

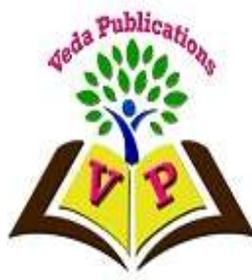


## IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCES AND FEMALE MARGINALISATION IN BHARATHI MUKERJEE'S *WIFE*

T.Santhi Sree<sup>1\*</sup>, M.Suresh Kumar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>(*Research Scholar, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur.*)

<sup>2</sup>(*Professor of English, Dept. of English, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur.*)



### ABSTRACT

Marginalization is generally used to describe and analyze socio-cultural political area where disadvantaged people fight for gaining access to resources and full participation in social life which Bharathi Mukerjee has depicted in her writings. This paper discusses the immigrant experiences and female marginalisation in *Wife* within the umbrella term of Diaspora and the problems the diasporas face in the Third World countries.

**Keywords:** *Immigration, Female Marginalisation, Diaspora, Third-World Immigrants.*

### Citation:

**APA** Sree, T.S. & Kumar, M.S. (2018). Immigrant experiences and female marginalisation in Bharathi Mukerjee's *Wife*. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 5(1), 379-382.

**MLA** Sree, T.Santhi and M.Suresh Kumar. "Immigrant experiences and female marginalisation in Bharathi Mukerjee's *Wife*" *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.5, no.1, 2018, pp.379-382.

*.Author(s) retain the copyright of this article*

Copyright © 2018 VEDA Publications

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License 

**INTRODUCTION**

"I had lived as a privileged member of the dominant community in the caste and class conscious society, and I had lived – was still living – as a despised and discriminated against minority in a race and colour conscious society". (*Memoir Days and Night in Calcutta* (1977))

As a representative diasporic writer Bharati Mukharjee deals the issues related to alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, and quest of identity that the diasporas face in the Third World countries. Uma Parameswaran has minutely dealt the various issues of diaspora: -----first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethno-cultural issues. The fourth is when they have 'arrived and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (Parameswaran, 165)

Bharati Mukherjee depicts in her novels the problems faced by Indian and third-world immigrants who attempt to assimilate in North American life-styles.

**BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S WIFE: A STUDY OF MARGINALISAION**

Marginalization is a complex term which has base of exclusion, globalization, displacement and disasters—natural and unnatural. Peter Leonard defines: "Being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity". The Indian women are marginalized by both nature and culture in society. She is always suppressed in patriarchy, stereo-typing, objectification and excluded and oppressed at every level of society. Simon-de-Beauvoir (1952) maintains that woman is to man 'a sexual being', 'a natural defectiveness', 'an incidental being' and above all she is 'the other', 'she is woman in virtue of her anatomy and physiology'. The theme of marginalization of women is critically dealt in *Wife*.

Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife* (1975) is a traumatic study of the inner world of a neurotic and solipsistic individual. She attempts to bring out the

psychological struggle of her protagonists who suffer mental trauma only because of their quest for being authentic to themselves. The novel can be studied in terms of the experiences of location, dislocation and relocation; and in the context of cultural displacement and the resurgent psycho-physical trauma that the immigrants experiences , as dealt by Salman Rushdie for Indian diasporas: "--- one physical alienation from India at almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of redeeming precisely the thing that was lost, that will, in short, create fictions not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of mind."(Rushdie, 1991:10)

*Wife* is a story of a middle class Bengali girl Dimple, married to Amit Basu, a consultant engineer. The novel shows the alienation, isolation and deep sense of culture faced by Dimple after marriage and migration to USA. Mukerjee portrays the feelings of traditional Indian girl where she imagines of her married life in a wonderful and colourful manner. Dimple in *Wife* also had many expectations from her life where she believes that this marriage would bring her freedom, fortune and happiness: "Marriage would bring notable characters. Marriage would bring her lover." "She thought of pre-marital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living" (Mukherjee, *Wife* 3). She imagined her husband to be the very embodiment of the sophisticated society. Her innate desires are thus expressed:

She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eye and chin from the body builder and shoulder ad, the stomach and legs from the trouser ad and put the ideal man by herself in a restaurant on a 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 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. (23)

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 quiet 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" (37). Unfortunately, all her dreams about marriage are shattered because her dreams didn't come true and moreover she faced adverse situations like her husband Amit didn't get suitable job in USA, the conflicts with mother and sister-in-law and finally she was pushed to an extent where she even attempts to kill her husband and does so.

