

**CULTURAL CONCERNS IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S JASMINE****Dr. M.P. Ganesan***Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Sourashtra College, Madurai-4*

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is a popular novel which was published in 1989. The readers can see the dominance of cultural concerns in this novel. Culture is a complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of the society. According to T.S.Eliot, Culture "makes life worth living" Generally, culture plays an important role in the writings of Bharathi Mukherjee. The desire to confront cultural tensions is remarkably manifested in all her fictional writings. The conflict between the native and the acquired culture and the in her novel *Jasmine*. Her woman character encounters a multicultural society in her immigration and evolution.

In this novel, the novelist tries to unfold the complicated layers of culture through the journey, the heroine undergoes from her village Hasnapur in Punjab to California, Newyork and Iowa. Jyoti is the seventh child to her parents and she is unlucky and fatal according to them. She is a bold, brilliant girl from her childhood who always longs for freedom and has rebellious attitude in nature. In India, one can see people having blind superstitious beliefs and an astrologer in the novel seems to find match for marriage through horoscopes which is considered as something incredible by Jyoti. The blind beliefs and superstitious prevailing in her small village argues against the fate which is adumbrated by the astrologer by saying, "Fate is fate. When Beulah's bridegroom was fated to die of snake bite on their wedding night, did building a still fortress prevent his death?" (*Jasmine*, 2)

Though Jyoti has faced many cultural restrictions laid down by her family, she is potential enough to come out of that shell and she married a modern man named Prakash and starts to lead a modern life with her inborn aim of studying in America. Jyoti has got a lovable husband who cares much for her studies. But still he is short lived and has got killed in a terrorist attack.

Her grandmother reproaches her for her modern outlook of her marriage and says "If you had married a widower in Ludhiana that was all arranged. If you had checked the boy's horoscope and married like a Christian in some government office.. if you had waited for a man I picked none of this would have happened.. God was displeased. God send that sardarji boy to do that terrible act." (*Jasmine*, 98).

She is forced to live alone in isolation and darkness after the death of her husband, according to the Hindu culture. For her leading a life as a widow, is worse than death. The readers can see the rebellious nature of Jyoti when she refuses to commit "Sati" after the death of her husband. Jyoti does not want to disobey her cultural rituals yet she doesn't want to follow it blindly when it starts to affect her personal life.

The interference of culture can be seen in the novel at all situations. After the death of her husband, Jasmine journeys to California via Florida from the village to get rid of this patriarchal society. Here one can see the strength of a woman who has decided to move on a long journey to the new world to fulfill her husband's dream. Jyoti says "My husband was obsessed with passing exams, doing better, making something more of his life than fate intended. If you could first get away from India, then all fates would be cancelled. We'd be on the other side of the earth, out of God's sight" (Jasmine, 85).

A half faced ugly man has raped Jasmine in the ship. At this juncture, Jasmine as a typical Indian woman decides to tend her life after having lost her chastity. The thought comes to her mind because of the respect she has for our culture. Her morality as an Indian woman gets outraged at this gross defilement and she realized that the lose of chastity for a woman is a life in death. To give punishment to the rapist for violating her chastity, she infuses with the destructive energy of the Goddess Kali and kills him. She has burned all her dishonored clothes which symbolizes the death of her older self.

The credit goes to the novelist for having changes the village girl to the goodness of strength and shown that women are not meet and submissive but they are strong willed and assertive by nature. Her punishment to the wrong doer brings out the agonizing size of the society where the other sex becomes demons when it comes to physical gratification.

After murdering the rapist, she coincidentally meets Lillian Gordon, a kind well wisher of illegal aliens like Jasmine. He helps her to meet professor Vadhara. She stays with them for some days where she gets the chance to see that family's struggle to maintain their Indian culture and Jasmine is not able to understand it and it looks artificial to keep up the indianness in the alien country.

Jasmine is compelled to wear saris that exposes her as widow in Vadhara's house. This tradition Indian Culture is not liked by her and she finds it very tuff to follow and she ran off to Manhatten to get rid of it. So the widow can see Indian Culture chasing Jasmine from her childhood in some way or the other to make her obey and follow.

In Mahatten she again starts her life with Taylor and Wylie and their adopted daughter Duff. In her new life she adopts the American culture and dressed as a young American woman. She starts live in the American consumerist society and culture. Though she tries acculturate in the Western culture there is abundant place for traditional values in her mind which comes out now and then Jasmine cultural concern can be seen when she comes to know that Duff is adopted child of Taylor. Jasmine understands that is American consumerist society and culture human relationship does not lost for a long time when Wylie decides to lead Taylor in search of in real happiness. Jasmine's happiness does not seem to live long and she becomes agitated because the terrorist who killed Prakash may harm Taylor and Duff. So she plans to go Iowa to protect them.

She meets Bud Ripple mayor and she restarts her life with him with new name Jane. One can see that Jasmine living with men she needs at various places and her adoption to American culture shout guiltiness about the acquire the cultural values start to

rise when she becomes pregnant unwillingly. Thus at each and every turning point one can see the class and struggle between Indian cultural values and American cultural values. The inherent Indian values are always defeated by the Western culture values of America. Though Jane is living with Bud she is unable to forget her relationship with Taylor and she got between Bud who is helpless and the love and affection for Taylor and Duff. One can see her final verdict giving more importance to her own self and willing to acquire the values of Western culture.

She begins her journey as an Indian lady surrounded by tradition. In her Journey she encounters both happiness and grief in all the steps towards her final situation. She rebels against the patriarchal society and make dominance both in India and in the States. In order to live and survive as a woman in third world country under the male centre society and culture one needs to sacrifice a lot and has to prove power of globalization.

Suswhila Singh, a critic on feminist literature, observes that “As a philosophy of life, feminism opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society, along with men’s claim to define what is best for women without consulting them; thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanisms” (Singh, 65).

#### References

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