fantasy, she easily falls a victim to the glamour and colourful world of advertisements. This fascination leads her to a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. Indeed she is unable to grasp her own intensity of feeling and chooses to terms with either her own culture or America's culture and almost in a fit of hallucination, kills her husband Amit" (15).

Dimple undergoes mental tension which allows her no peace. She finds no consolation or relief in America. The sense of violence and aggression is heightened in the novel by the pervasive violence in American life. Dimple confesses that in America talking about violence and murders were like talking about weather. The New York life appears to prove destructive to her. She is further shaken by the realization that New York with all the glitters is a crime-prone city, allowing no freedom to Indian wives. She experiences a total and complete estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. She finds a wide gulf between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation. She sinks into the world of isolation, unable to welcome the bright prospects of setting up a new home after Amit gets a job. Life with Amit, both in India and America, is naturally a great disappointment for

her like that of Maya, who is dissatisfied with Gautama, a practitioner of detachment against Maya's theories of attachment.

Dimple's Alienation :

When Dimple realizes that her husband is not designed to nurture her inner lives, she floats in clouds of alienation. Alienation drives her to men other than her husband. Milt Glasser is Dimple's answer to the problem. She knows that she is able to communicate with him freely: "He was the only one she could talk to. With the others, people like Amit and Ina and even Meena Sen, she talked in silences. With Milt she could talk about all sorts of things" (W 191). Her husband appears to her no more than a chimera. She feels that she is possessed by a monster. She feels that she has lost her balance. Her television world merges with the world of imagination and consequently leaves her in confusion between what she has seen in the television and what she has imagined. She finds herself collapsing inwardly, becomes terribly apprehensive of imaginary dangers, entertains premonitions and begins to lose touch with reality gradually. She just cannot understand what is happening to her. She is so confused that whatever is happening to her is beyond her reach and control. She is not sure of the source of her trouble. She turns with the force to self-destruction and devises at least ten different ways of ending her life.

Dimple begins to experience a split personality, sees her body and soul apart, manifests extreme self-consciousness and acutely suffers from imaginary illness. "But it was the imaginary ills that were impossible to treat. She felt moody and light headed" (205). She begins to experience death at close quarters. Thereafter in wakefulness too, she sees herself as dead and even post mortem performed on her body. Her sado-masochist drives further compel her to inflict the same kind of punishment upon Amit. The idea of murdering Amit ironically makes Dimple: "feel very American somehow, almost like a character in the T.V Series" (195). Her American frenzy accomplishes her wish. Dimple has not been able to adjust to the familial circumstances. She is alienated from her husband who, as a careerist, is hankering after lucrative jobs. Despair sets in her life. The alien circumstances accentuate her hypertension and drive her to the brink of regression and abnormality. She had potential signs of alienation in Calcutta before embarking on her voyage to America, and now the alien environment proves to be inexorable. As a result, she finds herself ill at odds to: "suffer the terrible assaults of lonely existence" (177). In America, even her body seems to be: "curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to her, yet weightless, almost airborne" (177). She feels that she would have been a very different person had she married someone else who unlike Amit would have adorned her and showered all affection and attention on her like Peter in Atwood's *Woman*, who adores Marian all the time for sex alone. As a result, Dimple starts searching for alternatives in attending and throwing parties and serving food in a glamorous way. She is tempted to roam in markets. She loves to go out with Ina to the restaurant for Pizza-eating. But it is the window shopping, which she likes most. Watching television and reading magazines become her favourite pastime. She thinks of television as her only friend. Like the women in the operas, she believes that infidelity would make her life thrilling and glamorous. In having an illicit relationship with Milt, she tries to find an identity in America. At this stage, her relationship with Amit is at the lowest ebb. She turns: "much worse off than ever, lonelier, and more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises, she felt like shadow without feelings" (200). She avoids and tries to reject her husband as she is in the process of absorbing American culture. Prone to the

world of fantasy, she easily falls a victim to the glamour and colourful world of advertisements. This fascination leads her to a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. Indeed, she is unable to grasp her own identity or feeling and chooses to express her ungratified passion through violence. She cannot come to terms with either her own culture or American culture. In the end, Dimple is: "unaccustomed to the role of comforting angel" (134). The will to live, the vitality of sex and the vitality of romance nullify in her. The television operas she views are concerned with death, murder, rape and adultery. She falls an easy prey to the glamorous way in which such violence is depicted in the Television series. The killer instinct grows in her. She imagines killing her own husband in his sleep or at his breakfast table. So, she enacts in fantasy the entire act of murder. An innocent duty conscious husband falls a prey to the neurotic madness of his wife. Though married to an educated and liberated husband, she is not able to strike a balance between the two juxtaposition worlds: the one she left behind and the other she comes to live in.

Conclusion:

Dimple gets totally cut off from the outside world. This situation starts thwarting her life. The isolation and powerlessness is so acute that the other potentialities such as sensuous, emotional and intellectual ones which are essential for life and evolution of personality cannot be sinuous and cannot be realized by her. The lack of inner security and spontaneity blocks this realization. This blockage increases with the shock of another culture. The burden of the feeling of being trapped weighs on Dimple's mind. It is manifested in her hysterical behavior. She confesses to Amit: "The trouble is I've stopped brooding about Calcutta" (111). Most of the time, she dreams because dreams feed her fantasy. Her alienated mind is strained beyond endurance. Her defences are not ready to meet the challenges of the western world. She is prepared for pain, inertia, exhaustion, and endless indecisiveness. Dimple's fantasy gives rise to destructiveness. She tends to develop masochistic strivings. The sick mind contemplates only death and destruction. Dimple arouses pity, horror, surprise, and shock, and a sense of futility too. Hers is the post-marital anxiety heightened by displacement and marital discord. The disorientation of an immigrant urge from sanity to insanity is authentic and pathetic.

Dimple has totally given her and herself to the world of dreams and advertisements. So that only she spends her time always before Television and particularly watching horrible scenes, which seems to sicken her psyche. Slowly she has become a masochistic woman, who takes delight in pain. She is a victim of her own expectations, dreams, hallucinations. She remains an incommunicado because no one listens to her, except Milt Glasser. She also fails to mix with others. Communication seems to be a rare one on her part. She is always silenced, muffled and muted. Hers is a silent suffering. Hence, it is masochistic in nature.

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