

Changing Voices of Women in Bharati Mukherjee's "Jasmine" and "Wife"

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Abstract:

There has been a tremendous change in the voice of women in the writings of Indian women writing in English for the last a few decades. These changes lead to challenging and questioning the domination of male in every walk of life. The women writers like Bharati Mukherjee portrayed her female characters from the traditional submissive, self sacrificing to clashing and struggling for their identity. They never wanted to be the victims of the male dominated society. The present paper focuses on Bharati Mukherjee's major women characters in the novels Jasmine and Wife and how they represent the contemporary women struggle. They dive deep into the distorted psyche of the immigrants who are in the dilemma between the inherent traditional values acquired through their family and their fascination for the western life style selected from liberal western society. It also presents various phases of suffering experiences of immigrant women at different stages of life.

(Keywords: change, women, suppression, male domination, Western influence)

Introduction:

Indian women writers are quite comfortable in expressing their independent identity with a unique fragrance in literature. Their patience, obedience and delicateness is neglected at every walk of their life which lead them to be very stubborn to protect their identity. The suppression of ideals in the patriarchal society resulted in their feminine confessions. Many women writers have taken up the themes of suppression, identity, rebellion and others in India and in abroad. The major themes of their works reflect discontent and disgust on various social problems that they face generally in the society. Their voice is very bold and strong against the serious problems faced by them under the disguise of traditions and conventions. The female protagonists of their novels surpass hurdles and tried to establish globally the female subjectivity. On the line of these discussions, the researcher has taken

Bharati Mukherjee who surpassed the hurdles created by male dominated society and reveals the actual situation of women in the Indian society. Mukherjee's female characters are brought from the urban middle class and lower segment of the society. The major concern of the characters is a kind of confrontation between tradition and modernity in the immigrant society. Mukherjee as a migrant writer faces number challenges and difficulties physically and psychologically from men out of her social experiences.

Bharati Mukherjee is quite perfect in revealing the complex subtleties of human relationships in a delicate manner. Her works expose the female struggle, anguish for identity and rebellion against the exploitation in a society of inequality. She lived in India, Canada and even in USA. During her stay in these countries, she has an opportunity of observing multiple voices of women with fragmentary nature. Her novels, *Jasmine* and *Wife*, find a kind of change in the voice of diasporic women in Canada and USA. The suffering of the major characters like *Jasmine* and *Dimple*, Mukherjee wants to give a clear picture of women who are under cultural instructions where they are not allowed to lead a free life from such restrictions. The social issues which she touched are of the metropolitan importance. The study of her female characters reveal not only the suppression made under male domination but also that the female step out of the four walls of kitchen to fight against the challenges rolled on her way. One way her female characters display the perfect structure and views of their identity and on the other hand, they redefine themselves with an innovative and spatial approach to the problems.

Jasmine establishes a gendered identity that destroyed male trivialities and egoistic nature. The description of the character, *Jasmine*, was of a half century back where rural Indian women were under the clutches of societal restrictions in a small village called *Hasnpur*. The female protagonist, *Jasmine*, reveals her story as a widow of 24 years and also as a pregnant. All her life shows the debatable distance between her Panjabi birth and her American adult life. Such a biographical sketch of the character indicate about her odyssey with five different situations, two murders, one rape, a suicide and three love affairs. One can observe while going through the novel, the female voice of their attitude changes time to time, again and again like from *Jyoti* to *Jasmine*, *Jasmine* to *Jazzy* and *Jazzy* to *Jase* and *Jase* to *Jane*. In the same way, her life travels from *Hasnpur* to *Fowlers Key, Florida*, from *Fowlers Key, Florida* to *Flushing, New York*, From *New York* to *Manhattan* and so on. Her story starts in a small village of India and moves to Europe and America. The novelists wants to express her feelings and emotions time to time through the situations and characters

to bring in a sense of instability in which her life is ruled and controlled by rigid and patriarchal Indian middle class society dominated by father and brothers. She exposes female attitude through the characters Jyoti, a changed name of Jasmine. The influence of her English Education made her to fall in love with a modern US based man Prakash. Initially, he encouraged her to go for English Education, with a new name and with a new life.

