



QUEST FOR BONDING IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*

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ABSTRACT

*In mythology and literature, a **quest**, is a journey towards a goal, serves as a plot device and (frequently) as a symbol. Quests appear in the folklore of every nation and also figure prominently in non-national cultures. In literature, the objects of quests require great exertion on the part of the hero, and the overcoming of many obstacles, typically including much travel. The aspect of travel also allows the storyteller to showcase exotic locations and cultures (an objective of the narrator, not of the character)*

Keywords: *Quest, identity, survival, existence, bonding*

INTRODUCTION

Bonding is the process by which a close emotional relationship is developed. Quest is a long search for something that is difficult to find or an attempt to achieve something difficult. The hero normally aims to obtain something or someone by the quest, and with this object to return home. The object can be something new, that fulfills a lack in his life, or something that was stolen away from him or someone with authority to dispatch him. The quest object may, indeed, function only as a convenient reason for the hero's journey. The different types of quest are as follows Quest for Knowledge, Quest for Gold, Quest for Glory, Quest for Crown, Quest for better Life, Quest for Food, Quest for Identity.



Jasmine is an individual who makes a lot of mistakes, but who has the courage to choose and take risk. Jyoti, a Punjabi village girl, to Jasmine, a loving and devoted Hindu wife, to Jazzy, a remade, non-immigrant, to Jase, a nanny in the home of a New York college professor, and to Jane, live in partner of a bank official in Iowa. Intelligent, beautiful and self willed, she finds her way to America after widowed. Prakash, her husband, dies in a bomb blast. For Jasmine nothing is rooted, everything is in motion. She again moves westward with Taylor, her former lover, in search of an adventurous future in California. She identifies herself as an American and no longer an immigrant.

Like the eponymous narrator of her novel, *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee has changed citizenship and cultures with disorienting rapidity. She encapsulates many aspects of the immigrant experience in America, in *Jasmine*, and in the process of revealing the ways in which new comers from the third world are being absorbed by and at the same time are transforming the society. Despite her difficulties, Jasmine survives with grace, holding on to her capacity to make new life for herself. As an Indian woman, Jasmine has to reinvent herself, even if it means relinquishing her past completely. There is no sense for her holding on to the past.

The exuberance of immigration which comes with the acquisition of Americanness and the immigrant Indianness as a sort of fluid identities to be celebrated does not come easily, for it is difficult to divorce oneself completely from ones own past, nor is it easy to overcome the “aloofness of expatriation”, or sever oneself from the roots and tradition of the culture that one comes from. No doubt the liberated Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase or Jane, who makes a life time for every name, looks like a possibility for every exuberant immigrant. Adaptability is the key to survival and the successful immigrant has that instinct. The protagonist is ever keen to demolish her past except for occasional memories of Prakash, her slain husband. She has the spirit of true immigrant. The *New York Times Book Review* called *Jasmine* "One of the most suggestive novels we have about what it is to become American." Jasmine grows very confident in her powers to shape a new identity. Her decision to leave crippled Bud, walking out with Taylor, shows her asserting self, not merely choosing between Bud and Taylor, instead she is trying to reposition her stars. In America she knows nothing that lasts for ever, and so she doesn't need to condemn herself to a life of mere duty and decides to move out to seek a life of happiness.

Jasmine experiences and compares each and every happening in America with that of India. But the situation in the foreign land is different she finds, mother Ripplemeyer at the age of seventy-six bothers to get her hands and nails done at Madame Cleo's. Jasmine knows that there is no way to return to India with her illegal passport so she makes up her mind to live in alien land without feeling as an alien. She doesn't want to have a sickening memory of India and she doesn't want to tell anything about her life in America. So she deliberately avoids it.

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She understands that there is no meaning in talking about things which cannot be changed. Though Jasmine comes from a village, unlike other women who are timid, Jasmine is very determined and courageous and confides that she is happy enough to live with the old Bud Ripplemeyer. She did not regret her stay at his place and she could not, because she was there by choice. This shows that her transformation is not easy for Jasmine, though she appears to be a person who assimilates the American way of life. Even as a young girl Jasmine is pragmatic and she is able to analyze things that happen around her. She knows that her family is originally from Lahore but circumstances made their family move to Punjab but her father could never accept Punjab as his own. So even as a girl she has realised great things in life which her father could not come in contact with.

Woman has to migrate and transplant herself from one place to another place in her life, in the childhood at her parent's place and then in her husband's place. In the journey of migration and transplantation, sometimes she has to surrender to the situation. If this journey is within the homeland, she might overcome the problems but if it is on the alien soil then she has to surrender to the situation. This is vividly depicted in the novel *Jasmine*. The first turning point in Jyoti's life is her marriage with Prakash, an energetic and enthusiastic young man.

