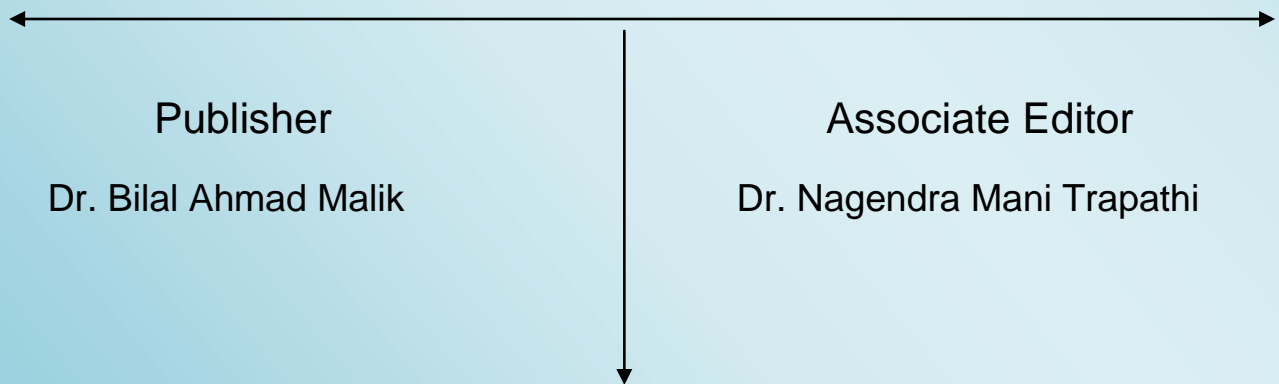


# North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

*North Asian International Research Journal of  
Social Science & Humanities*

**Chief Editor**

Dr Rama Singh



NAIRJC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

North Asian  
International  
Research Journal Consortium



## Welcome to NAIRJC

**ISSN NO: 2454 - 9827**

North Asian International Research Journal Social Science and Humanities is a research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi, Urdu all research papers submitted to the journal will be double-blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in Universities, Research Institutes Government and Industry with research interest in the general subjects

## Editorial Board

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| J.Anil Kumar<br>Head Geography University<br>of Thirvanathpuram                        | Sanjuket Das<br>Head Economics Samplpur University   | Adgaonkar Ganesh<br>Dept. of Commerce B.S.A.U,<br>Aruganbad  |
| Kiran Mishra<br>Dept. of English,Ranchi University,<br>Jharkhand                       | Somanath Reddy<br>Dept. of Social Work, Gulbarga<br>University.                                | Rajpal Choudhary<br>Dept. Govt. Engg. College Bikaner<br>Rajasthan                                 |
| R.D. Sharma<br>Head Commerce & Management Jammu<br>University                          | R.P. Pandday<br>Head Education Dr. C.V.Raman<br>University                                     | Moinuddin Khan<br>Dept. of Botany SinghaniyaUniversity<br>Rajasthan.                               |
| Manish Mishra<br>Dept. of Engg, United College Ald.UPTU<br>Lucknow                     | K.M Bhandarkar<br>Praful Patel College of Education, Gondia                                    | Ravi Kumar Pandey<br>Director, H.I.M.T, Allahabad  |
| Tihar Pandit<br>Dept. of Environmental Science,<br>University of Kashmir.              | Simnani<br>Dept. of Political Science, Govt. Degree<br>College Pulwama, University of Kashmir. | Ashok D. Wagh<br>Head PG. Dept. of Accountancy,<br>B.N.N.College, Bhiwandi, Thane,<br>Maharashtra. |
| Neelam Yaday<br>Head Exam. Mat.K..M .Patel College<br>Thakurli (E), Thane, Maharashtra | Nisar Hussain<br>Dept. of Medicine A.I. Medical College<br>(U.P) Kanpur University             | M.C.P. Singh<br>Head Information Technology Dr C.V.<br>Rama University                             |
| Ashak Hussain<br>Head Pol-Science G.B, PG College Ald.<br>Kanpur University            | Khagendra Nath Sethi<br>Head Dept. of History Sambalpur<br>University.                         | Rama Singh<br>Dept. of Political Science A.K.D<br>College, Ald.University of Allahabad             |

**Address: -North Asian International Research Journal Consortium (NAIRJC) 221 Gangoo, Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, India - 192301, Cell: 09086405302, 09906662570, Ph. No: 01933-212815, Email: [nairjc5@gmail.com](mailto:nairjc5@gmail.com) , [nairjc@nairjc.com](mailto:nairjc@nairjc.com) , [info@nairjc.com](mailto:info@nairjc.com) Website: [www.nairjc.com](http://www.nairjc.com)**

## BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*: RECASTING OF IDENTITY THROUGH RACIAL NEGOTIATIONS IN THE DOMINANT CULTURE

DR. RAJIB BHAUMIK\*

\*Asst Professor, Dept of English, Alipurduar College

### ABSTRACT

*Jasmine, the 1989-novel by Mukherjee, investigates, in an essential and searching way, the trauma and possibilities – following dislocations and uprooted identities. In the novel, the crucial role of migration, compulsive and intended, literal and emblematic, found in the female subjectivity of the young protagonist—initially named Jyoti Vijn – represents the dislocation and mutative progression within the scrambled structure of the protagonist's personal history. Transmigration and transplantation in postcolonial diasporic context, a major theme in most of Bharati Mukherjee's novels, have often to do with the memory, history or past that is subdued in nostalgia where their ethnicity and culture are submerged. In most of her writing, Mukherjee describes identity that is dislocated and disrupted by exile in the light of postcolonial 'otherness' and gender—a perspective that further questions fixed concept of identity and can also be seen as a means of linking the different ethnic poles of that identity, bringing into close contact cultures earlier considered utterly estranged.*

**[KEY WORDS:** *dislocation, ethnicity split structures, cross-cultural, assimilative code, margins, borders, space, transmigration, transplantation, otherness, gender.*]

*Jasmine, the 1989-novel by Mukherjee, investigates, in an essential and searching way, the trauma and possibilities – following dislocations and uprooted identities. In the novel, the crucial role of migration, compulsive and intended, literal and emblematic, found in the female subjectivity of the young protagonist—initially named Jyoti Vijn – represents the dislocation and mutative progression within the scrambled structure of the protagonist's personal history.*

Transmigration and transplantation in postcolonial diasporic context, a major theme in most of Bharati Mukherjee's novels, have often to do with the memory, history or past that is subdued in nostalgia where their ethnicity and culture are submerged. In most of her writing, Mukherjee describes identity that is dislocated and

disrupted by exile in the light of postcolonial ‘otherness’ and gender—a perspective that further questions fixed concept of identity and can also be seen as a means of linking the different ethnic poles of that identity, bringing into close contact cultures earlier considered utterly estranged.

The narrative structure of *Jasmine* is non linear, and tracks the protagonist’s memory from the narrative present of her life in Baden, Iowa, as the wife of an agricultural banker, back through her earlier existences as an Indian peasant girl, her advent as a young and vulnerable immigrant in America, and her transitional period headed towards assimilative merge. Each of these stages is represented by a name change. She starts out as ‘Jyoti’ of Hasnapur, is rechristened ‘Jasmine’ upon her arrival in America, is nicknamed ‘Jase’ by her employers in New York, and finally becomes the all-American ‘Jane’ in Iowa. The story depicts the ambivalence of self-fashioning by participating in the transgressive process of decolonizing the self. To quote Pushpa N.Parekh:

*The memory of Jasmine’s personal history and environment shapes and directs the reception of her present experiences and context and is often countered by the accruing of new memories of newer experiences. This double perspective of the shifts in time and space and their impact on the psyche of the immigrant woman can be explored through the tonal shifts with which the Jasmine-Jane protagonist concretizes her emotional an intellectual reality. Fear, anger, pain, bitterness, confusion, silence, irony, humour, as well as pathos underline her observations as she discovers for herself the undefined median between the preservation of the old World and the assimilation in to the new one.<sup>1</sup>*

The novel takes off with the astrologer’s prediction about Jyoti’s widowhood and exile. The seer foretells her future, pronouncing ‘my widowhood and exile [...] I was nothing, a speck in the solar system [...] I was helpless, doomed.’<sup>2</sup> Jasmine tries to go against the wheel of fortune repositioning the stars and she reaches out for a metamorphosis and transformation from a docile and meek Indian wife to an assertive independent woman who makes a journey of self discovery from a feudal condition to her migrancy and exile experiencing dislocations. The hard reality of her imperiled identity is negotiated by violence in the geometry of her entropic universe. After her marriage with Prakash her husband gives her a new name Jasmine. Her renaming is a sort of rechristening and a displacement from earlier role playing, similar to Dimple, addressed as ‘Nandini’ by her mother-in-law in *Wife*:

*He wanted to break down the Jyoti as I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name; Jasmine....Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities.*<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning, Jyoti rebels against her cultural inscriptions. Jasmine frantically moves to break the shackle of a jinxed future showing all signs of postcolonial dread of secondariness and tries to move away from the past at all costs, including the cost of a stable identity. Mukherjee is plainly disinterested in the preservation of cultures, the hallowing of tradition, obligations to the past; at least, she is not interested in the nostalgic aspects of such preservation. Rather, her current work forwards a distinction between exilic and immigrant *others* for whom attachments to personal and cultural pasts leave little room for peripheral significance. Such characters undergo personal transformation in their movements from culture to culture, changes that Mukherjee exemplifies in the strongest terms.

