



## MANIFESTATIONS OF DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMATION IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S JASMINE

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, the researcher has tried to bring out how Bharati Mukerjee's novel "Jasmine" uses the concepts of identification and metamorphosis to delve into diasporic expressions. Recent "Diaspora Writing" in postcolonial studies has explored themes of exclusion, resistance, racism, ethnicity, adaptability, and autonomy. Women's difficulties are central to Bharati Mukherjee's novel "Jasmine," which delves into cultural crises and the quest for self-identity. The ways in which characters in this book undergo a metamorphosis of their identities are much more analogous to diasporic dreams. Everyday struggles take a back seat to her quest for self-discovery and an appreciation of her American heritage throughout the story. 'Jasmine' exemplifies Bharati Mukherjee's position as a 'voice' of expatriate immigrant sensibility and the unresolved dilemma of modern women. Through the protagonist's quest for identity and metamorphosis, "Identity and Transformation: Diaspora Manifestations in Bharati Mukherjees' Jasmine" investigates how the author presents the experience of diaspora in the novel.

**Keywords:** Americanness, Diaspora, Gender, Independence, Revolt and Transformation, Quest for Identity.

## Introduction

This article examines how diasporic visions and major post-colonial issues like metamorphosis and identity are expressed in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. The Greek term *diasperien*, from which the English word "diaspora" is derived, means "to sow or spread seeds." Nowadays, "global nomad" is used "to denote a more comprehensive sense of displacement, as well as a challenge to the bounds of established borders," as stated by Wikipedia (Mitchell, 1997, p.259). Historically, the name "Diaspora" has represented Jewish settlement in different parts of the world, but it initially referred to Jews who resided outside of their native nation.

Mukherjee has stated that she identifies more with the American writer community than with the Indian diaspora. "I consider myself an American writer, and that has been my big battle: to get to realize that my roots as a writer are no longer, if they ever were, among Indian writers, but that I am writing about the territory, about the feelings, of a new kind of pioneer here in America," she told Amanda Meer in a 1989 interview. This distinction between immigrant and expatriate writing is probably something I am the first Asian immigrant to make. Before this, the vast majority of India's published authors

identified as Indian and drew their creative energy from India. India has been a place of refuge and provision. "Those are lovely roots, but my roots and feelings now reside in North America" (Amanda Meer, 1989). Bharati Mukherjee is a renowned author from the Indian diaspora who has risen to popularity in a relatively short period. She has been called a "voice" for the experiences of foreigners and newcomers (Nagendra Kumar, p. 14). Award-winning novelist Bharati Mukherjee sees her work as a celebration of the feelings she conveys in her writing. In many of her works, she discusses the ongoing problem that modern women face.

"If you have to wonder, if you keep waiting for signals, if you wait relinquishing tiny parts of unwilling self every year, clutching the trinkets of an ever-retreating past you'll never belong, anywhere," Mukherjee says in the introduction to her book *Darkness*, about her experiences as a South Asian immigrant. I've allied myself with a shadowy group of semi-assimilated Indians who maintain sentimental ties to their homeland but have no interest in really moving back there. She writes, "For me, there is a trend away from the aloofness of expatriation and towards the exuberance of immigration" (*Darkness*, p.3). Her attitude changed drastically after she moved to the United States.



“I switched between personalities” (p.77) Jasmine’s dual identities represent her dual worlds, India and the United States, and her struggle for independence begins when she arrives in the United States.

“I see myself as an American author in the tradition of previous American authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island” (Carb, *The Massachusetts Review* 29.4: 650). Gupta’s vivid portrayal of Jasmine, which highlighted two opposing cultures and the concept of “New Woman,” was described by Carb as “a writer from the Third World, I left India by choice to dwell in the United States.”

