CHAPTER - IV

REINVENTION

The exuberance of immigration which comes with the acquisition of Americanness and the immigrant’s ‘Indianness’ as a sort of fluid identities to be celebrated does not come easily, for it is difficult to divorce oneself completely from one’s own past nor it is easy to overcome the “aloofness of expatriation”, (24) or sever oneself from the roots and tradition of the culture that one comes from. No doubt the liberated Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane, who make a lifetime for every name look like a possibility for every exuberant immigrant. There is a flurry of change and action in the conflict and confusion of the whole cross cultural business, as Gayathri Spivak in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” puts it: the trauma of getting used to the idea that is not going to be completely at home in either place or trying to bury that idea is a heap of excitement in being and becoming American as Jasmine does (253)

Jasmine’s confidence level is very high throughout the novel, despite some real dark patches in her life. She finds herself being praised for her “great face” by an American woman professor. She is a source of love and inspiration for her “husband-lovers” - Prakash, Taylor and Bud. “You were glamour, something unattainable,” says Bud (199). Her rival Karin needs her
help: “Help me not to hate you Jasmine,” says Karin (203). She perceives herself as the woman with “stark-white bobbed hair and a sad, heavy, wrinkled face. It’s the face of a poet or a philosopher, the face of a woman who has come to terms with all the Sukhis and Half-Faces out there and is no longer afraid” (208). And finally unlike her adopted son Du, who chooses to remain hyphenated, she says, “My transformation has been genetic.” (222) It is important to note that unlike an expatriate, Jasmine claims to have changed her very chemistry.

The caption Reinvention is taken from Jasmine’s own words regarding the Hindu ‘Reincarnation’ concept. Braving illegal migration, hunger, cold and even rape at the hands of an ugly monster appropriately called Half-Face (whom she murders eventually in the role of goddess Kali), Jasmine sounds philosophical, typically, in the Hindu way when she realizes: “My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debt and sins all paid for.” (121)

The very essence of Jasmine resides in the concept of endless possibility. It is amazing how experiences are crammed into the few years of the young female protagonist - her confrontation with death, when Prakash her husband- meets with violent assassination at the hands of terrorists, the murder of the person who raped her, the assault and crippling of Bud, the
suicide of her friend Darrel, the mothering of a young Vietnam immigrant Du, and the expecting of a child of a crippled man, finally leaving him for Taylor on her onward march to the West California.

There are many questions that need to be asked in Jasmine not the least in regard to the improbability of a young unschooled girl from Hasnapur, Punjab, blossoming so quickly into the adventurous Jase in Jeans, T-shirts and sneakers. The protagonist is keen to demolish her past except for occasional memories of Prakash, her slain husband, she has the spirit of a true immigrant. Like her author, she appears to be saying:

I left India by choice to settle in United States. 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 in Ellis Island,(28).

Cross-cultural conflicts in Jasmine

In Jasmine, Mukherjee tries to unravel the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures that the heroine undertakes during her odyssey from Punjab to California Via Florida, New York and Iowa. Her struggle symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person piqued by a depressing sense of isolation all-round. The story opens with the village
astrologer under his banyan tree foretelling Jasmine’s “widowhood and exile. (3). It all turns out as nastily as he says it would, but at the same time, Jasmine is a survivor, a fighter and an adapter. Her journey through life leads Jasmine through many transformations - Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane via divergent geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally California.

Jasmine’s transformation from Jyoti to Jane had its own scars and stresses. Jyoti is born in a feudal village of Punjab, eighteen years after the partition riots. The fifth daughter and seventh of nine children of her parents, she is a dowryless, undesirable female child, a curse for them. However she is bold and intelligent, the first ever-likely student of master, fit for English-education. She is a non-conformist, a rebel, who questions the prophecies of the astrologer about her widowhood and exile in the harshest terms. “You are a crazy old man; you don’t know what my future holds”. (3)

This irritates the fortune-teller and he chucks hard on her head and she falls on the ground, getting a star-shaped scar on the forehead. This scar is seen as a curse but she treats it as her ‘third-eye’ and feels like becoming a ‘sage’. (5) Bharati Mukherjee shows that already Jyoti was peering out into the invisible worlds. “Now I am a sage”. (3)
The third eye gives her a wide and a true perspective on life. She learns to look to the past not like a coward bunkering herself inside nostalgia, sheathing her heart in a bulletproof vest. For her even her memories are a sign of disloyalty. Similarly with her Third Eye she learns to look into the future with pain and hope and when she embarks on her final journey in America she is as if like Shiva has swallowed the cosmos whole.

To exhibit the force of her belief she refuses to marry the widower selected by her grandmother and eventually ends up marrying Prakash Viji in a court of law. After marriage she becomes a true wife in the Indian sense of the term identifying her husband’s wishes with those of hers. Prakash wishes “to call her by his first name” (77). This christening means much to her: “He gave me a new name: Jasmine you are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You will quicken the whole world with your perfume” (77).

