



THE DISORIENTATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL PSYCHE WITH THE IMPERIOUS SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT – A STUDY OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S 'JASMINE'

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee stands apart from other female Indian writers due to her involvement with the life of young men and women in Indian cities. She discards all social concerns and asserts that she is interested in individual issues. She is concerned with psychic life of her characters. In her fiction, Mukherjee explores the experience and dilemmas of being an immigrant and the culture shock and alienation it entailed. She deals with the Indian situation, Indian women in the US and the Indian American community. The novel 'Jasmine' reveals her involvement for the upliftment of women who are seen as worst sufferer due to their marital discord. Societal. In Jasmine, Mukherjee explores the theme of identity and assimilation, as the character Jyoti reinvents herself in order to try to fit into American society. She changes her name based on different situations. However, it is meant to stand for the way immigrants feel compelled to perform according to the norms of their new homeland. The frequent changes of name each correspond to a distinct period and person who had great influence in the lead character's life, for good or for bad. Mukherjee explores the theme of love and devotion, as Jasmine is torn between different men who she cares for in different ways, and is forced to choose whether to stay out of loyalty or to follow her heart.

Key Words: Mukherjee, immigrants, alienation, identity and assimilation,

INTRODUCTION

In Jasmine, the main protagonist is Jasmine and her true identity began from the day she was born. She was born as Jyoti in the village of Hasnapur in Jullandhar district of Punja. She was the fifth daughter and the seventh of nine children. Her mother wanted her to be killed when

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she was born because she did not want her daughter to poverty. As a girl child she was almost strangled to death so that her parents might free her from the problems of marriage. But she survived that attack.

The story follows a non-linear path, beginning with Jasmine retelling a story from her youth about an astrologer who predicted her future as a widow in exile, and then fast-forwarding to her current life in Baden, Iowa. Now known as Jane, she is twenty-four, pregnant, and living with wheelchair-bound banker Bud Ripplemeyer, who is more than twice her age. The two have an adopted son, Du, from Vietnam. Although Bud wants to marry Jane, she refuses, partially due to her attraction to young neighbor Darrel Lutz. Lutz, who recently graduated college and inherited the family farm, is in conflict with Bud over needing a loan, conflict that is only heightened due to the attraction between Bud and Jane.

From there, the story flashes back to the city of Jasnapur in Punjab, India. As a girl, the main character goes by her given name Jyoti. She learns English from a kindly teacher named Masterji, who urges her to continue her education. However, soon after her father passes away, Jyoti meets a man named Prakash and they soon marry. Prakash, a poor but hard-working man, takes to calling her Jasmine and the two build a life together. They struggle to make ends meet, and plan to move to America when Prakash gets the chance to study under a Professor Vadhera.

Prakash is killed by a religious extremist in a bombing before they can fulfill their dream. Out of a sense of duty and honor, Jasmine decides to move to Florida alone and carry out Prakash's plans. She meets Half - Face, the captain of the trawler in which she crosses over to Florida. Half - Face had —lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam. (Mukherjee, Jasmine). In her travels, she is sexually assaulted by the ship's captain, Half-Face.

Jasmine begins her journey of transformation with disintegration and Regeneration in the alien land. As an attractive young girl, who arrives alone and unescorted on alien shores, Jasmine come across a series of shattering incidents during the adventurous Journey. She meets half - Face, the captain of the trawler in which she crosses over to Florida. Half - Face had —lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam. (Mukherjee, Jasmine).

She disintegrates and becomes heart-broken at this incident and decides to commit suicide but at another moment American outlook redeems her and is enlivened with the spirit to survive through eliminating the American evil and is mad to emerge like Indian goddess Kali to slit the throat of her rapist as a symbol of complete eradication of evil of consumerist

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culture. Jasmine's full transformation, from the victim into a vengeful Goddess, seems to be reinforced by imagining herself as the reincarnation of Kali.

She kills him in self-defense. Her journey as an undocumented immigrant in the United States is difficult, first lodging with Lillian Gordon, a seemingly kindly woman who calls her Jazzy and is later arrested for using undocumented Indian women for labor. Gordon does arrange for Jasmine to meet Professor Vadhera, who agrees to get her a green card for three thousand dollars.