### **Identity Change and Diasporic Representation**

The novel’s female protagonist is born in India and moves to the United States, where she undergoes several transformations that beautifully capture Bharati Mukherjee’s diasporic ambitions of switching identities. Jasmine knows firsthand the pain experienced by people who have been uprooted from their homes, like Jyoti, who was forced to leave his luxurious Lahore home for a life of abject poverty in the remote Punjab village of Hasnapur during the partition

Jasmine, the novel’s female protagonist, describes herself as “the fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children”

(p.39), reflecting the attitude of many people in many regions towards a girl child and the belief that having a girl child is a sin for a woman.

Mukherjee’s depiction of identity transition appears to mirror the diasporic qualities in Jasmine’s marriage with Prakash, which led to a sudden shift in her mindset. When Jasmine moves to Jalandhar from Hasnapur after getting married to Prakash, she immediately becomes a target of male dominance. The life of Jyoti-Jasmine-Jase-Jane has been full of transitions. She had the fortitude to overcome every challenge she encountered. She continues, describing her ‘newness’ in Jalandhar, which began with her name change to Jasmine, saying, “You are little and sweet and heady, my Jasmine.” “Your fragrance will energize the entire planet” (p.77). Liberal and well-educated Prakash “trashes some customs,” and Jasmine follows his lead by bucking the traditional role of a daughter-in-law by not moving in with her in-laws. On page 77, Jyoti says, “I shuttled between Jyoti and Jasmine.” The Khalsa terrorist Sukkhi calls Jasmine and other women like her “prostitutes! Whores!” (Dayal, p. 69) and is violently opposed to the “peaceful transition to modernity” (Dayal, p. 69).

Jasmine’s diasporic dreams are realized with the help of Mukherjee’s imaginative depiction of two episodes from her

childhood in Hasnapur. The first involves shooting a crazed dog that was charging at her, and the second involves getting a star-shaped cut on her forehead while trying to outrun an astrologer who had predicted her untimely death. This incision left a permanent scar on her brow, which she referred to as her “third eye.” I yelled, “It’s not a scar, it’s my third eye!” This shows that the astrologer’s words have stayed with her even after she has abandoned her Indian heritage and established herself in America, serving as a symbol of the identity shift that has occurred in her life. Her desire to study English is misunderstood as a “want of the world” (p.68). “Mukherjee’s special skill is a montage, a jump out movement that develops a rapport with the first person narrator and distance from everyone else, thereby highlighting with great economy the immigrant’s isolation, a by-product of American potential,” writes Melanie Kaye (Melanie Kaye). There is no negative alienation from her land in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, but rather a rich tapestry of sociocultural experiences that link to a complex negotiating process. *Jasmine* can’t ignore the alien identity’s beckoning.

### **How Others See the Current American Crisis**

Bharati Mukherjee sees the *Jasmine* image as symbolic of what it means to be

an American. The term “diaspora” is often used to describe people who have relocated from their original homeland to another area. *Jasmine*’s desire to control her destiny and use it as a springboard for personal development is naive. Mukherjee does a fantastic job of making America seem like a place of promise and hope for *Jasmine* in this story. “Even though the protagonist of *Jasmine* confronts numerous types of violence in the United States, the country provides her something that India cannot, which is the freedom to remake herself,” Inderpal Grewal states (Grewal, p. It was portrayed as Fate’s harsh thwarting of *Jasmine* and *Prakash*’s diasporic hopes when *Jasmine* tried to enter America with a falsified passport to commit ‘sutti’ on American soil, where *Prakash* had been admitted as a student. If it had simply been a case of giving up on life, she may have committed herself to Hasnapur. Her fiery character needed an idealistic outlet, and ‘sutti’ was all she could think of to do at the moment. Their undeniable chemistry was tested by her perilous journey to the other side of the world.

