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THE CONCEPT OF MODERN WOMAN IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S 'JASMINE'

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ABSTRACT



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This paper analyses various difficulties that occur in normal woman's life, the plight of physically and mentally stressed women and finally aims to signify the relevance of being a 'Modern Woman' in order to overcome the obstacles in her life. Bharati Mukherjee depicts a modern woman as a girl who rebels, revolts against all odds in her life valiantly, adapts herself to all cultures and surroundings thereby surviving and living her life courageously. Bharati Mukherjee imbibes the best of Indian and Western culture, finds 'Modern Women' to be an indispensable solution to face life with grace.

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History of transformation

Research studies reveal that women enjoyed their status on par with men in the early Vedic period. However this on par status has declined in the due course of time due to several reasons. Due to the evil practice of Sati, child marriages and ban of widow remarriages, the status of women has deteriorated. At that time, if women were subjected to huge humiliation, they ended their lives by committing suicide or lived a submissive life to the male dominated society.

After those cruel times, there came a period, where women tried hard to fight against the odds by acquiring education and more exposure. and finally after being hurt for ages, now women are transformed to ones who take different forms at different odd circumstances to fight their problems, survive in this modern world.

Changes as seen today:

Women have tried to establish their own identity in both business world and political world. Women in today's world have established themselves by enchasing opportunities in both education and employment.

India as seen from today's perspective, offers a lot of opportunities for women and their voice in everyday life in all walks of life. Women as an individual are rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering, trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting their individual self. Women had begun to

snatch themselves for opportunities and spaces for themselves. Modern women have succeeded to maintain their socio-economic position in the so-called "primitive" societies.

The very basic concept that Women need the "Self-Identity" more than just food, clothes and accommodation is clearly understood by Women in the modern Era.

There are a lot of movements which are fought for the issues related to women like gender discrimination, male domination, oppressive culture, domestic violence, sexual harassment, reproductive rights, property rights, equal salary, equal opportunities for career and business, liberation and empowerment of women. It has swept the world and has brought a tremendous change in the status of women across the world.

Concept of New Women in 'Jasmine'

Jyoti, her childhood memories become the instrument in her fight against fate and her search for self-identity. She is predicted of widowhood and exile by an astrologer when she is only seven years old. The beauty is that she is not dismayed down by fate. Instead she always tries to raise herself above blind beliefs and superstition. Her attitude is in contrary to the ancient women's lifestyle.

Jyoti, the female protagonist tries to tackle the problem of loss of culture and endeavors to assume a new identity in the US.

The protagonist Jasmine leaves her country to fulfill her wishes. On reaching the U.S., she begins to search for self-independence. She struggles hard to achieve it and at last she realizes that self independence is not to be an Indian or American but to be at peace with herself.

After her marriage, she shares the ambition of her husband happily. After her husband is killed, instead of spending the rest of her life as a widow, she decides to go to America. This way she shows her protest to express her anger for shattering her husband's dreams. This is not expected from usual women. Jasmine is reborn not by killing herself but after killing the person who rapes her. This way she transforms herself completely to a New Women by not killing her.

The pulling between these two opposite forces i.e. the Indian and the American doesn't frighten her but it excites her. Jasmine is happy that she is able to assimilate the new culture. The alien country teaches her to live with ease and confidence, despite her unstable identity. Jasmine gives her care and love to those people who needed her and who believed and helped her.

Jasmine learns how to survive in America and to dress and walk like an American which shows how she completely transforms herself into an American Woman. This shows her adaptability. Even though she adopts the American culture, she does not withdraw herself from the characteristics of sacrificing Indian Women within herself. Jasmine revolts against fate at every stage of her life by taking different forms in which, she can be described as a rebel, an Adapter and also a survivor. She tries to discover herself in every stage whenever she faces very odd and difficult situations.

When a person leaves his/her own culture and enters into another culture, his/her original culture comes into conflict with the new one he/she finds in the alien land. This cultural transplant leads to a crisis of identity. As the immigrants are torn between two different cultures; quest for identity becomes very important and a must in their life. Search for identity has a very wide meaning and it is manifested in the will to survive against all odds. Identity is one of the most important factors in the life of a person.

The violent moments as depicted in the novel reflects the pain and anguish that occurs with the change of culture and life. Hence Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine is the movement of Jasmine's life towards achieving true identity. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. Even when the protagonist goes through

the worst experiences of her life, she is able to wade through the obstacles and attain self-awareness and a new identity and overthrows her past life.

The protagonist Jasmine repositions her stars in the adopted country by deciding to remain as a care-giver to Duff in which she gets her peace of mind. At every step of her life, Jasmine is a winner, she does not allow her troubles and struggles to obstruct her progress in life and she is also finding a place for herself in the society. In other words, though she appears to be abnormal in her behaviour, it is the only way she finds in which survival can be achieved.

Throughout the novel, Jasmine experiences enormous situations which bring out the violence and mental trauma in her. She not only faces physical violence, but also faces mental violence that forces her to be born as a different person in various phases of her life. The progression of Jasmine from one stage of evolution to the other stage of life is portrayed as a courageous character.

Women's life and the choices they make are ultimately shaped by their changing circumstances. Jasmine experiences a variety of journey from the world of Rural Indian Punjabi woman to that of America's Mid-West.

In other words, she is a true feminist-Modern Woman who fights every challenge in life to establish herself in the society. Jasmine realizes that the true identity of a person does not lie in being an Indian or an American but it lies in the inner spirit of the person to be at peace with herself.

Jasmine, beginning from her birth till the emigration to the USA passes several situations and crosses from one country to another which reveals that her inner self is reborn several times till she achieves a higher level.

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