

**JOURNEY FROM DIASPORAL DREAM TO AMERICAN  
DREAM: A READING OF *JASMINE* BY  
BHARATI MUKHERJEE**

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**Abstract**

*The most remarkable feature of Bharati Mukherjee's writing is the deviation from the conventional approach of 'Diaspora Discourse' as being immigrants; especially women, always 'look back' to their native land and are unwilling diasporas. For, with the emergence of Feminism, 'the new women' have realized and striving hard to show their creative ability. Contemporary Indian women defy the patriarchal Indian society for their self-realization and self-reliance. They are crossing thresholds and going beyond the seven seas willingly to achieve their 'land of dreams'. Most of them are choosing 'fiction' as the best medium to pen down their experiences of loss, gain, realization and reformation of identity, culture, identity conflict and negotiation, love, rape, death, rebirth etc. It seems, being willing immigrant writers. They show the opportunities for the 'greener pasture' in the 'new land'. Among the women writers, the prominent one is Bharati Mukherjee. The Novelist shares her experiences of relationship between her 'adopted land' and India. Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is an anecdote of her own ambition to achieve the American dream of liberation, self-will, individuality. Jasmine, the protagonist of the novel, in a way, seems to be a mirror image of the novelist. As both of them are 'willing immigrants' to America. The paper explores, the protagonist, voyage from 'diasporal dream' to 'American dream'. During the odyssey Jasmine continues throwing off her old identities and grabbing new ones in the text *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee.*

**Key words: diasporal dream, diaspora discourse, identity conflict, adopted land**

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Diaspora is a two way process as it may bring a feeling of alienation , isolation, rootless, loss of culture and identity for a diasporas who comes back to his/her own country in hope of imaginary homeland, as a result of this some writers of the Indian Diaspora have been writing about the dissatisfaction of an individual. For example Bharati Mukherjee's Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* who feels alienated in her own country-India and determines to go back to the US, or some immigrants experienced the aforesaid feelings in their 'adopted land' as Jhumpa Lahiri's Ashima feels alienated, nostalgic in America in *The Namesake*. While the other way round it may become the 'land of opportunities' for some diaspora, since a long time who were yearning to grab the opportunities promised by this 'Promised Land'. The prominent diaspora writer, Bharati Mukherjee through her writing shows both the sides with a very convincing touch. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara, the protagonist feels 'nowhere' in India. Tara becomes an alien in her own native land, may be because of her ambivalent attitude to her native culture. While Mukherjee's *Jasmine* celebrates the protagonist's assimilation in America. The novelist herself willingly chooses America to get settle in. Mukherjee admires V. S. Naipaul, the diaspora writer for depiction of a large canvass of diaspora experience, however, she says,

'I don't write from the vantage point of an Indian expatriate like Naipaul... like Naipaul I am writer from the Third World but unlike him I left India by choice to settle in US. I have adopted this country as my home. I view myself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island.'

She advocates the American Dream-dream of freedom from all kinds of chains, shackles, caste, creed, family, gender discrimination, and orthodoxy etc. The novelist is a willing diaspora as she deliberately projects and celebrates through *Jasmine* the diasporal dream and succession of American dream as Jasmine embraces the American culture. The novelist vehemently asserts in one of her interviews, '...Call me an American writer; I'm no longer an Indian.' The novelist says, 'I am writing about the here and now of America' claiming herself to be not just an immigrant novelist but mainstream American writer. The claim of the author of being American is another issue of debate.

In the novel, Jasmine is introduced as a fifth daughter named Jyoti-(light) to her parents. Due to poverty her mother tries to strangle her to death but she survives, as her mother wanted to spare her of a dowry less bride '...I survived the sniping. My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter.' In childhood Jyoti kills a mad dog who was about to attack her, when her other women friends are too scared to even scream, that shows her as a fighter in future. Jyoti says '*I was not ready to die.*'(57) We come across Jyoti- a rebel against blind beliefs and superstitions as she refuses to accept the prediction of an astrologer about her early widowhood and exile. Jyoti rejects her fate and boldly faces the consequences in future. The spirit of Jyoti is really admirable when she gets a scar shaped wound on her forehead, considers it as a Lord Shiva's 'Third Eye'. She never looks back in past as a coward but with determination to set what went wrong. This, in a way, announces Jasmine's attempt to break away from her past. She refuses the proposal of a prospect who does not speak English, for she understands the importance of English language. After her father's sudden death, she marries Prakash as she feels that he is an ambitious and yearns to achieve 'more' in life, is like her. Prakash was an educated man who has a broad mind. He never let the orthodox traditions constrained his life. He encourages her to be her individual self rather than merely his wife. He inculcates in her feelings of independence and self-reliance. He gives her a new name- Jasmine. About Prakash Jasmine says, '*Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and made*

*me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me new name: Jasmine...Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identity.'*(77) Jasmine's dilemma of being trapped in between identities remains for a short time. When Prakash shows his desire to get settled in America for 'real life' Jasmine also looks forward to go with him to the new land. Her willingness to go to America itself shows how Jasmine is a self-willed and determined person. Unfortunately, Prakash is senselessly shot to death in Jullundhar by Sukkhi a member of 'Khalsa Lions'. When her grandmother tries to console her and asks her to accept the fate as God's wish, Jasmine boldly rejects the fate "*Dida, I said, if God sent Sukkhi to kill my husband, then I renounce God. I spit on God*" (Mukherjee 98). It is a sign of her rebellious spirit. Moreover, even after his brutal and sudden death, it did not cease her from the ambition of realizing her 'self' and determines to pursue her husband's and her own 'Diasporal Dream'. She would let nothing stand in her way of achieving 'American Dream'. As Jasmine says, '*Later, I thought, we had created life. Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash.*' (97). She faces severe disagreement from elders of the family. They cursed her and her fate but that didn't move her a bit. Jasmine begins her odyssey, determining to face hardships, insults, punishments, rape etc.

