

Complicated Layers Of Cross Cultural Reality In Bharati Mukherjee's Novel Jasmine.

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ABSTRACT: *The world is shrinking into a global village where differences melt into similarities, cultures and groups outside the dominant ideology find out ways to put forward their diversity. Eliot sees culture as the way of life, as one which affects us and in affected, in turn by our activities. He believes that culture is ideally a whole way of life, lived commonly and variously by a whole. Eliot dwells on several channels for the transmission of culture. The family is the primary channel of cultural transmission. The Indian-born, Bengali origin, American Novelist Bharati Mukherjee's novel Jasmine is the story of a young Indian woman who experiences cultural conflict both in and out of her own culture. This paper will shed light on the inter section of Western and Indian sub continental cultures with in the third space and the impact of cultural collisions on the character of Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine.*

KEY WORDS: *Cross Cultural, Globalization, Reality of life.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The word 'culture', "makes life worth living" as described by T. S. Eliot and to N. A. Nikam it "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 writings of Bharati Mukherjee. An inherent desire to tackle cultural tensions remarkably manifested in all her fictional writings. The conflict between Occidental and Oriental cultures and its impact in the life of the protagonist is expressed beautifully in her novel Jasmine. Her woman character confronts a multicultural society in her immigration and evolution. *Jasmine*, the most famous novel of Bharati Mukherjee, is published in the year 1989. Through this novel Mukherjee tries to unfold the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a succession of ventures which the female protagonist, Jyoti takes on during her journey from her native village Hasnapur, Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa.

The story of the fiction, *Jasmine*, revolves round the experiences of Jyoti, from her feudalistic village to America. After her husband's death in a terrorist attack Jyoti decides to go to America with forged papers to fulfil her husband's mission and perform 'Sati' a ritual of Hindu culture to burn the widow after the death of her husband. To achieve the goal of her life she has to face so many difficulties arises due to her confrontation of Oriental and Occidental cultures. From the beginning of the novel the novelist gives a hint of Jasmine's attempt to break out of the paradigms of traditional Indian culture. The novel begins with the lines "Life Times ago, under the banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears-his satellite dish to the stars- and foretold my widowhood and exile". Jyoti protests the astrologer's prophecy about her future "widowhood and exile" by saying that "You're a crazy old man. You don't know what my future holds!" Jyoti's harsh reply indicates that she is unwilling to imprison herself within the traditional cultural norms. Being irritate the astrologer chucks hard on her head and she falls on a twig sticking out of the bundle of firewood and gets "a star-shaped wound" in her forehead. Her sisters are concerned that this injury in her forehead may be valued her lesser as bride in future. They say to Jyoti: "Now your face is scarred for life! How will the family ever find you a husband?" Her sister's question unravels the truth of Oriental culture that girl's beauty is more important than her qualities for marriage. Bharati Mukherjee in an interview with Steinberg says: "for a Bengali girl to have a physical imperfection is to be unmarriageable". From her childhood Jasmine has an ardent desire for education. She is a brilliant student who wants to continue her education beyond six grades but is opposed by Dida, her paternal grandmother who represents the suppressive aspect of traditional village culture for woman. Jyoti does not believe the Oriental village culture that "Village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go". According to Oriental traditional cultural norms girls do not have any right to choose their life partners. They have to accept the persons whom their parents or elder family members select for them as their husband. Showing the force of her belief and breaking all the established cultural norms Jyoti marries a 'modern man', who wants to leave the backwardness of India for a more satisfying life in America. Their

marriage is held in a non-traditional manner - "no-dowry, no-guests Registry Office wedding". Prakash is a modern man who encourages her to become individual self rather than merely be his wife. He gives her a new name 'Jasmine' and says, "you are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume". After marriage she becomes a true wife in the Indian cultural sense and always tries to give more importance to the wishes of her husband. Jasmine decides to provide all-round support to her husband Prakash to get admission in the Institute of Tampah and starts dreaming about their immigration in America. But it is her bad luck that Prakash falls a prey to the Khalsa Lions, the rebels demanding a separate land of Khalistan for Sikhs and this incident renders her a widow. Now Jasmine is compelled to live the life of a widow in the company of other widows. According to Oriental Hindu culture, a widow must stay alone after the death of her husband for the rest of her life. Jasmine's widowhood robs all her rights to material fulfilment. It thrust upon her the life of isolation in the "widow's dark hut" and her condition is "little better than Mazbis and Untouchables". Jasmine is a born fighter and has a little faith on Oriental Hindu culture. She realizes that to live the life of a widow is to live a fate worse than death. She expresses her position in a feudalistic society by saying this:

"Feudalism! I am a window in the war of feudalism".

