



## INCONGRUITIES IN RELATIONS IN BHARATI MUKERJEE'S *DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS AND WIFE*

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### ABSTRACT

*Bharati Mukherjee has portrayed her protagonists as agonists who fail to adjust with anyone even with those important people who act as touchstone in their life. The research paper is an attempt to throw light upon the major issues behind the tragic doom of the protagonists in both the novels. An analysis has been done of the incongruous relations of woman protagonists in the form of disparity with parents, husband, in laws, sisters and friends--in the form of self-mutilation and abnormal shifting behavior because of protagonists' non-adaptable nature. Further, it has been highlighted how and why the bond of relationship fails at all levels and how a congenital flaw accelerates the incongruity with all. Mukherjee has tried to show that it is the high time that we should understand the mental diseases and incongruities do exist and can be cured just like any other disease and some positive steps must be taken to avoid the relationship problems from a different perspective and should accept it in a renewed manner. It ends up by showing the root cause of the incongruities of the characters pushed them to marriage bonding without judging their capability and flaw in their character.*

**Keywords:** *Agonist, Congenital Flaw, Disparity, Incongruous Relations, Self-Mutilation Behaviour*

### INTRODUCTION

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Bharati Mukherjee is a well-known novelist of recent decades. She is the first major Asian American writer and the first naturalized American citizen to win the National Book Critics Circle Award for her collection of Short Stories, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988). She was born on 27 July 1940 to a wealthy Bengali Hindu-Brahmin family in Kolkata and excellent schooling facilities were provided by her parents. She immigrated to the United States in 1961, married to Clark Blaise in an exceptional manner “intensely literary marriage” and went on to publish eight novels, two short story collections, two long works of nonfiction, and numerous essays, book reviews, and newspaper articles. She was Professor Emerita in the Department of English at the University of California, Berkeley and died in February 2017. She depicts female psyche, cross-cultural elements and search for identity very well in her novels.

In the novel *Wife* the protagonist Dimple, wife of Amit, a young engineer, fails to maintain her relationships with the people, who come in her contact. Also the protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* Tara leads an incongruous life in spite of having same opportunities and facilities provided to her as of her sisters. The aim is to study Dimple and Tara in the light of their incongruous relations and search for unknown stability and undecided goal. The paper will also throw light on the fact why the protagonists suffer and fail to cope up with her relationship and not satisfied with their current life.

*Wife* is a story of a middle class young girl, who in spite of all facilities provided by her parents and husband fails to keep balance in her relations, destructs herself and eventually kills her husband. Since beginning she had incongruities with her parents as it is reflected in the novel: “Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimony ads” (*Wife* 4). She was married to a suitable person Amit, but after reaching her in laws house she started complaining her mother about her father’s concealing the truth about the socioeconomic status of the family. As it is mentioned: “No, he did not tell me about water either, the water has to be carried up in buckets in store. The tap in the bathroom is broken.” (21)

When Dimple was at her father’s house, her only desire and destination was her husband’s house and her marriage as it is described in the novel: “Marriage, she was sure, would free her, fill her with passion. Discreet and virgin, she waited for real life to begin.” (3) Usha Bande aptly writes about her: “Dimple has an inordinate hurry to get married to her dream man. She appears superficial and fails to impress. All she demands from life is parties, glamour and love. Thus her approach of life is unreal.” (Bande 128) But when she got married she feels her in law’s house as unreal and does not enjoy any moment with any member of



the family but takes care of her mother in law only because she does not want any hurdle in her movement to foreign land. As it has been depicted in the novel:

*She herself feels that she has no problems and everything is in harmony so she should not act otherwise and when she realizes that she has started talking to herself she asserts: Happy people did not talk to themselves and happy people did not pretend that they had not been talking to themselves. Dimple Basu, she repeated, Dimple Basu is a happy woman. (Wife 21)*

Amit is not indifferent to her; he understands her needs and tries to fulfill them. This we can visualise with the given excerpt: “that evening Amit took her to Kwality’s by taxi and ordered chilli chicken, chicken fried rice and chicken spring rolls, because at home Mrs Basu permitted only fish. There were three other dinners. Amit sat very close to her and held her hand under the table. ----- We must do it every week there is no privacy at home.” (21-22) Dimple was getting all desired affection and attention. Amit does not demand anything even if she does not prepare lemon water when he returns from office on her different gestures also he says: “I like them both. You know I love you.” (22)

