

Struggle For Identity In Bharati Mukherjee's 'Jasmine'

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Abstract:

An Indian born American novelist and short story writer Bharati Mukherjee's works reflect struggle life and search for identity of woman. Her *Jasmine* novel exposes how Jasmine, the female protagonist as an Indian culture woman, strives to shape her identity to fit in the American society. In this novel, 'Jasmine' was renamed many times according to circumstances during her life's struggle. Even through her name changed several times but her confidence remained unwavering. This paper tries to explore how Mukherjee's female protagonist 'Jasmine' struggles for her own identity.

Keywords: reflect, identity, exposes, strives, explore, unwavering, protagonist.

As an expatriate and an immigrant, Bharati Mukherjee's writings mostly reflect her own experience as a woman. Bharati Mukherjee finds herself torn between two worlds. She is an Indian-born American novelist who has garnered a lot of attention from the general public in a short period of time. She is usually regarded as the representative of expatriate-immigrant sensibility. Mukherjee included autobiographical themes in her work *Jasmine*, and she mirrored herself in close projections through the protagonists. She felt it difficult to limit herself in India as a Bengali-Indian lady, thus she transcended borders and established herself as a pioneer of new experiences and writing.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the immigrants in Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* attempt to adapt to American society and are portrayed as rootless as a result. Jasmine Mukherjee aims to depict the fresh identity of immigrant women struggling to live in a strange nation in her story. In an age of diasporas, Bharati Mukherjee claimed that one's biological identity (parentage caste and creed) may not be one's true identity because emigration produces physical and psychological changes. The idea of a rift between desire and reason, dependent security and individuality, social and psychic identity, is present throughout her writings.

The novel *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee tells the story of a Punjabi pregnant widow who is 24 years old. Eighteen years after the partition violence, she is born as Jyoti in the village of Hasnapur in Jalandhar district, and an astrologer predicts her widowhood and exile. She has been subjected to sufferings and obstacles since birth, many of which have been foreshadowed by her patriarchal society's patriarchal structure. She is the fifth daughter and seventh of nine children, and like most Indian women, she is born as a disappointment and undesired kid to the family. Her mother wishes for her to be killed as soon as she is born because she is not an asset but rather a liability when married off. She survives that attack and remembers, "I survived the snipping. My grandmother may have named Jyoti, light but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter." (Mukherjee: 40) As a result, the first struggle Jyoti faces is one between the patriarchal society in place and the contemporary life she craves. She loses her sense of connection to rural India's culture and traditions.

Jasmine's life is filled with adversity after adversity. Instead than conforming to traditional Indian society's expectations, Jasmine's free viewpoint husband, Prakash wants to perceive her as a unique individual. Prakash is assassinated by Sikh fundamentalists—the Khalsa terrorists—on the eve of their departure as he plans to fly to America for higher studies. Her dream is crushed when her husband dies suddenly and unexpectedly. Sad and disappointed, he travels to America to perform "Sati".

Despite her willingness to migrate, she has not been welcomed in America since her journey, which she calls her "odyssey" (Mukherjee: 91)) is an illegal one and she is able to enter the dreamland she desires so much only from back door.. Jasmine's American Dream crumbles at first glance, but the worst is yet to come at the lonely Florida motel where she must spend her first night in this strange world. She is raped by the hideous monster Half Face with a sorrowful undertone of her American journey.

Jasmine is so humiliated by his humiliation that she wishes to commit suicide in order to reclaim her virginity. She, on the other hand, does not. She slits her tongue and pours blood into the rapist's mouth. Half Face is stabbed by her. She feels as if the grimy hands of half face are invading everything she holds dear. As a result, before leaving the motel, she burns them all in a metal garbage container, emulating a 'sati' ritual. In many respects, Jasmine's first night in America is significant because she goes through another death and rebirth cycle on this night. She believes she is dead after being raped until she chooses to exact swift vengeance on the man who has disrespected her in every manner conceivable.

After the nightmare savagery, Jasmine is saved by Lilian Gordon, a kind hearted American lady who gives her shelter and clothes for her kid. By dubbing Jasmine 'Jazzy,' Ms. Gordon offers her her first American identity. She is taken to visit Professor Vadhera, who assisted Prakash in gaining admission to an engineering college, with her assistance. The Vadheras' home, though, was very similar to the one she had in Hasnapur. In short, the Vadheras follow rigorous Indian values of order and authority because they are traditional and conservative. As a widowed daughter-in-law, she ends herself caring for the elderly members of the family. She's a 'prisoner doing unreal time' there, and she's made life unpleasant for herself at the Vadhera household.

