

From Turmoil to Self-Actualization -The Diasporic Journey In Bharati Mukherjee's - 'Jasmine.'

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Abstract:

With the floating population, and the inevitable merger, culture is growing, shaped and formulated. This is what is mostly dealt by the contemporary fiction writers. The term Diaspora is applied to the migrants or the people who have been displaced from their own very root, have emigrated from their own land due to unaccountable reasons. Bharati Mukherjee is a versatile writer with great creative sensibilities acknowledged as a major voice of the expatriate – immigrant's sensibilities in modern fiction. In the novel 'Jasmine' she portrays an Indian woman who is pushed at the threshold struggling miserably to save her Indian self. Jasmine is a story of transformation and assimilation of diverse cultural societies and the writer presents the true picture of the life of the migrants. The feeling of displacement ends and Jasmine ultimately settles down as an independent American girl from a docile village girl which reflects the literary exuberance of the great writer Bharati Mukherjee.

Key words: Culture, Diaspora, displacement, relocation, assimilation.

Culture needs to be defined and redefined, as it changes with changing times in terms of convention and prevailing norms and mental facilitation. Not only the most pertaining question that haunts us day night is whether do we have any culture left today or it has become a banana culture. Nothing can be termed as solely of the culture of the East or the West or otherwise. Above all this is an age of Plurality and hence, no cultures can be judged in isolation. An upheaval and torment can be experienced in the name of culture and the complicacy it generates is that of identity, belongingness, home and personal relationships.

We understand this is an age of modernization and globalization and multiculturalism, which paves challenge not only to the individuals or their respective cultures but also to the nations which has compressed into a small village. With the floating population, and the inevitable merger, culture is growing, shaped and formulated. In this process it, is very evident and all the possibility is there that some elements ate shed out while others are incorporated automatically, imperceptibly resulting into a mixed culture.

This fact has to be accepted in good sense, coming out of the shells of orthodoxy and conservatism. Most probably, this perception might challenge the tenets of Diaspora culture but this is the veracity, which needs to be examined and re- examined, established and re-established and confirmed and reconfirmed. This leads us to a big question mark. Today, the modern world faces the question of not a man alienated from a man but the alienation that separates a man from a man culturally, finds significance.

This is what is mostly dealt by the contemporary fiction writers. When a person leaves his own culture and enters another, his old values comes into conflict with the other. The condition of people living in a Diaspora is always under dilemma and they are always found in a dual state and in confusion and clashes. They are always haunted by a sense of isolation, identity crisis, dislocation and alienation and other corresponding issues which engulf them from all sides.

Diaspora is nothing else but creating a new identity in an alien land, accommodating and adjusting in the new cultural space and dealing with it positively. The term Diaspora is applied to the migrants or the people who have been displaced from their own very root, have emigrated from their own land due to unaccountable reasons. They are unable to come to terms with reality, they are dislocated and henceforth, lost, caught in the unidentical two worlds, engulfed in the criss cross and finds no way to come out of it. The detachment with its own native land gives a certain kind of trauma to the soul but still people try harder to blend and seize the moment of settling down into that whole new world. Thus diasporic fiction deals with the literature which combines with it the pangs and agonies of such displaced individuals.

Displaced, dispossessed, exiled or self proclaimed immigrants seek a new life or self reinvention by moving to a new country. Massive migration is today's life. Third world literature is gaining immense popularity these days as they are focussed studies on the varied problems man is facing in everyday life. However, displacement, rootlessness, alienation marginalization, hyphenated identities are most felt and talked about in contemporary writings. This is evident in Bharati Mukherjee's multi perspective fabric and it is seen continually evolving in the context of transnational and transcultural space. Declaring her to be an American writer in the mainstream tradition, Bharati Mukherjee's fiction reveals her roots which are in India. She has both been critically criticised and applauded for her stance on the necessary process of creation of identity for the immigrants.

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American author and is rightly acknowledged as a major voice of the expatriate – immigrant's sensibilities in modern fiction. She has to her credit, five novels, two short story collections, two non-fiction books all based on her personal experiences during migration from one place to another. She has experienced multiple dilemmas of dislocation and discrimination herself, presents in her novels a set of fluid identities with people who are "continually remaking their culture, and in doing so redefining the present and reconceptualising what they deserve from the future"(Long, 202). Consequently, it is the self that is neither unified, nor hybrid, but rather fluid, forever transforming, evolving yet never complete.

