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A STUDY OF CULTURAL ASSIMILATION IN BHARATI
MUKHERJEE'S "JASMINE"

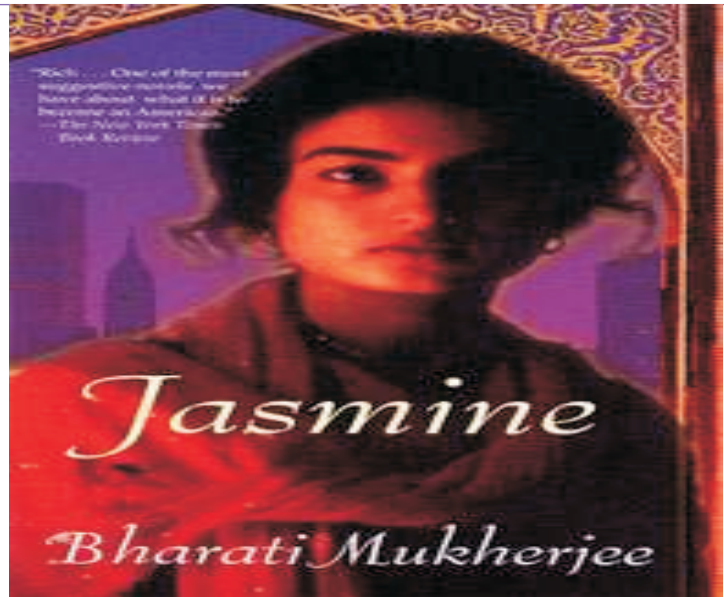


C. Yogaraneer

Research Scholar, Department of English, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu .
& Assistant Professor, K.C.S. Kasi Nadar College of Arts & Science, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee may be a celebrated author United Nations agency portrays her protagonist's inner struggle for identity and their cultural perplexity within the migrator land. 'Jasmine' is that the third novel revealed by Mukherjee in 1990. it's been chosen as a brand new royal family Times review article notable book of the year. The protagonist suffers as associate expatriate in America however she accepts it as a neighborhood of doctrine expertise. Her ever-changing identities from Jyoti to Jase to bush to Jane square measure inextricably coupled together with her cultural conflict.



KEYWORDS : *Cultural conflict, Indianness, Identity, Immigrant experience.*

INTRODUCTION :

Bharati Mukherjee may be a author United Nations agency has witnessed varied cultures. She is born in Calcutta. Educated in India, nice United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and U.S.A.. She is married to the Canadian author Clark Blaise. She received pH scale.D. in English and literary study from the University of Iowa. She presently works as a prof within the Department of English at the University of CA, Berkeley. Her far-famed works embrace The Tiger's girl (1971), better half (1975), bush (1989), The Holder of the planet (1993), Leave It to Maine (1997), fascinating Daughters (2002), The Tree Bride (2004) and Miss New India (2011).

The protagonist Jasmine is born in a small village in Hasnapur, Punjab, India. It is dominated by its own tradition of consulting the astrologer during every important happening in their life. It is the astrologer who predicts Jyoti's exile and widowhood early in her childhood when she is only seven. Her rebellious spirit is evident from the beginning when she does not believe his verdict.

Jane is reared in the culture where daughters are considered as curses as they have to be married off with dowries. She is the fifth daughter, the seventh of the nine children. She is actually prone to female infanticide – "ruby red choker of bruise around her throat and sapphire finger prints on my collar bone" (Jasmine 40) as discovered by her sisters. She is good in her studies. But educating a girl child is not given much importance.

Mukherjee sets the fiction in India during the partition riots and the trouble which ensued. Jasmine's mother is enthralled when she thinks of Lahore. They belong to reputed family who lived in big stucco house with porticoes and gardens. The Hindus were sent out of the country but it has

become customary for her father to tune to Pakistani radio broadcasts.

