



Depiction of diaspora identity crisis and cultural conflict in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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Abstract

Diasporic theory, an important component of English literature describes the experience of immigrants in foreign country. Whatever the reason for migration may be social, economic, religious, political, as preachers, as exile, or a worker, or in search for better life to survive in the new land, they must adapt to new surroundings. Between their two language and two homes they must choose. This paper aims to depict the diasporic identity crisis and cultural conflict face by female protagonist in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Jasmine*. The main protagonist Jasmine crosses many phases throughout in her journey. She faces many difficulties like identity crisis, alienation, cultural struggles. Jasmine feels the transformation of identity from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jasmine to Jazzy and Jazzy to Jase. The adjustment and assimilation undergo by the protagonist makes her question her own identity: "How many more shapes are in me? How many more selves? And how many more husband." She grapples with her own identity and the author has portrayed it with a symbolic change in the name of her character with every new phase of her life. She overcomes the limitations of all the various phases of her life and chooses happiness and fulfilment at the end. She decides to let go of the exigencies of the past and start afresh.

Keywords: Consciousness, culture, identity struggles, alienation

Bharati Mukherjee, who was born on July 27, 1940, in Calcutta, spent over ten years living in Canada before obtaining US citizenship and settling down there till her passing on January 28, 2017. She received her early education in Calcutta and Baroda. She graduated from Canada with a Ph.D. and a professional degree in

finance. She saw herself more as an American novelist than an Indian author who had moved abroad. Her work focuses on concerns of cultural transformation and the general immigrant experience in the periphery. Her work seems to be too close to the reality of India, America, and Canada, aside from cultural tensions. Her stories contain references to racism, brutality, and social hierarchy. Her family ties keep her in India even though she moved to the United States three decades earlier. Like many writers, she made room in her work for all of her life's experiences. In India, she was first a colonial subject before becoming a national one. Her creative journey and talents were also influenced by her status as a colonial Indian exile in Canada. A thorough examination of her writing enables us to comprehend and observe for ourselves how she evolved from an immigrant writer to an American author to a renowned novelist with a distinctive voice. Her stories centre on the amazing process of migration, the standing and position of immigrants in a foreign country, the feeling of alienation among migrants, and the struggle for the identity of the Indian lady. "Bharati Mukherjee analyses the new dynamics of female and male connection with a clear contempt of 'Sita' and 'Savitri' myths, which have been crucial in shaping the future of Indian womanhood," writes Agarwal (2009). In the framework of their familial interactions, she outlines the problems with feminine identity. Her female characters experience racial and sexual oppression in addition to going through cultural disorientation about their place in the world. Her characters' social and mental identities are severely torn apart as a result. She places more value on the present than the past because it will influence her future. Bharati Mukherjee is considered one of the most notable modern Indian women novelists in English due to her writing style and subject matter. The protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* struggles to survive and find her identity in America. The struggle of a woman to find her place in a brand-new world is poignantly depicted in this book. The story moves geographically from Punjab to Florida to New York to Iowa. From a psychological standpoint, it moves the reader from doom to doubt to depression to options to hope. It appears that the author drew heavily on her personal experiences of settling down in a different culture. The female protagonist struggles with her own identity, and the author depicts this by symbolically changing her character's name with each stage of her life. Born as Jyoti, her husband in India calls her Jasmine; in Florida, she goes by Jazzy; in New York, Jase; and in Iowa, Jane. The predicament of single women in India and even outside is discussed in the story. It takes place in the 1980s and begins in Punjab, where Jyoti is continuing her education. Here she meets Prakash and later marries him. They work hard to sustain their life in India and later one of the professors of Prakash asks him to move to Florida to better his prospects. But before they move, Prakash is killed in a bomb blast and the 17-year-

old Jasmine is widowed. Nevertheless, she travels to Florida, where the ship's captain molests her sexually. Then, after gathering herself, she decides to press on. She seeks shelter with Lillian, who makes arrangements for her to travel to New York so she might meet the professor who asked Prakash to relocate there. She stays there for a while before taking a job to look after Wylie and Taylor's son Duff. Taylor, who nicknames her Jase, becomes the love of her life. However, she quickly flees New York after finding Prakash's killer there. In Iowa, she changes her name to Jane. She settles in with banker Bud. He makes her a marriage proposal. Their neighbours become curious about Jane. She remains Bud's roommate. However, one day she gets a letter from Taylor saying that he and Duff have chosen to go looking for her and that they would love nothing more than for her to return to their lives. She worries about what her absence would mean for Bud, who is already in a wheelchair and whose son has abandoned him, but after much drama and thought, Jasmine as Jane decides to live for herself for once. She drives Taylor and Duff to California in their automobile. She recalls that Jyoti was once predicted to lead a difficult life as a widow and exile by an astrologer in India. She finally decides to put her happiness and love ahead of her obligations and consideration for others. She was urging the fates in this way. She was committed to "repositioning the stars" and living a happy and contented existence.