They start dreaming about their life in America but unfortunately Prakash falls a prey to Khalsa Lions, the rebels demanding a separate land of Khalistan for Sikhs on the very eve of the departure, rendering Jasmine heart-broken and alone. A born-fighter she is, she does not allow this heart-rending tragedy to deter her courage. She is supposed to visit the institute where Prakash had to get admitted and to burn herself a ‘Sati’ on the campus.
of that engineering school. “Jasmine’s decision leaves her family aghast and they wonder a village girl, going alone to America without job, husband or papers?” (97)

Jasmine leaves for America on forged papers knowing not what future holds in store for her. But she is aware of the fate of her life. She contemplates:

We are the outcastes and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tannic, ferried in old army trucks, where we are roughly handled and taken to rope off corners of waiting rooms. (101)

After her husband’s death in order to reach USA, she stows in a boat captained by Half-Face. But after landing in America when Half-Face demands his price (nothing less than the satisfaction of his lusty passion will do), Jasmine in a truly feminist gesture decides to kill the Devil Incarnate and Bharati Mukherjee very brilliantly fuses two archetypal images to enact this killing of Kali the Goddess of Destruction and Strength and the broken pitcher “When a clay pitcher breaks... the air inside is the same as outside... There are no insides and outsides. We are just the shells of the same
Absolute” (15). After Half-face has raped her she wants to kill herself but checks herself because she feels her mission was not yet over:

I did not feel the passionate embrace of Lord Yama that could turn a kerosene flame into a lover’s caress. I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die… I extended my tongue and sliced it. (117-118)

She kills the demon and for some moment remains perturbed:

The man I had murdered. The room looks like a slaughterhouse. Blood had congealed on my hands, my chin, and my breasts. I was in a room with a slain man, my body blooded. I was walking death, Death Incarnate. (119)

In killing Half-Face “Jasmine experiences an epistemic violence that is also a life-affirming transformation” (3). Pondering over the agonizing as well as transforming effects of evil Jasmine says: “For the first time in my life I understood what evil was about. It was about not being human ... (116). She has been reborn by killing not herself but Half-Face and she begins her journey into America travelling light, “She had burned herself in a trashcan funeral pyre behind a boarded up motel in Florida” (176). Her
soul as it were finds a new habitation. She marches towards questing on for a new identity.

She happens to meet Lillian Gordon, a kind Quaker lady who harbours her, pities her situation, calls her Jazzy and teaches her to talk, walk and dress like an American. She encourages Jasmine to proceed to New York for a suitable job with an introductory letter to her daughter staying there. Jasmine decides to meet her husband’s former Teacher Devinder Vadhera. “His home in Flushing Queens is part of a Panjabi immigrant ghetto with artificially maintained “Indianness” (145). Here among the Vadheras, she is a helpless widow not entitled to enjoy life. This is terrifying to her: “I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti like”. (145)

America has become a sole dream of people around the world and it has so many surprises for Jasmine in its ‘Pandora box’. To her dismay she comes to know that Devinder Vadhera far from being a real professor is a sorter of human hair. This fact unfolds, for the first time, the reality of immigrant life to her and she rationalizes:
He needed to work here, but he did not have to like it. He had sealed his heart when he’d left home. His real life was in an unlivable and across oceans. He was a ghost hanging on.(153)

She wants to get away from the claustrophobic traditional “Indianness” and Bharati Mukherjee brings out the contrast between professor's wife Nirmala and the protagonist. Nirmala only takes, Jasmine both takes and gives. That is why she can escape the Indian ghetto in Flushing and adopt herself to the patterns of dominant American culture but that does not mean she throws to the wind her race, her religion, her beliefs.

Jasmine does not hold fast to a nostalgia that is dead but maintains certain basic traits of Indian culture even after imbibing American culture. The shift to America wrought a sea change in the personality and gave a new fillip to her literary aspiration. To Jasmine New York seems to be “an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens” (140). Her failure in understanding the intentions of the American beggar is symbolic of confusion that grips an immigrant in an alien land. The American beggar abuses her and calls her a ‘foreign bitch’.
Jasmine’s Transformation

One can see Jasmine in an apartment at Claremont Avenue and becomes a caregiver to Taylor and Wylie’s adopted daughter Duff. This is the best period of her stay. Taylor gives a new name ‘Jase’ and she is all excited about her life with Hayeses:

Duff was my child: Taylor and Wylie’s were my parents, my teachers, and my family (165). Her Indian sense of values cannot tolerate the sight of naked bodies combing their hair in front of dresser mirrors,(171)

Jasmine is very much shocked to know the fact that Wylie had left Taylor for economic purposes in search of ‘real happiness’ (181). She feels defeated:

America had thrown me again. There was no word I could learn; no one could consult, to understand, what Wylie was saying or why she had done it,(181-182)

Jasmine has experienced the best moments of stay in America in the company of Taylor and Duff who are like family for her. Taylor also starts loving her and she too wishes that her role of a ‘day-mummy’ should never
end. Jasmine’s acceptance of both - the change in her own scale of values and the largeness of Taylor in remaining above racial and cultural barriers - is worthnoting:

Taylor did not want to change me. He didn’t want to scour and sanitize the foreignness... I changed because I wanted to... on Claremont Avenue, in that Hayeses big, clean brightly lit apartment I bloomed from a different alien forged document into adventurous Jase. (185).

