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Rootlessness and Loss of Identity Crisis in Bharati Mukherjee's Novel *Jasmine*

V. R. Suresh Kumar*

ABSTRACT

The study deals with the sufferings of the protagonist Jasmine. The protagonist suffers throughout the novel mainly due to change of root and loss of identity. The saga of transformation of Jasmine was expressed throughout the story. The protagonist could not get satisfied due to changes of root and her identity due to certain circumstances. The novel begins with a young Punjabi widow at Iowa narrating her experiences with an astrologer, about her widowhood and exile. The alterative roots made her to suffer in loss of her identity. The novel had depicted about the bold heroine who had continuous suffering but rises from the problem. She tried to get relieved from the problem and adapt to the situation in foreign land. Jasmine also had learned to endure in all her problems. The difference in roots made Jasmine to lose her identity.

In the novel, Mukherjee had brought out Jasmine's Indian way of life and American way of life. Jasmine tried to forget about the past life in India because she wanted to step forward in America. Jasmine was in need to move to US due to the unexpected death of her husband. She was caught between two worlds, the old world of dutifulness and the new world of practical mentality. Jasmine gets influenced by American culture. Thus, the protagonist of the story gets involved in relationship. Jasmine got transformed in progress of the story. A person's identity would be their name but Jasmine was in need to change her name and her character. Jyoti's name gets transformed as Jasmine, Jase, Jazzy and Jane. Jasmine in the end of the story got caught to decide between two worlds. Finally, she decided to adapt the new world of practical mind.

INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee an awarding writer was born in a Bengali Brahmin family of Calcutta, West Bengal, in India. In the year 1963, she married Clark Blaise, a Canadian-American novelist. He was a professor and a journalist. Bharati Mukherjee's novels dealt with the attempt of the Indian and other third world immigrants to tackle the problem of loss of culture and their endeavour to assume a new identity in the

United States. The women protagonist runs through a whole gamut of emotions on their way to adjust to a new world. Mukherjee heroines are shown as women warriors to triumph over the obstacles in their way and had taken control over destinies by crossing cultural lines. Women refashioning new identities are a persistent concern in Mukherjee's novels. It would be difficult for an immigrant to be born into a culture and replant in another culture with new identity.

*PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College of Arts and Science (Autonomous), Cuddalore – 1.

E-mail: vrsureshkanna@gmail.com, Mobile: +91-9952463749

Jasmine (1989) was published by Bharati Mukherjee after fourteen years of publication of *Wife*. The novel was about a girl Jasmine who suffered due to change of root and loss of her identity. She suffered before her marriage due to male domination. After her marriage the problem that she faced was due to loss of her husband. She immigrated and moved to US. Jasmine transformed her identity and changed her name in certain situation. She got locked but raised like a phoenix bird after every hurdle. Mukherjee fictionalised the process of Americanization by the trace of a young Indian woman's suffering and her survival in the new place.

The work of *Jasmine* is characterized by tendency in which feeling of being displaced is overcome by the desire to settle down, and find a new home. As Martin Heidegger puts it, "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greek recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing". (qtd. in Misha 223)

The novel expressed about the journey of *Jasmine*. It was also based on the idea of marriage in the East and in the West. She got caught in two worlds and suffered through her migration. *Jasmine* started her journey from the village of Hasnapur, to Punjab, to Florida, to New York, to Iowa and as the novel came to an end with the place California. Her name had been changed as *Jyoti*, the village girl in Hasnapur, *Jasmine* a city woman, then to *Jazzy* an undocumented immigrant, to *Jase* the Manhattan Nanny, to *Jane* the Iowan woman. The protagonist continuously shed her role to move into other roles. *Jasmine* was born in a village and her future was predicted by an astrologer. She does not accept the astrologer's look at the stars and foretells happenings. The astrologer uttered "Fate is Fate" (*Jasmine* 4).

Jyoti was named by her grandmother as *Jyoti*, which means light. As in peasant's family they treated the girl child as a curse. The idea that they had to pay dowry at the time of their daughter's marriage made them penniless. *Jyoti* lived in a male dominated society. *Jyoti* was good in her studies but was not supported by her family. Masterji found her special talent. He also felt that *Jyoti* was a "lotus blooming in cow dung" (*Jasmine* 16). According to her expectation, she met *Prakash* and got married to him. *Jyoti's* marriage fulfilled her expected wish which made her life happy. She lived a happy married life with *Prakash* in the city.

