

A Study Of Diasporic Experiences In Bharati Mukherjee's Novel Jasmine

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Abstract: Diaspora can be described as a group of people who either have come from a specific country or their forefathers have come from that specific country. But presently they live in some place other than their native-hood. The diasporic writings majorly depict alienation, dislocation, nostalgia, displacement, ethnicity and cultural identity. This paper lays emphasis on the deep evaluation of diasporic experiences along with self-identity and the consciousness of a woman in context to Bharati Mukherjee's famous novel 'Jasmine'.

Key-Words: Diaspora, Self-Identity, Alienation, Dislocation, Nostalgia, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity.

Content:

The term Diaspora is taken from Greek word and it denotes the dispersion of a people from their homeland. Simply, the diasporic literature can be described as the writings that are put forward by those writers who reside at other land than their native place. It attracts the readers crossing the borders despite of language, style, literary form and technique. It involves a milieu of variety of cultures, languages, histories, ethnicity, people, places and times.

Critics, writers and scholars have tried to define the term diaspora according to their own bent of mind. Safran has defined six fundamental features in his explanation of diaspora. According to him:

“For something to be called as diaspora there should be a dispersal from homeland to two or more foreign regions; those people who are away from their homeland have a collective memory about their homeland; they have a belief that they will always be disgraceful in their host state; they idealize their accepted ancestral home; there is a belief that all members of that society should be committed to the maintenance or renewal of the homeland and a strong ethnic group consciousness with a belief in a common fate.” (Safran, 1991).

The four additional characteristics of the definition by Safran have been adopted by Cohen. According to him:

“Diaspora should include scattering groups with aggressive or voluntary purposes; a strong link to the past or a block to integrate; diasporas should be defined positively rather than negatively; people of diaspora have also a common identity with co-ethnic members in other countries such as colonial settlers, foreign students, refugees, and economic migrants.” (Cohen, 1995).

Indian diasporic literature has put forward the evaluation of literature and other cultural beliefs. Generally, this can be considered as a significant contribution to diaspora theories. Interpretation of the various issues created by the experience of migrancy and diaspora like dislocation, unfriendliness, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural confrontation and many others are largely depicted in prevailing Indian Writing in English.

Bharati Mukherjee is a distinguished diaspora writer whose objective is to bring out the barriers and issues associated with South Asian women, particularly in India. Similar to the contemporary feminist writer, she upholds the reason for women, but she diverges from them because her fundamental concern is to delineate the issues of cross-culture conflict and the concept of identity faced by migrating women from India. It is crystal clear by ‘Tara Banerjee’ within the ‘Tigers Daughter,’ ‘Dimple’ in ‘Wife,’ ‘Jyothi’ in ‘Jasmine,’ and ‘Devi’ in ‘Leave it to me.’ Mukherjee's heroines are courageous and confident. They have a powerful potential for adaptability; they reside on the firm ground of reality and accept the bitter truth of their lives.

According to Mukherjee, immigrant writers in the U.S.A. are divided into two categories. First Willing Immigrants Writers who are settled in America from Europe and Asia. The second section includes Unwilling Immigrants Writers of American origin whose ancestors brought them to the U.S. However, Mukherjee considers herself to be different from other European writers. Many Indians live as emigrants and expatriates in Europe or America; they migrated only physically and not spiritually and religiously. They have kept their rich Indian culture and background alive in the foreign nations. It is because of Mukherjee's deep concern for the feelings and sensibilities of the expatriates.

The traditional incidents of migrants rotate around the phases of exile, distortion, a sense of loss, and pain of separation. Shattering this, Mukherjee presents the sensation of embracing and warmth in being part of the alien land. In her works, Bharati Mukherjee has focused on the “phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates” and on the expatriate’s quest for identity in a foreign land.” (Alam 1996:7).