Mukherjee does not show any inertia or emotional weakness for the past, although she is never unrealistic to drop nostalgia as outdated software. Her works embrace and accept fission that must accompany cross-cultural revision and personal change. Jasmine says: 'There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake ourselves. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams.'<sup>4</sup> It is the willingness of Jasmine to murder her past self that enables her to actively advance into unknown but promising futures. The futures she propel herself toward, and even help to shape, are not guaranteed to be successful, but do have the potential for personal, material and spiritual success.

Thus Mukherjee's woman escapes from a childhood and adolescence, circumscribed by a feudal economy in Hasnapur to become Jasmine. The transformational myth becomes operative on her and we are shown how the trauma of displacement generates a feverish anxiety on her. The story of *Jasmine* is the story of a personality in motion, in quest of identity. The novel seems to define immigration as part of the disintegration of a homogeneous culture and resultant dislocations which are to be negotiated in a new geographical and economic compulsion. In the language of Samir Dayal 'The syntax of her self-articulation is a parable for social transformation of the Indian postcolonial.'<sup>5</sup>

Jasmine goes through a whole process of deracination, displacement and transformation; she wishes to settle down, a desire not in contrary to her continuous flaking of skin and continuous transformation. She is both complicit and resistant to the hegemonic notion of immigrant identity. Jasmine's self-propelled mission is thus

inflected with some existential angst, she is at the periphery and in a situation from where she attempts to re-direct. Her translational transformation is a result of continual negotiations between her past and her future; her indefinite projected future self can never fully escape her past inscriptions. For Jasmine, history has the perpetual sway on the present and the future. History also has certain impositions creating fissures and ruptures and, as a result, the self becomes plural and conflicting. Her survival depends amid ambiguities out of rootlessness and upon a strategy of negotiated journey of self discovery and transformation. According to Alam the character of Jasmine has been fashioned to show Mukherjee's belief in the 'necessity of inventing and re-inventing one's self by going beyond what is given and by transcending one's origin.'<sup>6</sup>

In Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, such sense of homelessness and rootlessness is hard-edged steadily with each occurrence in the New World. The writer directs her protagonist from the *origin* and *location* of her birth to the land of her exile. There is no sequential development of her journey; there is no easy changeover of identity, nor any tame acceptance of the time. Instead, Mukherjee's diasporic women characters struggle hard to occupy and absorb the translational space, they find in the location of their choice. Most of her fictions stress the dichotomy of growing up in two cultures. In the practice of an exodus and migration there is an unspoken ambiguity; the sufferings of dislocation are tinged with the hope of arrival and the opening of new locations.

The novel replicates Mukherjee's emancipator recasting of identity through racial negotiations in the dominant culture. Jasmine undergoes a series of turbulence in search of a home. Jyoti is educated over the protests of her traditional father, and in time marries a modern Indian husband, Prakash. Jyoti is re-named Jasmine by her husband. She undergoes major identity shifts, from feudal Hasnapur to urban Jullundhar. She shifts from her traditional cultural desire to have children early, a wish that is thwarted by Prakash's contempt: 'We aren't going to spawn! We aren't ignorant peasants!'<sup>7</sup> She develops an inner trauma out of the displacement: 'Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities,' she says, and '[...] I felt suspended between worlds.'<sup>8</sup> There is a horrible turnaround of the events; a turbulence of situation destroys her dream. Prakash is killed, by a bomb meant for Jasmine and hidden in a portable radio by Sikh terrorists. Jasmine vows to complete Prakash's dream, to go to his intended school in Tampa, Florida and sacrifice herself on the campus. She manages to sneak into America using forged passport papers.

