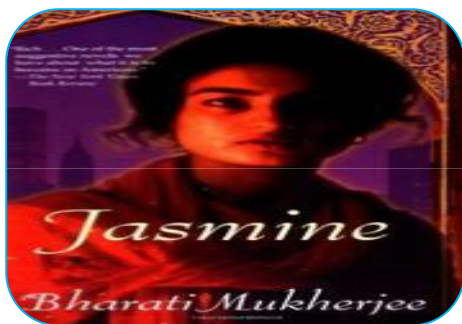




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REGENERATING IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*

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ABSTRACT:

In patriarchal societies feminine gender is marginalized, treated as non-entities. With the advent of postcolonialism, anti-slavery became popular, emerged as offshoots of postcolonialism. Throughout the world civil

movements and academic space supported the liberation of Women. In India after Independence people migrated abroad in search of knowledge. Diasporic women became constructive, reoriented, regendered away from taboos.

KEYWORDS: *Postcolonialism, liberation of women, diaspora women reoriented, regendered, diasporic woman-Jasmine regendered*

INTRODUCTION :

With the advent of postcolonialism, individualism, freedom and liberation, anti-slavery became popular and emerged as off-shoots of postcolonialism. Throughout the world subordination of women was challenged. As a Civil Movement, women emphasized their right and need to get educated, empowered. The Western World saw the emergence of Feminism as the Civil Right Movement in 1960. The dominant male society, its

patriarchal system, the master-slave attitude of the male members resulted in the annihilation of slavery. In the international arena countries, societies which practiced patriarchy, its monism and practice of polygamy were questioned and many protests were organized by Civil Right Movement. In opening a move against the slavery of Vietnam, to protest against female subjugation and male domination, active members of Western World took many measures. These activities in turn strengthened strategies to curb the ill-effects of Capitalism, Racial subversion and sexist-exploitation. As a result, Academic Space, Regional Literatures and Literature of the

whole world came out with many proposals to the upliftment of women. Many survival strategies were suggested to suffering women. Literary discourses with topics such as gender, as a crucial determinant factor cropped up. Women in general are viewed as vassal of culture. The tenets of culture have a strong hold on women. The social stratification help men to suppress women under race, sex differences. The Civil Right movement protesting slavery gained momentum. As an intellectual movement, it rightly questioned the patriarchal system about the denial of basic need of women. The literary world discovered new vision creating new domain and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1927), Simone de

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) are some of the important works creating an awareness among women. Thus we see the emergence of Feminism.

In the Indian context, Feminism appears to be an extension of Western Liberalism. By principle, it insisted on equality of sexes. Indian freedom struggle also motivated the demand for equal right, education for women. Women also participated in freedom struggle. With Independence, India was influenced by the idea of going abroad, in search of knowledge and experience which was the legacy of colonisers. People who migrated to other countries were of the mind to return to India at the earliest.

Indian diaspora women writers were caught in a dilemma whether to be traditional or modern. Their writings were based on the problems arising out of nativity and naivety. Indian diaspora women's writings concentrated on issues of identity, root, culture and home including exploitation on psychological and physical level, sexist advantages, misogyny. There are challenges in familial, spiritual, cultural issues. Roopali Sircar in the 'Introduction' of her book *Women in African Literature* An important step in development of feminist consciousness and criticism is the study of images. By attempting to identify negative and positive images the critic and writer recognizes the distortions and corrects stereotypical caricatures. Also the image of the 'women as victims' in women's writings makes a political statement by creating an emphatic identification, and by challenging the reader to change...while feminist writers have tried to demonstrate the specific choices that women often make, and the historical and cultural constraints within which they function, feminist critics draw attention to the unrelenting uniformly undesirable stereotypes and other limitation in the portrayal of women in literature. (1)

