

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 5. Issue.1., 2018 (Jan-Mar)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

**“PAINFUL SEARCH FOR MORE INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM” IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE’S  
JASMINE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper tries to explore the identity of the main protagonist in the novel *Jasmine* written by Bharati Mukherjee. Identity of an individual refers to the formation of an image in the society. These images are not stable and they are fluid in state. We find the character *Jasmine* as a very complex character with multi cultural identities. The character *Jasmine* undergoes lot of transformation as she keeps on moving to different places and acquires different identities. We find revival of the identity with each and every new name she acquires.

Indian born American writer Bharati Mukherjee has been recognized as the leading “voice” in the projection of the expatriate experience throughout the globe. She was born in India in Kolkata on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1940 in Bengali Brahmin family. Her brought up was in an extended family. She had a very privileged childhood. Her family looked westernized and modern because of their foreign visits and their convent education. They gave importance to English education, Literature.

Though she was a doctorate, she had done a course in creative writing Programme in USA. Her fictional writings depict creative sensibility. Her creative writing comprises the novels-*The Tigers Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993) and *Leave it to me* (1997) *Miss New India* (2011) and two collections of short stories (1988). She also was a co –author to her husband in two non-fictional works.

Bharati Mukherjee migrated to different places like the character *Jasmine*, acquired citizenships and lived with different cultural variations. In this transition from one place to another she was racially discriminated in Canada. Her husband’s work was recognized and her work was ignored because he was a native of Canada. At that time Canada was hostile to India. She experienced herself as “a psychological expatriate” in Canada and she stucked on to her ethnic identity – “I remember how bracing it was to cloak myself in my own brahmenical elegance.”

As Stuart Hall (1996, 2) states, identity and identification can be seen as “a process never completed,” and always keeps changing. It is not possible to accomplish, achieve, or gain but neither can it be “lost” or “abandoned.” (Hall 1994, 2) This refers to the idea of an incomplete identity.

The idea of an identity that keeps changing can be found common to cultural theory, as these identities absorb the cultures from the cultures around it. Hall describes identities as “never unified,” but “fragmented and fractured ... and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.” (1996, 4). This kind of fragmented and fractured identity is what I am going to discuss which is found in the novel *Jasmine*.

In Jasmine Mukherjee Portrays the complications that are involved in the cross cultural identity that the protagonist undergoes through a series of adventures that she takes from Punjab to California through Florida, Newyork and Iowa.Her painful journey symbolizes the quest of a person who has a rootless identity depressed and isolated all around.

The prediction of an astrologer under the banyan tree foretelling Jasmine's 'widowhood and Exile',turned out to be true, but Jasmine came out of it , fought for her right, identity and also adapted the new culture. Throughout her Journey to different places (from one place to another) she has undergone many transformations- Jane, Jasmine, Jase and Jane through different geographical places like Punjab, Florida, New York ,Iowa and California.Jasmine fights with her fate at each and every point of time against the injustice that was caused to her.

In the novel the present refers to Jasmine's role as Jane who was a live- in- companion to Bud Ripple mayor a small town banker. Past refer's to Jasmine's role as Jyoti from a small village called Hasnapur, Punjab. She got married to Prakash and the complications led her to go abroad. The transformation from Jyothi to Jane left her with brunt.

"A born fighter as she is ,she does not allow her heart- rending tragedy to deter her courage. She plans to visit the supposed Institute where Prakash had to get admitted and to burn herself a "Sati" on the campus of that Engineering school. Jasmine's decision leaves her family aghast and they wonder "a village girl, going alone to America without Job, husband or papers?" (p97).

Jasmine gets totally devastated by the mis happenings that occur to her life in an unknown country: "What country? What Continent? We pass though wars, through plagues .I am hungry for News, but the discarded papers are in Characters or languages. I cannot read (p101).

While she travels to the new world on a shrimper the captain of the ship half-face rapes her which is very outrageous to an Indian widow. Without losing the dishonor she promised herself that she is going to take revenge on the half-face by extending her tongue, slicing blood oozing out like the image of goddesses Kali destroyed the Devil who dishonored her chastity.

