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TRANSFORMATION OF 'JYOTI' INTO 'JASMINE':
A STUDY ON THE PROTAGONIST'S CHARACTER

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee, a renowned diasporic writer tried to focus on the women's struggle and consistent efforts to attain identification in a male dominated society. Cultural conflicts between the East and the West have also been taken by her as a superior theme in all her novels. Imagination has also been selected by her as a major issue, encountered by all her protagonists. Bharati Mukherjee portrays woman as protagonist in all her novels. This paper is an attempt to explore the transformation of the protagonist i.e., Jyoti, a poor Punjabi girl into Jasmine, a modern one. The paper depicts how the adventurous girl made her life journey successful from Punjab to California encountered the superstitions and feudal traditions of a male dominated society.

Keywords: Protagonist, transformation, identity, oppression, imagination.

Jasmine is one of the most remarkable and laudable novels of Bharati Mukherjee. It tells us about a woman's power of changing the social norms and feudal traditions by refusing to live by others. Jasmine is born as Jyoti in a small Indian village named Hasnapur of Punjab state. The fifth daughter in the family has to encounter a lot of problems as it is considered a sin to have a girl child in the family. She herself describes her birth:

In a makeshift birthing hut in Hasnapur, Jullundhar District, Punjab, India, I was born the year the harvest was so good that even my father, the reluctant tiller of thirty acres, had grain to hoard for draught. If I had been a boy, my birth in a bountiful year would have marked me as lucky, a child with a special destiny to fulfill. But daughters were curse. (Jasmine39).

At the age of seven, an astrologer prophesied that she would certainly become a widow at seventeen and also prophesied about her migration to foreign country. With a strong reply to the astrologer, she proves that she is not a woman of superstitious society. "I don't believe you" she whispered. (Jasmine4). At the end of the argumentation, the astrologer hits her on her forehead. When her sisters pretend a concern about her scars, she unhesitatingly replies them. "It's not a scar", I shouted "It's my third eye" "Now I am a sage". (Jasmine, 5)

A woman beyond superstitious world never allowed having primary education on account of the aggrieved condition of woman in the society. She is forced to marry an old man. Meanwhile, she falls in love

with a Christian guy named Prakash and marries him. As a Hindu girl marries to a Christian man, receives ill treatment from her parents and society. She is a girl of rebellious nature. She does not want to spend her life with an oaf:

I stopped sipping. The tea had cooled enough for a patch of brownish skin to form in the middle of the cup. I did not want to spend my life with an oaf who had to fake an accident in order to touch me. (Jasmine73).

As it is said, that marriage transforms a woman in a way that there is certainly no room for self identity, self care and concern. Jyoti's name is changed as Jasmine after marriage. Her husband Prakash is a man of modern India with modern concepts towards life. He always encourages his wife to read, write and to make herself a confident woman. Later, he also shares his dream of going America to pursue a technical course and the couple works hard to go to America to start a new life with a new prospect. However, the dream shatters as Prakash is killed in a riot. Actually, a group of enraged people was trying to kill Jasmine because she was not following the traditions and customs of a so called Hindu Society. Accidentally, Prakash died as he was trying to protect his wife. Ultimately, Jyoti's transformation into Jasmine (a modern one) kills her husband.

Now, Jasmine decides that she will herself go to America to fulfill her husband's long awaited desire. Although, the journey is not too easy for a woman like Jasmine, but with the help of her brothers she arranges all documents to the foreign country. During her journey, she is brutally raped by the captain of the ship. Later, in rage she killed him and proves that she is not a traditional village girl now; she has the strength to protect herself. Thus, she becomes a rebel to survive in a male dominated society. The following lines elaborate the agony of her soul:

No one to call to, no one to disturb us. Just me and the man who had raped me, the man I had murdered. The room looked like a slaughterhouse. Blood had congealed on my hands, my chin, my breasts. What a monstrous thing, what an infinitesimal thing, is the taking of a human life, for the second time in three months, I was in a room with a slain man, my body bloodied. I was walking death, Death incarnate. (Jasmine,119).

After this outrageous incident Jasmine decides to fly like a free bird in the alien land, not as a widow, but as a woman full of zeal and confidence. She says, "I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, Everything Jyoti-like". (Jasmine,145). Guided by Lillian Gordon, who calls her 'Jazzy', she gets company of Dr. Vadhera, her husband's teacher. Soon, she leaves him as he is a man of customs and traditions.

A few months later, she starts working at the house of Mr. Taylor as a caretaker to Duff, an adopted daughter of Taylor. She is now 'Jase' (from Jasmine), a more confident woman. There she is interrupted by Sukhwinder, her husband's killer. Irritably she decides to move to Mr. Bud Ripple's house. Jyoti, Jazzy, Jasmine, Jase- different names, different identity, however, each one has to encounter a brutal face of life.

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's Day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine is not this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Jasmine,127).

At the end of the novel, she declares to Karin

It isn't guilt that I feel, it's relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation; the frontier is pushing indoor through uncaulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove. (240).

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