Feminism slowly grew and developed in the West as a women's movement. With the matured idea, concepts of Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Ellmann, Kate Millet supporters in the medieval Europe like Jean de Meury, Christine de Pison, Mairede Gowmay, Aphra Ben and Mary Astell, the beginning of feminism had been traced in the period 1770-1860. This period professed the rights of women, equality and Enlightenment. Mary Wollstonecraft's work *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) had been treated as significant feminist document. France and America, raising slogans, supported the issues of women. Social activists in US and Britain extended helping hands in education, and employment. Movements like Evangelical Movements of 19th century, the Suffragette Movement (1860-1930), Women's liberation movement of the 1960s and the establishment of Consciousness Raising groups contributed to the growth of Feminism. Freud's discovery of the unconscious and sexuality, his ideas on female narcissism and female masochism opened new vistas about women's liberation.

Writers like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedman, Kate Millet and Germaine Greer made the personal issue public and political, attacking the social taboos and principle to reveal their personal experiences. Roopali Sircar in her book *The Twice Colonised: Women in African Literature* writes The 1970s and 1980s were the decades of the deconstruction of women, expressed in the fission of the feminist movement. Fragmentation into different groups resulted from the recognitions of the complexity of women's experience. The universalist claims of the 1960s were increasingly challenged by the working-class, third world, and black woman. In the Anglo-American feminist tradition there has been a growth of radical Lesbianism ('radical' is distinguished from 'liberal' or 'socialist' feminist as primary and fundamental). This strand of feminism had advocated separatism, but the problem of sexuality and power has returned in the form of debate over lesbian sado-masochism. (9)

Different countries and their traditions imbibe the essence of feminist movement and carve a niche of their own to fight for women. Writers from France like Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, with their psychoanalytical approach explored the problems in using language, sexuality and brought out the expressions that suppressed sexuality in the text.

Feminism brought an open discussion on gender. The large scale influence of gender on literature strengthened women's writing with large proliferations. Indian diaspora women writers and Indian culture could not escape women writers and Indian culture could not escape the impact of gender and its influences creating resourceful characters, their growth and development. The characters are conscious of their identity and confident of themselves. Many Indian diaspora women writers create characters with feminist view in concept and show immense concern to understand feminine psyche. An ambience with a positive and progressive notion opposing loss of moral values is created. Loss of social harmony and disintegration of familial bondage are condemned. Women's liberation is a state of mind. Not cultures have equal and same feminine sensibility, from the belief to another. Feminine sensibility varies from tradition to tradition.

Women writers delve deep when they write about the plight of women taking into consideration the pragmatic wisdom. It is viewed as 'subaltern consciousness'. The writers strengthen the difference as the real strength of women. When women are victimized, such moves generate power in victims to overcome such slips. The social, political, psychological and economic constraints of women should be radically changed, given with new orientation.

Indian diaspora literature in general, though problematized everything it could not avoid the gender issue. The gender issue played a vital role in shaping the culture and tradition. To quote Poornima from her paper "Gender Issues and Affirmation of Self"

Indian diasporic literature in English problematizes concept of nation, religion, identity, gender, marginalization, assimilation and acculturation in exploring the experiences of diasporic life. It focuses on experiences of women within distinct ethnic communities, gender politics within families and arena of paid work to bring out the realities and meanings of women's lives.(67)

The diasporic women writers create female characters who know the ways of adaptation and assimilation. In an entirely different strange milieu and environment female characters indulge in acculturation since they are free from restraints. Away from male-oriented taboos they are even constructive and productive. Unlike female diaspora, the male diaspora are nostalgic and are unable to accommodate themselves. To quote Gauri Shankar Jha from *Indian Diaspora Women English Writers* Gender, in all its ramifications, is social and cultural construct and it has nothing to do with the biological construct as such; it may undergo variations with race, culture and ethnicity. Both men and women have gender identity which are culturally constructed and to some extent by the individual himself; it is a state of becoming and not being, and when we talk of becoming, it means something added, and this addition is acculturation; in the process of the becoming of the gender; it is invented with an emancipatory potential and attests to the possibility of deconstruction of gender norms and practices that helps in the constitution of gender construction. (41)

In the patriarchal society feminine gender is marginalized and serves the males' whims and fancy. The prevalent hierarchial system is questioned by feminine gender. Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* challenges the gender construction.

