

Expatriate Experience in Bharathi Mukherjee's Jasmine

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Bharathi Mukherjee is undoubtedly the “Grand Dame” of diasporic Indian literature. Her works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates as well as Indian women and their struggle in an alien land. An expatriate is one who lives in a country he is not born in. The term is often used for someone who has moved out of a sense of dissatisfaction or protest and who maintain an easy, conflicting ties to the homecountry. Strictly speaking, expatriate means a person who has left his country, or has been forced to do so. However this term is now more commonly used to refer to people posted on jobs in foreign countries. Expatriates do not come to live in the host country forever. They are supposed to live there as long as the posting lasts and then return to home country, or may be posted as expatriate in some other country. In 1990 Mukherjee published her novel *Jasmine* that explores female identity through the story of an Indian peasant women whose path takes her from Punjab, to Florida, to New York, to Iowa and as the novel draws to a close she is about to set off for California. The novel is significant because it marks Mukherjee’s transition from expatriation to immigration.

Jasmine is the story of Jyoti. Born in Hasnapur in India has the distinction of being the most beautiful and clever in the family. Her life is controlled and dominated by her father and brothers like any other woman in India. At the age of seven, Jyoti is a rebel. When the novel opens an astrologer sitting under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, foretells that Jyoti will be widowed and exiled one day. He also tells her that one cannot challenge destiny. But she does not believe in it. She seeks a modern and educated husband who keeps no faith in dowries and traditions. At the age of fourteen she married Prakash Viji, an educated and intelligent young man and a friend of her older brothers. He worked for a company and he fixed technical items such as toasters, televisions VCRs. Prakash changed her name to Jasmine and wanted to make her a new kind of city woman. Thus ‘feudal Jyoti’ is transformed into Jasmine, the independent-thinking city woman.

Prakash encourages her to study English after going to the Unlimited States. His dreams of becoming a technology expert, and even promises Jasmine that some day they will open their own repair shop for electronic goods. After they were married for a short while he received news that he was accepted into Florida International Institute of Technology and they would be moving to America. When Prakash prepares to go to America, she also looks forward to going to America, sharing the ambition of her husband. But unfortunately he was killed in a Sikh terrorist attack. According to the traditions of her family, she has to perform 'sati'. But Jasmine is determined to live in America. Her quest for liberation, freedom, and self-realization drives her to America.

After Prakash's ultimate death she sets off to America. Hailing from an oppressive and a rural family in India, she comes to America in search of a more fruitful life and realize the dreams of her husband. After a hazardous journey in a shrimper called the Gulf shuttle, she reaches the Florida coast as an illegal immigrant. Capitalizing on the helplessness of Jasmine, the captain of the Shrimper, Half-Face takes her to a motel and rapes her. Jasmine claiming to be a mourning widow does not protect herself from the assaults of Half Face, who on contrary asserts his hegemony as male and as white. No one is there to help her she is vulnerable in an alien land. She understands the cruel reality of life after her rape. She murders Half-Face like goddess 'Kali'. Jyothi's Kali like encounter with Half -Face forces her to change her mind and instead of dying she kills him and decided to live and complete Prakash's mission of making good in America. When she was walking aimlessly along a country road not knowing what to do next, Jasmine is picked up by Lillian Gordon who names her 'Jazzy'.

Gordon changes her rural clothes and helps her to adapt herself to the new environment. Gordon teaches Jasmine to survive in America. Gordon helps her to get back herself - confidence and pays for her a trip to New York so that she can live with the professor Vadhera, a gentleman, an immigrant from India, who was instrumental in Prakash's securing admission in an engineering course. Jasmine spends five months in professors Vadhera's house and living in the company of Indian 'expatriates'. It was a crowded Indian community and Jasmine wanted to escape from there as early as possible. His wife appears to be happy to have her as a fulltime unpaid maid in her house. Jasmine has become an invisible, nameless woman in the flushing ghetto. As soon as the professor manages to get her a forged green card, she flees from the Vadhera apartment and takes one more plunge in to America.

Next Jasmine, with the help of Kate Feldstein, a photographer and Lillian Gordon's daughter, she moves to another place. She is able to secure a job as an au pare her friends, Taylor, the physics professor at Columbia University and his wife Wylie and their adopted daughter Duff. Wylie works in a publishing house. Jasmine begins to master the English language, empowering herself to further appropriate American culture. Taylor begins to call her "jase". As Jase she takes care of the family. Jase is able to realize the exciting, independent American identity that wanted to be all along.

Soon Taylor gets romantically involved with Jasmine. Wylie goes away with Stuart Echelman, an economist. But the relationship between Taylor and Jasmine ends abruptly because she sees Sukhwinder, the killer of her husband, selling hot dogs in the park. She decides to leave New York and go to Baden County, Iowa. The main reason for her running away is her fear that her presence in his household may jeopardize the safety of Taylor and Duff.

In Baden, Iowa, she meets Mother Ripplemeyer who introduces Jasmine to her son Bud Ripplemeyer, an Iowan banker. She becomes a teller in his bank. Karin is Bud's ex -wife. Jane always compares herself to her because she thinks that Bud was crazy to leave Karin for her. Karin ends up becoming friends with Jane and helping her. Jane knows that Karin loves Bud more than she will and finally leaves him and knows that Karin will take good care of him. Jasmine

becomes Jane Ripplemeyer, when She being to live with him as husband and wife without an official marriage. Jane and Bud adopted Du, a seventeen year old Vietnamese boy,as an orphan when he was fourteen. He comes from an entirely different culture than his class -mates who are all sons of farmers. Jane now feels assimilated and in fact becomes the typical American she always wanted to be. Jane is pregnant. But, her partner is severely injured in a shooting incident and his legs are paralyzed. He can move only in a wheel chair. Bud wants Jasmine to see her as familiar instead of alien. This new perception of her race is an essential part of her identity as Jane, because she feels assimilated into the American culture.

Taylor and Duff cometolowa. They request Jasmine to go with them to California. Jasmine asks Karin to take to charge of Bud. She leaves for California with Taylor,where Duff,her adopted vietnamese son,lives with his sister. She is uncertain of her identity from ‘jyoti’ to ‘Jasmine to ‘ jane ‘ to ‘jase’ is suggestive of the death of one personality and an emergence of a new, but it does not have negative implications. 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 he means of her survival. The surrounding and change are means of her formation of her identities. Her perception of herself changes,thereby resulting in a multiplicity of consciousness. She keeps reinventing herself to belong and get assimilated into the American Dream to the fullest,and begins her journey to California.

In India, Jyoti is seen against the backdrop of the rigid and patriarchal Indian society. In America herself awareness is reflected in her relationship with Bud, Taylor,and Du. She tries to establish a new cultural identity. She caught between two cultures of the East and West,past and present, old and new. She lived many lives,in each she is a new woman. She has fully assimilated herself to the American life. She wants to be economically independent, apart from acting as-day mummy for Duff, she takes up some casual work at the university. America an economically independent land, gives her full freedom to decide her future.

Bharathi Mukherjee has depicted Jasmynes transition as a positive and optimistic journey. Throughout the novel Jasmine re-invents herself. During her course of deconstructing and reconstructing selfhood, she encounters violence at every step. Jasmine herself describes her journey as a “war between my fate and my will”. Thus the novel depicts the various changes Jasmine goes through, as the journey’s from the world of rural Punjab to America, discovering her American dream in the process. Finally she achieves self-awareness through her experiences with men in America. Though Bharathi Mukherjee considers her novels to be similar to miniature paintings where both background and foreground are equally important, her novels resolve only around the lives of the protagonists.

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