



FEMALE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVEL 'JASMINE'

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper is aimed at understanding the behavior, struggle and fight against feudal traditions of woman in Mukherjee's novel, *Jasmine*. The paper also tries to highlight the image of women in two different cultures. *Jasmine* was born in a village of India named Hasnapur situated at Punjab. Jyoti was the name given by her parents at the time of her birth. Struggle of the protagonist, *Jasmine* begins from her birth itself which she continues till the end to live a life against feudal traditions of the society. A different chapter in *Jasmine's* life begins after her marriage with Parkash. She gets married to him opposite to the tradition and even her dreams. Suddenly Parkash is murdered in a bomb attack. She is left alone and all her dreams destroy in a very short period. After the rape by Half-Face she considers that now can't run away from the new insight of her identity. Therefore, she turns to violent behaviour in order to tell the conflict she is feeling. She murders the Half-Face captain in a very violent way and after murder stains of blood scatters in the entire room even on her body. In the end of the novel we find that *Jasmine* moving to California with Taylor, unclear of what the future will bring but nonetheless confident in her decision to depart. Therefore, it can be concluded that Mukherjee's *Jasmine* highlights a positive approach regarding the problems of immigration, struggle for identity and adjustment by woman in various apposite circumstances.

Key Words: Identity, Multiculturalism, Protagonist, Revolutionary, Struggle

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Bharati Mukherjee has spent her most of the time in the United States and Canada since 1961, teaching at universities and colleges, writing various research articles, eight novels, two nonfiction books, four short story collections and earning degrees. She lived in Canada from 1966 to 1980. Bharati Mukherjee described herself as a 'Hindu Bengali Brahmin' who was born in Calcutta on 27th July 1940. She maintained her attachment with her religion, beliefs and race living at United States and Canada. Various famous and remarkable novels has written by Bharati Mukherjee those have both the portrait of a contemporary American story of a woman and a traditional Indian Brahmin family

who still remains tied to her native nation even after broken with tradition in many ways. Her third novel *Jasmine* expressed her Indian sensibility.

The novel *Jasmine* discusses the story of an uneducated, simple but courageous Indian woman, opening with her birth and early life in an Indian small town, over the emigration to the United States and finally to herself and what it means to become an American. The titular narrator in the novel, also known as Jyoti, Jase or Jane, passes through one condition and nation to another and so is her inner self born again various times towards a higher level, until she finally seems to have found a place to rest. *Jasmine* experiences many circumstances that bring

violence with them, during the whole novel. She is not always the subject of these circumstances, but they are always related with her. It is physical violence experienced as well as mental violence that affects Jasmine's further way of life and forces her to be reborn as a different person. The rough images that Mukherjee draws of severe moments reveal the psychological torture that comes with the replaces of life and culture that Jasmine experiences.

The present research paper is aimed at understanding the behavior, struggle and fight against feudal traditions of woman in Bharati Mukherjee's remarkable novel, *Jasmine*. The paper also tries to highlight the image of women in two different cultures.

The credit goes to Bharati Mukherjee for provide a new direction and voice to the female's literature in English. Most of the times her female characters (protagonists) are of Indian origin, struggling in search of their identity and find theirselves in the trap of identity crises. With the help of their female characters she has presented the concept 'New Woman' which may be considered, "the emotional segregation of women and man, which brought about and led to the development of a specifically female world" (Gupta 154).

In majority of her works, she discusses the views concerning post colonialism, multiculturalism, identity, globalization, struggle of women, appose of outdated traditions etc. Considering herself as an American writer, she expresses, "I totally consider myself an American writer, and that has been my big battle: to get to realize that my roots as a writer are no longer, if they ever were, among Indian writers, but that I am writing about the territory, about the feelings, of a new kind of pioneer here in America" (Tandon 135).

The novel *Jasmine* deals with in which the protagonist shows a strong appose against the feudal traditions and superstitions in an attempt to find a prestigious and independent existence. The novel *Jasmine* reveals a lot of energy of protagonist, which makes her capable to appose all the odds that come in her way over her journey. She "takes her life into her own hands and makes herself an American, very much like her creator" (Tondon 134).

The novel is one of her most renowned and meaningful novels which shows to us a powerful woman who fights against to be led by others. In the book 'The Fiction of Bharati Mukherje', it is explained 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).

