

Complex Trauma and Behavioral Theory in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*: A Study

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing the psychological trauma faced by Jyoti, the female protagonist and the search of her own self in the foreign land. Bharati Mukherjee through her diasporic novel *Jasmine* portrays the realistic problems faced by women in her own soil and in the alien soil. Cultural conflicts, complex trauma, identity crisis and metamorphosis are the aspects dealt in this thesis. Application of behaviorism in this article shows the transformation from Jyoti to Jane. She creates her own identity breaking out from a shell. Finding her root in the alien soil despite the complex trauma is the soul subject of this article.

Key words: Trauma, Identity crisis, Cultural conflict, Behaviorism, Alienation, Diaspora.

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian Canadian writer who is considered as one of the epitomes of diasporic literature. Her works show us the realistic problems, suppression, trauma and conflicts faced by the migrants. The autobiographical elements in her works bring to limelight the unexpected conflicts and complexes faced by the people. Finding the roots despite the cultural combat, oppression of women, misogynistic approach clearly depicts that she is a feminist diasporic writer. Bharati Mukherjee exposes the struggles of her female protagonists to blend into the alien world and the metamorphosis they undergo for the same in each of her novel. The theory of behaviourism applied here shows how her situation changes herself into a whole new person. Bharati Mukherjee through her works break many social taboos. Certain part of her works act as 'Satire', through which she brings out the problems in both the native and the alien soil.

The novel *Jasmine*, written by Bharati Mukherjee is one of her prominent diasporic works. This novel distinctly displays the cultural shock, conflicts, alienation, quest for identity, re-rooting one's self. The

plight of the Indian women in both her motherland and alien soil is exposed in this novel. Bharati Mukherjee is a first generation immigrant and she has smoothly portrayed the problems of the protagonist Jyoti. She uses the technique of 'Nested Story', usage of flashbacks have helped her to convey her nested plot in a better way. The psychological crunches and the misogynistic botheration has caused complex trauma to the protagonist. The life of Jyoti takes a turn after the death of her husband. She wanted to kill herself in her husband's dreamland [sati] but instead she killed her identity and evolved into a new person. She evolved from Jyoti, a normal suppressed Indian girl to Jasmine who wanted to fulfil her husband's dream to Kali who killed her rapist to Jane, a complete new American woman. She has embraced the foreign culture and attribute and has educed as a new person. She has self-identified and evolved as a better person and has also overcome alienation in the foreign soil. This journey from Jyoti to Jane has caused a lot of psychological disturbances and physical disturbances.

Complex Trauma

Cathy Caruth a professor of English who is specialized in comparative studies was the pioneer of trauma studies. She started the interdisciplinary of bringing the psychological trauma faced by the characters into literature. Complex trauma is caused by multiple events that build up pressure inside the person's heart for a longer time. The consecutive sufferings, suppression, harassment over the years would cause trauma in them.

Interdisciplinary, trauma has a close relationship with the other field such as psychology, sociology, history, war, politic, and significantly literature. Trauma as a new phenomenon makes an interdisciplinary role for itself. It starts a movement to illustrate an episode of changing; the path of suffering and pain continue to reach to a point of knowledge and understanding (Negin Heidarizadeh 2).

Right from her birth, Jasmine has faced a lot of traumatic incidents. Coming to know that her family decided to kill her when they found her out to be a girl child was the first dreadful incident she has faces. Though she was named Jyoti, 'light' she was not given the basic love and respect she deserved by her family. The misogynistic approach deprivation of equality in her family caused a hollow space in her. The death of her husband in front of her, sexual harassment and loss of her lover's leg are the major traumatic

incidents that she had faced. All these occurrences resulted in the change of her personality, feeling of detachment, guilt and isolation. All these are the symptoms of the complex trauma. The accumulation of all these incidents down the years, the suppression she faced, the misogynistic attitude of the society has caused an ample psychological effect and the chunking of all the events together has caused complex trauma. Half face is the symbolic representation of the problems and Jasmine kills him. "Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful" (*Jasmine* 171). Her own words showcase the difficulty she has gone through. All these incidents build up inside her and erupted like a volcano. Seeing a bomb blast in front and seeing her husband die in front of her has caused a tornado in her. This has caused a complex trauma in Jasmine.

Change in Identity

Identity crisis is one of the major themes of the novel *Jasmine*, written by Bharati Mukherjee. She had confusions about who she was and she was not accepted even in her own family. John B. Watson is considered as the founder and father of behaviourism theory. "Behaviourism, also known as behavioural psychology, is a theory of learning which states all behaviours are learned through interaction with the environment through a process called conditioning. Thus, behaviour is simply a response to environmental stimuli" (Behaviorist Approach). Behaviorism is a theory, which deals with how the external environment influences the character and the behavior of the person. In this novel *Jasmine*, the protagonist has changed her identity multiple times due the influence of the environment. Modification of the identity due to the consecutive external factors is portrayed throughout this novel. Every petty incident in her life has contributed to the metamorphosis from Jyoti to Jane.

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (*Jasmine* 127).

The quest for her identity started in her native soil and it took rapid growth in the alien soil too. Even though Jyoti wanted to create a new identity for herself, the cultural conflicts and other factors dominated

her so much. Jyoti who was a weak person evolved into Jasmine, when she married her husband. Her husband gave her the new name and changed her character several times which proves how the external situations made her change her identity. Jyoti was her and a new person was born. Jyoti who was not given equal importance was killed and Jasmine a new person with new character was born. “Jyoti, Jasmine. I shuttled between identities” (*Jasmine* 77). Her next change takes when she was brutally raped by Half face. This particular identity symbolizes goddess Kali. She slits her tongue and it is red like Kali’s tongue and she kills Half face. Then she changed to Jase, an American woman. “I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory” (*Jasmine* 165). She adopted the culture and the trends of the alien soil and changed herself into a new woman. “For every Jasmine the reliable caregiver there is a Jase, the prowling adventurer. I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces” (*Jasmine* 176). She wanted to discover her even more and her lover Bud gave her a new identity Jane. Thus every incident and environment has made her evolve into new persons.

Conclusion

This article gives a clear picture of how the continuous incidents in the protagonist’s life have traumatized her. The influence of the environment over her made her shift identities. Through the female protagonist, Bharati Mukherjee has brought to light the extreme difficulties, cultural conflicts, crisis and lack of belonging faced by the immigrants. The autobiographical elements she has used here, contribute to the deep understanding of the immigrant’s problem. The confusion about her own identity came to an end and she started living as Jane Ripplé mayor. She adopted the American culture which she could not even think of a few days back. She left a comfortable environment and struggled hard for her identity. From a woman who went illegally to America to perform Sati, to a full American woman who is concerned more about her own happiness, she found her true self. Despite the various traumatizing happenings and the conflicts between the society and her inner self, she has found her true identity. This process of self-identification and evolution had loads of dreadful experiences. Breaking all those she found her identity at the end. She was uprooted from her own soil and was struggling to get a new root in the alien soil.

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