

## Cross-cultural conflict in Bharati Mukherjee's "Jasmine" and "Wife"

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### Abstract

Bharathi Mukherjee is a strong and eminent Indian diasporic writer settled in U.S.A. She celebrates a different diasporic identity in her writings and tries to focus on cross cultural issues. She in her writings illustrates the fluidity of cultural boundaries, migration, ethnicity and globalization at the top of her literary agenda. In her novels she has beautifully portrayed the immigrant in a lovely land. In her novels "Jasmine" and "Wife" she presents journey of two young women in US under dissimilar circumstances. Though the protagonist goes through the worst experiences of her life, she is able to come through the obstacles and attains self-awareness and a new identity and overthrows her past life.

**Keywords:** bharathi mukherjee, "jasmine", "wife"

### 1. Introduction

Bharathi Mukherjee, born in 1940 in Calcutta, married a Canadian fellow-student, Clark Balise, at the University of Iowa, in 1963. She lived in Canada from 1966 to 1980. She became a naturalized Canadian, got Canadian citizenship and lived in Toronto and then in Montreal and held teaching positions at McGill University and Concordia University. She migrated to the U.S.A. in 1980 with her family and became a U.S.A. citizen in 1988.

In her novels *Jasmine* and *Wife*, Bharathi Mukherjee has shown a dual cultural shock. *Jasmine* and *Dimple* leave their respective countries in search of their dreams. This migration or "cultural transplant" leads to a crisis of identity and a final reconciliation to the choice. She has presented a fascinating study of the problem of a displaced person in America as well as India. *Jasmine* leaves India in search of the America Dream.

We are all socialized differently because we come from different cultural backgrounds and we grow up in different communities. But at the core of every culture remains the uploading of basic human values. A globalised culture has evolved and it must combat the world of heterogeneous societies who do not wish to leave aside their historical particulars which give them uniqueness, Bharati Mukherjee and many others are taking up issues like identity crisis, nationalism, alienation, marginalization, insider outsider, hegemonic. Power discourses in the fiction that they are writing today. In Mukherjee's both novels the role of memory in a process of change is often used by the writer in an effective way. It is through the eyes of the first generation settlers that the second generation learns about the homeland. Another way to look at the diasporic writing is to note the motifs of dislocation, homelessness, rootlessness and escape. The psychological and cultural experience of diaspora can be one of hybridity, exile, nostalgia, selective adaptation or cultural invention. It is a experience that is sought to be transmitted to reader though the diasporic literature, the diaspora writers are obsessed with search for identity and their writing displays a poetics of exile and displacement.

According to John Hortley, diasporic communities are groups of people that are distanced from their homeland as political or

economic migrants in search of work of refugees escaping war. The experiences of exile may be accompanied by a sense of belonging to the former homeland and a continued allegiance to that remembered culture while staying within the host country. As such, the diasporas can be defined as "heterogeneous cultures spatially separated from their place of origin yet living between the places". The stress of in betweenness in such cases has to be underlined here. This very characteristic has been brashly put forth by Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands*: sometimes we feel that we straddle two culture: at other times, that we fall between two stools.

Bharathi Mukherjee's *Wife* and *Jasmine* chronicle the journeys of two young women to the US for different reasons, under dissimilar circumstances. Both of them pass through torturous physical mental and emotional agony affecting their whole being to such an extent that they are driven to violence, *Jasmine* starts her life in the US with a murder, *Dimple* rounds up her stay, There is a striking semblance in spite of the wide difference between their temperaments and circumstances.

*Jasmine* journeys through different continents, as also through hunger, ill-treatment, violence, rape and murder but she is not frightened at any time since her mission, Her death-wish can be fulfilled only in the desired but alien new land. She is willing to make all compromises and adjustments; hence there are no deeply stirring situation. *Jasmine* hops from place to place and person to person trying to find her real place in life. From *Jyoti* to *Jamine*, to *Jase* and *Jane* may appear to be real transformation of the personality of the protagonist; from *Hasnapur* to *Jullundhur* to *Florida*, *Manhattan*, *Iowa* may appear to be moving from old world values to the brave new world. But the person we see at the end of the novel moving away with *Taylor*, is very much the same person we encounter at the earlier stages in the novel. The woman who surrendered to *Prakash* to be moulded according to his ideas is the person who wants to be shaped according to the American way of life, and secure a place as a legal wife an all-white American.

Her experience of having been raped by the Half-face does not leave any traumatic effect on her psyche and *Jasmine* seems to take it in her stride as an American evil only to be crushed and conquered by the Indian virtue through the symbolic *Kali* that she turns into. E.M. Forster's use of the hallucination of rape

and VasANJI's use of the imagined rape transform the characters and open up the new realities the protagonists must come to grips with, whereas Jasmine's a rape is not only margined to the theme of the novel, it does not only margined to the theme of the novel, it does not even reveal any significant or special aspect of American life. Rapes are being committed everywhere, here and there. One wonders what makes Jasmine to turn into Kali and kill only the Half-face since Jasmine the Jane states: which of us is the undetected murderer of the Half-face monster, which of us held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms. It may be considered as an inverted Caliban –miranda syndrome in a sense that the Indian (Balack) woman is raped by the white Caliban.... But Mukherjee just describes the incident and does not utilize it for any structural or artistic purpose.

In her second novel "Wife", the protagonist Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. This novel tells the story of Dimple, a seemingly docile young Bengali girl who, as any other normal girl, is full of dreams about her married life and so she eagerly and impatiently waits for marriage. She marries Amit Basu. She visualizes a new life for herself in America where Amit is expecting to immigrate. She is expected to play the role of an ideal Indian wife, stay at home and keep the house for the husband. Her frustration is built up gradually by the circumstances. She resents being wife in the Basu family and rebels against wifedom in many ways. One such way is here including a miscarriage by skipping herself free from pregnancy, which she views as a Basu's property even in her womb. But herself-identity is avoided by marriage. She aspires for self-recognition and dreams fulfilment. But Basu behaves in a different way. He want her to be docile and submissive. So Dimple hates Basu and his behaviour. He needs her only for sexual enjoyment. She feels it's a sort guilty. Finally in her mentally upset state, she kills Amit in act of self-liberation and eventually commits suicide.

An important concern of the post-colonial literature is related to place and displacement. The self may have eroded either because of "dislocation" or "cultural denigration" Beyond their historical and cultural differences, places, displacement, and a feature common to all post- colonial literature in English. Displacement frequently leads to alienation of vision and cisis in self-image.

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