

THE NEW MOVEMENT IN INDIAN DIASPORIC ENGLISH FICTION – AN EVALUATION OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*

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Diaspora - Introduction

When we talk of Diaspora we start with Jewish context, where exclusion led to the dispersal of Jews away from the homeland. Despite some limitations of specificity of the concept Diaspora is employed in the analysis of emigration and settlement of people beyond the boundaries of their homeland. Retention of the cultural identity in the host society is another important parameter of this. There is considerable literature on various Diasporas. It clearly portrays their socioeconomic and cultural experiences, experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host societies. Emigration of Indians may be examined in terms of three phases:

- The Ancient and the Medieval
- The Colonial and
- The Post-colonial phases
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Bharati Mukherjee – Post-Colonial Writer

In the present paper the researcher has taken up the writer Bharati Mukherjee who belongs to the post – colonial period. Diasporic writing of this period born out of the dialectic between displacement and relocation raises theoretical formulations which provide a fresh perspective to creative work. Bharati Mukherjee is an award winning Indian born American writer. She is brought up in Western background and is considered as an ethnic artist who looks beyond the immigrant's sense of alienation and dislocation to trace 'psychological transformation' especially among women. This versatile writer is at her best when she draws on her experiences of the native world while writing with insight about the new world to which she belongs to now. Her writings reflect not only her pride in her Indian heritage, but also her celebration of embracing America. The phenomenon of migration, the condition of new immigrants and the sensitivity of estrangement and alienation often experienced by expatriates and the struggle of Indian women as immigrants are the major themes of her novels.

Jasmine

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is basically the story of transformation with disintegration and regeneration. The protagonist is an Indian peasant woman whose journey takes her from the village Hasnapur, Punjab, to Florida, to New York, to Iowa and to a close she is about to set off to California. Jasmine metamorphoses herself constantly during her journey, which starts with Jyoti, the village girl in Hasnapur, to Jasmine, the city woman, to Jazzy, the undocumented immigrant, to Jase, the Manhattan Nanny, to Jane, the Iowan woman who enters the story. In this novel the author expresses the idea of assimilation and makes it clear that Jasmine, the central character needs to travel to America to achieve something significant of her life, because in the third world

she encountered only desolation and loss. In the beginning she is immersed in the prejudices, exploitation and violence of migration, but it allows her to overcome these difficulties by internalizing the very tactics used against her.

Journey Metaphor

Journey is a metaphor that advocates the ever-moving, regenerating process of life itself. In India, Jasmine is seen against the backdrop of the rigid and patriarchal Indian society. She tells the story as a twenty four year old pregnant widow, living in Iowa with her crippled lover, Bud Ripplemeyer. Jasmine juxtaposes in her memory each of her identities – as Jyoti, Jasmine, Kali, Jazzy, Jase and Jane, implying that she evokes and revises her past in articulating her identities. The author depicts this transformation and regeneration as a positive and optimistic journey.

The Protagonist

Jyoti, the protagonist of *Jasmine* being the fifth daughter, seventh of nine children is literally strangled to death by her grandmother is a survivor and fighter from the beginning. The writer has delineated Jyoti as a rebel against blind beliefs and superstitions. Jasmine appears to be jubilant sharing the ambition of her husband, intent to go to America, a land of her dreams and opportunities. Her husband Prakash is killed in a bomb blast on the eve of their departure to America. Grief stricken, Jasmine hears his voice exhorting her from every corner of her room: There is no dying, there is only an ascending or a descending, a moving onto other Planes. Don't crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism. That Jyoti is dead (Mukherjee 1989, 86)

Journey of Transformation

Instead of succumbing to fate and leading a life of widowhood she decides to set off for America, with the help of her brothers. *Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash* (Mukherjee 1989, 63). She is set free from the claustrophobic and culturally absurd native place. She sets off to America with forged documents.

Jasmine's transformation begins with disintegration and regeneration on the alien land. She encounters 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. She is brutally raped by Half-Face. She disintegrates 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 slit the throat of her rapist as a symbol of complete eradication of evil of consumerist culture. She transforms herself from the victim into a vengeful Goddess, as the reincarnation of Kali. Jasmine is surprised at her own desire for survival. Her Indian identity leaves her at this point; the body becomes a mere shell, soon to be discarded and what she discards is her Indian psyche and is reborn in America as Jase and Jane. She shuttles between the past and the present. Jasmine's transformation of identity occurs not only through construction but also by the destruction of her existing self.