When Jasmine marries Prakash in the Registrar Office without dowry, her friend Vimla tells that it is the Christian way of getting married which is against the Hindu culture. Jasmine accepts that Prakash "did trash some traditions, right from the beginning" (Jasmine 76). In Jullundhar, he opts to live as a nuclear family with his wife instead of being a part of the joint family in his uncle's house which is considered a breach in Indian tradition. Prakash gives her liberty. He christens her as Jasmine. Her change in identity is coupled with the change in her culture and lifestyle as well. Prakash transforms her village girl's attitude to the mindset of a city girl. He insists her to address him by his name which is strictly forbidden in Hasnapur. As Ruppel observes, Prakash is not the one who follows the Indian patriarchy,

In contrast to the other men of the traditional culture, Prakash does not see marriage as the cultural sanctioning of patriarchal control and enforced obedience. He renames Jyoti as Jasmine, a symbolic break with her feudal past. Yet this break causes Jyoti/Jasmine deep conflict. As a traditional woman she wants to get pregnant immediately to prove her worth and to validate her identity. Indeed, in this society, pregnancy is the only available identity" (Ruppel 184).

Prakash is a practical man representing the modern younger generation in India. When Jasmine wants to get pregnant when she was only fifteen, he rebukes her that it is her "kind of feudal accomplice was what still kept India an unhealthy and backward nation" (Jasmine 77). He aspires to have a real and new life which rewards his talent and intellect. He thus embraces the opportunity to immigrate to America. It is Prof. Vadhera who encourages Prakash to travel to US to celebrate the perfect freedom of American culture.

When Prakash dies in the bombing contrived by Sukhwinder, Jyoti's grandmother, Dida chides her for not consulting the groom's horoscope with the astrologer. She also enlists the reason for Jyoti's widowhood to several other incidents - addressing husband by his name, celebrating his departure by buying a sari which are all her attributes to her hostility to the tradition. Dida is a conservative who thinks Jyoti's behaviour as only a revolt against her traditional ideals which displeased God. Yet Jasmine says, "Dida, I said, if God sent Sukhi to kill my husband, then I renounce God. I spit on God!" (Jasmine 98).

When Jasmine is flung from one way of living to the other she struggles hard but still manages to adopt to the new environment. This leads her to the destiny which she yearns for. She decides to fulfill her husband's mission to go to US. She gets forged passport with the help of her brother. During her venture, she is raped brutally by the ship's captain, Half Face. Her Indianness advised her to commit suicide as she burnt in shame. However she cuts her tongue. Her bleeding tongue gives her an appearance of Goddess Kali. In all her rage she murders Half Face who abused her physically and mentally.

Jasmine then meets Lillian Gordon who feeds her, clothes her in her daughter's dress and gives her a place to dwell. She is a very kind lady who shelters mostly the illegal women immigrants who have no one to care for. She even teaches her how to perfect her speech and how to behave publically. She changes her way of dressing and her walking style. Jasmine is groomed to seize American culture in the hands of Mrs. Gordon. She is guided by her to meet Prof. Vadhera, her husband's teacher.

Prof. Vadhera's family is very kind hearted to accept Jasmine as one among them. The Flushing is dominated by Indian families with familiar landscape of Indian shops. After few months she realizes that life has become a normal routine with no adventure. She starts to feel sick as there is no progress in her life. She has started to forget her English and the style which Mrs. Gordon taught her. "In the Vadhera family, the reflections of "artificial Indianness" distort her sense of dignity. In order to

assimilate in yankee life she retains her natural Indian values" (Agarwal 21).

She leaves Flushing and meets Kate, girl of Mrs. Gordon. Kate gets her employment as a nanny for pudding, the adopted girl of Taylor and poet. shrub ponders, "Adoption was as foreign to Maine because the plan of widow marriage" (Jasmine 170). Later, poet deserts them in pursuit of her man. shrub takes excellent care of pudding. Taylor falls dotty together with her. She feels one with them until she finds her husband's murderer in New York. She fears that Sukhwinder might be a threat to Taylor's family so she leaves to Iowa where Duff's biological mother lives.