He is the subject, he is absolute, she is the other....She is differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (XLIV-V)

Indian Diaspora Women Writers in English create female protagonist in their own uniqueness. Kamala Markandaya's women in any social setup, is conscious of her identity and self-confident. In case of Anita Desai, though her women characters are liberated, they have to undergo psychological and philosophical analysis. Her characters help us to understand feminine psyche. Jhumpa Lahiri's works focus on cultural adjustment and stating clearly gender issues bringing out the complex psychological problems. Her characters opt for the autonomous selfhood which vary according to ethnicity, race and class. This can be equated to gendered consciousness subversion perceptions. Lahiri's female characters are new images in the diasporic space since they undergo acculturation and deculturation. The indelible mark of the past and the association of the present result in the transformation in the subjectivity of their gender. Her characters experience psychic struggle to wrench their identity in an alien land. As Lahiri's female characters are more bound by cultural constraints than by anguish of separation. One notices Freudian concept of through subordination of women, in family, society and work culture. Rituals of various sorts vary from culture to culture.

Lahiri's protagonist Ashima in the novel *The Namesake* undergoes 'process of exclusion' suffering as a non-entity in a traditional family set up. She creates Moushmi in the same novel who protests against retentive customs, rises against the myth that women are weak and dependent on men. She refuses to believe women as non-entity bringing transformation in the social code that affirms the subjugation of women. Quoting from Gauri Shankar Jha's book *Indian Diaspora Women English Writers*

In diasporic literature it is known as hybridity (Bhabha), as an 'in-between-space' a space created by encounters of the immigrants with new ways of life in a new culture, a space in diasporic consciousness, a voice of feminism through the process of learning and relearning, of acculturation and deculturation. (42)

In many ways immigration has helped in the liberation of women. To quote Gauri Shankar Jha's book Immigration is a global phenomenon and it could produce diaspora literature, large in volume and diverse in perspectives; it is, somehow a new literature comprising new narratives of travel, dislocation, displacement, uprootedness and anxiety for identity, home and culture. Every entity has to undergo transformation in the alien land but it is not voluntary, rather an imposed one; they have to suffer the trauma of self-transformation to survive and sustain; it is more a survival technique than a graft perse....cultural encounters help in enriching the diaspora experience; it complicates and intricates the cultural sensibility; it may uphold certain values and reject some of them; it may imbibe something new and modify something strange; it happens during affirmation and assertion, assimilation and accreditation. (43)

Among Indian diasporic women writers in English, Bharati Mukherjee views migration as positive, professional and practical. She professes a new kind of nationalism embracing the whole world as one nation. In her work *American Dreamer* Mukherjee observes

Others who write stories of migration often talk of arrival at a new place as a loss, the loss of communal memory and the erosion of an original culture. I want to talk of arrival as gain. (2)

Bharati Mukherjee's female protagonists are rightly oriented, non-complaining. They have necessary ability to face problems and know the right way to solve the dilemma, difficulties common to diaspora. Her characters are for America and its individualism. Contradictably Mukherjee's female protagonists practise feminism in a very different way. Unlike their predecessors and contemporaries, they are well-composed, undergo traits and tribulations strictly. Mukherjee's Jasmine in the novel

Jasmine is an aggressive and decisive immigrant. She loves to be free and loves American freedom and its conducive environment.

