

Cross Cultural Consciousness in Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine

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Abstract:

This paper aims to bring out the cross-cultural consciousness in *Jasmine*, the protagonist of the novel. Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian born diasporic writer finds difficulty to disconnect herself from Indian set of minds. In her novels she writes about her struggle, her difficulty in adapting to foreign culture and the age-old traditions and customs of her, which she cannot write without it. "*Jasmine*" is a story of a Punjabi young woman whose cultural conflicts leads in search of identity crisis. Through the character of *Jasmine Mukherjee* has beautifully brought out the cross-cultural sufferings of *Jasmine* which in some way matches Bharathi Mukherjee herself.

Keywords: Cross cultural consciousness, diasporic, identity crisis, struggle, sufferings

I. INTRODUCTION

Women novelists has a prominent role in contributing the growth of Indian English fictions. Indian Writing in English flourished with the help of the seed sown during the British rule. Various perspectives, interesting themes, and various dimensional views were seen in the works of feminist writers during the 19th Century. The problems of women were seen brought out in their works and it paved a new spectrum to the feminist issues and brought it into the limelight. During this era, it gained its popularity and the feminist writers planted their roots and started to gain recognition and Bharati Mukherjee is one among them. Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American women novelist and a short story writer. Mukherjee's works reflects the cross-cultural consciousness and conflict of immigrant Indian women novelist. She is a postcolonial diasporic writer, born in India immigrated to Canada and settled in America. Bharati Mukherjee's novels deals with Indian women, Babu indicate, her "female protagonists are immigrants and suffer cultural shock but they are

potential women and are anxious to establish their identity by undertaking their heroic journeys" (P.40).

The immigrant feeling from the homeland to other nations and her works mirrors the cultural consciousness and conflicts of Mukherjee's mind. Writers like Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Salma Rushdie, expresses rootlessness and identity crisis in their novels and has umbilical dysconnectivity in their works reflecting the age-old traditions and customs of their nations in their works.

II. CROSS CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

"*Jasmine*" is one of the novels which narrates the cross-cultural conflicts in the minds of *Jasmine*. *Jasmine* in "*Jasmine*" undergoes cross cultural conflicts and identity crisis and struggles to find her way with self-realization. Mukherjee herself admits that there is a similarity between *Jasmine* and herself.

Mukherjee admits in an interview:

“Jasmine” contains the shape of my life and my desires, but no incidents is at all autobiographical... I do believe in personal strivings. 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 (Edward 43)

So, through this we get the vivid picture of Mukherjee’s the cross-cultural conflicts in her minds as a diasporic writer struggling to fix in alien land.

“Jasmine” is a story Jasmine, a young Punjabi woman who is the protagonist of the novel, born in a small village Hasnapur, takes up her journey from Hasnapur, Punjab to Florida, New York. During her journey her names and identity gets changed according to the places she moves in. Starting from Jyoti in Hasnapur, Punjab as Jasmine, then Jazzy as an undocumented immigrant, then as Jane in Manhattan, then to Jane in New York. “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 97). Her thoughts are preoccupied with the prophecy foretold by the astrologer when she was very as a seven years old child, she says the stench of the rotten dog stays with her. “That stench stay with me.... but every time I life a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it” (Jasmine 5). She continues to carry the star shaped scar in her forehead which she calls as a third eye and her struggle to get rid of bad memories has no escape.

The mental sufferings of Jasmine make the readers to feel empathy for her. The novel can be viewed in cross cultural perspective and it is based the backdrop of the idea of marriage.

The cultural conflicts arise within Jasmine as she starts her journey. She has the mind of what the young generation of today expects. She wishes to marry an educated man who does not believe in dowry system and so she marries Prakash who has

the western way of thoughts. The cultural thoughts and her life in her village are unforgettable to her.

Jasmine’s life with Prakash seems quite different to her. He wishes her to study and he advises her not to bear child as she is very young. He gives her a new name Jasmine, but her happiness does not exist long because of the death of Prakash. The life she has spent with Prakash made her to adapt to the Western way of life. After the death of her husband, Jasmine returns to her family in Punjab and after a few months she goes back to Florida with illegal documents symbolizing her acceptance and to the new way of living in abroad. She fulfills the desires of her husband by leaving her family in India and opts to live in Florida even as an illegal immigrant. Both Jasmine and her husband had the same opinion about America as a land of opportunities and wishes to live there.

III. CONCLUSION

Bharati Mukherjee has beautifully depicted the journey of Jasmine as an optimistic cultural advancement journey. Jasmine’s identity gets changed and she was christened with various names according to the people, place and she too accepts the change. “I survived the sniping. My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, light but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter” (Jasmine 40). Acceptance and adaption grow within her which makes her unique. The rigidity as an Indian to cling on to a family relationship is very clear through her life with Bud. The way she tackles all her problems and adapting to new culture was different in the beginning of the novel but in the end the readers can see the changes in her new skills, desires to live and in her attitude. She undergoes a transformation in her mind, body and in soul. When Due seeks the help of Jasmine in his studies, she finds it difficult to because he was learning Teddy Roosevelt’s Presidency. Jasmine, a woman with acceptance and adoption and a Western way of life and thinking but Mukherjee’s readers are made to think that her

cultural roots are deeply rooted only in Indian culture.

IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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