In Iowa, she meets Bud, a banker who is an invalid in the wheel chair after being shot in his back. She renders support to him when Karin his wife abandons him. She carries his child without marrying him. Du is the adopted son of Bud and Jane. He is born in Saigon where he had a large and happy family. He is then raised in the refugee camp. "Du's mother and brother were hacked to death in the fields by a jealous madman after they'd gotten their visas" (Jasmine 18). Even in the school in Iowa, Jane realizes how he is tormented by his history teacher, Mr. Skola on the basis of identity and his roots. Jasmine wonders, "I suppress my shock, my disgust. This country has so many ways of humiliating" (Jasmine 29). The culture and ambience in which Du is brewed has made him stoic to accept the reality of life.

Bud calls Jasmine as Jane as in - 'Calamity Jane' or 'Jane Russell'. However she prefers to be called as in 'Plain Jane'. It is Jasmine's foreign identity that frightens Bud. He thus tries to associate her to his own people. "My genuine foreignness frightens him. I don't hold that against him. It frightens me too" (Jasmine 26). Jasmine to feels alienated because of her ethnicity which at times frightens her. Jane contemplates as how one has to give up their culture slowly to adapt to the new one.

Once we start letting go - let go just one thing, like not wearing normal clothes, or a turban or not wearing a tika on the forehead - the rest goes on it won sinkhole. When he first arrived, Du kept a small shrine in his room, with pictures, a candle, and some dried fragrances. I don't know when he gave it up (Jasmine 29).

Jane and Du are the paradigms of how the immigrants have to lose their native culture and identity in order to grab the new prospects.\

Jane meditates how people of different culture, identify her in different places. When she was in Baden, the farmers seek oneness. They are afraid to suggest that she is different. According to them the knowledge about the alien is intelligence. In New York, Taylor's friends would start guessing her nativity. "You're Iranian, right?" If I said no, then, Pakistani, Afghan, or Punjabi? They are strikingly accurate about most thing, and always out to improve themselves" (Jasmine 33). On one hand, they are very calm like the farmers with no questions and ready to accept whatever culture they belong to. On the other hand, try are inquisitive only to update their knowledge. But Jane wishes to forget her painful, past experiences which they like to probe. She feels that it might kill her with guilt.

Mukherjee also highlights the ritual of performing sati. Jasmine's Pitaji dies horribly attacked by a bull. Her mother wanted to throw herself in the funeral pyre. When she is not allowed to do so, she shaves her head with a razor, wears coarse cloth and sat in a corner. This symbolizes how the widows are neglected and hold no hope for the future life. When Jasmine is widowed, she completes her husband's mission to reach US. She burns his suit in the University campus where he was offered to study. It is a form of sati as a mark of respect to her husband.

With the purpose of becoming a real part of America, Jasmine leaves the artificial Indian world of the neighborhood of Professorji and adapts the American way of life. She works as a babysitter. From the life of Professorji, she understands that "He needed to work here, but he didn't have to like it. He 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 136).

Bharati Mukherjee herself in her attempt to assimilate to the American culture claims an American identity and not a hyphenated Indian-American one:

I maintain that I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I'm ashamed of my past, not because I'm betraying or distorting my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived here, and I write about the people who are immigrants going through the process of making a home here... I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation. That is very important. I am saying that the luxury of being a U.S. citizen for me is that can define me in terms of things like my politics, my sexual orientation or my education. My affiliation with readers should be on the basis of what they want to read, not in terms of my ethnicity or my race (Basbanes 95).

Jasmine is thus caught between the two cultures of the east and the west, the past and the present. She is in constant conflict throughout the novel and finally decides to embrace her American dream by going along with Taylor and his daughter Duff to falsify the words of the astrologer who predicted her future. Jasmine is thus an example of modern, bold, new woman who fights against feudalism and orthodox customs.

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