

CULTURAL STUDIES IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*

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Abstract

Culture is the characteristic and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts, In the humanities, one sense of culture as an attribute of the individual has been the degree to which they have cultivated a particular level of sophistication in the arts, sciences, education, or manners. Bharat Mukherjee's work features not only cultural clashes but undercurrents of violence. Her first novel, The Tiger's Daughter(1972), tells of a sheltered Indian woman shocked by her immersion in American culture and, on her return to India, by a changed Calcutta. Wife(1975) details an Indian woman's descent into madness as she is pulled apart by the demands of the cultures of her homeland and her new home in New York City. In Jasmine, the protagonist Jasmine search for identity and her true self began from the day she was born. She was an unwanted child to the family because she was the fifth daughter and the seventh of nine children. Her mother wanted her to be killed when she was born because she did not want her daughter to suffer the pains of a dowry less bride.. This novel had a lot of problem through male society. Her novels based feministic aspect also cultural identity problem into their novels.

Introduction

The level of cultural sophistication has also sometimes been seen to distinguish civilizations from less complex societies. Culture are also found in class based distinctions between a high culture of the social elite and a low culture, popular culture, or folk culture of the low classes, distinguished by the stratified access to cultural capital. In common parlance, culture is often used to refer specifically to the symbolic markers used by ethnic groups to distinguish themselves visibly from each other such as modification clothing or jewelry.

Mass culture refers to the mass-produced and mass mediated forms of consumer culture that emerged in the 20th century . Some schools of philosophy, as Marxism and critical theory, have argued that culture is often used politically as a tool of the elites to manipulate the lower classes and create a false consciousness, and such perspectives are common in the discipline of cultural studies. In the wider social sciences, the theoretical perspective of cultural materialism holds that human symbolic culture arises from the material conditions of human life, as humans create the conditions for physical survival, and that the basis of culture is found in evolved biological dispositions.

Culture is a sense of ultimate value possessed by a particular society

As expressed in its collective institutions, by its individual members

In their depositions, feelings, attitudes and manners as well as in significant

Forms which they give to material objects.(MIFE 3)

Bharati Mukherjee's fiction portrays the delicate place of Indian and other Third World immigrants in North American culture. *The Tiger's Daughter*(1972) provides a satiric look at Indian Society from the point of view of a young expatriate, Tara Banerjee Cartwright. Cartwright is caught between an American culture to which she is not yet accustomed and the culture of her native land from whose morals and values. She is estranged. *Wife*(1975) tells the story of Dimple, who moves to the United States with her husband and becomes torn between Indian and American cultures in . *Days and Night Calcutta*(1977), written with her husband Clark Blaise, is a journal of the couple's 1973 visit, have argued that culture is often used politically to India. The novel *Jasmine*(1989) based on Mukherjee's short story by the same name, the title character is widowed, which in her native Punjab means a life of sorrow and loneliness. She rejects this fate and leaves for America, where she undergoes a series of transformations. Her travels eventually lead her to a new identity as Jane with a common law husband and child in the farm country of Iowa. The novel ends with the protagonist abandoning her life again for a new existence in California.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee explores themes of identity and assimilation, as the lead character frequently reinvents herself in order to try to fit into American society. In the book, this is taken literally changing her name based on different situations. However, it is meant to stand for the way immigrants feel compelled to perform according to the norms of their new homeland. The frequent changes of name each correspond to a distinct period and person who had great influence in the lead characters life, for good or for bad. The book also explores themes of love and devotion, as *Jasmine* is torn between different men who she cares for in different ways, and is forced to choose whether to stay out of loyalty or follow her heart. Bharati Mukherjee shows that victory of a person lies in fulfilling one's dreams and realizing one's potential. *Jasmine* remains one of the most effective novels of Bharati Mukherjee. The novelist shows the process of acculturation in a new environment. The novel has multiple themes like the theme of expatriation, feminism, existentialism and multicultural consciousness. Bharati Mukherjee believes that in a globalized world, one must be opened to new ideas, new challenges and new experience both good as well as bad.

The novel *Jasmine* by the Indian American novelist Bharati Mukherjee from a predominantly feminist and post colonial perspective. It examines the predicament of the women immigrants in America, as reflected in the life of the woman protagonist in the novel. Life in America with its immigrant problems turns out to be chaotic. This paper also highlights the confusion of gender boundaries, and the historical implication of cross- cultural phenomena, as they emerge in Mukherjee's fiction. In *Jasmine* (1989) Mukherjee tries to unravel the complicated layers of cross-cultural confrontations through a series of adventures which the protagonist undertakes during her odyssey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa. The narrative shuffles between past and present,

between India of her early life and America of her present one. The past is Jyoti's childhood in the small village of Punjab, her marriage to Prakash who gave her the name Jasmine.

