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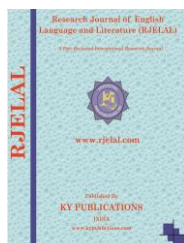
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PLIGHT OF WOMEN IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper probes into the plight of women characters in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*. *Jasmine* is a story of about an Indian woman, who was born in a small village Hasnapur, Punjab and emigrates to USA. Jasmine is the narrator in the novel and the story revolves around the character, Jasmine. She is christened by men everywhere she goes. There are other women characters who consider their sufferings as fate. They accept their sufferings and go on with their life. Fate has a stronghold upon these women. The mental agony and pain of Jasmine can be felt while reading the novel. She is tossed and tormented by fate and never made her escape from it. The women are in the hands of fate and in this novel Bharati Mukherjee has beautifully brought out the physical and mental sufferings of women.

Keywords: Plight, Women, Bharti Mukherjee, Jasmine

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most celebrated immigrant writers today. Her writings are largely appreciated for problem solving and outspoken writings about the issues of women. She was the most prominent woman writer who was concerned about women. This paper attempts to bring out the problems faced by women in their daily life. In the book, *The Fiction of Bharti Mukherjee*, it is rightly observed that

In a language of emotion and meticulous metaphor using images provided by the woman protagonist the novelist has articulated the many sided pathos and rebellion of contemporary Indian Woman, not only in India but also in New World". (Dhawan 154)

Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* is based on one main single character called Jasmine. She is the protagonist of the novel and the story is set around her. Jasmine's desire to change her destiny in some ways match Mukherjee's personal life. Mukherjee herself accepts in an interview:

Jasmine contains the shape of my life and my desires, but no incident is at all autobiographical ... I do believe in personal striving. Like Jasmine, I want to reposition the stars. At the same time, I am aware of a large design. My way of solving is to say that every single moment has a purpose. I want to discover that purpose (Edwards 34)

From the beginning of the novel, *Jasmine*, who is called as Jyoti in Hasnapur seems to be quite occupied about her future. She is foretold by an

astrologer that she will be widowed at the age of seventeen and she will be exiled. This prophecy gets into her mind and she tries to escape from it. After she comes to know about her future, she gets hurt by hitting the ground. She gets a star-shaped scar in her forehead which she calls it as a third eye which continues to remain and remind her fate all through her life. "It is not a scar, I shouted, it's my third eye" (*Jasmine* 5). She flees to the river soon after the prophecy and she kicks and paddles in rage. She touches the body of the rotten dog which is floating in the river and the stench from the dog leaks. She says the stench of the rotten dog continues to stay with me. "That stench stay with me... but every time I lift a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it". (*Jasmine* 5). She wants to escape from the bad memory which she got under a Banyan tree when she was just seven years old in Hasnapur. She keeps on connecting this memory, while drinking water.

In *Jasmine*, there are also other women characters who accept their fate and continue to live with it. Jasmine, though she lives in a village, she has an American mind. She is slightly different from all the women characters around her. She decides within her to change her plight and tries to escape in search of something. The desire and longing to come up in life can be understood when she envies Vimala. She also feels bad for her when Vimala douses herself after the death of her husband.

Jasmine tries to behave like a matured woman. She likes to read and learn English. She takes pride about her writing English compositions and job applications. Jasmine wishes to enjoy the basic daily routine with other women in the village. She enjoys doing her house work and being tactic in bargains. Jasmine wishes to attach herself emotionally with her parents. She feels happy and comfortable living with them. Every woman character in the novel is very innocent and never escapes from the hard fist of fate.

Mataji, Jasmine's mother, encourages Jasmine to stay in school for three years longer than her sisters. Dida, Jasmine's grandmother who is a widow, when comes to know about Jasmine's education and comfortable life, she tries to hold Jasmine. Dida lives in an ashram in Hardwar and

visits her family occasionally. Dida is attracted towards ancient rituals and so she stays in ashram. After the death of Jasmine's husband, she laments saying: "A houseful of widows ... House of Sorrows! House of Ill Fortune!" (*Jasmine* 98)

When Jasmine's father was killed by a bull, her mother tries to throw herself in the funeral fire. She was stopped by Jasmine and so she shaves her head and wears a coarse cloth. She sat in the corner all day long and ate rarely.

Jasmine fell in love with a man named Prakash and she decides to marry him on listening to his voice. Later, they get into marriage. Prakash wants to call him by his first name. She feels shy and hesitant to call him by his name. He gives her a new name Jasmine and he also explains the new name. "You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume". (*Jasmine* 77)

Living with a modern man, a city man Prakash who is different from all the men around her. He looked so special to her. He has trashed off old traditions and tells Jasmine that she is too young to get pregnant. He motivates Jasmine to learn English and implants a seed to move to Florida.

Jasmine thinks by moving to Florida with Prakash her fate will be cancelled.

"I thought of the old man under the Banyan tree. If we could just get away from India, then all fates would be canceled. We'd start with new fates, new stars". (*Jasmine* 85)

But she never escapes from her plight. Prakash gets killed in a bomb blast and she becomes a widow. Jasmine stays with her mother and comfort herself. She continues to proceed with Prakash's plan of moving to Florida. With the help of her two brothers, she plans to move to Florida. On her way to Florida she gets raped by half face, the captain of the ship. Out of anger and shame, she kills him.

Jasmine runs away from fate searching for solace. The mental agony and restlessness can be felt while reading. She likes to forget her past and she flees from Prof. Vadhera's house which reminds her life in Punjab.

With the help of Kate, she moves to Taylor's home in Iowa and became a care taker of Taylor's daughter, Duff. Taylor calls Jasmine as Jase. Jasmine develops love interest for Taylor. She starts to live with Taylor after Wylie leaves Taylor's house. In the novel, Jasmine is a woman who faces ups and downs in life. She slowly becomes the part of American society. The American mind along American way of life gets into her. She feels convinced and adapts herself to the place where she goes. She is willing to accept the change. The bitter part of Jasmine comes into her memory and she tries to get rid of the past. The various names she undergoes in the novel, named according to the convenience of men never seems to bother her. "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". (*Jasmine* 197)

Jasmine gets pregnant with Bud Ripplemeyer who works for a bank in Baden. Bud gets shot by Harlan and he becomes wheelchair-bound. Bud asks Jasmine to marry him officially but she avoids it without any reason. Bud and Jasmine lives with their adopted son Du, a Vietnamese. Jasmine has an admiration for Du, for his talent in fixing various electrical parts. Du reminds her of Prakash who was excellent in handling electronics. Jasmine calls herself and Karin as wounded God.

"I still think of myself as care giver, recipe giver, preserver. I can honestly say all I wanted was to serve, be allowed to join, but I have created confusion and destruction wherever I go. As Karin says, I am a tornado. I hit the trailer parks first, the prefabs, the weakest links. How many more shapes are in me, how many more selves, how many husbands?" (*Jasmine* 215)

In the end of the novel, when Taylor comes in search of Jasmine, she goes along with him to California which is a new move in her life. She feels guilty and leaves everything to her fate. In the novel, none of the women made their way out of fate. They went along as how life took them. The acceptance of fate of Jasmine and other women

characters makes the readers feel pity for them. And thus, the plight of the women can never be changed.

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