Some Australians take kindly to the Asians and regard them as “exotics that are having difficulty in sending the roots into alien ground” (150). The locals expect the expatriates to change and harbor strange notions about the immigrants. The expatriate faces the dilemma of being unable to return home and yet not finding a home in the adopted land. He nurtures the hope that he will be able to merge into the new culture to the new land. They change names, clothes and even partners as in the case of Jasmine. She runs off with one man when she is pregnant with another man’s child. No wonder Jasmine says. “I had been reborn” (163), a total change from the girls of Punjab. Mukherjee repeatedly uses this concept of one life, in this novel. Borrowing from Sant Kabir’s well-known couplet of water she uses the metaphor of air to indicate merging with the total
experience of the new country. "I took in every thing" (175) admits Jasmine. A large dose of Hindu Philosophy figures in this concept of the self-mingling with the Absolute. Mukherjee firmly believes that the multi-cultural U.S welcomes all immigrants, irrespective of color and race. Hence after the initial, brutal assault, Jasmine faces no discrimination of any sort. Taylor and Bud Ripple Meyer lean on her and Jasmine too takes their every wish a command. She is confident: "I had landed and was getting rooted". (179).

This idyllic life comes to a sudden halt when her accidental sighting of Sukha, the terrorist who killed her husband, makes her flee from that place. Her main reason in running away is the fear that her presence in their household may jeopardize the safety of Taylor and Duff.

The meeting of Mrs. Bud Ripple Meyer leads to get a job in a bank and finally ends in Bud's falling in love with her. Jane settles down to a peaceful life in Bud's house, happy in her new financial security and her own step-mother status with regard to Du, a sixteen year old Vietnam war victim adopted by Bud, after his grownup sons left the house and he is separated from his wife Karin. Violence even mars the tenor of her life yet again, this time in Bud becoming a cripple waist downwards, by a disgruntled farmer's shooting at him from point blank range. Nothing is fair, God is cruel. The most terrifying aspect of the violence is that its roots are
comprehensible but it strikes at random. Jasmine’s stay at Taylor’s for two years is the most fruitful period of her life in America.

This period in Jasmine’s life is the most restful and comforting, emotionally, psychologically and intellectually. Bud is always uneasy with her past and never enquires of it. Jane feels: “My genuine foreignness frightens him. I do not hold that against him. It frightens me too” (26). One is able to witness a changed Jasmine here. Jasmine’s every movement is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development a vital change is marked in her personality. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and renaming as Jane is indicative of a slow but steady immersion into the mainstream American culture. Jane is a rebel who revolts at every step against the path drawn for her.

An immigrant’s life is in fact a series of incarnations. He lives through several lives in a single lifetime. Mukherjee, by submitting her heroine to multiple codes of society and geographical locales seems to send the message that if one has to assimilate oneself to the mainstream culture of the adopted land, one should forget one’s past. This truth explains the condition of Bharati Mukherjee as well as that of Jasmine. As Mukherjee explains in one of her interviews with Connell Michael, Jessie Grearson and Tom Grimes, “An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee,” The IOWA Review
This assimilation of Jasmine is not so smooth as it might appear on the surface. Fear, anger, pain, bitterness, confusion silence, irony, humour, as well as pathos-underlies her observations as she rediscovers for herself the undefined media between the presentation of the old world and the assimilation into the New one. Jasmine knows that blood is thick but the very prospect of losing him is like a miscarriage.

Bud Ripple Meyer has been a silent companion of Jasmine. Taylor and Duff come to take her to California where the new world, the promise of America is eagerly awaiting her. In deserting and choosing Taylor, Jasmine does not change between men but she changes her whole world. As she herself confesses, “I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old world dutifulness” (240). Jasmine’s linking her life to that of Taylor is to be seen as a validation of her avowed belief. “Treat every second of your existence as a possible assignment from God (61), a reaffirmation of the courage she mustered in killing the mad dog saying I was not ready to die” (56).
Jane is expected to eventually become Bud Ripple Meyer's wife and the mother of the expected child. She however, is a complex blend of the "silent woman", "The speaking person and the teller of Tales". As the silent woman she accepts the almost preplanned and tailor made itinerary of a certain predictable way of life with Bud. But her increasing sense of isolation and loss of self in this suffocating world is heightened by her inability to share with him, the memories or reflections of the past, which are as much a part of her identity as the present. Ready to sacrifice her own happiness and dreams Jane almost acquires to become Bud's wife. It is Du, their adopted Vietnamese son, through whom she wishes to sustain her identity as an immigrant.