Dimple pretends to be docile and obedient wife but does not want to have baby as is shown in the novel: “She began to think of the baby as unfinished business. It cluttered up the preparation for going abroad. She did not want to carry any relics from her old life.” (42) Hence, she takes a bold step and murders her child in womb. As it is reflected in the novel: “She had skipped ropes until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned. Then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulder, over the tight light curve of her stomach, she had poured until the last of blood washed off her legs.” (43)

When she reaches her desired destination, she starts thinking that she is not suitable for that place and in place of learning something as suggested by her husband; she gets trapped under the clutches of Ina Mallik and feels pride in imitating her. Her seduction of Milt, her landlady’s brother in her own bedroom, can be interpreted as a desperate attempt by her diseased psyche to preserve her and stop her further deterioration. In other words, she wishes to die but by forming a reaction she kills Amit. Her killing of Amit with a kitchen knife is the most longed for, albeit unconsciously masochistic, event in her life. The incident occurs in a free-floating dream-like state and is rendered by the author in a virtually delirious style:

*She sneaked up on him and chose a spot, her favourite spot just under the hairline, where the mole was getting larger and browner, and she drew an imaginary line of kisses ... she touched the mole very lightly and let her*



*finger's draw a circle around the delectable spot, then she brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times, each time a little harder, until the milk in the bowl of cereal was a pretty pink and the flakes were mushy and would have embarrassed any advertiser, and then she saw the head fall off- but of course it was her imagination because she was not sure any more what she had seen on TV and what she had seen in the private screen of three A.M. (212-13)*

Jasbir Jain observes that “it is difficult to treat the novel as a study of cultural shock for even while in Calcutta, Dimple is an escapist and lost in her private world of fantasy.” (*Problems of Postcolonial Literatures and Other Essays* 35) Though it's visible that she is oblivious to her surroundings, never tries to cope up with her traumatic mental condition and accepts new beginning smoothly does not share her pains with her husband but complains that too she does not do with clarity that what exactly she wants, sinks into a world of isolation without any sharing of her thoughts or taking guidance from anyone she tries merge herself into the new culture by wearing the outfits of Marsha and by flirting with Milt Glasser. She is not capable in differentiating between the fantasy world and the reality of her situation. As it has been quoted aptly: “Dimple is a study of an abnormal woman. Her character has two pronounced traits: an apparent helpless of a dependent person coupled with a desire of an aggressive personality to revolt and to master, the person who comes in contact with her.” (*IJSELL* 118-121)

*Difficult Daughters* is the story of three sisters, Tara, Parvati, and Padma, born and raised in Calcutta in the 1950s. They are nurtured in same background with same facilities, hence, supposed to have similarities in their nature and characters. As it is shown in the novel: “Sisters three are we...as like blossom on a tree” (*Difficult Daughters* 21). Though they are born and brought up in the same culture and milieu however, they three are different in approach. Her older sister, Parvati, married to a rich man of her choice immigrates to America but finally settles in India following all Indian ways typically. Though she is allowed to make a love match, yet she fills the traditional role of an Indian house wife. Fayeza Hasanat writes about her:

*Parvati, a very gullible yet influential orator, fabricates history by juxtaposing her mundane daily life. The third sister, Padma, has also immigrated to America and established herself in New Jersey. Padma is a well-known news anchor who also runs a designer sari business on the side. All three sisters have benefitted from tremendous privilege, born into the elite caste in a wealthy Calcutta family. (Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives 82)*



The novel further depicts the incongruity in relations of Tara with her elder sister Parvati and she feels offended when her didi says “Tara answer your damn phone” further when she says “My friends do not judge me by the price tag on my saris” her didi’s counter question “what price do they judge you by”? depresses her.” (DD 254) Tara, who is married to a multi-millionaire, Indian Silicon valley Icon Bishwa Priya Chatterjee by her father’s choice, neither she raises her voice against it nor she approve this marriage as she feels, “I married a man I had never met, whose picture and biography and blood lines I approved of because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market” (26). During her visit to her didi’s house, she attends parties organised for business. Her didi uses her as model for her earrings and necklace and when the deal is finalized, she asked Tara to take off the jewellery as it was sold out and Tara feels depressed as it is shown: “She found a dark corner for stripping me of my finery. I felt like Cinderella and it wasn’t even midnight. Thank God, she hadn’t sold my sari; feeling naked enough already.” (257) When a young man, Chris Dey, approaches at Tara’s home and proclaims that she is his “mashi” and he is the illicit child of her older sister Padma, She not only believes but also tries to validate the fact. After a thorough analysis of the characters, we can say that both the protagonists Tara and Dimple face incongruities with all her relations because of congenital flaws in their character, that check them in establishing any sound relationship with anyone. We can compare this flaw to Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), a mental disease which leads the person towards unstable identity, a fraud, a social illusion.