From the beginning, Jyoti rebels against her cultural inscriptions. In Indian culture, the lives of the people dance to the tunes of astrologers who mint money from them due to their naivety. When Jasmine is seven, an astrologer prophesies widowhood and exile for her. She slips and falls on hearing the astrologer's prophecy and emerges with a permanent star-shaped wound engraved on her forehead 'It's not a scar', she tells her sisters, 'it's my third eye'. She compares it to the third eye of Lord Shiva and says that through this third eye she will have a wider and true perspective of life. She repels credulousness and myths and argues against the fate as:

"Fate is fate. When Behula's bridegroom was fated to die of snakebite on their wedding night, did building a steel fortress prevent his death? A magic snake will penetrate solid walls when necessary". (*Jasmine 2*)

Change for the national-cultural identity thus begins with a changing individual, particularly one who cultivates her identity by moving across national borders. *Jasmine* chronicles the movement of an India to the United States. With each new location to which the protagonist migrates, she assumes a anew identity, one that adopts the apparent clichés of the American immigrant experience in order, ultimately, to subvert them. Jasmine moves from hapless illegal immigrant defined by vulnerability to the modern service of an au pair to an immigrant wife presented as orientalist trophy. But while each of these cliché roles seems to confine and define her as subordinate, Jasmine's mobility and transformation reveals a character who redefines herself by using the common tropes of American immigration as a platform from which to grow, not as an end result.

Born as Jyoti in the Punjab village of Hasnapur, Mukherjee's adventurous and spirited narrator kills a rabid dog, learns English, had-selects her husband, and seeks to defy the fate portended for her by a village astrologer. Her husband, Prakash Vih, a progressive man who shuns the strict traditions of India and plans to travel to the united States for university studies, names her Jasmine to distinguish her from such conventional roles as the dutiful Indian wife. Prakash uses his wife to completely reject Indian culture, for which he feels contempt. As Jasmine recalls, "He wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name" (*Jasmine 77*).

Jyoti stands as a rebellious character in the particular 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 "the cultural assumptions and practices that govern the social constructions of men, women and their social relations" (CSTP 240). 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" (*Jasmine 39*).

Instead, Jyoti likes “hearing the men talk” (*Jasmine* 59). 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.

The diasporic novel is entirely explicit in its reflection of hybridity of cultures. Positioned on the margins or interstices of two antagonistic national cultures, it claims to open up an in-between space of cultural ambivalence. As Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture*, such writing refuses to

Oppose the pedagogy of the imperialist noun to the inflectional

Appropriation of the native voice, preferring instead to go beyond such

Binaries of power in order to recognize our sense of the process of

Identification in the negotiation of cultural politics. (TLC 233)

The novel is a unique example of cross-cultural relationship. It is based on interaction of both the eastern and the western cultures. The exchange of ideas and values depicted in this novel is significant for better understanding of the both the cultures. Rudyard Kipling had observed that the East and the West are two different cultures and they will never meet each other. However, this has been reflected by current trends.

Conclusion

Bharat Mukherjee’s first novel *Jasmine* highlights her immigrant phase in America. During this phase, she proclaims and reveals her complete American identity. She throws away her hyphenated identity and totally denies Indian, Hence, *Jasmine* reflects the ebullience of expatriates and absorption into the American culture and proclaims Mukherjee’s total denial of immigrant condition. The major literary works of Bharati Mukherjee have highlighted the immigrant anxiety, their problems and the trauma they suffer due to cultural clash. All immigrants, including men and women, Asian and Europeans became the victims of these cultural conflicts. Transplantation of human beings from one cultural world to another is always painful and it is more painful to the female immigrants.

Bharati Mukherjee is a diasporic fiction writer who holds the migratory experience and has enriched expatriate literary writings. In fact, her experience as an expatriate forms the main source of her writings. Her novels also deals with the issue of identity, the notion of belonging, the feeling of alienation and footlessness, migrations, dislocations and relocations. Her novels are chiselled by her diasporic identity, immigrant experiences as well as her personal experience of being a woman. In her novels, Mukherjee represents India as a postcolonial writer who affiliates with the West and today. She is one of the most acclaimed authors of the postcolonial immigrant experience in America.

The woman writers of this period have captured this situation in their works. The theme of feminism finds expression in so many fictions of post independence women writers who have given voice to women's feelings and problems in their fictions. They have expressed the feelings of women and their struggle for existence in society. The study aims at exploring the cultural and psychological conflicts in the mind of Bharati Mukherjee's women immigrants while settling down in a foreign country in a new milieu their problems, anxieties, miserable plights in the light of present socio political scenario. Bharati Mukherjee weaves the different tensions defined by mass cultural expatriation and literary migration to show that the gap between pre and post-twentieth-century pioneers cannot be completely bridged yet can be made narrower through recognition of differences and appreciation of similarities in fellow human beings caught in the painful reality of assimilation and preservation of cultures in their quest for old and new roots.

The protagonists of Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* is neither typically Indian nor exotically Westernized. To them America is merely a land of opportunities, a place with financial gains, independence and freedom of movement. What so ever is there, the fact does not take away the diasporic experiences in any way. This process is the search for a voice remains mostly incomprehensible even to the protagonists. The unresolved dilemma of modern woman is a recurrent theme of the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, a widely acclaimed author and winner of the National Book critics Award. She considers her works, a celebration of her emotions that she brings out of her heart.

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