After the nightmarish brutality, Jasmine is saved by Lilian Gordon, a caring American woman who provides her with home and clothing for her child. Ms. Gordon gives Jasmine her first American identity by calling her 'Jazzy.' Professor Vadhera, who helped Prakash win admission to an engineering college with her help, is taken to see her. The Vadheras' house, on the other hand, was quite similar to her Hasnapur home. Because they are traditional and conservative, the Vadheras adhere to strict Indian principles of order and authority. She finds herself caring for the family's older relatives as a widowed daughter-in-law. She's a 'prisoner doing unreal time' there, and she's made living at the Vadhera household difficult for herself. He believes he needs emotional support when his wife Wyle leaves him, so he declares his love to Jasmine. She is taken aback by his genuineness and gentleness, and she begins to approach him. She says, "I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College Dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. (Mukherjee: Jasmine,1989)

Her joy, however, is short-lived because she suspects that Sukhawinder, the Khalasa Lion terrorist who murdered her husband, is following her. In order to shelter Taylor and Duff from her violent background, the protagonist moves to Iowa in search of a new home. She then leaves her job as a 'caregiver' and relocates to Iowa to marry Bud Ripple Meyer, a middle-aged divorcee. Bud's child is conceived through a live-in relationship and an artificial relationship. Du, a sixteen-year-old Vietnam War survivor adopted by Bud, becomes her stepmother. Bud is estranged from Karin, and

his adult sons abandon him. Jane is the unofficial wife of the fifty-two-year-old local banker in a wheeled-chair.

Jasmine was born to be a victim. After a furious farmer shot Bud, leaving him paralysed, violence rocked her life once more. She is concerned about him and is willing to help him. And now, because of her pregnancy, Bud and Karin have reunited, and Karin realises that she (Jane) does not want to marry him. To quote Mukherjee, “Bud would have left Karin on twisted in midlife until he dropped. I was catalyst. Not a cause”. (P-200)

As the narrative draws to a close, it is revealed that Jane receives a letter from Taylor stating his desire to take her. The unexpected letter worries her about the impact on Bud if Du decides to visit his sister and family in California. She knows Du's predicament, having experienced the heat and dust of exilement herself. Taylor persuades her that leaving Bud is not a bad idea, and she agrees to accompany him. Her agony is over. She quotes, “The moment I have dreamed a thousand times finally arrives” (P-237) and I am not choosing between two men...A caregiver's life is a good life, a worthy life...It is not guilt that I feel it's relief”. (P-240)

As a result, Jasmine's voyage from India to America represents her escaping the pressures of her motherland. She walks towards the west each time, which is a sign for her growing American identity. She is the object of male dominance throughout her journey, beginning with her family and on through the men in her life. Men subject her to assault, rape, want, and lust. Every time she flees, she meets another man who wants to take control of her life. As a result, she is unable to break the circle that keeps her from fully discovering her own identity. Finally, instead of Bud, she selects Taylor, which is a necessary step in breaking the circle.

Despite the fact that she develops a new identity for herself not because Taylor desires this time, but because she desires it, her decision to leave the father of her unborn child is a long cry from her committed love for Prakash, which demonstrates her emancipated, American identity. In contrast to her innocence with Prakash, she gains self-awareness in America as a result of her interactions with men. She discovers her various identities by saying: “I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane. Half-Face for Kali.” (Mukherjee, 1991: 175).

Jasmine begins her life as an Indian girl raised in a traditional family. Every step she takes towards her end position brings her both joy and sorrow. She fights not only male dominance in India and the United States, but also enmity between her Eastern and Western qualities in the hopes of achieving total self-liberation and unification. Though she appears to have complete control over her life in the end, she is still a long way from where she began and what she desire.

Jyoti-Jasmine-Jase-Jane, who journeys through a succession of challenges and hardships in life, is synonymous with struggling. She is not only abandoned and forgotten as a victim of society, but she is also subjected to emotional pain and angst. While many of Jasmine's troubles stem from conditions in India, the majority of her problems are her own inventions. She is a self-made woman, and her ego and natural desire for power cause a slew of issues. We see her defying customary conventions and marrying against her will from an early age. She even goes against social norms in order to develop her profession and financial independence. She understands that adversity and misfortune are unavoidable in life and are intricately linked. Because adversity is an unavoidable part of life, one must prepare for it. In escapement, This was what Fyodor Dostoyevsky said in *Crime and Punishment*, “Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart”. As the protagonist, she grasps and conveys the notion that avoiding suffering entails avoiding success.

Her anguish, her suffering, cannot be uttered in public. Shame and harassment, on the other hand, result in a figurative metamorphosis. Jasmine believes she is being raped both physically and psychologically. As a result, being a woman entails accepting physical and mental suffering.

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