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The Quest For Female Identity In Bharati Mukherjee's Novel

Jasmine

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee's women encounter self-division, alienation even madness as they seek to define themselves a new in their transition from the old World to the new world. She devotes greater efforts to the development of female characters than male characters. Her narrative method frequently employs satiric devices. This paper focuses on the novel of Jasmine the female character thus Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jase-Jane transformation liberates her from the deforming past, empowers her and gives her a voice.

Keywords: Liberation, transformation, gender, Feminism, empower suppression, women, identity, expatriation.

1. Introduction

Jasmine is set in the present about a young Indian women in the United states who trying to adapt to the American way of life in order to be able to survive changes, identities as several times .She also has a request for identity .She is in search of her identity since childhood, an astrologer foretold about her widowhood she was not ready to accept it:

"Lifetime ago, under a banyan tree in the village of hasnpur,
an astrologer cupped his ears his satellite dish to the stars
and foretold my widowhood and exile .I was only seven the,
fast and venturesome, scabrous armed from leaves and thorns."
(Jasmine3)

Jasmine is a protagonist of the novel of Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine as a name begins as joyti in a small village of Hasnapur in Punjap. she is renamed Jasmine after her marriage to Prakash viji.Prakash wants her to become a mordern city women and as he aids her transformation from jyoti to Jasmine. Eventually become the figure that Prakash desires to create. Here Bharati Mukherjee is depicting identity formation as a complex process that is dependent not only solely upon the agency of the individual but also upon surrounding environment. Here renaming is a sign of her initial migration away from traditional india. Jyoti and Jasmine are two separate selves, yet Jasmine finds herself occupying both identities. As she describes it;

"To break off the past , he gave me a new name:
 Jasmine..... you are small and sweet and heady, my
 Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume.
 Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities."(Jasmine 77)

Suddenly Prakash is murdered and Jasmine emigrates to America all alone to fulfill her dreams. Upon her arrival in Florida, she meets Half-face, the captain of the ship on which she entered the country and his disrespectful treatment gives her first taste of American racial categorization. Half-face sees her only as a sexual being and after the rape Jasmine finds that she cannot escape this new perception of identity. Thus she turns to violence in order to express the conflict she is experiencing. She stabs Half-face to death and in this act she finds the strength to continue living and vows to start a new life in America, separate from India and the native identity of her past. Hence Bharati Mukherjee portrays Jasmine's identity is formed not through construction alone but also by the destruction of her existing self. She further explains it;

Mataji and I are alone in the Widow's dark hut little better
 than Mazbis and Untouchables. My young friend Vimala never
 visited".(Jasmine 96)

Jasmine then meets Lillian Gordon, staying with whom begins her process of assimilation by learning how to become American. Lillian bestows upon her the nickname 'Jazzy', a symbol of her entrance into and acceptance of American culture which she welcome gladly. After that she moves in with a traditional Indian family in Hushing, New York. Jasmine soon finds herself stifled by the interior of this home for it was completely isolated from everything American. Considering it to be a stasis in her progression towards a new life, she tries to separate herself from all that is Indian and forget her past completely.

She proceeds with her migratory pattern and moves to New York City, to become the pair for an American family. With Taylor, his wife Wylie and their daughter Duff, she creates yet another identities are never completely erased. They emerge in specific moments in the text and exacerbate the tension, thereby causing Jasmine to create another more dominant identity, different from all those that come before. While living with the Hayes, Jasmine begins to master the English language, empowering herself to further appropriate American culture.

"Lillian called me "Jazzy"....And lillian taught us all to cook hamburgers
 and roasts, to
 clean toilets with cleansers that smelled sweeter than flowers"

Before long Taylor gets romantically involved with Jasmine and embraces her different ethnicity without orientalizing her into an exotic fantasy. Jasmine transforms but this time the change is not from a reaction but rather from her very own yearning for personal change. In becoming Jase, Jasmine gets increasingly comfortable with her sexuality which she always tried to repress earlier, more so, after her traumatic experience.

But the relationship between Taylor and Jasmine ends abruptly when the past creeps upon her once again manifested in the form of Sukhwinder, the murderer of her husband. The inescapability of memory and the boundless nature of time and space is stressed once again and Jasmine finds her life distorted by the consciousness through which she now experiences the world. She loses even her sense of self expression. Unable to withstand this plethora of conflicting identities she flees to Baden Country, Iowa for a new beginning. She adds;

"But jyoti was a sati-goddess; she burned herself in a
 trash can funeral pyre behind a board up model in Florida
 Jasmine lived for the future, for vijh& wife."(Jasmine 176)

In Baden she meets Bud Wippelmeyer, an American banker who instantly falls in love with her. They eventually marry and Bud renames Jasmine 'Jane' yet another sign of her evolution. Bud encourages Jasmine to freely change roles from caregiver to temptress whenever she feels the desire to view her sexually through the lenses of his own oriental fantasy. This instead of denigrating Jasmine, serves to imbue her with a sexual confidence and she thrives on it.

Her racial identity also morphs in Baden for her difference is recognized but not comprehended or openly acknowledged. The community attempts to see her race is an essential portion of her identity as Jane because now she feels assimilated and in fact becomes the typical American she always wanted to be.

2. Conclusion

The end of the novel finds Jasmine moving to California with Taylor, uncertain of what the future will bring but nevertheless confident in her decision to leave. This sense of movement further reinforces the notion that her identity is forever evolving, she cannot remain in a stable life because disruption and change are the means of her survival. The surrounding environments influence her formation of her identities and she navigates between temporal and spatial location, her perception of herself changes, thereby resulting in a multiplicity of consciousness. These create a tension within her and she feels the need to reconcile these conflicting perceptions so that they do not wage psychological war inside her. Thereby we see her reinvent her identity completely. She adds;

I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane and Half Face for Kali". (Jasmine197)

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