Gamal (2013) notes:

Jasmine identifies herself with Kali, the consort of Lord Shiva and the goddess of violent power whose incarnation is a figure of annihilation. However, she is positively compared to Kali, the slayer of demons, when she slaughters Half Face, the man who rapes her...

According to Samir Dayal, in killing Half-Face she experiences an epistemic violence that is also a life affirming transformation." After this painful experience she starts afresh. She meets Lillian Gordon, a kind lady who pities on her renamed her Jazzy and taught her to dress up and behave like an American. Lillian Gordon always helped the illegal immigrants. She helped her to go to New York and look for a good Job.

In New York Jasmine finds "more greed, more people" (p140).She feels very bad when an American beggar calls her a "foreign bitch".She has a desire to remember her past and the urgency to forget it:

I feel at times like a stone hurling through diaphanous mist , unable to grab hold ,unable to slow myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I'm on. Down and Down I go, where I'll stop, God only knows.(p139).

Next we find Jasmine as a care giver to the adopted daughter, Duff of Taylor and Wylie.She was very happy with Hayses.She says: "Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, and my family"(pg165).In their company Jasmine becomes more Americanized learnt English proficiency, but always her Indian values stood first than American. For example when she came to know that Duff was an adopted child and not their own she reacted in a different way. She felt unhappy when she comes to know Wylie's decision to leave Taylor. It was very strange for Jasmine to think about the relationships in America. She feels bitterness among the relationships.

She feels that "In America nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate.(p181).

For an immigrant life is like a re-birth.Bharati Mukherjee reveals in one of her interviews: I have been murdered and reborn at least three times, the very correct young woman I was trained to be, and was very

happy being, is very different from the politicized shrill, civil rights activist I was in Canada, and from the urgent that I have become in the last few years in the United States.

We find the same outburst in Jasmine "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake one. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves-in the images of dreams.(p29).

She deserted Bud and chose Taylor. By doing this she changed her whole world around. She says, "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness" (p240)She was very loyal to Bud Ripple mayor and not at all guilty for being in relationship with him. She behaves like a dutiful woman full of hope and positive thinking.

Each and every step for her was an encounter for her in the alien world. The more problems she encountered, more strong she had become. She said to herself that she is going to write her own destiny and prove the words that were foretold by the Indian astrologer.

She says "watch me reposition the stars; I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove (p240).She has seen the worst of her life. Jyoti to Jasmine, Jassy, Jase and Jane through these transformation of identities. As per the name each and every form of her can be related to some identity. According to Karin Jane can be related to a conscienceless "gold digger"(p195),Jyoti can be related to "sati-goddess"(p176).Jasmine can be related to Kali, Jase can be to an adventurous woman (p186) and Jane who is very plane(p26).Each and every step of her life has become a metaphor for a woman who immigrates in the process of finding her roots and strengthening them.

Though she shared her life with Bud Ripple Mayor, felt isolated and suffered silently unable to share her past experiences with him which are very much related to the present identity of her. But never asked her to share her past experiences. She almost accepts herself to become Bud's wife not bothering about her future vision. In examining herself Jasmine as a very complex and multiple identity woman she relates herself to an immigrant. Her comparison of past and present makes her feel more of an American rather than an Indian. Her Indian identity stands very feeble when compared to American. But sometimes she feels that she is an outsider in the alien land. she feels "This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing"(p29).

Her Indianness comes at each and every point of her life. She says "A good Hasnapur wife doesn't eat just because she is hungry. Food is a way of granting or withholding love (p216).She also rebels against the widow system that was prevailing and also sati that compelled Indian women to sacrifice their lives. By the end of the novel Jasmine is projected as a woman who is totally transformed as an American but with Indian values.We can find the identity of Jasmine as hybrid identity which is fluid in state and undergoes lot of transformation.

Hong states that "People desiring to acculturate quickly surround themselves with symbols and situations that prime the meaning system of the host culture. Conversely, expatriates desiring to maintain the accessibility of constructs from their home culture surround themselves with stimuli priming that culture". (2000, 718).

Bharati Mukherjee showed Jasmine as a modern woman, a trend setter who finds herself a new way and comes out of all her problems. Through Jasmine she has given the message to all the women to be adaptable, fight for the injustice and stabilize their life.The novel Jasmine is one of the best works of Feminism.

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