All the forces in Iowa eventually freeze her to conformity and continued alienation. Bud is uncomfortable with her tales of Hasnapur. Bud cursorily pays heed to her stories about her Indian life. She realizes that she cannot remake herself through Du. "My transformation has been genetic; Du's was hyphenated" (222). In evaluating her past and present and envisaging her future, she confronts the complexity and multiplicity of her identity as an immigrant woman.
Jasmine's restless move from one place to another betrays her gripping alienation and bewilderment. On more than one occasion she realizes that she is an 'outsider' and 'other', in America-illegal immigrant without passport, living among aliens whose ways she knows nothing about. She is always apprehensive of the American life.

She comes from the Third World, where experiences are always painful and it is in sharp contrast to her experience of America. All for her Indianness, which has made her a lovable and caring wife and an affectionate mother to Du, Jasmine never forgets her past, which impinges upon her senses like the stench of the carcass of the dog, she encounters early in her life. She perpetually haunts, and is haunted by her ghostly identities. She shuttles between different identities.

Violence follows Jane. Bud is shot at and is confined to a wheel chair and Jane must take over the duties of a wife. Trying to make him comfortable and confident, she becomes pregnant but does not want to marry him. She has finally assimilated herself to the American family life with adopted children and pregnancy. Bud is waiting for her real love, which she finds when Taylor comes to her. From her duties towards others, she now thinks of her duty to herself. She changes because she wants to change and
thinks of her happiness, her love, herself. She does not feel any guilt, she no longer thinks of herself as Jane.

She has survived the dangers and turmoils of American life and now is free like an American to choose her place in Taylor’s life. Her attempt is to reposition her stars. She ventures out, greedy with wants and reckless from hope (24). The doors have opened and risk must be taken to become part of the American life. The novelist refers to the broken pitcher again and again to emphasize the rebirth of Jyoti time and again. In this life she is born and dies many deaths. But is reborn many times acquiring a new though ‘a fluid identity’.

Jasmine is an exile in flight from the old world of India and its cultural values. Her sense and sensibilities are actively engaged with the world outside her, leaving no time to reflect on the problems whether life is meaningful or why one should think of East, West, North or South, when one can be a singular self as culture and history would shape one. But in creating such a character, in attempting to relocate the character in a desired but alien environment, Mukherjee does not probe the inner-consciousness of the protagonist nor does she depict the deeper struggle, the Americans undergo in relating to each other. Jasmine takes the bird’s view of the American life and does not touch the deeper values there. The novel looks at
American life from an immigrant’s point of view leaving aside the American experience of the immigrants, their legal and illegal entry into their country and its consequences.

Bharati Mukherjee seems to consider marriage to a white person, as perhaps one way of assimilation to American life. M.G. Vassanji in his novel No New Land finds assimilation through education and employment. Even when the protagonist journeys through a traumatic experience of being accused of rape, he resolves his conflict attaining self awareness after properly positioning his past life in the country of his births. Mukherjee’s Jasmine repositions her stars in the new country with new hope in accepting marriage to Taylor.

At every step she is a winner - her struggles, her inner sensibilities do not find much of a place in her life. She lives a floating life as it were without so much stomaching the realities of the immigrants, especially the illegal ones face at every step. She appears to have no real address, no specific mission, and no search for special identity; it is enough for her if she can identify herself with American way of life.
Mukherjee presents a protagonist who finds the new country where as she can forget her past life that she considers as bad as death and leads a new life. The easy choices, the eagerness to conform and commitment to assimilation make the character a mere puppet and not a carved out three-dimensional character. Transformation is certainly the major theme of Jasmine. Like Jasmine, Mukherjee has changed citizenships and cultures with remarkable rapidity. There is a large dose of Hindu philosophy thrown as well:

We are just the shells of the same Absolute (15) and again the scale of Brahma's vast, as vast as space in the universe (60).

My body is wanly the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for. (121)

Bharati Mukherjee’s heroine Jasmine has to traverse much of the long and hazardous journey of life before she can transcribe the village from theory to practice. Beginning in Hasnapur, passing through varied ‘Adventure, risk, transformation’, (204), finally looking forward to a future in the West- in California-the story of Jasmine’s life can be read as a Movement towards the realization of the social and spiritual dimensions of existence.
New Literature created by women has both a social and spiritual dimension. "It reflects both women's struggle to create a new way of living in the world and a new naming of the great powers that provide orientation in the world" (328). She also believes that there are two dimensions of a single struggle for their fulfilment. Vital personal experience should be transformed into universal and ideal terms by consciously choosing action, which is expansive, reactive, and growth affirming. This subsumes the process of going beyond a narrow and constructing mould to become a complete individual, to arrive at self-realization through making the right choice and enlightenment. This implies an altered awareness and sharpened perception.

To achieve some or all these conditions for fulfillment must, therefore, become the mission of every life. Bharati Mukherjee's attempt at integrating them into her fiction through the portrayal of Jyoti-Jasmine-Jase-Jane is, as successful as is her protagonist's attempt to remake an existence, which threatened to end even before it had begun.