The main character's bravery and tenacity are what stick out throughout the entire book. She repeatedly faces off against fate, yet each time she prevails and shines even brighter. She manages to fit into this new culture while staying true to her personality and upbringing. She overcomes all the constraints that she faces of the different stages of her life and ultimately decides on happiness and fulfilment. She decides to forget the past and the pressures of the past and begin again.

Srivastava (2018) in her article titled "Transformation of self" on the work of Bharati Mukherjee tells us about the crossing of boundaries and its effects on the mind of people, especially women who feel a big transformation in their selves. The author with the various aspects of self as perceived in her novels. She also shows how different norms and codes of life impact the character of the self. Bhadrusha and Mohanty (2018) in their article titled "Clashes of Culture on the novel of Bharati Mukherjee" have shown how a shift in culture affects the sensibilities of the characters in Bharati Mukherjee's novels. It shows that Bharati's works manifest immigrants' experiences from a cultural point of view. They have asserted that the characters go through psychological transformation when they shift from one country to another. The social and cultural conflicts affect the lives of women in her novels. Nityanandam (2000) has demonstrated the attempts of the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee's novels to strike at their roots and several causes of their failure to do so in the novels

The Tiger's Daughter, Wife & Jasmine. The female characterization in the first two novels of Mukherjee mentioned here indicates the traditional image of women, but in *Jasmine*, with a loss of identity, Mukherjee frames her own rules and regulations to survive and develops her as a personality unbounded by traditional limitations. Thus, the author highlights the progressive characteristics of Bharati Mukherjee's women in her book. Lata Mishra critically points out that Mukherjee fictionalizes the process of Americanization by tracing a young Indian Women's experiences of trauma and triumph in her attempt to forge a new identity for herself in the article *Representing Immigration through the logic of Transformation: Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine*.

The subject of Bharati Mukherji's novel *Jasmine* is the process of moving from one's own country to a new one to start a new life, get money, etc. After a huge struggle, refugees from foreign land desire to start a new life. They struggle with loneliness, nostalgia, and sadness. This paper examines immigrants' resistance to change and cultural transformation. Through her characters, Bharati Mukherji attempts to explain the nature and culture of America in her book *Jasmine*. From her perspective, America is the land of change. Migrants experience several highs and lows during their entire lives. While she is traveling, three stages make up the metamorphosis. The first begins with Jyoti being predicted to become a widow. "Watch me reposition the stars" *Jasmine* responds. She begins her quest for self-awareness. *Jasmine* transitions through a variety of personas and appearances at every stage of her life. When she got married and moved to a city with her husband, the trip began. Her spouse envisions her as a contemporary American woman. She begins to change her identity right there. She first goes by the name *Jasmine*. She deals with the tension between her two personalities with her husband. One is the Indian woman's identity, and the other is what her husband desired her to be.

"For the uncle, love was control. Respect was obedience. For Prakash, love was letting go. Independence, self-reliance: I learned the litany by heart. But I felt suspended between worlds. (*Jasmine*, p.76)"

Jasmine contrasts Prakash's view on love with that of his more conventional and conservative uncle. When *Jasmine* and Prakash are married, Prakash's aunt and uncle want them to live with them in their house, but Prakash demands that they have their place so that they may distance themselves from what he perceives as the "feudal" customs of their upbringing. "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness".

As a result, she prefers Taylor to Bud for marriage. She rejects the constraints of the stereotypical Indian woman and opts for fulfilment. She departs with Taylor in genuine American fashion.

Jasmine exposes her characters as "I have had a hundred for each of the women I have been, Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jaze, Bud for Jane, and half face for Kali".

The villagers say when a clay pitcher breaks, you see that the air inside is the same as outside. We are just shells of the same absolute. (JS, p15)

"Daughters were curses", (39) says Jasmine, as she recalls the bruise marks on her infant's neck when she was born. She relates these early memories through the lens of sharing them with Taylor and his wife Wylie.

