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EXPATRIATION IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVEL - JASMINE

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Abstract

'Expatriation' is actually a complex state of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for the past, the symbol of ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness and the struggle to maintain the difference. The family is the primary channel of cultural transmission. No man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree of cultural which he acquired from his early environment. Third world countries where they cannot get enough to do, are making an unabated flow to America. This flow of divergent races, classes and culture has totally changed the face of America. This paper examines Bharati Mukherjee's an Indian immigrant centered novel Jasmine features an Indian immigrant protagonist who leaves a native land for life in United States and rebirth of the individualism which her collectives have silenced.

Key words: Novel, Jasmine, Bharathi Mukherjee and Expatriation.

1. Expatriation in Bharati Mukherjee's Novel - Jasmine

Bharati Mukherjee has changed citizenships and lived in various cultural milieus with disorienting rapidly. There has been an on-going quest from expatriation to immigration in her writing. Her major concern as a writer has been the life of South-Asian expatriation/immigrants in USA and Canada and the problem of Acculturation and Assimilation. This movement coincides with her immigration from Canada to USA. Mukherjee's novel Jasmine draws a line between Jyoti and Jasmine in India and other identities employed by her protagonist in America. Thus, the book becomes the combination of two stories that take place in two different countries and cultures. Following such a scheme, it is possible to say that the India part of the book is about Jyoti's survival under the hegemony of traditional patriarchy and her rebirth with the help of Prakash who gives her both a new name and a new life despite the fact that Jyoti's rebirth as Jasmine is possible only with the help of a man.

Jasmine is set mainly in the seventies and eighties (with movements back and forth on the axis of time, for better character enhancement and fluidity of plot) when the violent separatist demands of the militant Sikhs forced many Hindus to migrate from Punjab. The novel is structured around the life of its narrator (who, for reasons that will become apparent later, will for the moment remain nameless), an adolescent Hindu widow who uproots herself from the familiar and travels from Hasnapur, India, to America, in search of a new life and identity. The novel is not a conventional narration of a life (many literary works have taken autobiography as their formal model), but is told through the prism of the narrator's memory and from her present location in the American Midwest. Furthermore, though it is very much an account of the events that have happened to the main character of the novel, Mukherjee's work is also an account of the myriad cultural influences that have gone to make the heroine who she is, and through the main



character, the novel becomes the embodiment of the story of exile itself: We are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs.

Jasmine's protagonist starts as Jyoti in India where she stands against the role that was prepared for her by the patriarchal system of her homeland. Like most of the Indian women, she is born as the disappointing baby girl of her family and her whole life is under the control of her father and brothers. According to Indian tradition, a girl should be married at an early age with a dowry which is a burden for the families. Additionally, girls are seen as belongings of their future husbands. That is why families are reluctant about educating them or giving them extra facilities. In short, they are named as curses directed towards women "who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations" (Mukherjee, 1991) according to their religious belief.

Jyoti is born in the small village of Hasanpur, in the district of Punjab, India. She gets married to a laborious, handsome young man, named Prakash Viji. While living in India, Jasmine perceives America differently. For her being American means being white. When her husband Prakash brings the brochure of the Florida International Institute of Technology, after going through it Jasmine gets astonished to catch a glimpse of America and feels America in fact is very different. In addition to this, Jasmine has an opposed perception about the sexuality of American woman and she becomes anxious because Prakash is studying in that institute where "there will all those hot-blooded American girls. You know what they are like". At this moment Jasmine is unaware of all the complexities of cultural and ancestral identities in America and what is more, she is right-wing in her perception about female sexuality.

When Prakash renames Jyoti as Jasmine, it throws light on a significant question of mechanism or operating system that assists in the process of identity-formation of Jasmine.

