

**NEUROTIC ISSUES OF ALIEN CULTURE IN BHARATI  
MUKHERJEE'S *WIFE AND JASMINE***

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Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most fabulous writers of the Asian immigrants experience in America. Her writings are predominantly influenced by the numerous displacements of her personal biography. In her fictional writings, she has given much emphasis on the lives of women who migrate from India to America. She has become the champion in depicting the predicament of those Indian women who migrate to new locations and confront with the problems of immigration.

Mukherjee, an exponent of expatriate writing, is originally an Indian settled in America. She takes up the life of the Indian immigrants in the USA as the subject-matter of most of her novels. There she tries to vivify the image of those women who have tried to assimilate the alien culture and has tried to accept the changed identity, over-throwing the Indian culture heritage in which they took their first breath. What is most important in them is their spirit with which they overthrow their old culture and adjust themselves with the surroundings. The psyche of an immigrant is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between two socio-culture environments, between the feeling of the rootlessness and nostalgia.

When a person visits the unknown land, he is an outsider and there he has to struggle a lot for his survival. Conquering the new feeling of nostalgia, he carves out a new territory and wraps himself totally with the lure of the west. He recreates himself into a new personality and forms emotional ties with the place he lives in. This discovery of a new self makes him to forget his own native culture. On his return to his native land he finds that his native taste and touch have turned alien to him. His mind is again torn apart between the culture clash of two environments and he is forced to fight with his split personality.

The word culture makes life worth living as described by T. S. Eliot and to N. A. Nikam culture is a quest for good but it is not good if the quest is not a free choice. Culture, whether, it

is Oriental or Occidental, plays an important role in the novels of Mukherjee. An inherent desire to take cultural tensions finely defines her creative use remarkably manifested in all her novels. The conflict of the Occidental and Oriental cultures and their impact in the lives of the protagonists are expressed beautifully in her novels. Her women characters confront a multicultural society in their immigration and evolution.

In the concerned study Mukherjee has given emphasis on her women characters mainly on their struggle for identity and mental trauma due to cross-cultural dilemma resulted in /final emergence as self-assertive individuals free from the bondages imposed by relationships /of the past in her novels. She chose women as her protagonist rather than male members in her/ novel. The India- born writer Mukherjee is one of the most widely known immigrant writers of America. Her novel truly reflects the temperament and mood of the present American society as experienced by immigrants in America. One of the most significant themes of modern literature is the depiction of cross-culture crisis, a subject which has assumed a great significance in the present world of globalization. In an interview, Mukherjee clearly states her aim in her writings:

The portrayal of different problems faced by her women characters in the novels, give us the idea that how a woman can become so strong for the survival. The only thing is the point of realization of her self-struggle. By comparing the themes of the novels it was found that there is a trend of delicate change in the thematic patterns. Cultural alienation is a world phenomenon today. The tremendous difference between two ways of life, leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be called culture shock. When a person leaves his own culture and enters another, his old values come into conflict with the new ones he finds.

In the novel *Wife* the novelist has portrayed the problems arises due to cross-cultural confrontation of her protagonist, Dimple, to settle down in abroad with her husband with high expectation of happiness. Being brought up in a passive and dependent Indian cultural society she had not enough courage and inner strength to adjust with the fear and challenges of immigration that ultimately lead to the way of her tragedy. Like the Western women, she did seek her freedom but the way she chose for her freedom was not the right way. She killed her unborn child and her husband to free her-self from all bondages but it was a moral and cultural suicide. Culture, whether, it is Oriental or Occidental, never gives permission to anyone to break its positive norms and systems to do anything in the name of freedom.

Mukherjee's *Wife* falls into the category of the modern novel as it presents an intense inner world of neurotic and solipsistic individual using symbols as centering nodes. Instead of trying to combine the freedom of the individual with tolerance for fellow- beings, Mukherjee chooses to glorify the alienated individual. Rootlessness and unreal existence are the main concerns of this expatriate novelist who has set out to make a deliberate distortion of Indian womanhood. Her women characters are tantalized by the possibility of passion, which they mistake for love and self-expression, which appears to be a free land, a veritable dream-land for all Indian girls.