“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”. (Jasmine- 77)

From a middle class village girl to wife of an American traditional husband, Jyoti dreams of her liberty, frankness and open mindedness. But all her imaginations are wiped off with her bad fate and returned to India as a widowed woman. The strong and rigid traditions on widowed women in India or to lead a life of her past husband hailing from America, is the biggest one to raise her voice. The two cultural clashes can be traced here with two different worlds of nativity and immigrant. She realizes the dreams of her husband and returns to America in search of a better life. She starts her second life with an intellectual Taylor and turns herself to be a Bud’s Jane. When she moves to Florida, she recollects all her displacements and dislocation and her struggle for strong identical voice. She tries to create a new world of her own with new ideas and values never minding her past life. Her new cultural voices are synchronized with her new desires and life habits. This change makes her life very significant because of her relations with men. She continues to change herself from Jasmine to Jane and now Jase. Mukherjees describes this alteration as a positive and optimistic journey to New York. She clearly identifies there her strength to adapt herself to the situations;

“I wanted to become a person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, and affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer not widowed, raped, destitute, and fearful.” (Jasmine- 171)

Jasmine then meets Lillian Gordon, staying with whom begins her process of assimilation by educating how to turn into American. Lillian confers upon her short name ‘Jazzy’, a “symbol of her entrance into and acceptance of American culture which she welcomes gladly. After that, she moves in with a traditional Indian family in Hushing, New York. Jasmine soon finds herself stifled by the inertia of this home for it was completely isolated from everything American. With Taylor, his wife Wylie and their daughter Duff, she

creates yet another identity upon a new perception of herself. But though Jasmine creates a new identity for every new situation, her former identities are never completely erased". They come into sight in precise moments in the transcript and aggravate the anxiety, thereby originating Jasmine to create another leading identity, diverse from all the previous existing issues.

While staying with the Hayes, Jasmine starts to excel in the English language, making powerful herself to advance American culture. "Taylor begins to call her 'Jase' suggesting that she does not have power in the creation of her new self. Also, for the first time in the Hayes household, Jasmine becomes aware of her racial identity because Taylor and his friends understood that she was from South Asia and tried to associate her with that community. Jasmine constantly shuttles in search of a concrete identity". She closes the novel by stressing the complex identity of a female in banishes.

In the novel "Wife", Dimple, the protagonist surpasses through the traditional proscriptions of a wife. The opening of the novel introduces the protagonist and keeps the sarcastic tone. She gets married to Amit Basu who is travelling to U.S.A. "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 takes exception to being a better half in the Basu family and rebels against wifedom in feminists perspectives.

Be that as it may, her self-character is maintained a strategic distance from by her marriage. She aims for herself recognition and satisfaction of her desire. Basu carries on in an alternate manner. He needs her to be an easygoing and accommodating spouse. So Dimple detests Basu and his conduct. He needs her just to fulfill his sexual wants. At long last, in a condition of sorrow, she executes Amit in a demonstration of self freedom and submits suicide. Her act, in this sense frees her as she dismisses the talk that socially and ideologically has so far interpreted her personality by fitting her sentiments and wants as a lady.

Conclusion:

Thus, the two different characters like Jasmine and Dimple have their own identical voices raised against the suppressions and exploitation in the name of cultural and social restrictions. The novelists systematically portrayed the delicates issues in the form of woman characters in the society under real time tones. The experiences of these two female protagonists of the novels have bitter experiences in their sense of loss, dislocation, estrangements and their

struggle for their identical voices. However, they strived their best to get adjusted in the West in order to come over the hurdles in their life, they achieved their object in the life.

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