



## QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN BHARATI MUKHARJEE'S JASMINE

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### Abstract

**Bharati Mukherjee's writing reveals the meaning of life. Her writing is mostly focused on the identity of women. Issues are centered around immigrant women, their struggle, problems and hardships that the women were facing. Wherever we go in the entire globe, identity is one of the most important factor. The novel of Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine revolves around the central theme as the quest of identity. Jasmine is the main protagonist of the novel. Quest for self identity is the basic concern of her heroine.**

**Keywords: Quest for identity, Self-realisation, Immigrant, Cultural Construct.**

Indian woman is more conscious about the moral values and ethics of human life as Indian culture is the most orthodox on the ground of morality and feminine world. Indian women immigrant is different than other racial woman. Foremost woman is mild and delicate when she struggles with such diplomatic and delicate issues that time she has to face many problems.

Quest for Identity is a single or multi-faceted term stands for self-realization or self-actualisation. This concept is studied from feminist perspectives. Patriarchy is an alarm to the feminism. **Colette Guillemin**, the French Feminist, writes about the gender discrimination "women are doomed to belong to the class of women and they cannot escape this categorization in a male dominated world". Guillemin believes that the specific nature of the "oppression" of women is caused by "appropriation" (Guillemin 178) of the class of women by the class of men, thus reducing women to "the state of material objects" (Ibid). Therefore, the relation between women in any sphere of society and appropriation is not only physical, but also social. So he further states:

An interchangeable object with no other women in never anything but a women, characteristic than her femininity, whose fundamental characteristic is belonging to the class of women. (Ibid)

Women writers have taken a great pain and hard work to create their world. It has allowed them to set the condition of existence free from the direct interference of men. Similarly, so women have taken to reading women's writing because it has allowed making them a "safe place" from which they can explore a wide range of experience of the world from which they can identify with a range of characters and a variety of existences. Hence we can say that women's writing has occupied such a significant and central place in women's lives. The present paper attempts to reveal the journey of Jasmine in different cultural spaces with her different identities connecting to the quest of the protagonist to realize her own individuality. Irrespective the geographical locations in order of patriarchy. The aim of the journey is aimed at to rediscover and reinvestigate her own inner self. In this context Bharati Mukherjee's fiction truly shows the temperament and mood of the present American. Mukherjee has started her writing career in 1971 and in 1988 her collection of short stories offered her National Book Critics Award in America. The content of the collection is her "immigrant experience" in America. In an interview Mukherjee clearly states her aim:

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in new independent or emerging countries.... What we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb two hundred years of American history and learn to adapt to American society... I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories.

My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country (Mukherjee, 1989)

Bharati Mukherjee represents the Indian woman in a cross-cultural context. She seeks a new identity for herself, but it turns out to be a broken identity. The difficulty of the fate of the females in cross-cultural spaces has been a major component of the literature produced by writers, surviving in the conflicting pulls of *home* and *homelessness*, passing through the voyage of migration to assimilation. Her protagonists suffer from a sense of frustration and loneliness excluding the protagonist Jasmine in her novel *Jasmine*. Jasmine appears always fresh, happy, energetic and delightful to be in the company of either a man or a woman. Her only determined destination in America and in her life was to complete the dream and desire of her dead husband, Prakash Vih & wife.)

This novel can be read as a feminist novel, where the protagonist rebels not only against age old superstition and traditions, but also effects a proper balance between tradition and modernity. The novel celebrates the power of woman and not her weakness. The opening of the novel is about the prophet of astrologer, about her widowhood and exile. The protagonist Jasmine journeys through many transformations- Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane through large geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally through California. At every stage of her life Jasmine revolted against her fate and the path drawn for her, says **Shobha Shinde**. (Shinde: 47) Jasmine Quest structures, sustains and enlarges her consciousness in addition to taking her out of a social order that had gone on untouched for thousands of years. (Roy:229) Even in her childhood Jasmine is aware of the potency of power through which she can win all battles and establish a strong identity.

So far as the nature of Jasmine is concerned, she is an innocent village girl, unaware of the traditional ways of the world, but is sufficiently conscious of her own desires and choices. Her life begins in a small village of Hasnapur, Punjab and ends in Iowa. In her journey of life she faces with the flux of cultural identities and in this tradition she justifies herself in each and every role and sustains her basic identity of being an Indian woman. In defense of Jasmine's character, Bharati Mukherjee presents a confessional note:

The kinds of women I write about... are those Who are adaptable we've, all be raised to please, been trained. To adaptable as wives and that adaptability is working To women's

(Agrawal:41)

At different occasions Jasmine performs various roles as -wife, daughter, care-taker, beloved and competent professional. But at every stage she is conscious of her being an Indian woman. She is neither a *rebel* nor an oppressed subject but a woman with her independent vision, sharing the best both of native tradition and the mystic world of the west. (41) She learns to identify *permissible rebellion* (47) against the norms of society which she will later exploit to her own advantage.

Jasmine is born in a traditional family of Punjab where *women* conditioned to maintain the perpetual silence against the order of patriarchy where the only the purpose of girl's life was to find out *cut rate* husband. The inferiority of groups, her psyche, born out of two complexes -her existence as a woman and her subaltern status for being a *village girl* (Ibid). She makes a candid confession, *that big-city men prefer us village girls because we are brought up to be caring and have no minds of our own. Village girls are like cattle, whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go* (39). The hierarchy of gender bias is deeply rooted at the core of Indian cultural colonialism. Her ability to write the *Best English Composition* was of no worth in Indian family. Her grandmother finally located a possible groom, widower with three children to take her off. Jasmine in spite of her own traditional upbringing nourishes her dreams of life. She expresses her first independent thinking, *I want to be a doctor and set up my own clinic in a big town* but her high ambitions were treated only as her madness. (45) After the death of her father, she was stupefied, looking at the humiliation of her mother who tried to throw herself on the funeral pyre, shared her head and wrapped her body in coarse cloth.)

Iowa where she comes in contact with Bud, a banker, and his mother Ripple Mayer. Jasmine tries to mix up with the American life but she could never detach from her cultural roots. Subsequently, Taylor comes close to her and demands her to have sexual love. Jasmine has no

guilt in this relationship because she comes to the realization that each male possesses an inherent desire to rule the body of women. It may be out of love, contempt or revenge. As Jasmine says: ^^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\*\* (175)

But loves Jasmine for she is his embodiment in the West. She loves him after his divorce with Kiran. She gives him everything at her and is pregnant from Bud . But Taylor returns Jasmine again and asks her to accept him with his love. Then Jasmine makes Taylor her ultimate choice and goes away with her love leaving a father like figure Bud at Iowa. Her acceptance with the new cultural constructs and identities is to celebrate her own freedom. **Fakrul Alam** is more tolerant in his tribute of Jasmine .

By making her heroine triumph over Widowhood and by depicting her opting for a Fate different from what seemed to be in store For her sisters, Mukherjee is making a kind of feminist statement in the Novel; women can make difference in their Lives even if they cannot cheat fate completely.(155)

The protagonist stick to her firmness and static with her complete femininity. Throughout the novel Jasmine's identity is unique. Hence we can conclude that it is the victory of feminism.

### **Conclusion**

The novel is a unique contribution made by her in this regard. Jasmine is the protagonist of the novel. She was a modern girl who faced the challenges of life boldly and courageously. Mrs Gordon provided her education, freed her from the past memories and gave her the power for the survival. She absorbed the alien culture rather greedily. At this phase of her life, Jasmine had been able to gain a personality and became very confident about her personality. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. Even though she was struggling hard, but she overcomes every difficulty and achieved the victory of life.

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