The novel *Wife* stands out as a unique fictional work by virtue of its insightful probing into its heroine's psyche and its indubitable technical excellence. *Wife* is the simple story of Amit and his wife Dimple, newly married Bengali immigrants to the USA. Dimple's ill-concealed sad-masochistic compulsion is soon precipitated by the violence-ridden and individualistic American life and culminates in her killing of her husband. This psychic development in Dimple has been variously but uncritically viewed as her desperate effort to

forgot her Indian roots necessitated by the demands of American life and as her assertion of independence from her overbearing husband. She dreams a different kind of life and fantasized about young men as “With mustaches, deemed in spotless white, peering into opened skills”(1).

In the final scene of the novel, she kills her husband with kitchen knife. This is an ultimate gesture of fragmentation and deprecation. Being immigrant women she feels alien, powerless and helpless and becomes a victim of culture shock. In fact the novel explores the psychological trauma of alienated immigrant women who is doubly displaced both from her family and her nation. Thus this final act of Dimple shows her complete transformation from subjugation to liberation. She lived in India; she would have either reconciled to her frustration or ended up. It's all because of the culture that she stabbed him. It was the American notion of freedom which makes her acts as a rebel against the conservativeness of her dominating husbands and helps her get rid of all the predicaments that lie as obstacles in the way of her desired life. She evolves inwardly from an obedient, submissive and typical Indian wife into a psychic murderer in order to attain freedom.

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* can be divided into three parts. In the first part, the focus is on narrating the situation of immigrant who is in the process of immigration or settling down and in the second part the heroines are in the process of proving their identity. In third part the protagonist is invariably given to making love with a partner of the opposite sex who is rooted in the American soil. *Jasmine* is the story of immigrant from the Third world to the *Jasmine* is the story of immigrant from the Third World to the United States who has been uprooted and re-rooted in alien soil. The main protagonist of the novel is Jasmine. Her family moves from Lahore, where they have aristocratic connection to Hasnapura. Here they have to lead life of simple peasants. Jyoti is considered as the most beautiful and intelligent in her family. Her life as happens in patriarchal societies is controlled and dominated by her father and brothers, village girl are like cattle, whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go. Jyoti is the fifth daughter, seventh of nine children, Jyoti's worries mother wants to kill her in order to spare her pain of bride without dowry and diminish her future distress for a happy life. Although the killing is violent, for Jyoti belonging to poor family it symbolizes relief from would be restraints and afflictions.

Thus in the beginning itself the novelist throws light on patriarchal violence towards women. The political disputes in the country, such as the partition riots and the rebel movements which affects Jasmine's family also depict the violence. Jasmine is very different from other women protagonists and her reason for emigrating and her experiences too are very different. Moving to the US as an illegal immigrant with forged papers with a few knowledge of American culture and milieu, her entry into the US becomes dangerous and pitiful. She has been raped by the captain of the ship.

Jasmine is very different from other women protagonists and her reason for emigrating and her experiences too are very different. Moving to the US as an illegal immigrant with forged papers with a few knowledge of American culture and milieu, her entry into the US becomes dangerous and pitiful. She has been raped by the captain of the ship. She becomes Day Mummy to Duff, fits in easily into the vacant slot left by Wylie in Taylor's life. She has to run away from him fearing an attack by Sukhi, her husband's assassinator. She even carries Bud's child without being married to him. Jasmine's experiences are as varied as the vast American subcontinent which she traverses.

It is quite obvious that for Jasmine it is her willingness to accept the new culture that makes the process of acculturation easy. She feels the culture shock and feeling of novelty that all immigrants have to face. It is quite obvious that for Jasmine it is her willingness to accept the new culture that makes the process of acculturation easy. She feels the culture shock and feeling of novelty that all immigrants have to face. A perfect balance between tradition and modernity can be seen through the character of Jasmine. She retains her values while she keeps changing her identity and keeps pace with the American life. Her motivating force is to prove astrologer's prediction of widowhood false. Every time she changes her identity. She is reborn in her rebirth. She refuses to be idle and lives a life of sacrifice but

The novel *Jasmine* ends with a positive note with the hope of new dawn. The novel depicts the permanent mark carved on the psyche of women by traditions, norms and conventions of the male-dominated society which prohibits them from exhibiting their true self. The mode and style of their development inculcates in them submissiveness, silence and passiveness which holds a strong hold on their psyche. Even modern, educated women consciously drape themselves with these traits and find themselves in a fix. Thus Mukherjee conveys the message that the modern Indian women should learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. The novel comes to an end with a note of compromise rather than revenge which is the basic attribute of Indian feminism. The end shows the positive acceptance of protagonist after facing worst condition boldly. Ultimately she has adjusted herself in alien world. Its plot is quite sentimental. And this novel is another example of the stream of consciousness novels that every small thought can emerge at any time when the character gets to compare the past events with the present time of being specially located in India and America.