Viewers gain diasporic perspectives on American culture through *Jasmine*’s portrayal. “Even if they never leave their town in Punjab, some people were destined to be Americans,” Davidar says. In their hearts, they will always be Americans. “I wanted to become a person they believed



they saw: witty, bright, polished, and loving,” she says of her ability to adapt in New York. Not a criminal, a murderer, a widow, a victim of sexual assault, a person living in poverty, or a person who is terrified of the dark. With her passionate appreciation of the exhilarating, distinctive American dedication to the individuality of the person, Bharati Mukherjee vividly describes social and cultural themes in *Jasmine*. Her ability to creatively focus on one or both of her heroines’ identity transitions is beautifully displayed here. *Jasmine*’s life transitions and other factors indeed influence women’s social and cultural aspects in ways that vary from place to place. It’s “the battle between my fate and my will,” *Jasmine* says (p.12). Her journey through life was distinguished by the dismantling of geographical, cultural, and historical barriers. Her transition from Hasnapur culture to American civility has been presented masterfully with transnational elements, illustrating an ebb and flow of ‘diasporic predicaments.’

The decision *Jasmine* made to fight against suicide rather than take her own life has had far-reaching effects on her life. Her desire to oppose the mindless powers of fate drives her to leave India, but her first experience in the United States is a horrific one: upon her arrival, Half Face raped her in a hotel room at the Flamingo Court. After Half-Face has raped her, she says, “I

didn’t feel the passionate embrace of Lord Yama that could turn a kerosene flame into a lover’s caress,” but she holds back because she believes her duty isn’t done. She then brutally murders Half-Face, leaving blood splatters all over the room and even on her own body. They have “no one to call, no one to bother us,” she says. It looked like an abattoir and it was “just me and the man who had raped me, the man I had slain.” There would be plenty of opportunities to die... I cut it open with my mouth” (P.117-118). “I couldn’t allow my humiliation to get in the way of my purpose” (p.119). “Blood had filled my mouth.” It was on my chin that I felt it” (p.118). This figurative description shows the global incarnation of the Indian goddess Kali, who takes on human form to combat the demons.

### **Symbolic Representation of an Indian Goddess**

“*Jyoti* does not carry a sense of regret for a lost home when *Jasmine*, the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee’s eponymous novel, comes to the United States as an illegal immigrant. *Jasmine* is a symbol of the Indian Goddess Kali, and her harrowing ordeal symbolizes double tyranny and abuse, particularly for female immigrants. Mukherjee “has created a marvelous weave of diaspora sensibility one that seeks out new cultural experiences

and positions with zeal” (Nayar.p177). The setting of the Florida marshes, which she describes as “Eden’s waste: plastic bottles, floating oranges, boards, white and green plastic bottle bags knotted tight” (p.107), seems fitting for the tragedy that awaits her.

Bharati Mukherjee effectively uses two iconic images to carry out the slaughter: the destruction and strength of the Goddess Kali, and a broken pitcher in which “there are no insides and outsides when a clay pitcher breaks since the air inner is the same as the air exterior” (P.120-121). Jasmine is forced to face the harsh reality of American culture, which teaches her that nothing lasts.

Soon after, Jasmine made a life-changing connection with Lilian Gordon. Mrs. Gordon educated her, released her from her old memories, and ignited her drive to live. “Let the past make you apprehensive, by all means,” she told Jasmine. However, do not allow it to distort you” (p.131). Jasmine benefited both physically and psychologically from her advice. The symbolic image of her burning her traditional bridal robes and accepting a new American life pattern illustrates cultural diversity that varies by location, clearly highlighting transnational components. Jasmine arranges to meet with Professor Vadhera, the man responsible for Prakash’s expulsion from an engineering college. “If we could just get away from

India, then all fates would be cancelled,” she says, aware that the professor makes a living not by teaching but by trading in human hair, and irritated by the meticulously guarded ‘ethnicity’ in that household, including the sternness of widowhood she is expected to observe. We’d start with new fortunes and stars. We were free to say or do whatever we wanted. We’ll be on the other side of the world, out of God’s sight” (p.89). Because Jasmine’s consciousness is permanently imprinted, she cannot tolerate being in the company of people who focus solely on themselves. This indicates that she is on the path to self-actualization and that her recent adoption of an American worldview has paved the way for this to occur.

In this piece, Bharati Mukherjee discusses the transient nature of American life, because nothing, not even relationships, is guaranteed to survive forever. “Nothing lasts in America,” she says. That’s obvious to me now, but at the time it was the hardest thing I’d ever had to learn. The monuments were constructed of plastic, and the agreements had already been broken when we arrived to learn, adapt, and contribute. Nothing is so dreadful or majestic that it cannot eventually fall” (p. 181).