Let’s analyze protagonists with the symptoms of BPD:

1. **Fear of abandonment** - Fear of abandonment is one of the symptoms of this mental disease where the person is full of the feeling of self-deterioration and abandonment. This feeling is always there in Dimple. She becomes terribly anxious of imaginary dangers, entertains premonitions and remains out of touch with reality.
2. **Self-harm-** Both the protagonists are filled with the feeling of Self-harm, because of which, in spite of all comforts and support, they do not feel satisfied rather takes silly actions to harm themselves as Dimple freezes herself by sitting outside in freezing temperature and skipped the rope to induce a miscarriage, thinking about different ways of suicide. and let her seduce by Milt, her landlady’s brother in her own bedroom.
3. **Extreme emotional swings** - Extreme emotional swings are also the symptoms of BPD. Tara suffers throughout and without any reason starts crying when Amit does not look up from the paper. As it has been shown in the novel: “She lost her temper, started to cry, she





said, “I felt a sort of dead inside and all you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You never listen; you have never listened to me .You hate me. Don’t deny it; I know you do. You hate me because I am not fat and fair.” (DD 110).

3. **Chronic feelings of emptiness-** People with BPD often talk about feeling empty, as if there’s a hole or a void inside them. At the extreme, you may feel as if you’re “nothing” or “nobody.” Dimple feels the same as we find in the novel “she worried that she was ugly, worried about her sitar shaped body and rudimentary breasts.” (Wife 4)

4. **Explosive anger-** If you have BPD, you may struggle with intense anger. Dimple shows intense anger when she kills a pregnant mouse. “I will get you” she screamed. There is no way out of this my friend. She seemed confident and transformed now, a woman transformed. And in an outburst of hatred her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury, she smashed the top of a small gray head.” (34).

5. **Feeling suspicious or out of touch with reality-** People with BPD often struggle with paranoia or suspicious thoughts about others’ motives. When under stress, you may even lose touch with reality. Dimple exhibits these symptoms - she does not want to understand and accept the reality and before her marriage also she shows an abnormal behavior. In spite of having a good husband, she is not fit enough to understand her husband’s priorities and plans, suffers from insomnia and gets out of touch with reality and even her husband seems unreal to her as depicted in the novel: “and because she could not sleep he seems unreal to her, like all sleeping people She thought if she were to shut her eyes and listen fumbling keys at the front door, she could make Amit die in his sleep.” (185)

The present paper is about the need of a balanced personality which is required for a healthy relationship without any hidden congenital fatal flaws and if the symptoms make appearance, it should be taken seriously and the person connected with the patient should consult a doctor. As it has been depicted by Bharati Mukherjee through the character of Tara and Dimple, who lack adaptability and do not react desirably and spoil themselves.

Tara in *Desirable Daughters* in spite of getting same opportunities as of her siblings and spouse to tailor her with all crisis and other adjustment problems, does not react desirably and fails to keep balance at all levels, divorces from her parent-selected husband, lives in San Francisco with her adolescent son Rabi and lover Andy, an ex-biker/ hippie Buddhist carpenter. When her husband meets her after 3 years she wants reunion as she admits in the novel “Bish’s plan was to drop off Rabi then return immediately to Arterton. Mine was to delay him. I’d picked up a bottle of Champagne for a symbolic christening of the house.”(DD



258) She feels reconciliation but again shifts her focus and comes to India to find peace and her roots. She tries to find the glory of her ancestors.

Whereas in *Wife*, Dimple has been provided all liberties to spend her time according to her own will. Her husband a docile, caring young man loves her and tries to meet all her needs. Because of fatal flaw in her she gets incongruous with all her relations and wants to commit suicide. Had she been treated properly with her mental illness she would have elevated her position with her husband. Identifying and working on their flaws could have saved them both from incongruous relations and could have been living a gratifying life full of privileges with fortified future. Thus Mukherjee has portrayed the real picture of the inner strife of a woman, fighting within herself, between her own knowledge and that thrust on her by the surrounding.

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