Notwithstanding the strength and resolve of Jasmine's character, her transitions are fraught with dangers, challenges and nearly insurmountable barriers. Inspite of grasping the ideas of power and control she has been strongly conditioned by the society into which she is born. This conditioning
expects her to disguise her true self most of the time and live according to images fashioned by others. Such an uncomplicated equation fails to satisfy Gaiety. Her father’s ruling, “that bright ladies are bearing a bright son, which is nature’s design” (5) she encounters with the disclosure of her “unconventional” ambition:

I said I want to be a doctor and set up my own clinic in a town. Like the mustached doctor in the bazaar clinic, I wanted to scrape off cataracts, fit plastic legs on stumps, work miracles. My father gasped, the girl is mad! I’ll write in the back of the dictionary: The girl is mad!.(51)

The stigma of madness, which is, in fact, the outburst of an authoritarian figure demanding conformity does not deter Jyoti from responding to at least a small part of her dream of working miracle. Prakash gives a new name and identity. In addition to this identity, Jasmine also takes a close look at her husband’s driving ambition. She becomes acquainted with his obsession for “doing better, making something more of his life than fate intended” (85). Jasmine’s attempts to reshape destiny and make it the foundation of the development of her inner potential is sheer naivety. This is brought forcefully to her mind after Prakash’s murder. But her indominant
will surfaces even in much adversity and helps her restructure her mission with a single-minded zeal that implies her later success.

Self-defence in a hostile environment has made her welcome the freedom of the anonymous in the US. Unlike other Indian writers such as Kamala Markandeya and Anita Desai who treated Indian immigrant experience as one of the conflicts and adjustment with a little understanding and love, Bharati Mukherjee gives it a new, challenging perspective, enabling the immigrants emerge out of their cocoons and finally they declare that they do belong. Jasmine, the fascinating heroine of her third novel, stands as an example of the ‘fusion’ of the author whose claim is occurring. In an interview to The Sunday Magazine, Mukherjee explains: “Immigration was a two way process and both the whites and immigrants were growing to unite the third thing by this interchange and experience”. (4)

While Tara and Dimple, the protagonists of The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife become isolated rootless aliens because of the ambivalent attitude to the native tradition as well as the culture of the New World, Jasmine enjoys the assimilated status of immigration by a sheer will to bond herself to the adopted land. To change from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jasmine to Jase, and Jase to Jane is not an easy process. She survived hideous times that involved rapes and murders, terrifying challenges and unimaginable crises. She is not
sentimental about her Indian identity, nor does she suffer from nostalgic longing. Instead she has used all her strength and resolves to forge new alliances in the friendly soil of the adopted homeland. The ‘fusion’ between the East and West pleases her and she rejoices, that her journey to America has unfolded her ‘affirming’ self.

While Jasmine is triumphant and her transformation has been genetic, Du, her adopted son remains defiant immigrant who refuses to assimilate. Unlike her, he has tried to develop contact with the other Viands in Baden and maintain his hyphenated identity, Vietnamese-American. Inspite of his brilliant performance at school and his genius for adaptation and appropriation of Technology, Du can never be a total American, as he always would be attached to an experience and American father like Bud could not fathom. When Jasmine admits that for some immigrants there is no way except that, Bud says, “but not for you Jane, that’s what I love about you”. (232)

Jasmine’s Reinvention

It is perhaps this Americanness in her that has made Jasmine accept Taylor’s offer to go to West towards an unknown future, yet another adventure leaving the security of Bud’s home. As an Indian girl, she would
not have dreamt of deserting Bud, denying him even his child. Having seen death and the worst of life closely many a time, having suffered and survived times, she seems to regard her relationship with Bud just another phase in her journey of self. It is America once again that has taught her that nothing lasts in that country, “Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful that it wants to disintegrate”; (181)

Taylor does not attempt to change her yet she changes. The ironies of life, however, pursue Jasmine, in the reappearance of the sikh assassin, sukhwinder, reminded of her illegal status, cannot call the police and seek justice even as she could not in an earlier instance when Half face had raped her. She again becomes ‘Voiceless’ and seeks sanctuary away from New York in Iowa.

Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and her name change to Jane are indicative of a slow but steady immersion into the mainstream of American culture. It is a psychological mode of survival for Jane, drawing tentative parallels between Iowa and Punjab. From the special and unique nature of her evolving, Jasmine becomes, as her name implies, a non-entity even a conscienceless ‘gold-digger’ in Karin’s works. From the ‘sati-goddess’ Jyoti to the Kali-Jasmine to adventurous Jase to plain Jane has been an eventful, uneven odyssey. The protagonist’s name changes as well as her shifts in places of
residence that become metamorphosis for an immigrant woman’s process of uprooting and rerooting. Dubiously recognized for her mysterious Eastern qualities or her unique culinary skills, Jane is expected to eventually become Bud Ripple Mayer’s wife and the mother of their expected child.