### **Aspirations of Exiles: Pride in American Exceptionalism**



Lillian Gordon's presence in Jasmine's life is the impetus for her eventual transformation. This link stands out for its positive impact and bright outlook on her future. Initially, Jasmine's transition names were Jyoti, Jasmine for Prakash, Jase for Taylor, and Jane for Bud. The fact that Jasmine has left Bud's life is not a frivolous act. "The moment I've dreamed of a thousand times finally arrives," she writes (p. 237). She continues, "I'm not choosing between two men." "I'm torn between the promise of America and the duties of the old world" (p.140), indicating that the decision was not made hastily. In some ways, Jasmine's decision echoes Du's bravery in attempting to take control of his life and Darrel's cowardice in attempting to evade life's difficulties by taking the extreme step of death. Taylor didn't want to change me, Jasmine adds gently of her shift in ideals and Taylor's largest in overcoming racial and cultural barriers: Taylor didn't want to alter me. He didn't want to sift through the unfamiliar and sterilize it. I made the switch because it was something I wanted to do. Being a coward means drowning oneself in nostalgia and encasing oneself in regret. On Claremont Avenue, in the Hayeses' spacious, neat, well-illuminated apartment, I matured from a weird foreigner with fake documents into the daring Jase (p.185). Bharati Mukherjee has created a space in Jasmine's self-

sufficiency and financial autonomy for her diasporic objectives to be realized. After a brief stint on the streets, Jasmine is hired as the 'carer' for Duff, Wylie, and Taylor's young daughter. Jasmine appreciates her newfound financial independence as well as the kindness of her coworkers. She is known as 'Jase' here, and she stays for two years to learn about American family life, such as how the husband helps in the kitchen, how the woman works long hours outside, and how the young couple may adopt a daughter rather than wait for a natural kid. "Adoption, like widow remarriage, was completely strange to me." "Its comfort, less confidence, and elegant self-absorption (p.171)" is how she describes her affection for the American world. She had a voracious appetite for learning about other cultures. This phase in her life may be able to help her develop a personality and instill confidence in her character.

According to S. Indira, "the healing touch of people like Lilian Gordon, Kate, and Taylor, who treated her as an intelligent, refined, sincere, and affectionate person, transformed Jasmine from a different alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase, living only in the present" (p.70). Jasmine is shocked by Wylie's debate with Taylor over love and her decision to be in this world with another guy, but the two quickly develop an

intimate relationship. Yes, I admit that I fell in love. with what he stood for to me: a professor who welcomed a maid into the great democracy of his humour despite her lack of understanding by offering her cookies, smiling at her, and accepting her. “I was intrigued rather than horrified by his life because it appeared to be entirely American” (p.167).

Bharati Mukherjee shows Jasmine to be brave and strong by having her say things like, “The moment I have envisioned a thousand times finally arrives” (P.237) and “I am not choosing between two guys” (P.238). “A care-life giver’s is a good life, a noble life” (p.240) displays her real commitment and courage. “To maintain the author’s inclusion, the figure of Jasmine cannot always embody the feminist ideal of strength, and she cannot accomplish her version of the American Dream inside the text,” according to Lauren D. Hazenson. Each character who is affected by Jasmine’s maximalist worldview begins to survive and discover their wants on their terms, and this is the true achievement of Jasmine. Because of America, “every character, including Jasmine, can resignify and reinvent themselves in the image of their wishes” (Lauren D. Hazenson, p.32). Jasmine herself acknowledges this transformation, saying, “Then there is nothing I can do.” Only time will tell if I’m a Tornado, a troublemaker that arises from

nowhere and dissipates into a cloud. I dash out the door and down the rutted Postcolonial marginalization, resistance, racism, ethnicity, adaptability, and transformation are common themes in Bharati Mukherjee’s writings. For Tandon, being an American writer is something she fully embraces. In this context, Bharati Mukherjee describes Jasmine’s journey to America as a process of discovering her self, and her passion for Americanness in the diaspora form echoes this journey. She’s had a tough go of it, but she’s managed to reinvent herself and emerge victorious. “As a result,” sums up Sumita Roy, “reading Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine as an ambitious attempt to depict the life of a woman engaged in a serious quest for values is satisfying.”