Mukherjee's women are different in the respect of extra marital relationship. They prefer to western society and attitudes. Dimple's mild flirtation with Milt is merely another half-hearted attempt of western life style. To Jasmine, the relationship with each man is important during the course of that relationship. She remains fully faithful to Bud and Taylor during her relationship with them. Her relationship with both of them does not seem to be momentary extra marital relationship. At last, she breaks her relationship with Bud and prefers to live with Taylor because of her fascination towards America

The immigrant writers in America can be divided into two categories. Firstly the willing immigrant writers who settled in America from Europe and Asia and who have made it their home. The second category consists of the unwilling immigrant writers with African origin whose forefathers are brought to America in some slave ship. Dimple and Jasmine, the female protagonists of Mukherjee's *wife* and *Jasmine* too are faced with the problem of the loss of culture and both of them are endeavoring to assume a new identity in the US. Do they too find the loss of old culture an exhilarating experience? Are they thrilled at the prospect of giving up their old identity and assuming a new one? Does the society which is free from the shackles of caste, gender and family offer them the desired freedom? Mukherjee's *Wife* and *Jasmine* chronicle the journeys of two young women to the US different reason, 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 with a murder.

In Mukherjee's novels like *Wife* and *Jasmine*, her women protagonists alter in the wake of a physical move from India to new culture. Dimple and Jasmine move from India to America

either voluntarily or by force. With each transformation, a new name is associated with the characters, Dimple in the novel *Wife* and Jyoti, Jasmine, Jane or Jase in the *Jasmine*. Basically her protagonists are diverse bunch of Hindu feminism. Not a single character can be defined on a traditional pattern of set rules. Each and every character seems to be an embodiment of feminism. Them apart from each other and contribute to the variety of protagonists in her novels.

Depression is a serious mental ailment which has been depicted with great skill by the novelist. Thus Mukherjee has effectively portrayed the breakdown of an Indian woman's psyche in America and also how the cultural-shock turns her into a neurotic. In other words, misguided Americanization brings out the destruction of morality and one has to guard against it. In a patriarchal society, women undergo suppression and oppression. In the case of urban women, it is less as most of them are educated and employed. Whereas the condition of rural women is worse as they find themselves still in the shackles of the conventional society. This situation will change when men understand the importance of women and their role in uplifting the society.

Mukherjee asserts that in an age of diasporas one's biological identity (parentage, caste and creed) may not be one's real identity as emigration brings changes, physical and psychological both. Her writings contain the split between desire and reason, dependent security and autonomy, social and psyche identity. She believes in the present not in the past for it will shape her future. She realizes that her transformation is a two – way process because it affects both the individual as well as the national cultural identity. While other writer of migration write of new place with the sense of loss and erosion of original cultural, Mukherjee writes empathetically of gain and arrival to a new place. It is just a question of attitude and instinct for survival. The fact is that her women have seen not as victims of oppression, as passive spectators of the drama of history, but as having influence and a history of their own and provide a firm platform for studying the progression of new colonial Indian women from feminine to the female.

Through her writing Mukherjee intends to ascertain the fact that all are individual even though each belongs to ethnic origin. Her emphasis on the way human nature works. She writes psyche violence and effect on the masses. While physically she moves from Canada to America her novels shift in theme from pessimism to optimism, from racism to homelessness to a celebration of assimilations to nationalism. In the concerned study Mukherjee has given emphasis on her women characters mainly on their struggle for identity and mental trauma due to cross-cultural dilemma results in final emergence as self-assertive individuals free from the bondages imposed by relationships of the past in her novels. She chose women as her protagonist rather than male members in her novels. As a researcher I have examined the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and most of her women characters desire to migrate to USA with the expectation that a foreign land would provide them the liberty to create their new identity which they could not achieve in their native land for the invisible chains of typical conservative society. The present study is a close examination of the two novels of Bharati Mukherjee, with a view of analyzing the elements of culture and tradition in the wider sense of Diasporic consciousness.



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