Jasmine was born in a village of India named Hasnapur situated at Punjab. Jyoti was the name given by her parents at the time of her birth. She was "the fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children" (JAS 39). There was no celebration and welcome of Jyoti's birth following the attitude of people in various places towards a girl child. In fact, woman having a girl child is considered a form of sin. Therefore, Jasmine expresses that:

If I had been a boy, my birth in a bountiful year would have marked me as lucky, a child with a special destiny to fulfill. But daughters were curses. A daughter had to be married off before she could even enter heaven, and dowries beggared families for generations. Gods with infinite memories visited the girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations. My mother's past must have been heavy with wrongs. (JAS 39)

Jasmine's struggle begins from her birth itself which she continues till the end to live a life against feudal traditions of the society. She continues to move ahead braving every unusual that crosses her path to obtaining her identity and does not believe in compromising. Her grandmother wanted to kill her at her birth, yet she survived:

When the midwife carried me out, my sisters tell me, I had a ruby-red choker of bruise around my throat and sapphire fingerprints on my collarbone...I survived the sniping. My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter. (JAS 40)

Jasmine's father gets killed in an accident when Jasmine is teenager. Her mother cuts the hair of her head afterwards as a sign that she has given up her own life. Thus, having experienced of mental violence, see the father dead and the mother resigned, Jasmine presents herself a strong woman and plays the role of the mother in the house. At that stage in the novel, Jasmine already prepares herself for a new role in her life and leaves the old. She is again born as a young woman and the child is gone. She has to take responsibility for the rest of the family.

A different chapter in Jasmine's life begins after her marriage with Parkash. She gets married to him opposite to the tradition and even her dreams. Now there is big marriage party and dowry for her as she expresses us:

Ours was a no-dowry, no-guests Registry Office wedding in a town, a 250-rupee taxi ride south of Hasnapur (JAS 75).

Parkash has revolutionary thoughts and modern ideas about life. He believes that men and women should have equal rights and duties. He is strongly against the attitude as considers in the society that woman is lower than a man:

My husband, Prakash Vih, was a modern man, a city man. He did trash some traditions, right from the beginning... "There's no room in modern India for feudalism," he declared... For the uncle, love was control. Respect was obedience. For Prakash, love was letting go. Independence, self-reliance. (JAS 76)

Suddenly Prakash is murdered in a bomb attack. The bomb was in fact situated for women who were considered to be modern by some far-reaching. She is left alone and all her dreams destroy in a very short period. She decides to live the life of widow with her mother but refuses. She remembers that he wanted her to go ahead in life. Jasmine prepares to live the dreams of her husband and don't waste her life. She immigrates to America all alone to achieve his dreams. She tells us:

Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash (JAS 97).

In Florida, she meets the captain of the ship on which she entered the nation. The behavior of this Half-Faced captain is very impolite and rude. Half-Face looks her only for the purpose of sex. He rapes Jasmine. After the rape she considers that now can't run away from this new insight of her identity. Therefore, she turns to violent behaviour in order to tell the conflict she is feeling. She murders the Half-Face captain in a very violent way and after murder stains of blood scatters in the entire room even on her body. She expresses:

No one to call to, no one to disturb us, Just me and the man who had raped me, the man I had murdered. The room looked like a slaughterhouse. Blood had congealed on my hands, my chin, my breasts. (JAS 119)

Jasmine tries to stop thinking about her past totally and separate herself from all that is Indian. But though Jasmine creates a new identity for every new condition, her former identities are never totally erased. In between, she meets Taylor in New York City and she makes yet a new identity upon a new awareness of herself. Taylor gives her a new name 'Jase'. Before long Taylor gets passionately entailed with Jasmine and hugs her different ethnicity without orientalisng her into an alien fantasy. The relationship between Taylor and Jasmine ends surprisingly when the past crawls upon her once again appeared in the form of Sukhwinder, who killed her husband. She says:

That was the man who killed my husband, He knows.....he knows me. He knows I'm here. (JAS 188)

The inevitability of memory, and the infinite nature of time and space is tensed once again and Jasmine finds her life uncertain by the different awareness through which she now experiences the world. She loses even her sense of self look. Unable to live with this embarrassment of conflicting identities she flees to Baden County, Iowa to give her life with a new start.

In the end of the novel we find that Jasmine moving to California with Taylor, unclear of what the future will bring but nonetheless confident in her decision to depart. This sense of movement further reinforces the concept that her life is full of struggles, she can't remain in a constant life because

changes are the means of her continued existence. The adjacent environments affect her observation of herself changes, thereby following in a multiplicity of awareness. These make a strain within her and she feels the need to resign yourself to these conflicting insights so that they do not wage a psychological war inside her. Therefore, it can be concluded that Mukherjee's *Jasmine* highlights a positive approach regarding the problem of immigration and struggle to come in the mainstream or adjustment.

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