She doesn't want to become a dead body. We see herself looking at a dead dog floating in the river and broken pieces sinking in the river as, "A Stench leaked out of the broken body, and then both pieces quickly sank"

To avoid being criticized by her sisters, she swims out into the river and brushes against a dead dog while doing so. The dog's body cracks open as she touches it, and it falls into the river. The reader is then informed by Jasmine that she is 24 years old and resides in Iowa. She claims that she is reminded of the dead dog in the river each time she sips a glass of water.

The patriarchal society, her family, and others provide her with numerous challenges, but she pushes through them by discovering herself. By overcoming all the obstacles, she encountered, she soon learns to acquire a new identity in American culture.

"Calamity Jane. Jane as in Jane Russell, not Jane as in Plain Jane. But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other". (p26)

Jasmine's statement exposes some element of her acceptance and underlying restlessness at being cast in yet another role "Jane". Here, she is Bud's partner, the mother of his unborn child, and she wants this new chapter of her life to be as monotonous as possible.

We murder who we are so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams. (p29)

Jasmine makes this comment to herself when talking with Du's history teacher after he admits he tried speaking Vietnamese to the young man. She is upset with this man for his subtle racism and for his inability to see that people like Jasmine and Du, foreigners in a strange land, have to leave behind who they were and imbibe into a new culture if they are to survive. There are many things I deserve, but not all of them are better. Taylor thought dull was the absence of action, but dull is it's kind of action. Dullness is a kind of luxury. (Jasmine, p.6)

This quotation is an early example of Jasmine drawing comparisons between her own experience and that of Hayes. The Hayeses eschew "dullness" and "flatness" in favor of excitement, but for Jasmine, who has been across several oceans on the ship's prow, dullness is a welcome break from uncertainty and peril.

I fell in love with what he represented to me, a professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her, and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she didn't understand it. It seemed entirely American. (Jasmine, p. 167)

Here Jasmine describes the nature of her initial love for and attraction to Taylor, which was not a physical attraction necessarily but a symbolic one. He represents a benevolent, generous, and democratic spirit; loving him was loving the possibility of sharing his ease. It represents the most flowery, optimistic shade of America's mythology of social mobility.

I remember the thick marking pen in his hand printing a confident RETURN on packages of books, records, and knife sets I'd thought I wanted. The cord feels dusty. (Jasmine, p. 239-40)

Here, Jasmine reminds Taylor of one of her teachings on how to control the rise of consumerism, she goes through when she starts making a consistent income and purchasing junk from catalogues. He advises her to simply "RETURN TO SENDER" any items she decides she no longer requires. She's considering leaving Bud at this point, and Taylor is reassuring her that she does not need to. Her return of items as a result of her noncommittal behaviour demonstrates how American values are different from those she was raised with, where duty, dedication, and sacrifice take precedence.

Jasmine recalls a time shortly after Bud divorces Karin when Karin calls her a gold digger at the grocery store. Jasmine responds, "Bud is gold ... and if digging him out of the sadness he was in when I met him was what she meant, then, yes, I was a gold digger" (196). Jasmine believes that Karin may have been able to talk Harlan down from shooting Bud, and in that way, she feels especially guilty for her inability to read the signs that afternoon. Karin calls Jasmine a "tornado blowing through Baden" (206), uprooting everything in her path.

Each life even has a different name corresponding to it: Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, Jane. Jasmine says, "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" (197). Kali is a Hindu goddess of, among other things, the destruction of evil forces in the world. At several points in the novel, Jasmine refers to herself as a goddess, or as a woman who has transformed into a goddess. She exposes herself as "I think sometimes I saved [Bud's] life by not marrying him. I feel so potent, a goddess," (12).

When Jasmine says, "I've never been to Lahore, but the loss survives in the instant replay of the family story: forever Lahore smokes, forever my parents flee" (41), her words reflect her mission to express her past traumas through repetition, trying to find a way to relate these stories in a meaningful way for herself. She attempts to

make this connection with Du, who resists her attempts to have him share his experiences from before he was adopted by the Ripple Meyers. Jasmine, the assimilated immigrant changes America as she floats through different identities.

Jasmine is portrayed by Bharati Mukerji as a Phoenix who repeatedly emerges from the ashes under several identities and personas in her book. She effectively portrays the lives of an immigrant Indian woman as well as the challenges she must overcome to improve her life in a foreign country.

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