



Cultural Assimilation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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Abstract-Bharati Mukherjee is not a typical Indian woman writer, who tries to glorify the Indianess with reference to the attributes of the sub-continent. She is the first recognized American citizen from India to receive the prestigious National Book Critics Award in 1988. She accepts that her novels have the autobiographical elements. Further, she has categorically announced that her women characters are the products of her thinking about the liberation and emancipation of gender. She has exhibited the society where she lives in. She is proud to be named as an American and narrate the stories as if she is used to America and feels comfort there.

As a writer hailed from India and settled in America, Bharati Mukherjee exhibits the complexities of her position as a literary artist. Her swing between Indian environment and the American social frameworks are evident in her novels. She understands the very fact that she is not an Indian anymore for she has been uprooted from there. Her writings insinuate the very fact that liberal attitude gets stronger while she lives in America, Being a woman, who loves the taste of freedom she tends to focus it in her novels. *Jasmine* is one of the early novels of her, and it is not exceptional for that matter. In this present study she compares, directly or indirectly, the lives of women both in India and America.

Keywords: Immigration, Expatriation, Emancipation, confrontation, Transformation, Assimilation and Reincarnation

I. INTRODUCTION

Jasmine is the story of a young Indian woman, who visits America with high amount of dreams after the death of her husband. The entire novel revolves around the way, in which the protagonist is able to fulfill her needs. Further, the new social environment seems to be conducive to her for constructing the new aspired life. Still, there are some hurdles to be crossed in her life. They are not easily done. However, she is able to manage them and she is seemingly a very successful woman at the end of the novel. The conflict between her dreams and reality constructs the novel in an effective manner. Even though the strategy of showcasing the conflict is not new in Indian fiction in English, Bharati Mukherjee has done it with enough artistic skill.

According to Bharati Mukherjee, she is the first immigrant to ascertain her immigration. She differentiates the major difference between expatriation and immigration. Expatriation is not easy to deal with. It is a sort of experience travelling against the course of wind. Immigration, she reckons, is a pleasant experience to have. Bharati Mukherjee is of the opinion that the people, who have settle in America from India for the betterment of their economic status, are comfortable after their initial struggle against the newly found environment. She insinuates the fact that every immigrant comes with his or her dream and fulfills them in the prosperous country. *Jasmine*, the protagonist of *Jasmine* also comes to America with dreams and confronts difficult situation to attain what she expects.

Jasmine pictures both the modern cities of America and Indian rural background. This create enough tension in the mind of her readers, which, according to the new critics of the early part of the twentieth century, is an essential component for the success of any writing. Bharati Mukherjee's focuses the lives of immigrant. Still, the urge of her gender for prompting her feminist is also evident. She is indignant that *Jasmine*, while living in India suffers a lot due to the abstract values imposed upon her in the name of tradition and culture. Like every human being she also conceives some great dreams about her future. She wants to be free from the clutches of her family's rules and regulation. Marriage provides her to escape from that for some extent as her husband is open-minded and he seems to be instrumental in fulfilling the dreams of her. His death spoils everything. The novelist, unlike the other feminists of her time reveals her point that marriage provides enough freedom to women, for the new generation men respect the thoughts of their respective wives.

Bharati Mukherjee depicts an interesting picture that an Indian beautiful girl named Jyoti, having no good education moves to Florida with the hope that she can be successful there. Her husband's death prompts her to do so. There she is molested by a Vietnam veteran. So that she develops the initial impression that

the people of the newly found nation are narrow minded. Comparing the society of India the new environment threatens her as she has received harsh treatment by the Vietnam veteran. Still she does not want to give up her hope and wants to confront the new environment. This confrontation is the explication of Bharati Mukherjee's own experience in the white dominated social background. She has accepted it:

I know from the moment I got here and that I wanted to stay...mine is clear eyed but definite love of America. I am aware of the brutalities, the violence here, but in the long run my characters are survivors. Like Jasmine, feel there people born to American. By American I mean an intensity of spirit and a quality of desire. I feel American in a fundamental way, whether Americans see me that way or not. (Sushma 139) Jasmine receives the offer of a job as nanny with a well refined couple of the West side. Her thirst for emancipation gets aggravated there. So that she tends to register a course in Columbia University to ensure her additional qualifications. She modifies herself both externally and internally. She is able to dress like an American and speaks their language skillfully. The comfortable zone in the couple's house does not remain permanent in her life. She falls in love with an invalid banker and she adopts a new teen-aged refugee boy from Vietnam.