Marginalization at every level is keenly seen through the central character of Dimple in the novel. The Indian women are always alienated /exiled of their desires, self respect and are imposed by unwritten code of conduct carved by culture. Dimple wishes to marry a neurosurgeon but her father looks for an engineer in the matrimonial ads and insists her to marry Amit Basu, an engineer, here her thoughts and her existence is totally marginalized. Her quarrel with mother and sister-in-law prove the same one. Indian women are merely treated as child-bearing properties and that's how she first protests this by self-abortion. The frenzied action and psychological trauma have been depicted with a realistic touch:

"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).

Self-abortion is an indication of her incipient rejection of her role as a subservient "other".

In the Indian culture marriages are arranged by parents, especially the father: her husband assumes authority over the wife: the wife is expected to surrender her individual and private identity into the social and cultural patriarchy. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note, "Women in the societies have historically been reduced to mere child-bearing properties." Mukerjee exposes the dilemma of social role of Indian woman defined by patriarchal culture:

We've all been trained to please, trained to be adaptable as wives and that adaptability is working to the women's advantage when we come over as immigrants. For an Indian woman to learn and drive, puts on pants, cash cheques, is a big leap. They are exhilarated by those changes. (Tandon 56)

The deep rooted Indian culture is stiff to her even in USA. This shows that she denies her rights of having personal feelings and desires that serve her own interests. As a traditional Indian woman, Dimple is brought up under the surveillance of her father and subjugated to husband where she can't comprehend any reason to justify her feeling at least to her husband. She, in spite of staying in USA is supposed to surrender her will to her husband. Her internal marginalization is forced by her "self" when seduced by Milt Glasser. She herself isolates and assumes that she has betrayed her gendered Indian culture. She marginalises herself by moving away from Amit.

In "*Literature of their Own*" Elaine Showalter notes that: "The middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood which developed in post-industrial England and America, prescribed a woman who would be a perfect lady, an angel in the house, contently submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity and religiosity, queen in her own realm of the home. Thus, under this rhetoric statement the woman is guile and marginalized at every step."

Mukerjee foregrounds the experience of suppression both within her (own) Indian culture and alien (AME) culture. Dimple had believed that she would be free from the so called traditional, marginalised, biased, Indian culture and would fly into the world of freedom, but paradoxically she experiences the same old alienated and cultural mooring in spite of tearing the boundaries and coming to USA also. She faces the same trauma and suppression among the "Americanized Indians" and is reminded of her "Indianness". In addition to this she is marginalized in adopted culture also because, when her friends in USA asked her to have the experience of being in abroad she rejects to drink because she knows pretty well that if she drinks Amit would write to his mother and his mother would intimate to Dasguptas and accuse them of raising an immoral and drunken daughter. This makes her understand that being a woman she would never get a space of her own in both the cultures and is marginalised and should be a passive object forever. She, because of her inability to speak language is marginalized even at that level also. She is afraid of the social world represented by Ina Mullick. Thus, being self and imposed marginalization she gets



addicted to watch TV, which becomes cause for her madness.

Marginalization evokes her madness which in turn tends her to kill her husband. The effect of patriarchal ideology and alien culture makes her feel more marginalized being an Indian. Amits' marginalized attitude towards her sparks the effect of insanity in her. Mukerjee exposes the perception of cultural and feminine outlook through the persona of 'Dimple'.

### CONCLUSION

The persona of Dimple is heart-touching. Dimple's madness 'grows form the result of her mute sufferings and resistance to male ideology. The violent act of Dimple may be seen as liberty from 'othernesses'. Her acts may appear of negativity of marginalization if seen superfluously, but as we know, every person has his/her own views. The same is projected here. By acting out her repression Dimple transforms her marginality, her silence, her suffering into action which draws her otherness from cultural and ideological periphery to the centre.

### REFERENCES

- [1]. Anita, Myles, *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists in English*.
- [2]. Mukerjee, Bharati. *Wife*, New-York: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.
- [3]. Parmeswaran, Uma. "Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too." *ALR*, VOL. 1, NO 2, (pp-165).
- [4]. Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. London, Granta Books, 1991. (p 10).
- [5]. Shukla, Bhaskar D. Post-Colonial Literature. *IRWLE* VOL. 10 No. 1 January 2014
- [6]. Tandon, Sushma. *Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: A Perspective*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2004.