



Research Paper

An Analysis Of Identity In Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine

Chrisna Jose

M.A in English, Kerala University, Kerala
Corresponding Author: Chrisna Jose

ABSTRACT: Migration is a voyage which can be defined not only as a physical transplantation; it is a quest to get adopted and to be adapted. This paper endeavors to bring out the identity and transformation attained by Jasmine, the central character in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989) through the process of migration and assimilation. The change in identity associated by transformation becomes integral for the protagonist to survive in an alien land.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Transformation, Survival etc.

Received 03 October, 2018; Accepted 15 October, 2018 © The author(s) 2018. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee is a versatile writer whose creative sensibility manifests characters, who are driven to move by confronting difficulties of transplantation and assimilation as the surviving aids. Mukherjee herself was a migrant who lived in diverse cultural societies and this experience stimulated her to fictionalize the migratory experience in the most compelling way. Her life in India, Canada and the United States authorized her to render the true picture of migrants as a trace of her experiences. She recounts her own works as "stories of broken identities and discarded languages" (Darkness,3) with characters having "the will to bond to a new community" (Darkness11). She estimates the identity transition experienced by herself in her writings,

I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous driven underclass of semi-assimilated Indians with a sentimental attachment to a distant homeland, but no desire for permanent return ... Instead of seeing my Indianess as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or, worse, a "visible" disfigurement to be hidden) I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated (Darkness 3).

The novel *Jasmine* gives the adventurous life of the protagonist Jasmine, a girl from the village of Hasnapur, who migrates to America and later encounters identity transmutations in her endeavor to adjust with her surroundings which makes her a strong woman, the one who wins over her destiny. The narrator Jasmine takes her reader to different time shifts. The novel is a weaving together of the present situation and past memories which in turn exhibits the shifting of her multiple identities. Her initial change in identity befalls after her marriage to Prakash, who changes her name from Jyoti to Jasmine, "Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities" (Jasmine77). The past is never dispatched, "My life before Prakash, the girl I had been, the village, were like a dream from another life" (Jasmine 91). Following the death of her husband, Jasmine decides to immigrate to America to commit Sati in the University campus where her husband was dreaming to go. This confers her change from a mere village girl to the one who is determined to fulfill her husband's dream. Her thought reveals how traditional she was before migration uprooted her life, "Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash" (Jasmine 97). The anguish in her mind concerning the journey is best reflected in her words,

We are outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped-off corners of waiting rooms where surly, barely wakened customs guards await their bribe. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of intercontinental vagabondage. We ask only one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue. We sneak a look at the big departure broad one the tourists use. Our cities are there; too, our destinations are so close, but not yet, not so directly. We must sneak in; land by night in little-used strips ... What country? What continent? We pass through wars, through plagues. I am hungry for news, but the discarded papers are in characters which I cannot read. (Jasmine 101)

After her landing in America, Jasmine was brutally raped by Half Face but she was not willing to capitulate before fate. She burns her husband's suit in the hotel, which can be counted as an act which reflects her constraint towards established traditions.

Vadhera's isolation to merge in the new land was in contrast to Jasmine's urge to secure her place. She was not willing to confine herself in the Indian ghetto where she is discerned as a young widow, "In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianess, I from everything wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like. To them, I was a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude" (Jasmine145). The protagonist Jasmine is trying to move on which sparks her assimilation. For her, Vadhera "had sealed his heart when he'd left home. His real life was in an unlivable land across oceans. He was a ghost, hanging on" (Jasmine 153). She is renamed as 'Jazzy' by Lillian Gordon, who teaches her the ways of American life. For Jasmine, Lillian "Was a facilitator who made possible the lives of absolute ordinariness that we ached for" (131). Lillian becomes a protector of illegal immigrants.

Jasmine gains the next identity when Taylor and Wylie open a new phase of life before her. She was a caregiver for their adopted child Duff. For her "Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family" (Jasmine, 165). Taylor assigns her the new name 'Jase', the marking of her new identity, "Jyoti was now a sati-goddess; she had burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine lived for the future for Vih & Wife. Jase went to movies and lived for today" (176). Even though she is assigned new names, her former identities are not completely erased. The shift between past and present, the continuous psychological travelling of the mind brings out the inner conflict experienced by the protagonist in the midst of her varied identities. When her physical identities are altered the psychological mind is also flowing along with it, The love I felt for Taylor that first day had nothing to do with sex. I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, and affectionate. Note illegal, not a murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, and fearful. (Jasmine171) Jasmine is given the new name 'Jane' by Bud, the banker in Iowa, which shows nearly a completion of her Americanization. She closely identifies herself with their Vietnamese adopted son Du, "Once upon a time, like me, he was someone else. We've been many selves. We've survived hideous times" (Jasmine 214). Being for the present is what she tries to do, "Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer" (Jasmine 127). For her "Experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill" (Jasmine 33). Jasmine recognizes her multiple identities by saying "I have had a husband for each of the women I have been, Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane and Half-Face for Kali" (Jasmine 197). The sexual freedom revealed by the protagonist reflects the breaking up with traditional codes. She describes her decision to join Taylor I'm not choosing men. I am caught between the promise of America and old world dutifulness ... It isn't guilt that I feel, its relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through un-caulked windows. Watch me reposition the stars (Jasmine 240). Jasmine cannot live a constant life. She adopts and adapts according to her situations. The sense of movement portrayed throughout the novel projects the necessity of change and transformation as the surviving aids for existence. In her journey Jasmine is assigned various names- Jyoti, Jasmine, Jane, Jase, finally renewing her as an independent woman who decides to live with the man whom she loves. The freedom of choice that she made gives new definitions to her inner self- a great fighter and survivor. Jasmine articulates her distinct identities throughout the novel in which she herself defines the changes happened to her both in physical and psychological levels. There is no constancy, as the protagonist is carried through various space dimensions, there happens an incarnation of her innate self, which in a way reflects her multiplicity of consciousness. Jasmine fights against every challenge in her quest to live. There is always a passion for life, an urge to move on. The feeling of displacement is overcome by the desire to settle down by capturing the present. The novel can be seen as a saga of struggle for living, which turned a mere village girl to a strong and independent Americanized woman. In Jasmine, Mukherjee has thus created an exotic heroine, who taught the world to overcome the hurdles of life, to survive, to live. There is no doubt that the protagonist and her creator will remain forever in the mind of every reader which reflects the literary exuberance of the great writer Bharati Mukherjee.

REFERENCE:

- [1]. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. New York: Groove, 1989. Print.
- [2]. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Darkness*. Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1985. Print

Chrisna Jose "An Analysis Of Identity In Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine " (Quest Journals) Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science 6.9 (2018): 69-70