Jyoti is the fifth daughter and seventh child in a family of nine children. From her childhood, she has been bold and decisive. An astrologer predicts her widowhood and exile. Defying the prediction she calls him, "a crazy old man" (3). Chucked on the forehead by the astrologer, the wound is star-shaped. With robust faith, she calls it a third eye "it is not a scar... it is my third eye" (5). In the river she touches the carcass of a small dog, it breaks into two and stench emanates from it. As she is intelligent, her mother as well as her Masterji encourage her often. Masterji convinces her father "An educator's duty, Sir, is not to burn the flower with the dung" (50). The unexpected accident of being gored by a bull, Jyoti's father dies forcing her brothers discontinue their studies to provide financial assistance. As a dowryless girl, she marries Prakash Vih her brothers' friend in a registrar office. Prakash calls her Jasmine. As a progressive young man, he wants to study in Florida University. Unfortunately he is killed by Sukwinder Singh of Khalsa Lions who misconceive Jasmine to be impure. Undeterred by traditional moorings she wants to do more with her life. The cruel act of violence changes something in Jasmine. Quoting from N.Swamy's article "Multiple Identities in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" Although Jasmine's sense of agency and resistance emerge early on in the novel, they recede to dormancy in her marriage to Prakash. It can be imagined that if her husband had not been killed by the bomb, Jasmine would have been continued to be content with her marital life, waiting for her husband to come home in either a rented apartment in Jullundhar or in Flushing, after their arrival in America. (164)

Jasmine wants to commit Sati burning Prakash's suit on the university campus in Florida where Prakash wanted to study. To quote Amarjit Singh in his article "Symbolism in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" Jasmine brought with her new suit which he had got specially stitched for his abortive visit to the States. She wished to burn it in the school in Florida to which Prakash was admitted, as a symbolic gesture so that her husband's soul could rest in peace.(167)

Forging passport, as an illegal immigrant Jasmine decides to venture into a hazardous journey to US by a Shrimper called *Gulf Shuttle*. Seeing her innocence and vulnerability, Half-Face, the Captain offers her life, takes her to a motel and rapes her. Though she wants to commit suicide, cutting her tongue, she kills the Captain, Half-Face for his heinous act donning the image of Goddess Kali. Burning Prakash's suit in a trash can instead of committing Sati, she is ready to face new situations, symbolically welcoming two hundred year old American history and burning two thousand year old Indian past. Her readiness to face the unknown is one of the characteristics of a feminist.

Jasmine is rescued by Lillian Gordon, a seventy-year old Quaker lady helping her to come out of her misfortune. "She had a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia. Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you"(131). Sparing Jasmine with her daughter's dresses, Lillian taught her 'American' walk and talk. From the novel, I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes. I couldn't tell if with the Hasnapuri side I'd also abandoned my Hasnapuri modesty (133).

Lillian Gordon initiated the change of identity in walk, talk and change of name. She names Jasmine as Jazzy. Quoting Sandra Ponzanesi from her article "The Exuberance of Immigration, Feminist Strategies and Multicultural Negotiations"

Lillian Gordon, the first among Jasmine's many rescuers introduces Jasmine to the first concept of American life: no backward glance which entails the loosening of concepts of origin, language and belonging and a survival which means go America!... she is not Jasmine the city girl anymore, she is Jazzy, the American illegal immigrant, full of promises and promises.(90)

Jasmine meets Prof. Vadhera, Prakash's teacher who lives in Flushing, New York. A stay of five depressing months at Flushing, her decision to leave Prof. Vadhera is strengthened by the truth that he is only a sorter of imported hair in a basement of a hotel. Vadhera's expatriate sensibility to love anything Indian is detested by Jasmine. Such a sensibility may suit the Vadheras, not a widow like Jasmine as it stunted her growth and individuality.

Kate Feldstein, Gordon's daughter, helped her in getting an employment as an au-pair of Duff, the child of Wylie and Taylor. Despite her fear of getting adjusted with Wylie and Taylor, she tries to understand and co-operate with them. Unlike other diasporic women, Jasmine has the strength and mettle to face the oddities in life. She is not nostalgic about India or Indianness like her father who loved Lahore and its glory. She refuses to get lost in the memories of the past eventually missing the present. Her body and mind wait for opportunities to explore and exploit every possibility of survival. To quote Jermone Beaty and Paul Hunter's book *New Worlds of Literature* Thinking of home is often accompanied by nostalgia the absence or loss of loved ones, the remoteness of the home place we are cut off from our childhood home are Exiles. And the rest of us can perhaps understand, that we are all "exiles" from our past, our childhood, that universal home".(1)