Bharati Mukherjee is a versatile writer with great creative sensibilities. Mukherjee has received several prestigious awards including the National book critic, Critic award, (1988) and in addition to novels, has produced articles and book length notification. She exists as a unique writer, who continues her experimentation on a wider canvas. Her protagonists are mainly characters who are bound to confront difficulties. In the novel 'Jasmine' she portrays an Indian woman who is pushed at the threshold struggling miserably to save her Indian self. Jasmine is a story of transformation and assimilation of diverse cultural societies and the writer presents the true picture of the life of the migrants. The novel is the weaving of the past and the present memories which in turn exhibits the shifting of her multiple identities. Consequently, the protagonists swing between the past and the present, like a pendulum. Indira Nitayanandam is of the view:

"The diasporic writers enter into an investigation of the complex process of adaptations and survival which can expatriate faces in the land of adaptations. An intriguing and inalienable part of the life of the diasporic is they're – questing' of identity. Torn between various and varying identities, one is never sure how much to change- the process of uprooting that begins at the moment that one leaves one's country leads to either are rooting in the new land or a going back to one's root, i.e., deciding to return home may be firm by different attitudes to the home which can be real, imaginary, temporary, syncretised, stimulated a fascination with a sense of belonging or affiliation to the native land."(238-39).

Jasmine has a prehistory and is vulnerable, a docile wife of Prakash in Punjab and widowed by a terrorist bomb and completely surrenders her individuality who transforms her from Jyoti to Jasmine. His death brings chaos in her life and she decides to flee away to New York, the city of dreams and happiness. In this process, Jasmine undergoes many incarnations and she explores her transformations both as a woman and as an American. Jasmine rebels against the Indian traditional Values; Jazzy is a self imposed, upbeat American girl:

and Jase is the vision of an American woman, who determines her own life, making unconventional and disturbing choices. With each new identity Jasmine tends to move towards self actualization and self discovery. She says:

“not choosing men, I am caught between the promise of America and old world dutifulness....it’s not guilt that I feel, its relief....Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through unlocked windows. Watch me reposition the stars.”(240)

Jasmine’s anguished mind concerning her journey is best reflected in her words:

“We are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines landing at the end of Tarmacs ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped off corners of waiting rooms where surely barely wakened customs guards await their bribe. We are dressed in shades of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of intercontinental vagabondage. We ask only one thing to be allowed to land, to pass through; to continue. We sneak a look at the big departure broad one the tourists use. Our cities are there; too, our destinations are so close, but not yet, not so directly. We must sneak in land by night in little used strips... What country? What Continent? We pass through wars, through plagues. I am hungry for news, but the discarded papers are in characters which I cannot read”. (101)

The reader is naturally awestruck to witness the resolution of the author to opt for such plan in the plot of the novel. Jasmine is a typical Indian woman, who never sheds her Indianess, typical of which is the dependency on the male factor, the essence of a patriarchal society. She is somehow unrealistic, superficial, enthusiastic and yet distasteful and that is why she earns different names at different junctures of time. In her journey she has been assigned different names. Jasmine has undergone spectacular transformation from Jyoti to Jasmine, to Jase, to Jane according to the situation. The sense of movement portrayed throughout the novel projects the necessity of change and transformation for her existence. Even after imbibing American Culture she has her roots in Indian culture, beliefs and traditions and tells Duff the story of nachiketa and yama and about Gods and demons. She has learnt how to transform unsettledness and helplessness into belonging and empowerment. The story of Jyoti in her various phases of growth as Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase and Jane deconstructs the multicultural, multiracial fabric of the globalized society along with the complicated issues of self identity and culture.

Perhaps the decision to go with the professor at the end describes the need for security, safety and comfort. Jasmine becomes a transformed and transforming individual who epitomizes the mutating American consciousness infused with myriad culture and voices. Jasmine’s story is not only of Jasmines story but also a story of a woman who becomes transformed and empowered through the undergoing experiences and becomes a changed woman of substance.

Finally, she becomes the independent woman who decides to live with the man whom she loves The freedom of choice gives her new assertion and definition to her inner self and discloses the fact that she is a great fighter, which is an incarnation of her inner self. A survivor, a fighter and an adaptor, Jyoti is a struggler all through her journey. The feeling of displacement ends and Jasmine ultimately settles down as an independent American girl from a docile village girl which reflects the literary exuberance of the great writer Bharati Mukherjee.

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