According to Pushpa N. Parekh, with Prakash brutal death and Jasmine's odyssey into self-exile and illegal entry into the Florida backwater, begins the telling of the "speaking person's" tale-one of struggle, violence, wonder, despair, survival and transformation. As a faithful wife, after the death of Prakash, Jasmine wished to complete the unfinished mission of her husband. She thought it is the only mission of her life too. But before reaching her destiny she had to undergo obstacles, even the unimaginable, incident of rape. Across two cultures, Jasmine undertakes a journey that involves physical, emotional and intellectual awakening. It is in the same land Jyoti witnessed a human so inhuman and a human full of kindness. Lillian Gordan, an American woman, can be called as a source of inspiration for Jyoti to lead her life in the alien land with such a determination. Lillian Gordan is the one who taught Jyoti about the ways of life in America. She made Jyoti to dress in a way to keep in pace with the society. Jyoti realised that it is not possible for her to lead a life in the alien land without shedding her past. It was Lillian Gordan who guided her through out, till she felt that jyoti can be on her own. Gordan gave her daughter's old clothes to Jyoti. When Jyoti said that, she wanted to go to New York to visit Professor Devinder Vadhera, she helped her with her final tips, "Now remember, if you walk and talk American, they think you were born here" (JMN 134-35). Gordan played a major role in the life of Jyoti, even later in her life Jyoti remembers Gordan with gratefulness, "...she saved my life, after others had tried to end it. She represented to me the best in the American experience and the American character" (JMN 137).



At one point of time Jasmine does not know where her journey leads to. She is uncertain about her own existence.

I feel at times like a stone hurtling 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. (JMN 139)

It seems that Jyoti is determined to make her survival in America, whatever may be the obstacle she faces in this land. While on her way to Professor Devinder Vadhera's place, she met a driver and he said, "In Kabul I was a doctor. We have to be here living like dogs because they've taken everything from us" (JMN 140). But she was not disturbed by his words,

"I would not immure myself as he had. Wife was built on hope" (JMN 140).

This shows how Jyoti is full of hope and no story can put her down from pursuing her goal. She knows that she is a survivor and can adapt to any kind of situation for her survival. Though Jyoti thought of her past now and then, she wanted to get rid of her past. She does not want to feel the pain of her widowhood. Jyoti had a very satisfied life with Prakash; she always wanted to be in a family with Prakash and kids. Though her dream was not fulfilled, the longing to be in a family was always felt. She felt closer to Du, the adopted son of Ripplemeyer, It was Taylor, after Lillian Gordan, who brought great changes in Jyoti's life. She was happy to look after Duff and was much admired to see the small child, who immediately related to adults and join in their conversation. Jyoti was satisfied with Taylor and his family. She was even surprised to see Taylor, a professor who served biscuits and smiled at her. She felt much curious about his life. Adaptability is the key to survival and Jyoti has that instinct. At times she compares Vadhera with that of Taylor and his family. According to her the Vadhera family is preserving the old ways of an Indian life style and they are afraid to lose their grip on anything because of the fear that they may lose everything. In contrast, the Taylor family confirms that, in America nothing really is lost forever.

The protagonist identity as Jane and Jasmine seek to bring together their needs and thoughts into possibilities and realities. The choice and quality of the story repeat the immigrant woman's personal journey as a new quest from self denial to self realisation. Jyoti enjoys the freedom and self-worth she experiences, even as she encounters other unfamiliar customs she cannot reconcile herself to, such as Duff, a small child, sleeping in her own room. However, in contrast to her "suspect" position as a competitor to Nirmal in Vadhera's house, in Taylor's place she gains her self-confidence. She feels like a guest at their dinner table. Jyoti initially has no consciousness of her self, no sense of identity. Prakash works as a catalyst,

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initiates her journey, but when she is into different kinds of situation her growth becomes swift, surer and the element of self-will becomes greater, so that by the end we witness her as a woman of free choice. Jyoti was happy to have Wylie as her employer because she treated her with due respect. Jasmine would have been lost if she did not find Wylie and her family to support her. At a point of time Jyoti had her own thought about Taylor. She started to think more about him.

Jasmine liked her position as a caregiver and she almost longed to have it forever. She also knows that her position is not a permanent one. Jasmine's longing to have a family of her own and lead a peaceful life with the loved ones, was strong in her. Her thoughts too reflected it vividly. After spending some days with Bud, Jasmine realises that Iowa is not the place for her to live. She awaits a chance to move away from Bud and when she receives a letter from Taylor, she makes her mind to join Taylor and Duff.

She decides to leave Bud and move to California with Taylor, grasping at yet another chance of happiness. By doing so, she is not merely choosing between Bud and Taylor, she is symbolically asserting her right to try and move her stars, instead of passively accepting her fate. She has learnt by now that nothing lasts forever and so she needs not condemn herself to a life she does not want to. Self-assertion is a power that she believes in, and is beginning to enjoy. (Tandon 170)

At last she finds out that her ultimate quest is to be in a family with a man and kid she loves. Thus she discovers the real 'Self' through various struggles and identities.

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