### **The Quest for Self-Definition**

The need for individuality represents Jasmine’s ongoing struggle to find her place in the world. Her origin narrative begins when Jyoti, a typical Indian girl, decides to start over by adopting the identity of Jasmine. The Wylie family gave her the name Jase after she arrived in America. Because of her exotic allure, Jane is the surname that Bud Ripplemeyer chooses for her. The endeavour to re-create the past and bring it into the present is symbolized by this final turn in her life’s journey. Notable postcolonial critic Jennifer





Drake calls these identity shifts “rebirths”; the character Jasmine uses this device to show how the story’s themes of sexism, metamorphosis, and diaspora all intertwine by adopting a variety of personas from different eras and eras and then killing them all. In particular, the fact that she has chosen to fly to California with Taylor and return to her native country proves that she is capable of making her own decisions. “Even though the protagonist of Jasmine confronts numerous types of violence in the United States, the country provides her something that India cannot, which is the freedom to remake herself,” Inderpal Grewal argues (Inderpal Grewal, 2012).

Jasmine, by Bharati Mukherjee, is enlivened with typical American appreciation for individual individuality. It would seem like Bharati Mukherjee painted Jasmine if we go by the standard American worldview. “Mukherjee’s special skill is a montage,” Davidar says, “a leap out movement that develops a relationship with the first person narrator while putting space between everyone else, so highlighting with the remarkable economy the immigrant’s isolation, a by-product of American potential.” “Even if they never leave their village in Punjab, some folks were born to be Americans.” They are Americans at their core. As Davidar rightly noted, “some folks were destined to be American even if they never leave their town in Punjab.” (p.164)

Bharati Mukherjee provides several chapters of Jasmine’s life as it wanders across the grounds of Hasnapur, Jullundur, Florida, Columbia, and California. The phase of metamorphosis in her name signifies that she is re-creating her identity.

“This novel serves as a signifier for the dialectic of a progressive engendering of identities as these bar any already existing identities, putting them under erasure without consuming them,” according to Elizabeth Bronfen in “A Sense of Strangeness: The Gender and Cultural Identity in Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine” (p. 79). Jasmine transcends her roots by adopting novel perspectives and skill sets in each environment. She does not receive her identity from the culture around her but rather constructs it through her efforts. “How many more forms, how many more identities, how many more husbands are there in me?” (p.215). Jasmine becomes Jase and falls in love with Taylor while working as a carer for Duff in New York. When she recognizes Prakash’s killer, Shikwinder, she leaves him horrified, and along the road, she finds Mother Ripplemayer, Lillian Gordan’s Iowa equivalent.

Jasmine’s struggle with her own identity is reflected in her intermittent desire to adopt a new persona. Naturally, her journey begins when Jyoti, a typical

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Quest for Identity.

Indian girl, decides to start over by adopting the identity of Jasmine. When the Wylie family brought her to America, they named her Jase.

### Conclusion

Jasmine, by Bharati Mukherjee, emphasizes identity and change while mimicking the improvisatory qualities of diasporas. Occasionally, Jasmine's yearning for identity reveals her struggle to convey the alienation that preoccupies the feelings of people who are both culturally and geographically separated from their homes. The anguish of immigrant women in a foreign culture is portrayed as a result of Bharati Mukherjee's deliberate attempt to imbue Jasmine with numerous diaspora; female oppression; and transnational features. The novelist's concept of Americanness as a way of life seems to be embodied in Jasmine. "Reading Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine as an ambitious attempt to sketch the life of a woman engaged in a genuine quest for values is satisfying," writes Sumita Roy (Sumita Roy, 1996, p.187).

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