

## A Study of Alienation and Disharmony in Bharathi Mukherjee's Jasmine

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Alienation is the unbearable rift between a human being and self. The state of exile is a sense of loss. The pain of separation and dislocation makes Bharathi Mukherjee's novel "Jasmine" a quest for identity in an alien land. Jasmine the protagonist of the novel undergoes several transformations during her journey of life in America. Her journey becomes a tale of moral courage, a search for self-awareness and self-assertion. Jasmine sways between the past and present attempting to come to terms with the two world's one of nativity and the other as an immigrant. Caught between the cultures of the east and west, past and present, old and new Jasmine experiences alienation and disharmony. Jasmine tries to establish a new cultural identity in exile and she ultimately cultivates new habits and expressions of life. Born in Calcutta and now a distinguished Professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Bharathi Mukherjee was the first naturalized American citizen to win the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. She is also the author of *leave it to me*, *The holder of the world*, *Darkness*, *The Tiger's Daughter*, and *Wife*.

Bharati Mukherjee was born on July 27, 1940 in Calcutta, India. She was born into a wealthy family, which assisted her in her dream of becoming a writer. She lived in India, Europe, the United States, and Canada. Migrating to these countries that are so different from her place of birth enabled her to write very powerful novels on immigrant experiences. Mukherjee's novels focus on exploring the migration and the feeling of alienation that is experienced by these immigrants. Her works have explored such themes as isolation, sexism, discrimination, the mistreatment of Indian women, and exploring identities.

The novel Jasmine follows the life of the title character from her birth in a rural village in India to her adulthood in the United States. Jasmine, which changes her name even as she recreates herself again. The course of Jasmine's life unfolds in five vastly different locations across the globe, beginning in the Punjab, continuing across the Atlantic Ocean in Florida, New York, Iowa, and finally on the other side of the continent in California. Major themes explored in the novel include rebirth, identity, alienation, and free will.

The journey of Jasmine, as presented in the novel, touches the readers making them feel for her. The journey of Jasmine appears to have a direct association to with the subject of alienation and in this process, offers an insight into the issue of disharmony. 'Jasmine' is based on the idea of the marriage of the East and the West, with a story that portrays a Hindu Indian woman whose husband is murdered. Being widowed at the age of seventeen, Jasmine leaves India for the United States. Through a series of events including her number of problems and getting raped, shatters her completely.

The protagonist made her go through the journey from India to the United States and shift from one culture to the other in the course of living. Jasmine, rather, Jyoti, born in Hasnapur in India, is the most beautiful and clever child in her family. The way she has been controlled dominated by the male members of her family, and the way it has been shown as taken for granted clearly reveals the side of male dominance over the female in Indian culture. Like the girls and women in most of the Indian families, Jyoti's life is also controlled by her father or brothers. Culture is typically characterized by its tendency to change in various forms, is also revealed through the events in the novel. Marriage at an early age is still a part of culture in some parts of India. Yet, Jyoti has the mind to think in a different way as young generations in most cultures do. Though Jyoti does not deny to get married, she does have the desire to marry an educated man who does not believe in the dowry system. Thus she is married to Prakash, a man who is based in the United States and has the modern way of thinking.

It is after marriage that Jyoti's immigration becomes quite obvious. At the same time, Jyoti's shift from one culture to the other and also the shift from one identity to the other occur. Prakash encourages her to study English after they shift to the US. He also gives Jyoti a new name Jasmine. This change of her name is much symbolic of the change of her identity as well as of her shift from the Eastern culture to the Western one. However, though Jyoti was quite happy in her marital life, it is too short-lived as Jasmine is widowed after Prakash is murdered.

The second instance of immigration in Jasmine's life seems to have much to do with culture and also with multiculturalism. The time that Jasmine had spent in the US with Prakash had made her adapt to the Western Culture that is not, at least, as superstitious as that of India. When Jasmine returns from the US to her family in India, she has to choose either performing Sati according to the rigid tradition of her family, or to lead the life of Jasmine in America. Now she becomes an illegal immigrant to Florida, symbolizing her journey of transformations, displacements and shifts of identities.

Recording the female as puppets the fathers and brothers of Indian women say that "village girls are cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they go." (Jasmine 46)

Jasmine's family also had the same opinion on her the sense of alienation starts from the home itself and follows as a shadow throughout. Jasmine gets separated from the other members of the family due to her personality comprising modernity and education. Alienation includes multiculturalism and the diaspora. Jasmine wanders place to place holding her husband's dreams and desires in order to sustain the ability to adopt another identity. Another identity which is caught between different cultures. Jasmine's identity is shattered in various locations moving from one place to the other. The inner strength of Jasmine is depicted by these lines which Jasmine boldly utters:

"I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bullet-proof vest, was to be a coward." Taylor the new company of Jasmine and his friends started separating Jasmine because of her South Asian origin. The sense of loss and longingness in Jasmine makes her quest spiritual. The inescapability of memory of Jasmine haunts her continuously and finally she becomes a person who is fit to live in the world where individuals exist. The singular identity of Jasmine is the ultimate end. Bharathi mukherjee in her novel highlights a protagonist with optimistic qualities. The transformation of Jasmine is positive and bold which any one could do. In the path of life experiencing alienation and disharmony Jasmine discovers a separate world for her.

#### **PRIMARY SOURCE**

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