There she is raped by her smuggler, after which she kills him and relieves herself from her earlier plans. Thus the first shock of the location outside her home is not cultural but physical. She arrives in America and that very moment she is compelled to commit murder for self-defence. The purity about the body is gone and she

learns that body is just a covering which can be done away with when tainted and polluted- 'My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn debts and sins all paid for.'<sup>9</sup> Abandoning the past like a baggage she feels relieved and reborn: 'With the first streaks of dawn, my first full American day, I walked out the front drive of the motel to the highway and began my journey travelling light.'<sup>10</sup>

She is befriended by an American woman, Lillian, who helps her learn American ways she calls her 'Jazzy.' Mrs. Gordon supports and helps her to recuperate and transforms her totally. Within a week Jasmine sheds off her traditional shyness and dresses up on a jazzy T-shirt, skin-tight cords and snickers. With the change in clothes comes the change in the culture, so much so that the native traits of her persona begin to wane. With this change she moves from being a 'visible minority to being just another immigrant.'<sup>11</sup> This is another point of her dislocation before she plunges in to the continuity of translation and negotiation.

She moves to New York, gets attached to Prakash's old professor Devinder Vadhera and feels desperately that she has moved back to Hasnapur. She gets a green card and an au pair position in Manhattan. This allows her to complete her Americanization and gradually she gets used to the mainstream American practices by becoming an integral part of an American family and also by learning how to consume, which she does happily. But she finds here the life lived by Indians astringent, and prefers to work under Taylor Hayes, a Columbian Physicist, and Wylie Hayes, an editor in publishing firms, and their adopted daughter Duff. In the two years Jasmine is with them, the Hayeses separate and Taylor falls in love with her. As the Hayeses treated her as a part of their family, she feels that she had landed and was getting rooted.<sup>12</sup>

Even when the Hayeses separate, and Jasmine is reminded<sup>13</sup> of the essential fluidity of America,<sup>13</sup> she is able to take the breakup of the family in stride, although she concedes that the hardest lesson of all she had to learn about America was that in this country 'nothing last.'<sup>14</sup> The hegemonies that exist at home provide her with a useful perspective on the predatory effects of global governance. She internalizes the transformation myths and understands its role to survive in the New World. However, her husband's killer appears in New York as well, and she flees to Iowa, where she marries Bud, a rural banker, becomes Jane Ripplemeyer, and adopts a Vietnamese refugee son, Du.

The novel closes as Taylor, her now-divorced former employer in Manhattan, asks her to come with him and his daughter to California, where Du has already gone. Pregnant from her time with Bud, she leaves him to be with Taylor in California. This is the simple story outline of the novel, but its unifying theme is

Jyoti/Jasmine/Jane's mutability, her adaptation to conditions, expressed as a transformation from inert, traditional object propelled by fate to energetic, modern, cross-cultural and assimilated subject.

In *Jasmine* the woman narrator is in search of identity through diasporic transformation and mongrelization of self. Measured at the axis where a multiple displacements are negotiated, James Gleick's *Chaos*, quoted as an epigraph in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, inducts the reader into the world of the woman protagonist- not rounded, not smooth, scabrous. It is the predicament of the pitted and broken up, the twisted, tangled and intertwined.<sup>15</sup>

## REFERENCES

- Pushpa N.Parekh. "Telling her Tale: Narrative Voice and Gender Roles in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Emmanuel S.Nelson, New York: Garland, 1993.p.119.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,p.3-4.
- <sup>3</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Jasmine*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1990.p.77.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 25.
- <sup>5</sup> Samir Dayal. "Creating, Preserving, Destroying: Violence in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Emmanuel S.Nelson, New York: Garland, 1993.p. 66.
- <sup>6</sup> Fakrul Alam. *Bharati Mukherjee: Criticism and Interpretation*. New York: Twayne's United States Author's Series. 1996. P.109.
- <sup>7</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Jasmine op.cit.*, p.77.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76-77.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Darkness*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 1990. p.2.
- <sup>12</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Jasmine. op.cit.* p.179.
- <sup>13</sup> Fakrul Alam. *Bharati Mukherjee: Criticism and Interpretation. op.cit.*, p.107.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.181.
- <sup>15</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Jasmine op.cit.*, Epigraph.



## Publish Research Article

Dear Sir/Mam,

We invite unpublished Research Paper, Summary of Research Project, Theses, Books and Book Review for publication.

**Address:- North Asian International Research Journal Consortium (NAIRJC) 221, Gangoo Pulwama - 192301**

**Jammu & Kashmir, India**

**Cell: 09086405302, 09906662570,**

**Ph No: 01933212815**

**Email: [\\_nairjc5@gmail.com](mailto:_nairjc5@gmail.com), [nairjc@nairjc.com](mailto:nairjc@nairjc.com), [info@nairjc.com](mailto:info@nairjc.com)**

**Website: [www.nairjc.com](http://www.nairjc.com)**