Her increasing sense of isolation and loss of self in this suffocating world is heightened by her liability to share with Bud, her memories and reflections on the past which are a part of her identity as much as the present is. Bud prefers not to discuss her Indian past with her. Handicapped as a result of a shooting by Harlan, Bud slowly sinks into a self-centered existence in which the most natural feelings of sexual passion have to be artificially created. Ready to satisfy her own happiness and dreams, Jane almost acquiesces to become Bud’s wife. It is through Du, their adopted Vietnamese son, that Jane wishes to sustain her identity as an immigrant. All the forces in Iowa would eventually freeze her to conformity or continual alienation.

Bud is embarrassed with Jasmine’s tales of Hasnapur. He wishes her silent, and Du, driven to quickly become thoroughly American, only cursorily listens to Jasmine’s stories of India. Although Jane senses in Du, a fellow survivor, she realizes she cannot remake herself through Du. He escapes Iowa and its imprisoning milieu, to seek his own sister and to
remove his own identity. Pondering upon her past, Jane, as the ‘Teller of Tales’ frames her silence and her speaking with a historical reality and substantiates new personal significance. In evaluating her past and present and anticipating her future, Jane confronts the complexity and multiplicity of her identity as an immigrant woman.

This double perspective of the shifts in time and space can be explored through the tonal shifts with which the Jasmine- Jane concretizes her emotional and intellectual reality. Fear, anger, Pain, bitterness confusion, silence, irony humour, as well as pathos underline her observations as she discovers herself the undefined medium between the preservation of the old and the annihilation into the new one. Painful recollections of the past find a necessary sheathing in a voice that delivers facts in an objective way of reportage.

A striking mark of her supposed limitation as defined by others is a visible star-shaped scar on Jasmine’s- forehead, a visual image of physical deformity and more significantly of the stamp of fate. Even the most ‘Silent Woman’ transforms this scar. The Third Eye of Shiva, the Hindu God of destruction depicts that God is all seeing and wise. Placed in the center of the forehead on which the yogi concentrator while in mediation, this spot is symbolic as the seat of wisdom. Shiva opens his Third Eye to destroy Evil.
This destruction is a necessary antecedent to the birth of the New Universe. In a sense, Jyoti’s conviction that she is as powerful and Godlike is later expressed by Jasmine in terms of the Goddess image Kali.

The destiny of Jasmine, the protagonist of the novel bearing the same name, best illustrates this; First introduced as the saucy heroine of a short-story and later with modifications, the protagonist of a frontier novel acquires the independence and respect for success. Jasmine’s yearning for these, from early childhood marks the beginning of her struggle for self-actualization.

*Jasmine* is a story of a Punjabi rural girl. It is the story of the Indian girl from the childhood to womanhood during the second half of the twentieth century. Indian girls have nothing of themselves, no human rights, and no inherited property, any individual identity as human beings; they have no rights anywhere, not even on their names. They have to get their names either from their parents’ side or from the husband’s side. The condition of woman is religiously preached. It is depicted thus: “In childhood a female must be subject to her father and in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons, a woman must never be independent” (195).
Jasmine’s thinking and behaviors reflect her Indian culture. Ultimately she has to accept the truth and that is the adjustment with the changing environment. In America, she became a victim of exploitation because in the beginning she could not adjust with the change. Lillion suggests to her “to become American by talk and walk” but she was shocked at this sort of transformation. There is no other alternative for her; though Indian village girls are trained in such a way so that they can adjust easily with the change, Jasmine has to accept the change. As a Hasnapur girl, She does not like the change. She thought:

I feel at home like a stone hurling through diaphanous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to slow myself. Yet unwilling to abandon the ride I’m on. Down and down I go, where I’ll stop, God only knows. (21)

Woman’s life passes through many uncertainties right from her childhood. Her misery is that in many cases she is not responsible for that but her feminine sensibility and love that create the problems in her life. This truth frequently reflects in this novel. Jasmine goes Taylor’s family because she has seen Sukhi, the killer of her husband. Throughout the ongoing process of her journey in her life, she becomes Jase from Jane.
Jasmine accepted the change and becomes an unwedded mother. It was unpardonable crime for the Indian widow in India but in the States Jasmine has accepted it because that was the only option for her survival and the American society has accepted it the way of living life. When Bud has opposed to marry she remembers the unpleasant forecast of her future. That is why after long thinking she calls Karin, Bud’s former wife, to live with him and herself preferred to go with Taylor, the new family - herself, Taylor and Duff.

For Jasmine nothing is rooted but everything is in motion. She again moves westward with Taylor, her famous lover in search of an adventurous future in California, Jasmine undergoes a series of metamorphosis, as she struggles to leave her old self behind and find a new American identity. Her story is of an ultimate adaptability. She identifies herself as an American and no longer an immigrant. Jane is not prepared to accept Karin’s label of a ‘destructive tornado’.