Now able to work, Jasmine manages to get a job in child care for Wylie and Taylor Hayes, friends of Lillian's daughter. She helps their adopted daughter Duff through her parents' divorce, and Duff takes to calling her "Jase". She is happy in her position and even finds herself falling for Taylor Hayes. However, a chance encounter with Sukhwinder, the bomber who killed Parkash, leaves Jase in fear of her life and makes her decide to flee the city for Iowa.

Back in present-day Iowa, a flashback to the shooting that left Bud wheelchair-bound takes place. More on Jane's life in Iowa is explored, including her friendship with Bud's former wife Karin. Jane receives a letter from Taylor that he and Duff are on the way to find her. Du begins to figure out that his adopted mother is in love with another man, and she has a major fight with an increasingly unstable Darrel over his inability to understand why she stays with Bud. In the aftermath, Du chooses to leave for California to live with his biological sister rather than see his parents' marriage fall apart.

Jane convinces Bud to approve of Darrel's loan application, but it's too late and the depressed Darrel has chosen to hang himself. Despite of these shattering incidents, Jasmine, through her undaunted spirit rises as a powerful figure capable of struggling for survival and proved her sociability.

Although she cares for Bud, Jane realizes she doesn't truly love him. When Taylor and Duff arrive, Taylor attempts to convince her to leave with him. In the end, Jane realizes that she no longer feels like Jane, and that her fate doesn't have to be here. As she leaves for California with Taylor and Duff, she rejects the destiny the astrologer laid out for her as a child and chooses to forge her own path in the future.

Identity formation is the process by which a person locates oneself in society. The overall conditions of a life, such as class, cultural background and location can be considered as the factors that contribute to identity formation. Renowned psychologist Henry Clay Lindgren [3] opines about identity formation thus. Our involvement in the roles we play is likely to have

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some kind of effect on the kinds of people we become or, more accurately, are continually becoming.

Although a role may be viewed as a kind of psychological garment that we put on and take off and that effects our appearance and behavior for the moment, the fact that this metaphor is appropriate does not necessarily mean that there is no residual effect when we are no longer playing the role in questions...Furthermore, carrying out role-appropriate sequences of behavior requires that we learn certain perpetual styles-certain ways of looking at ourselves and our environment.

The idea of discarding one's ethnicity in order to become a successful immigrant is quite debatable. Yet, it has to be noted that Jasmine is a willing immigrant and she stands poised to achieve the American Dream, confident that she can freely refashion her life by obeying its dictates. Though it is difficult to generalize, a willing immigrant can refashion himself/herself any number of times to suit the situation h/she is in. Jasmine makes her individual choices, and in America where there is freedom of choice, her transformation cannot be questioned. She is a 'self-willing subject of the West' (13) and therefore can be termed successful. Jasmine wonders how many 'more selves' are in her.

She feels that she can rip herself free of the past as she assimilates with American society. She trails through an array of Americanized names and identities- Jazzy, Jase, Jane and tries to forget her past. Jasmine, however, severs her ties with the past. This blotting out every image of the past seems impossible and this has brought in a lot of criticisms. But in Jasmine's case, 'Experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill'. She lives in the present. Even while leaving Bud and going with Taylor, she thinks of the present; 'pulling down an imaginary shade' over the past, she moves on.

The deep analysis of the characters shows that she suffers from different kinds of alienation. Immigration and immigrant experiences are the cause for the alienation. Due to immigration, the feeling that no one cares is always at the back of their minds. They come group oriented Indian culture. They feel alienated in independent western culture. In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee focuses her attention on the problems of alienation. The characters in this novel suffer from alienation, and the intensity of their suffering varies. At last She finds a different path to escape from this alienation.

It has rightly been maintained that in the novel tension between the local and the immigrant Jyoti involves issues of displacement, alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and familiar world (qtd. in Dubey54). Mukherjee has brilliantly portrayed the dilemma of uprooted individuals through her novels. The experience of exile,

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cultural conflict, human relationship and existential problems which are the common problems in the twentieth century literary scene are visibly dealt with in her novels.

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