Jasmine's metamorphosis is ever permanent right from her childhood days. This continues even after her arrival to the new nation. Her move towards the western life-style is evident. She tries to give up her identify as an Indian immigrant in search of prosperous future in America. She feels happy to be named as an American rather than an immigrant from the Asian country. Hence, she does not entertain Kavim's comment upon her as a devastative tornado, but she imagines herself as an audacious and ambitious woman, who wants to fulfill all the aspirations with the help of the newly found social environment. This signifies the renovation in her character. She is flexible enough to adopt the new environment without taking much risk. The rapid speed, in which she achieves things in America, is astonishing. For doing this, she readily gives up her Indianness and the other attributes associated with her homeland. In short, she does a lot of things in America to come up in her life and she is ready to confront anything for that.

Bharati Mukherjee has created Jasmine as an ideal immigrant, who can handle the new social structures effectively. The recent Indian women writers have been doing the marvellous job of exposing the social conditions and evils to the readers. So the readers can find the right way to cope with the issues. The immigrant writers have also done the same on their part. Bharati Mukherjee not only exhibits the current situation of the foreign country, but also presents the possible way of confronting the problems of the new socio-political ambience. The novelist displays the way in which the dreams of the immigrants are not easily fulfilled in the white dominated country. The conflict between dream and reality is explicit in her novels. *Jasmine* is not exceptional for that matter. In this novel, she has exposed many features of the Indian immigrants:

I have lived through so many worlds and have been put Indian so many odd, momentous situations, accidentally, that all those worlds somehow creep into a single sentence. Mine is not minimalism which strips away, but compression, which reflects many layers of meaning. (47)

Jasmine manages to increase her American identity continuously. For doing that, the American liberalization, concept of freedom and gender equality of the nation are seemingly supportive to her. Similarly, Bharati Mukherjee has also become more of an America rather than an Indian. Her characters are instrumental in understanding her concept of nationality, individuality, freedom and self-emancipation. She believes in the growth of human endeavour through hard work. At the meantime, as an individual she has to cope with the give situation, which would be highly challenging. One's talent lies in solving the problematic situations foisted upon her. Bharati Mukherjee has created her characters, especially the protagonists, with enough skills of doing that. This does not mean that all the immigrants have got the skill. It is rather novelist's aspiration and the creation of ideal immigrant women. Perhaps, the success of the protagonists is the escape from the novelist's own personality.

The final refinement of Jasmine is the complete outcome of her constant endurance. As a result of that she is able to catch the new pattern of life suitable to her career. Her dream of having a comfortable life is achieved through her fight against the foisted environmental structures upon her. She accepts things as they are. She does not lose her hope when things do not happen on her way. Her consistency in approaching both positive and negative situations indicates her growth as a matured woman in the white dominated nation.

Bharati Mukherjee has the universal vision that everyone from any nation should have compassion towards the people, who immigrate to their respective nation. C.Sen Gupta perceives the notion of Bharati Mukherjee that cross-cultural journey through migration is a positive trait of human beings as it fulfills the dreams of a lot number of people. *Jasmi*e indicates this factor. America, in this novel, is conducive to the immigrants' lives. The protagonist of the novel comes up in her life using the positive atmosphere of the country the novelist is of the notion that globalization is asserted through the process of immigration. The

concept of one-nation one-culture theory is more found in the western countries. *Jasmine* depicts certain situations. The world, having the burgeoning growth in the field of science and technology is in motion and it hardly stops its movement. The immigrants, especially women from the third world countries, can make use of the opportunities. The education they have possessed is instrumental in prompting them emancipated.

Bharati Mukherjee asserts the fact that the hybrid immigrant tradition is more connected with the western culture, which is celebrated for its liberal attitude she herself conveys this to her readers as "I am one of you" (9th in Lauren 1). *Jasmine* is also very much pleased with the American cultural framework. Her Indianess is too much found in her character, but it does not mean that the Indian attributes are totally absent in her. She recalls the Indian background whenever she tends to remember too past. The reminiscence does to provide her sadness or anxiety rather that is seen more a passing cloud which takes her away from the routine works for a while. Interestingly, she comes back from the past with the determination that she has to work hard to abolish her past identity as an ideal Indian girl, who plays second fiddle to men. However, she cannot go away from the past. Interestingly, there is no one to instruct her to follow the cultural frameworks of Indian while she lives in America. This kind of presence of the past in her mind and her physical detachment from the home country are instrumental in fulfilling her aspirations. The protagonist of the novel is seen as an ideal and constructive representative of the entire immigrants from India, who resides in America with the dream of prosperous life.