We could say, Jasmine is 'willing immigrant' to America who is ready to adopt the New World and to 'adapt' herself to get assimilated in it. . Though Jasmine faces many problems in her journey, she is excited about the 'American dream'. As a rebel she sheds off her image of a rustic village girl-Jyoti. Since her childhood she is a very bold girl, furiously refutes her future of early ill-fate of widowhood and exile predicted by an astrologer. Jyoti gets married to Prakash, who gives her new name 'Jasmine'. Prakash tells her about his 'Diasporal Dream'- dream of going to America. Even the brutal and sudden death of Prakash could not stop her. It makes Jasmine more determined to go to America to pursue her own and Prakash's ambition to achieve the 'American Dream'. Initially, she feels the dilemma of hanging in between two cultures- new and old one. But her assimilation is quiet fast as she easily takes on different identities as Jasmine, Jase and Jane etc. She adopts this fusion of new and old identities quickly which rather helped her to take on new identity

symbolizing her assimilation in America. Gradually, Jasmine feels proud-she is getting rooted in foreign land comparatively fast of other immigrants, Jasmine says 'I had been reborn', 'I took in everything', 'I had landed and was getting rooted.'

To pursue her diasporas dream of going to America, Jasmine goes through a tough journey being an illegal immigrant. On her way, on the ship Jasmine met many people like her. When she got off the ship, she did not know where to go and how to reach to Tampa. Half Face, the captain of the ship offered her help. She was glad but soon she realized that he helped her to only satisfy his sexual lust by raping her. She felt cheated and wanted to end her life. As she says,

'It was the murkiness of the mirror and a sudden sense of mission that stopped me. What if my mission was not yet over? I didn't *feel* the passionate embrace of Lord Yama. I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die.'

Jasmine's odyssey initiates, simultaneously, by discarding and accepting one after another identity symbolizing her refusal of old culture and her excitement for the 'New World' like her author. In America, during her voyage from Florida, New Jersey, New York, Iowa, again to New York Jasmine takes on new identities till she achieves her 'American Dream'. In Florida, the expatriate community no longer excites her as the immigrants, she feels, in spite of their long stay failed to assimilate in the American lifestyle and still stick to their past Indian culture. She determines to move to New York to stay with Taylor, there she accepts the job of a 'Care Giver' to Taylor's daughter Duff and assumes for herself a new name Jase. There she starts living American life. After few days she leaves New York for Iowa, for she has seen the killer of Prakash who could be, she thinks, harmful for Taylor family. In Iowa, Jasmine takes on a new identity as Jane Ripplemayer with Bud-a fifty years old banker who loves her and wants to get officially married with her as she expects his child, but Jasmine is in no hurry to wed. Her unwed motherhood does not disturb her is a positive approach of assimilation in the 'American dream'. It's a process of her

transformation. She nurtures the hope that she will be able to merge herself into the culture of new land. Being an illegal Indian immigrant in America, Jasmine encounters with the New World and gradually transforms and thoroughly adopts the American culture.

Obviously it would not have been easy for Jyoti to become Jasmine, Jase, and Jane. Jasmine's journey goes through tough trials as it involves rape, murder, exploitation various other conflicts & identity crisis. Bharati Mukherjee depicts a young protagonist's hopeful progression towards self-discovery. As Andrea Daska calls Jasmine's journey as an 'Uncompromising quest for identity and a sense of belonging.' she hardly becomes sentimental about her typical Indian women image & raises herself with all her willpower to get accommodated in the adopted land. Whatever she receives from the new world returns it back to the same world. For example, hatred and revenge for her rapist Half Face. Love and kindness for lovely people like Taylor & Ripplemayer and family members. Jasmine in actual sense achieves the self-realization and maintains it at any cost, is a sign of American dream of individual freedom. At the end of the novel, she leaves Bud in Iowa and decides to go with Taylor. Jasmine feels that she has found her true love with Taylor. We could say that Bharati Mukherjee celebrates the immigrants' positive approach towards the diasporal dream and succession of the American dream. And it would be aptly correct to say that Jasmine is a mirror image of the author.

To conclude, in America Jasmine acquires a new consciousness is a sign of new womanhood and women's space. The diaspora women who make conscious effort to assimilate in the new culture find their true selves in the American background. They acquire new identities and these acquisitions of new identities help them in changing the global image of America. Hence America is emerging as a multicultural and multiracial country. Mukherjee's *Jasmine* centers on the life of immigrant Jasmine-Jasmine in love, in difficulty, in relationship. Her interest lies in showing Jasmine's paradoxical existence which began soon after she left Indian shores and made herself free from the limitations and shackles of typical Indian society and culture.

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