It is the celebration of the ability of a lady, not her weakness. In an exceeding language of sentiment and scrupulous metaphor using pictures given by the female protagonist, the novelist has expressed the numerous sides of sadness and rebelliousness of contemporary Indian women. The theme of the novel is an Indian immigrant's encounter with the new land and her progressive

transformation as she rigorously absorbs new culture. It also arranges a probe for identity that how a woman involves the term with herself.

Mukherjee analyses the various social issues through a feministic approach in her works. In *Jasmine*, she portrays an Indian woman, Jasmine, born in Hasnapur and migrated to America after some years. Throughout the novel, Jasmine faces a series of unfortunate circumstances as an immigrant and tries to survive in those painful conditions. Eventually, she traps herself in the catastrophe of identity, and brutal reactions start from her behavior. Jasmine's life is affected by both physical and mental violence. Jasmine is on an never ending journey to describe, seek, and see bright ways of life that are different and unique from conventional ones. Jasmine realizes the change herself. Indira says:

“With the healing touch of individuals like Lillian Gordon, Kate and Taylor who treated her as an intelligent, refined, sincere person; Jasmine blooms from being a distinct alien with forged documents into adventures Jase living just for this. The pull between the opposing forces does not intimidate her and rather excites her. Amidst the opposite immigrant domestics who suspended between the two worlds, Jasmine feels proud that she is finally getting rooted within the new world”. (Indira,86)

Jasmine was a seven years old innocent girl living in the village of Punjab namely Hasnapur. She got married to Prakash Vijn. She then became Jasmine, the wife of a person who wanted her to change. In America, she became Jane, wife of a divorced man in his fifties. During twenty-four years of her lifespan, she suffered and experienced many changes and acknowledged each change as a brand new challenge. She played a unlike role in every transformation. Sandra Ponzanesi writes: “The transformation of identity from dutiful, submissive widow into assertive, criminal and individualistic American woman is in full swing.” (Sandra 89).

Jasmine is cognizant of the change. Prakash wanted to break down Jyoti. He wished to transform her into a new city woman. He gave her a new name, Jasmine to end her past. Whether to Walk and Talk like an American, she takes every opportunity to turn herself into an American, or Jasmine changes into Jane. Moreover, she kills Sukhwinder, the Khalsa lion group member who murdered her husband. Later, she goes to Iowa with a different name, Jase. The diverse facts or characters played firstly as Jasmine, then as Jane and lastly, Jase assaults the vigor in women.

However, Jasmine has shattered all the foundations from caste, gender, and family cuffs. She has learned to breathe for herself, not for her husband or the kids. Jasmine is a survivor, warrior, and adaptor who beats all the unfavorable circumstances and becomes a conqueror. She creates a brand new life in a foreign territory.

Jasmine is a story of a village girl's revolt to come out of the illogical conservative nutshell setup of Indian society. Her rebellion is indicated in her response to the astrologer, her mad dog killing, finding of ignorant woman cheating by the vendors. It is a tale of the struggle for existence, adaptation and not accepting defeat. Jasmine's journey of self-identity, taking her from a feudal condition to her migrancy and exile in the West, is encircled by violence.

The central character portrays a unique harmony between modernism and tradition. There are various instances of the transformation of the main character in the story. The lady keeps changes into herself and attains multiple identities throughout the novel. In the beginning, 'Jyoti' grows as a village girl of Hanspura, converting to 'Jasmine' after her wedding with Prakash; then, she becomes 'Jase' the undocumented immigrant, further changes into 'Jane' the Manhattan Nanny, finally 'Jane' as the Iowan woman. The presence of letter 'J' in each name indicates the element of continuity, transformation and Feminism throughout the novel. Elisabeth Bronfen observes:

“The letter J serves as a sign for the dialect of a progressive engendering of identities as these bars already existing identities, putting them under erasure without consuming them. Jasmine's dislocated others speak out a self-conscious and self-induced effacement in the voice of resilient and incessantly hybridity.” (Bronfen, 79)

This unexpected voyage of Jasmine's life and the blossoming of her career, her individuality accurately like a Jasmine flower is the main focal point of the novel. Mukharjee has paid attention to the challenges before Indian women for changing their centuries long continued situation. They would not revolt until they were familiar with their liberation and identity. Jasmine's voyage has traditional Indian girls grown fully adapted and assimilated in modern multicultural and feudal societies.

