

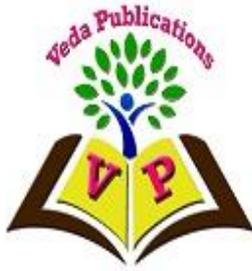
**ESTRANGEMENT IN VANDANA SINGH'S *THE WIFE***

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"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."

-Maya Angelou



Vandana Singh's story 'The Wife' powerfully critiques the 'Family Life' and its darker shades. She questions about the compatibility of married couples, the secured feeling of married women and their emotional attachment which leads them to their exploitation. The present paper titled "Estrangement in Vandana Singh's The wife" is a study of alienation in marriage. Padma had dreamt of a wood which was rooted inside her and "making a nest somewhere in the jungle of her mind..." (168) But in reality she is thrown out of her own house. Padma as a wife is estranged by her husband and is fallen in to the well of loneliness. But what is noteworthy is that how she raises on her own and maintains the decorum of her mind and individuality.

Keywords: *Self-realization, marriage, loneliness, compatibility, understanding, stress, Stockholm syndrome.*



Padma had played the role of wife for twenty three long years and now she was declared that she was no longer a wife. Everybody in their family her husband and two grown up children were living on their own but she had given up living for herself the moment she was married and now she was shattered. Toni Morrison points out "Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin? What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to be him at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company (Morrison) When she walks in the woods she remembers her relationship with her family, "It occurred to her that wood held many stories and mysteries, not just her own, and that perhaps there were other people wandering about in it, following threads of dream or the traits of booted feet." (169) When She was in the bad phase of her life, the time when her hubby had left her and she was collecting to share the things between them the memories haunted her more as it cannot be divided. "What was left felt like a sinful of unwanted dishes the morning after a half-remembered party: the old house, the inevitability of solitude and her face growing increasingly alien to her day by day". (170)

Padma remained a dutiful wife till she learnt about her husband's affair with his new colleague Prof.Maya. Who was famous as she had written a monumental novel based on her travelling experiences through the war zones. Padma's husband had denied his affair and mocked her not to be conventional and said, "I could have slept with her, you know but I did not. What I want from her is an intimacy beyond the merely physical... Don't you see, I am not interested in this woman as a woman? What I want to do is find the words make a box from metaphor and symbol, meaning and simile, and put her in it"... (171) When Padma was asked by her husband "who are you, Padma?" the only answer she could give him was "Your Wife", but he had shaken his head. Padma could not recollect accurately when he started drifted from her. "She had come to know only gradually that she had disappointed him, like that time the time she could never remember without a prick of anger, even after all these years." (171) Padma had merged her identity and was

performing the duty of a wife after marriage. But her husband expected something more from her. He wanted thinking individual who could understand and share his intellectuality. That's why he had gone close with his colleague Prof.Maya who was intellectual and independent individual. In our patriarchal society there are very few men like Keshav who aspires and tolerates intellectual wives and women. Many men prefer their wives to be a silent creature with feminine body. Padma being a simple village girl did not understand how to impress her husband. She had thought marriage as a sacred institution which would bind her husband to her forever and only death can depart them. Never had she dreamt that she would stand alone outside the marriage. If Padma was in her husband's place she would have not treated him in the same manner.

One night when Padma had come back from her work she had a surprise ready for her. Her husband had conducted experiment on her, her older son's tennis shoes soaked with blood lay at the bottom of the stair and bloody foot prints all over the floor. Padma had got scared seeing the scene but she was consoled after seeing her children safe and in sound sleep. When he uttered it was an experiment she had got angry but he had failed to notice it. He had used half a bottle of ketchup for blood. He wanted her to understand how our conclusions are based on the circumstantial evidence. He was explaining her how we make realities out of words, words in our minds and on the page but Padma was unable to register to her mind as she was worried only about the safety of her kids. Though she was a sociology graduate she had molded herself to the house hold chores. All her cleverness had gone with her studies and was unable to appreciate her husband's cleverness also. "All the time she had been bringing up the boys, supplementing the family income with a series of small jobs, cooking and cleaning, reading her mystery novels she had been unaware that she was, in a subtle way, a failure. Among the university functions she with her silk saree was like a museum exhibit for them. She was "the exotic bride of that brilliant, if unpredictable Keshav Malik". (172)



Padma as a wife had forgiven many flirtations of her husband but she was unable to understand and forgive his retreat from her. She wants to live with him as she is used to him and scared to be left alone. Padma remembers her childhood idiot uncle "who had a way of assuming the identity of things other than himself." (174) At her young age Padma found very interesting to watch her uncle climbing the stairs and behaving in a strange way. But Padma was just eight year old when her uncle imagined himself to a bird and flew down from the terrace and lost his life. Padma was in such a shock that though she witnessed him dying could not warn anybody of this danger. She remained a mute spectator watching him fall from the tree. It seems Padma was unprepared for any situations and even after many years she remains unprepared. She had not answered where she had been on the death of her uncle now after 37 years also she doesn't have any answer where she is in her life. When she had married Keshav and had come to abroad it was so difficult to adjust to the new life that too in a foreign land. But now she doesn't know where to go without him. She had lost her parents in India there were her brother and two sisters who had their own families. When she had divided and separated their things she had left with their wedding pictures. She ended up with keeping it in a box in the basement. When she went there she found a wooden cage on the desk, its door broken open and tiny droppings and urine stains over pages of notes in Keshav's tiny hand. She thought it as a parting gift from him. Finally she understood and came to the conclusion." She was the stranger looking into the little windows of her own house. All these years she had thought it was her home, her refuge from the world, but after all it was only a sarai, a temporary stop on the way to the other place." (179)

Padma felt like a stranger in her own house. It was a horrible feeling for her to get isolated from her husband and detached from their home. Padma is a strong woman who accepts her alienation and is ready to face the reality with much maturity. Finally she was released from the trap of marriage. Marriage captivates two beings and suffocates each other. Sophistication in marriage and the cultural values

drilled in Padma the stereotyped was unwilling to move away though the door was open to her. Ultimately Padma is forced to think about her own and her life line of dreams which she had not traded as she is off stage playing the role of wife and prepares to be herself. Finally Padma realizes that being self is more important than anything in life. Padma is very inexpressive being an introvert that too in shock she is mute which is very evident from her childhood experience. Even in her life she was unable to recognize in advance the damage occurring slowly. She believed what she saw and was unable to see and think behind the things or behind the mind.

There is no verbal or sexual abuse or wife battering to term it as domestic violence yet Padma is a victim suffering emotionally with helplessness and low self-esteem. The depressed Padma emerges as a strong woman withstanding the mental assaults. Whatever Padma did in her life was for her husband and his children and her sacrifices remains unnoticed and unrecognized. Padma had acknowledged captivity and was unwilling to leave the captor. Padma suffered from Stockholm syndrome. "Stockholm syndrome" was the term given to this "bonding" that occurred in hostage negotiation. It is defined as the psychological tendency of a hostage to bond with, identify with or sympathize with his or her captor. (Mathew H.Logan) Padma the protagonist grows as the story moves and with a new frame of mind she becomes an independent individual.

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