Prakash was an innocent man and was a broad minded person. *Prakash* was also a reason in the process of changing her name as *Jasmine*. *Prakash* gave freedom and removed her from traditional beliefs. *Prakash* respected her talent and treated her as equal partner. *Prakash* planned to move to Florida for improving their lifestyle. They planned to become the owner. But *Jasmine* was not able to move as she had not enough age to get visa. Thus, *Prakash* planned to move to Florida technical school and thought to call *Jasmine* to US later. The Sikh terrorists were going on scooters and planting bombs. The planted bombs led to the death of many innocent people. Unexpectedly, it also resulted in the death of *Prakash*. The bomb, planted for the Hindu woman inside the saree shop, led to the death of *Prakash* and brought disaster to *Jasmine's* life.

Jasmine decided to move to American University to her husband's dreamland and to commit suicide in the land of Florida. *Jasmine* spent all the money earned by *Prakash* to get fake passport. As she wished, she reached the land of Florida as an illegal immigrant and got molested by Half-face. That made *Jasmine* change her attitude to commit Sati. She disguises herself as Goddess *Kali* and kills him. The difficult situation made her decide in an optimistic way. This also made her survive in an alien land. "Jasmine becomes a new woman without the hangover of two thousand years of history. Simultaneously she gets ready to imbibe the two-hundred-years history of the New World" (Stephen 52). She remained as a survivor and fighter in all situations. But the loss of root made her to search the identity. *Jasmine* also found difficult to interact with people. She was helpless as she could not comprehend their accent. She complains "What a country? What a continent? We passed through was through plagues. I am hungry for news but the discarded papers are in characters or language that I cannot read" (*Jasmine* 49). *Jasmine* was sheltered by Lillian Gordon. She also says to her "now remember, if you walk and talk American, they'll think you were born here. Most Americans can't imagine anything else" (*Jasmine* 134-35). She also named her as *Jazzy*, an illegal immigrant. *Jasmine* removed her from traditional beliefs and started to wear American T shirts, mascara, changed her language. She tried to get relieved of her identity.

Jasmine had an urge to meet her husband's professor *Vadhera* with the mission to complete the dream of her husband. She was not able to stay with

them and hated their Indian way of life. She tried to escape from the situation and moved to Taylor's house with the help of Gordon's daughter. In Taylor's apartment, Jasmine becomes Jase. Taylor becomes Jase instructor and taught the advantages of democracy. She started to take care of Taylor and Wylie's adopted daughter Duff. Soon Jasmine fell in love with Taylor and tried to enter his world. She also became intimate with him. Jasmine also became close with Duff and the child was a real consolation for her. Jasmine got used to the transformation but was not able to adapt. She was not able to accept in her mind. Taylor becomes Jase's metropolitan lover. Jasmine gets a job opportunity through her intelligence. The alien land gave respect, created freedom, dignity, opportunity and economic independence to her. There was a way to express her innate talents. But she did not experience full satisfaction. Jasmine weeps at the photographs of migrant workers. She consoled herself and decided to never look back. To her dismay, she met Sukhwinder from far. He sold hot dogs in central park. Jasmine felt that he followed her to kill her like her husband. Thus, she moved from the place.

In the new place Iowa, she met Mother Ripplemeyer, a Lutheran of German extraction. Through Ripplemeyer's mother she came to know Bud. He was an Iowa Banker and represents the emblem of Capitalism. "Iowa is the territory of transition between old and new America, it is the middle location of hybridization" (Ponzanesi 92). Jasmine and Bud falls in relationship that estranges his wife Karin. Bud was not interested to know her past and thus he was not aware of her past about Hasnapur and other incidents.

Jasmine lived as a companion with Bud and became Jane Ripplemeyer. They also adopt a Vietnamese refugee. The happy mood of the family got changed by a frustrated farmer Harlan Kroener. He shot Bud and was permanently confined to the wheel chair. Jasmine took care of him and his adopted son. Unexpectedly, Taylor arrived with his adopted daughter to take Jasmine with him to California. Jasmine asks for help to Bud's ex-wife to take care of him. She admits that, "I was wrong to call you gold-digger. I don't know if I could have nursed him" (Jasmine 228). Jasmine was pregnant with Bud's child and she was not ready to reveal to Taylor. She was caught between two worlds and finally led into a decision. "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old world of dutifulness" (Jasmine 240). Jasmine decided to move from her old world of dutifulness. Thus, she decided to move with Taylor and Duff to California.

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