At first, her journey is limited only up to the institute of Tampa, where her husband is to get admission. Jasmine, an innocent, guiltless, and hesitant woman with forged documents, converts adapter and fighter, adventurous in America. By adapting herself, she learns the method of American life. She learns that nothing lasts forever in America. Nothing is lovely, and nothing is taken seriously. Her journey stands for the cultural stage.

The novel has taken up the action of some other features of the thematic outline like the theme of transforming from old to new and the theme of Feminism from Lahore to Hasnapur, from Punjab to America, from Iowa to California, and from Florida to New York. The views of actions, changes and the shifts from old patterns of life to new representations are remarked upon throughout the novel. The story of Jasmine's life is the rationalization, justification, explanation, and exemplification of the main points and tips of diasporic experiences and self-identity.

Mukherjee's female characters are immigrants and go through a series of cultural shocks, but they are capable and commence the heroic journey to establish their identities. Eventually; she has received significant attention in almost every part of the world and in just a short period of twenty-five years. Although she has been recognized as the voice of expatriation immigrants, the sense of scrutiny of the release of her novel reveals that she has written all novels with the views of women in particular. Her female characters are victims of immigration. She focusses on the difficulties and the result of immigration. As the representative of the male dominating society, the man has, in the end, been liberated from the center of women's gravitation. The woman is now going to have her gravitational power over the fullness of the patriarchy.

Mukherjee's work demonstrates features of identity and alienation. In *Jasmine*, the main character recounts the idea that Indian femininity undergoes a bunch of changes as it emerges from the ruler background of the Lahori peasant family in the Jalandhar region. The story of the dislocation and relocation of the main character, Jasmine, continues to cost lives to shift from one role to another, traveling westward while persistently shedding fragments of her past. She steadily expands on the journey to America and by changes names; Jyoti – Jasmine – Jazzy – Jase - Jane and Jasmine. Everywhere she goes and every word she puts together to make a new Jasmine. Through Jyoti, she paints a picture of Indian society, women's issues, and migration.

An identity transforms, starts for Jasmine when the unexpected and cruel killing of her husband by the group of terrorists. She decides to fulfill his vision and visit the USA. Bred in traditions of rural India, her mission now is to reach a university in Florida, lie down on his new, unworn suit, and commit Sati. One can explain her decision only by seeing the kind of culture in which she was raised. As a baby girl, she is choked to death so that her parents can avoid later constraints of marriage and dowry. Afterward, she finds the sheltered life of widows unbearable; she sees her friend commit Sati rather than prefer to live as a widow in rural Punjab. In that concern, it is hardly surprising that she is willing to journey to America at any price on a bogus passport, with underworld traveling companions, raped by a scarred stranger in an unknown motel, etc. Next, she takes on the terror from Kali, freezing her tongue to allow blood to ooze out; she kills him in a demoniac way. Then she sets out to encounter the world and the land of her dreams.

Conclusion:

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* stands out as a diasporic novel with a disparity. The novel conveys a message that in multicultural society absorption, acculturation and accommodation are essential. The protagonist, Jasmine symbolizes a new woman who wants to enjoy the liberation of woman and appears with rebellious nature and adventurous spirit. The feminist perspectives in the novel have tried to explore the various images of woman. Jasmine is the movement of Jasmine's life towards achieving true identity. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. In *Jasmine*, the protagonist's struggle symbolizes the restless search of a rootless person irked by a depressing sense of isolation all around. Her journey through life leads Jasmine through many transformations in various locations. Jasmine tries to assimilate into the cultures of abroad where she attains new independent individual identification in the novel, *Jasmine*. It deals with the diasporic experience of protagonist and her struggle for self-identity.

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