Bharati Mukherjee has changed citizenship and cultures with disorienting rapidity. She encapsulates many aspects of the immigrant experience in America, in Jasmine, and in the process revalidate the ways in which new comers from The Third World are being absorbed by and at the same time are transforming the society. Her characters have always reflected
her own circumstances and personal concerns and one is able to trace her
growth in self-confidence and her slowly developing identity as an American
through her fiction. Her compact and fluid style is similarly a matter of
gradual evolution: “I have lived through so many worlds”. (108)

Bharathi Mukherjee, the writer of immigrant tales in America
underscores the reinvention of the woman centered oral tale in the narrative
structure and thematic content of *Jasmine*. She unravels the triple voice
strands in the complex triad of the Jyoti-Jasmine-Jane persona. Jyoti, the
silent Woman is foretold a certain kind of existence and identity. In the
traditionally feudalistic Punjab, in an environment of fatalism, customs
claim, the power of speech is usurped by the dominant male figures. In the
family centered society these figures are the father, the brother and
eventually the husband.

By the end of the novel, all the identities dissolve into one and
Jasmine becomes a metaphor for that type of Indianness which has through
the ages welcomed and absorbed within itself, all that is fine and decent from
every country, every religion, and every culture. “Her search for self-
recognition takes her in social and spiritual directions till she arrives at a
time when she can view the future with hope and confidence. In her
Introduction to *Darkness*”, Bharati Mukherjee explains:
Instead of seeking my “Indianness” as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration or worse, a visible disfigurement to be hidden, I see it now as set fluid identities to be celebrated.

(17)

Despite her difficulties Jasmine survives with grace, holding on to her capacity to make a new life for herself. According to Sen Gupta, what Bharati Mukherjee given us, “is a universal vision bathed in the general sunshine of love and compassion that captures the essence of birth Indian and American heritage” (18). Migrating through cross cultures is a journey she understands as few other writers do. Jasmine’s, like Mukherjee’s brilliant collection of short stories, is one such journey navigated with astonishing skill. In her Introduction to Days and Nights in Calcutta, Mukherjee says:

India will exist in the immigrant writers’ work as a ghost, a friendly one that visits her occasionally. Although India will be a part of life of her imagination, it will not be central to her writing it can only remain a friendly specter in the background, and she declares later, there are new epics she must explore in the country of immigrants she will be living in. (qtd. in Emmanuel Nelson 23 - 25)
Bharati Mukherjee defiantly announces to her American readers, "I am one of you", (23) and in the ambition declared herself as an American in the immigrant tradition. The characters in Jasmine are all exiles, expatriates, wanderers and people on the move, casting off old lives easily as a snake sheds its skin. They are third old refugees fleeing poverty and oppression, but they are also Americans, moving from coast to coast, small towns to cities, exchanging one partner for another, in search of a dream that always seems to elude them. A feeling of dislocation, displacement and rootlessness is a heavy price they must pay for the infinite freedom and possibilities that America offers. Everyone in Jasmine appears to be reeling from the speed of changes overpowering him.

In Indian homes, fortunes have disappeared in the wake of partition. Similarly in Vietnam, families are torn apart by the war. Bharathi Mukherjee shows in Jasmine, says Michiko Kukalini, a survivor by the sheer dint of courage and will power, so rapidly does her life change, that the reader at turns is overwhelmed by the speed of transformation. Jasmine can be considered as being deceptively simple allegory. Mukherjee writes with an almost surgical sense of irony, an irony that subtly dismantles and unravels a history of oppressive positioning.
Mukherjee's *Jasmine* has carved out as her own the assimilation of Third World Immigrants into the American 'melting pot', which is itself enriched by those she describes 'as new pioneers'. Jasmine is one of those pioneers, a survivor with courage, wryness, and a hopeful streak at odds with her fatalism. She is a girl rushing wildly into the future. In her powerful depiction of clashing cultures and philosophies, Mukherjee has created an ambitious and impressively compact work. The writing is vivid and economical as the author moves easily between Punjab and Iowa, Florida and Newyork city.

The first person narrative and the unfolding of each episode like a scenario creates a sense of immediacy. In describing different immigrant types, Mukherjee has explored her theme with its many nuances. The transformation of Jasmine from a semi-educated Punjab rustic to an American society, the immigrant who is trying to establish himself is fulfilled.

The stock is quite endless. In the midst of chaos, that Punjab represents, the author seeks to project the lonely, singular voice of Jasmine's quest for freedom, but Jasmine can only enter the writer's epic imagination by participating in the latter's cosmopolitan dream and once she is
objectified as the immigrant subject, Bharati Mukherjee can easily validate her own authority to represent the experience of exile as expressed in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* to find voice that will represent the life that "I know in a manner that is true to my own aesthetics" (61). Jasmine declares that she has begun to view herself as an American, when she goes to New York to live with Taylor. In her interview with Bill Moyers, Bharati Mukherjee claims, "I feel very American... I knew the moment I landed as a student in 1961... that this is where I belonged" (62)

Yet this feeling of longing for America cannot be called identical, for they belong to two different strata of society. Here, the First World artist reconstructs the Third world subjects as The First world inheritor of the American dream. Once Jasmine enters this free world, she is made to undergo a serious of transformations so that she can identify with this dream, the dream of an urban, cosmopolitan.