To get rid of from this patriarchal society she decides to go to America equipped with the forged passport and Prakash's paper, his clothes specially blue suit and her white sari to become 'Sati', an idea deeply absorbed in ancient Indian culture. During her adventurous journey from culturally absurd native village to her dream land America she meets Half-Face, the smuggler and the captain of the trawler in which Jasmine processes over to Florida, raped her. Her morality as an Indian woman gets outraged at this gross defilement for according to oriental culture 'chastity' is the most precious among all the wealth attained and once if it lost willingly or unwillingly there remains only 'life in death'. To give punishment to Half-Face for violating the chastity of a Hindu widow she infuses with the destructive energy of the Goddess Kali and kills the rapist. After murdering monstrous Half-Face, Jasmine abandons the motel. She coincidentally meets Lillian Gordon, a kind benefactor of illegal aliens who helps her to meet professor Vadhera who has been instrumental in her husband's admission. In Queens, Jasmine lives with the family of Mr. Vadhera. Vadhera family's utmost struggle against Occidental culture by maintaining their Indian identity gives a shock to Jasmine. She cannot understand why they are trying artificially to maintain their Indianness in an alien country. Here among the members of Vadhera family she is a helpless widow not entitled to enjoy life. She is forced to wear saris with patterns that expose her status as a widow. This typical widow life irritates her, she wants to go away from this life and she says: I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-life"

Jasmine feels that it is very difficult to adjust with the conservative Vadheras so she takes decision to run away from here to Manhattan to get rid off from the traditional Indian culture that imprison her even in a new country. In Manhattan, she restarts her life with Taylor and Wylie and their adopted daughter Duff as a caregiver by adopting the dress of a young American woman to blend herself in to the occidental consumerist society and culture. Though jasmine is trying to assimilate in the occidental culture, there is a soft corner in her mind for traditional oriental values which comes spontaneously out now and then. So when she comes to know that Duff is not a natural child but an adopted one her reactions shows cultural concern. Again Wylie's decision to leave Taylor for economist Stuart in search of "real happiness" gives a strong shock to her and she realizes that in American consumerist society and culture nothing lasts for a long time, not even human relationship. Jasmine's happiness in Manhattan does not live long. She becomes restless for the security for Taylor and Duff thinking that Sukhwinder, the Khalsa lion and killer of Prakash may harm Taylor and his family. So in order to save them from the terrorist she plans to go to Iowa. In Iowa she meets Bud Ripplemayer who gives her a new life and a new name Jane .She starts to live together with him. Jane's live-in relationship shows her willing assimilation into Occidental culture. Later on Jane becomes pregnant and this unwilling pregnancy arises into her a sense of guiltiness about her inherited cultural values. Every moment there is going a conflict between Indian cultural values and American cultural values in the mind of Jane and every time Indian values are defeated by the traditional cultural values of America. Though Jane is living with Bud; she never forgets her relationship with Taylor. So when Taylor calls her again to go with him California she is puzzled and does not decide what she will do. She is caught between the old world dutifulness for needy and helpless Bud and her responsibility and affection for Taylor and Duff splits her 'self' into two and both selves are equally important to her innate and native cultural values. Her final decision gives the indication that Jasmine willingly gives more importance to her 'self' which is very eager to adopt the values of Occidental culture.

To sum up, Jasmine starts her journey as an Indian girl surrounded by tradition. She experiences both happiness and grief in every step she takes towards her final situation. She fights against not only the male dominance both in India and in the States but also the hostility between her Eastern and Western characteristics with the hope of total freedom and unity in herself. Though she eventually seems to have whole control over her life, she is too much far away from where she started and what she desired. In other words, in order to survive as a woman in a

third world country under the pressure of the male-centred Western culture, Jasmine sacrifices a lot proving the power of globalization. Thus Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* proclaims the need and the desire to unite, to think trans-culturally and to build new bridges across the world, to become a global citizen.

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