Transformation

It is strange to note that an incident of violence and disintegration is associated with each transformation in Jasmine. As Jyoti at Hasnapur, her father is gored to death by a bull and her masterji is killed by terrorists. Next, as Jasmine, she encounters an incident that is the death of her beloved husband Prakash Vijn, who is killed in a terrorist bomb attack. During her immigration to

America, as an illegal immigrant, she is exploited by Half-Face who rapes her repeatedly and whom she kills that very night itself. Jase, while leading a life as a ‘caregiver’ she meets Sukhwinder Singh who reminds her of the death of her beloved husband. Despite these shattering incidents, Jasmine, through her undaunted spirit rises as a powerful figure capable of struggling for survival and proved her ability.

Undaunted Spirit

Jasmine is not feeble and timid to accept all whatever comes on her way, instead her undaunted spirit to survive and her valour helps her to adapt herself to the new situation. She confesses, “I survived the sniping. My grandmother ma have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter” (Mukherjee 1989, 40). As a fighter and adapter, she survives, regenerates even after so many transformations and disintegrations.

Jasmine moves to Manhattan, New York to join a glamorous and emancipated couple, Taylor and Wylie Hayes and their adopted daughter Duff as a caregiver. Jasmine is renamed as Jase by Taylor and starts her transformations into a sophisticated American woman. Here Jasmine boldly asserts:

I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward. On Claremont Avenue, in the Hayeses’ big, clean, brightly lit apartment, I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase (Mukherjee 1989, 185-86).

Though Jasmine creates a new identity for every new situation, her former identities are never completely erased. They emerge in specific moments and aggravate the tension which results in disintegration, thereby causing Jasmine to create another more dominant identity, different from all those that came before. Taylor becomes Jase’s American instructor; he teaches her about all the advantages of democracy. He helps her transform herself from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase. Taylor feels desolate when Wylie moves out of the family to move in with the wealthy Stuart Eschelman. Here Bharati Mukherjee registers her comments on the uncertainties in America, where nothing lasts for a long time, not even a human relationship. She says:

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 (Mukherjee 1989, 181).

Personal gamut

Jasmine enters a personal continuum of time where events swing backwards and forwards from place to place and from childhood to adult, from despair to hope, compassion and love. The inescapability of memory, and the boundless nature of time is stressed here and Jasmine finds her life distorted by the different consciousness through which she experiences the world. She loses even her sense of self expression. Unable to live with this plethora of conflicting identities she

flees to Baden County, Iowa to give her life a new beginning. She prepared herself physically and psychologically for another transformation of identity. Bharati Mukher through this novel presents Jasmine as a Phoenix who rises from her ashes.

Bharati Mukherjee has carved out the assimilation of Third World immigrants into the American 'melting pot' which is enriched by those, she describes as pioneers. Jasmine is one these pioneers, who survives and reinstates herself to a new life. In this assertion she has declared herself as an American in the immigrant tradition. 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.

Disruption, Change and Survival

It is explicit that Jasmine cannot remain in a stable life because disruption and change are the means of her survival. Destruction is the manner in which she ultimately transforms and recreates herself. The surrounding environments influence her formation of her identities and she navigates through various locations, her perception of herself changes, thereby, resulting in a multiplicity of consciousness. These create a tension within her and she feels the need to reconcile these conflicting perceptions, so that they do not wage a psychological war within her. Jasmine has achieved a proper identity and balance between and modernity in the concluding part of the novel. The transformation of the heroine from tradition to modernity satisfied her inner self rather than the society. This change in her is a proof to picturize courageous nature of the heroine who acts according to the self consciousness. Finally the novel attains the theme of fulfillment within the inner self.

The potential of fluidity which Bharati Mukherjee attributes to American culture is epitomized with the main character's metamorphosis from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jasmine to Jazzy, Jazzy to Jase and finally to Jane. These character transformations are marked by changes in behaviour and personality. Through these transformations, Jasmine sets herself to be the best example for the girls in rustic areas in overcoming various stumbling blocks despite difficulties. The transformation of Jasmine is full of violence with disintegration which brings tremendous changes in her in all respects such as psychologically, emotionally and physically. Thus, Jasmine succeeds in her attempt to regenerate herself through various transformations with disintegration.

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