According to Lacan's definition of self, this mechanism is external force which inspires to generate Jasmine's new identity, Jasmine herself is going through an internal transformations. While comparing Jyoti to Jasmine, Jyoti is delineated as a more independent woman than Jasmine. Jyoti's new identity has emerged from Prakash's psychology, so in greater proportion she is a male's creation. On the other hand, Jasmine is more advanced, progressive and forward looking woman but this metamorphosis is the result of conventional Indian male dominated system, as Prakash wishes to see her. She modifies herself and eventually becomes the outcome of Prakash's expectations and aspirations. Thus, through this Mukherjee examines the process of identity formation through Lacan's perception. Lacan describes that identity formation is a very complex process and it is not entirely dependent on the internal power of an individual, but also upon external forces eventually becomes the outcome of Prakash's expectations and aspirations. Thus, through this Mukherjee examines the process of identity formation through Lacan's perception. Lacan describes that identity formation is a very complex process and it is not entirely dependent on the internal power of an individual, but also upon external forces.

Jyoti stands as a rebellious character in the patriarchal society that dominates India. She does not want to obey her society's predetermined gender roles which are summarized by Chris Barker as "the cultural assumptions and practices that govern the social constructions of men, women and their social relations". Having interests and demands more than the usual girls, she wants to continue her education to finally become a doctor and to have her own choices in life unlike the village girls who are "like cattle" that follows "whichever way you lead them" (Mukherjee, 1991). Instead, Jyoti likes "hearing the men talk" (Mukherjee, 1991) since they usually talk about a world to which she is a stranger. Thus, the first conflict Jyoti experiences is the one between the dominant patriarchal system and the modern life that she desires. She



loses her sense of belonging to the life and traditions of rural India and dreams a life which is impossible even to dream for many Indian girls.

Unfortunately, Jasmine becomes widow at the age of seventeen after Prakash is murdered. In shattered and crushed condition, she makes up her mind to accomplish the unfinished dream of her husband of moving and settled in America. "Prakash had taken Jyoti, and created Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash". After landing in Florida, she encounters Half-Face, who is the captain of the ship through which she makes an entrance into the country. At this moment, she encounters her first experience of American ethnic division. Jasmine is surprised about the name of Half-face which sounds ("Bubba"). She enquires whether this name does have Indian origins because it sounds somewhat Indian "Baba". Half-face then answers "Bubba ain't no Indian name, no way. In the nigger-shipping bizness we don't bother with last names". Half-face behaves in a disrespectful way to Jasmine, for he views her not as an Indian, rather as a black person.

Jasmine's American Dream collapses at this very first sight, but the worst is yet to come at the motel where she has to stop for her first night on this alien land. She is not only raped by the man called Half Face but also humiliated by him. She feels everything that is dear to her is invaded by the dirty hands of Half Face. Therefore, she burns them all in a metal trash bin imitating a sati ritual before leaving the motel. Instead of suicide, Jasmine decides to finish her mission which is to visit the campus and sit under that particular tree for Prakash. With the help of the symbolical steps she followed after the murder, she metaphorically kills her Indian identity and her past to find a new identity and a future in America which Consequently, Jasmine's journey, from India to

America, stands for her moving away from the pressures of her homeland. Each time she moves towards the west which is the symbol for her increasing American identity. Why she defines herself as "walking death. Death incarnate" (Mukherjee, 1991). Consequently, Jasmine's journey, from India to America, stands for her moving away from the pressures of her homeland. Each time she moves towards the west which is the symbol for her increasing American identity. As Yadav points: Jyoti, Jasmine, Jane, Jase, each of her different identities, took place in a different space, i.e. India, Florida, and New York, Iowa. Such a character who embraces wanderings is attempting to destroy traditional ways of conceiving female identity. She is marginalized by both gender and race and changes herself according to her surroundings which are characterized by an ever-changing uncertainty just as Jasmine herself is. Her continuous movement and vagueness in which nothing was rooted anymore and everything was in motion, makes her a diasporic individual". During her journey, she is the object of male domination starting within her family and going on with the men in her life. She is exposed to violence, rape, desire and lust all by men. Every time she runs away, she comes across with another man to control her life.

2. Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's uniqueness lies in the presentation of female characters are quite adventurous, bold and powerful. They are ready to attempt new ideas and new way of life.

3. References

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