Wylie and Taylor call her Jase. The change of name indicates the change of personality, mindset and instinct to challenge oddities. Prakash in India and Lillian Gordon in America initiate this change of identity. Jasmine loves Taylor, a professor of Physics. His simplicity serving tea and biscuit to an au-pair impressed her. Taylor called her Jase. Jasmine loves everything Taylor does or says. Wylie, noticing Taylor's soft corner for Jasmine, leaves home to live with wealthy Stuart Tschelman. The shocking revelation breaks the heart of Jasmine.

In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate.(181)

Renaming of Jasmine as Jase is a step towards changing her into American subjecthood relieving her from colonial subalterity. A re-born American, it is Taylor who helps her in retaining the needy and leaving the unwanted. Unexpected reappearance of Sukwinder Singh at America, frightened Jasmine about the safety of Duff and Taylor. She leaves Taylor and goes to Iowa. She meets Mother Ripplemeyer whose son Bud is a banker. He falls in love with Jasmine, divorces his wife, lives a live-in life with Jasmine. Though, India and its life pattern scare Bud, coming to know of other Asian countries change him. Regretting war against Vietnam, he adopts Du Thien a Vietnamese war refugee. Bud calls her as Jane trying to get her assimilated into the melting-pot of America which is the nineteenth-century conception of America. Jasmine is not for sanitising her. Though Bud loves her, Jasmine's "genuine foreignness" frightens him. She affirms her love by playing whatever roles demanded by him, becoming the domesticated exotic. On the contrary she is an exoticised domestic in the household of Wylie and Taylor. But Jasmine's ability to "shuttle...between identities" (77) is a technique adapted by postcolonial "third-world". The quick change in her identities seems a self-imposed pre-requisite to survive.

There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams. (29)

But Mukherjee herself rejects the suggestion of Jasmine's assimilation. Though Jasmine could change her identities, she could change America and its people. Maya Jaggi in her article "When in America" underscores Mukherjee's opinion.

Jasmine is a true American in the sense that she's a romantic: she wants to keep the frontier open, and is constantly seeing a remaking of herself in the future.(9)

Maiming of Bud by a dejected farmer Harlan Kroener, the marriage proposal by Bud's neighbour Darrel, Bud's wife Kareen's jealousy make Jasmine leave Bud. Taylor and Duff come to Iowa in search of Jasmine. Unwed, carrying Bud's child, Jasmine goes with Taylor and Duff. Jasmine is beautiful with inborn talent, intelligent. She learns the method of survival. To quote Sandra Ponzanesi from her article "The Exuberance of Immigration" she appreciates Mukherjee's idea of valorizing Jasmine.

Her idea of integration, mongrelisation and fusion implies the transformation of Jasmine's different identities, none of which can be wiped out, but all exist contained and metamorphosed in the new other. Therefore in the constant politics of renaming, which is Mukherjee's leading device for showing the multiplying of identities, an element will remain unchanged and fixed. (93)

Unwilling to be wrecked by social moorings in India, ruined by violence in US, Jasmine sheds her past and moves ahead. Sandra Ponzanesi from her article "The Exuberance of Immigration" views Mukherjee isolates, in fact, a particular figure from the Indian reality and forges her into the subject she needs to validate her transformative American model. The author does not take into account the communal aspect of Indian identity but selects *apropos* her subject as already characterized by inherent distinctiveness. In doing this, the quick passage towards individualism is made possible for Jasmine. (92)

A daring and dynamic Jasmine overcomes dark avenues and dark, murky situations, choosing a brighter aspect of life. Gauri Shankar Jha in his book *Indian Diaspora Women English Writers* rightly points out ...the diasporic women is not content to live in a meaningless space of nothingness and individuality of their own; it requires a reorientation of self and the relationship which is a kind of ungendering their general status and to regender themselves as determined individuals with strong sense of selfhood; it reveals the growing urge and potential for self affirmation.....(61)

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