"In an investigation of subaltern in Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Middleman and Other Stories* and *Jasmine*, Alpana S.Knippling argues that she finds Bharati Mukherjee’s discussing a kind of contradictory colonial legacy in her *Immigrant Writing* “where she sees herself as both, we and the others; that is the colonial subject and the colonial Indian native respectively” (28). Bharati Mukherjee says in *Immigrant Writing*
We all clashed in the other legacy of the colonial writer, and that is his or her duality. From childhood we learnt how to do two things simultaneously to be dispossessed as well as dispossessor. History forced in to see ourselves as both, we and the other, and the language reflected our simultaneity perhaps it is this history mandated training in seeing myself as the other that now heaps on me a fluid as a set of identities denied to most of my mainstream American counterparts,(ibid. 28)

This west’s ‘other’ is in Bharati Mukherjee’s frame of reference to the ‘other’. There can be no claim for a pure space that is truly Indian in the colonial landscape. She herself typified her social determinations as bourgeois. In “Immigrant Writing” she eludes to her “Brahminical elegance” as constituted by “top family, top school, top caster city” (28). She has described her exceptional educational and family background, affording her the status of an upper-middle class bourgeois. But the question of privilege becomes important, when Bharathi Mukherjee claims to represent ‘the other’ as the ‘Wholly other’ in her writing. Gayatri Spivak in her Can the Subaltern Speak? Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture suggests that to give ‘the other’ a voice is a fraudulent attempt to turn ‘the other’ as ‘quite other’ or the subaltern:
No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely other into a domesticated other that consolidates the imperialist self.

(253)

Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine* created waves in literary circles since she claims to have illustrated her “Credo of Maximalism”, of expanding the American experience which ignores the major changes America was passing through. The immigrant writer, village born, colonized, traditionally raised, western educated, brought with him the experience of the centuries of history in a single life-time and thereby opened the doors to the new experience of life from beyond the seas.

In *Jasmine*, America, the land of dreams had many disillusionments for her. The world’s misery was a challenge to her ingenuity. The final crisis of the book comes when Jane is confronted with the souring of the American dreams, through the suicide of Darrel. She feels potent enough once again to reposition her stars: “Watch me reposition the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove” (240)
Appearing self-possessed and patient, Jane, through her interior monologues, is seething. Likening herself to a "tornado" she wonders over the changes that are yet to reshape her destiny:

I still think of myself as caregiver, recipe giver, and preserver. I can honestly say, all I wanted to serve, be allowed to join, but I have created confusion and destruction wherever I go. As Karin says, I am a tornado. I hit the trailer parks first, the prefabs, the weakest links. How many more shapes are in me, how many more selves, and how many more husbands?, (215).

In "telling her tale," Jane and Jasmine selves of the protagonist seek to blend their "wants" and "dreams" into possibilities and realities. The range and the texture of the narrative voice reiterate the immigrant woman's personal journey as a new questing pioneer's movement from self-denial to self-realization.

A close experience of both the worlds – the Western and the Indian in all the three novels – gives Bharati Mukherjee an authentic and objective perspective with a delicious combination of malice, charm, irony and sympathy. She pushes her heroines to the edges of their worlds, and liberates for a new world order. Jasmine's success in her twin venture can be gauged
by the determination she discovers within herself in the end. "Watch me reposition the stars", (240) she tells the absent astrologer. One can apply her one description of Du as "a real yogi; always in control" (18) to Jasmine herself, after this incident. And her "scrambling ahead of Taylor", (241) is the climax of her successful quest, which propels her into a new dimension of existence. In Jasmine, Mukherjee gives a story of an immigrant from the Third world to the U.S, pushed from one disaster to another. Jasmine emerges not as a tragic character but as one who is determined to change her destiny and explore infinite possibilities. In her latest novel, The Holder of the World, Mukherjee makes a bold attempt to rewrite the origins of American history. "The Making of America" and Americans has always been a preoccupation with Mukherjee.

Jasmine leave its readers with a freshly remained world- the sensual thrill felt by the Third World alien touching a tap and having the water 'hot-hot' and plentiful. It presents an American, whose urban landscape is an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens: "Mukherjee’s concentrated prose form starts to finish of this picaresque novel, definitely energetic and indelible"; (49)
The concluding chapter entitled *Reincarnation* sums up all the points discussed in the previous chapters. The following chapter further throws light on Bharati Mukherjee's attempt to show these immigrants in their struggle to reinvent themselves, in the midst of alien culture. What they could have been as a result of acculturation and what actually they emerged themselves into, thus presenting themselves from disintegration and souring themselves to lead a life, of different quality, is inferred.