Jasmine indicates how a girl compromises herself and accepts the reality as it is. The protagonist's transformation from one position to another is beautifully depicted through the different names given to her. The names Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane have some inner meanings. The first name 'Jyoti' is given to her by her father embellishing that he is as bright as an illuminating. Jasmine is the name given by her mother-in-law as the attribute of famine gender. Jase and Jane are the names that she ear from the Western country, where she wants to settle down. The Hindu girl's fusion of traditional Indian names and the Western names are indicative that hybridity is ever permanent in her life. GayatriSpivak is of the opinion that the post-colonial period has made the social structures complex as they prove themselves hybrid mixing with some alien framework. This becomes more complex for immigrants.

Jasmine is the narration of the India audacious young girl's life in India and America. She is passive while she leads her life in India. The same girl becomes aggressive when she enters into the new land. Her experience in America makes her more bold and courageous. She does to want to recollect the past except Prakash, her husband. This indicates the fact that the past is cruel to her. As she has got some bitter experiences in Indian she goes to America in search of better life and identity. After that she assumes America as her homeland. Still she cannot quit the Indian background completely. Her transformation does not affect her faith in the home band's religious faith.

The novelist is very much aware of the conflict between the Western concepts of rebirth and the Indian belief of reincarnation. Jasmine, being an immigrant from India confronts this problem. Being herself an immigrant, Bharati Mukherjee is also aware of this. The contrasting notion regarding the reincarnation has been a problem for an immigrant for she cannot be detached from the Indian ideology in order to achieve new life.

The protagonist of *Jasmine* is very much aware of the responsibilities foisted upon her. As an unmarried girl she knows how to satisfy her parents and the member of the society. After getting married to Prakash, she wants to exhibit as an ideal wife to him. Further, she proves herself to be a responsible daughter-in-law of the family. It is Prakash, who has sowed the seed for her dream of emancipation. His love upon her finds no limit. He wants to make her modern and free from any restrictions. His unfortunate death shatters all the familial expectations of her. She, instead of going after other relatives for help, takes up the help within herself and believes that it is her responsibility to emancipate herself. This is self-assurance for her bright future.

Bharati Mukherjee is not partial in her treatment while dealing with the two nations: India and America. As a reality she tends to expose both the positive and negative aspects of both the societies. The ambivalence towards the Indian environment is explicit in *Jasmine*. For her, India is known for gender partiality and women are to given proper treatment in the nation. Jasmine's birth for example is too celebrated in India simply because of the reason that she is a female child. This is where the novelist finds the vast gap between the concepts of the West and East. Further, this is the reason why she is seemingly comfortable with the foreign land rather than her own home condition. Hence, fulfilling their dreams is not an easy task while residing within the social structures. Moreover, marriage is another hurdle for the women of India as the institution has proved to be restrictive to women. The immigrant women writer from India is also aware of it and they are happy that they have escaped from the restrictions due to their being away from the homeland. Bharati Mukherjee is one such writer, who wants to expose the gender

partiality existing in India. She is preoccupied with depicting the lives of immigrant in the alien environment, but she explicates the Indian background with all its merits and demerits.

The dual co-existence of the east and the west provides enough flexibility to Jasmine and it is very much useful to cope with the alien environmental conceptual structures. Unlike the western women, who are fond of too much of freedom, the Indian women are trained in such a way to endure the pain caused by her familial relationships. This is explicit in the life of Jasmine. Her tolerance comes into light even during her stay in India. She does not rebel too much against the male-chauvisticbehaviour of her society. Her dreams are hidden in her. For them the social concepts are seemingly hurdles. Still, she manages to confront the given situations effectively.

Jasmine wants to make Bud confident and comfortable about his own life. She is ready to be pregnant but she is not willing to marry him. She feels isolated when Bud leaves her for California, she believes that Taylor will come to rescue her. At that moment, she seems to be fully assimilated to the America environment. Her longing for love is also explicit. In the initial state, she is obsessed with the needs of others. Later, she concentrates on her own need. So that she thinks that it is to a great mistake to leave Bud after providing enough moral support. Bud feels uncomfortable about Jasmine's past. On the other hand Taylor is not much obsessed with the past. Taylor knows about her dead husband and prepares to accept the unborn child of Bud. Jasmine's walking out of Bud's life is not a wanton act of frivolity. The feeling of guilt is absent in her character. After some extent, she does not think herself as Jane. She has survived the worst in American like ad now, she free like an American to choose her place in Taylor's like. She continues to enjoy her adventures with Taylor, she heads towards California. The novel ends on a triumphant note.

Thus, Jasmine's dream, right from the beginning of the novel, is evident. She is careful enough to fulfill the dreams through careful endurance and tolerance.

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