4.1 Cross-cultural Background: *Jasmine*

*Jasmine* is Bharati Mukherjee’s third novel that came out in 1989. *Jasmine* is the story of the transformation of Jyoti Vijh into Jane Rippleneyer. The story is full of ups and downs. The novel has twenty six chapters sub divided into sections. In the village of Hasnapur, when she was seven years old, an astrologer predicted her widowhood and exile. The astrologer repeated that what was fated was destined to happen.

Jasmine has remembered Taylor who did not want Jasmine to leave New York and to go to Iowa. In Iowa, she lived with Bud Rippleneyer, a small town banker. Bud wanted to marry Jasmine who was carrying his baby. The farmer neighbor Darrel Lutz has lost his father, and is thinking of selling the farm. Bud does not want Darrel to sell the farm. Bud has three hundred acres farm, Bud has adopted Du, a Vietnamese Orphan Bud Rippleneyer was worried about Darell’s selling the farm but he realised that it was better to allow Darrel to make his decisions. Jasmine feels the pull of opposing forces of hope and pain. Jasmine is considered to be the wonder of Baden, Iowa. Last week Jasmine saw Darrel Lutz, the neighbouring farmer, eyes red and unsteady on his feet. She invited him for dinner which he politely refused. Bud considered Darrel’s father Gene to be a man of discipline, strength, patience and character. He does not have the same opinion ‘of Darrel’ Bud Rippleneyer calls Jasmine Jane. Illegal migration is rampant on the border. Jasmine visits Du’s room to help him in the homework. Jasmine was sitting in the University Hospital. For having the baby, the assistance from Dr. Kwang was needed. It was Mother Rippleneyer who got Jasmine and Bud together. Once Bud was in control and an impulsive partner but now he no longer was a whole man but
desire had not deserted him. Now she must do all the playing and make love to him. On this not spring cool night, Bud is asleep, and Jasmine watches the tender night.

In Hasnapur, Jullunder District, Punjab, India, Jasmine was born in a year of bountiful harvest. She was the seventh of nine children, the fifth daughter. Her mother complained about God’s cruelty in making her beautiful and giving her brain. The family was uprooted from Lahore during the Partition riots. Her father remained attached to Lahore throughout. Her whole world was the village of Hasnapur. There was an unlighted hut. She stayed in school for six years. Her two brothers Arvind Prar and Hariprar went to the town of Jullundhar for completing some technical course. Her father inquired if a lotus was blooming in the middle of all the filth. She told her father and her teacher that she aspired to become a doctor. In the morning she was informed that her schooling was to continue. Pitaji died the next May, He died horribly. He was gored by a bull. Jasmine’s brothers, after Pitaji’s death, quit their technical school and began to look after their mother and sisters. They sold the farm and set up a scooter-repair shop. Her brothers began to bring home their friends and clients. One day her brothers brought home a man from the village. They began to discuss the future of the state of Punjab. Sukhwinder spoke about the demand of the sovereign state of the Pure-bodied and the Pure-hearted, the Khalsa, the Land of the Pure-Khalistan. Another friend of her brothers, whom they called Prakash argued with Sukkhi and Sukkhi then left but the other man Prakash stayed on. He was a city boy from Amritsar, and was about to graduate. He desired to go to the United States or Germany. He was talented in fixing televisions, VCRs, computers. In Hasnapur ways, it was Love before first night.

Jasmine and Prakash married in a no-dowry, no-guests Registry office wedding in a town. Prakash Vijn, Jasmine’s husband was a modern man, a city man. His uncle expected him to move in his uncle’s family but Prakash rented a two-room apartment in a three-storey building across the street from the technical college. Prakash declared that there was no room for feudalism in modern India. To break
off the past, that gave her a new name: Jasmine saying she was small, sweet and heady to quicken the whole world with perfumes. He left the apartment before five-thirty in the morning six days a week and did not get home before eight or nine in the evening. He worked on two jobs. And then he slogged for diploma exams. She was asked to take over the runnings of a Ladies Group raffle and detergent selling. A week later he showed her an aerogram that had come from Professor Vadhera who had helped Prakash in his first year in the technical college. Prakash read the letter to Jasmine in which Professor Vadhera wanted Prakash to register with one of the International Institutes in Florida which would help him in getting the visa and admission. Prakash too was determined to go to America. He was obsessed with passing exams, doing better and making something of his life. Prakash was excited about electronics. Prakash made her read the manual and made her work with a pair of pliers. He declared that they would open their own store with the signboard Vijh and Wife. Those were the happy times when Prakash brought home toasters, clocks, calculators and fans and Jasmine learned to probe. There were unhappy times for the city as radios burst into flames and cars blew up. One day in April, Prakash told her that admission was obtained by him in the Florida International Institute of Technology, Tamplan. They discussed about the arrangements to be made for visas. He was a faithful husband and he loved Jasmine. Prakash took Jasmine to a sari shop in the bazaar. She told Prakash that she had made her pick but she wanted him to guess. Prakash was taking out money when on a motor scooter she saw Sukkhi’s face. There was an explosion. Jasmine was saved but Prakash was killed. The police officer told her to identify the victim. She identified him and his watch. She told the officer that she saw the man who did it – Sukkhi – Sukhwinder from the Vocational College. Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash. She formed the vision of Vijh and Wife. She would be going to America to complete her husband’s mission. Her brother Hari-prar arranged the documents, the passport with her name Jyoti Vijh and age nineteen by the date of birth.

Jasmine passed through three continents. They came out of Europe on the trawler. Half Face promised them accommodation and transportation. At night they were
sent down to walk to the shore. Nobody was there to pick up Jasmine. Half Face picked up her suitcase and threw it into the back seat of his car and took her with him. Half-Face whisked her deep into the country, to the Flaming Court motel. She was ready to face what was fated to happen as it would certainly happen. He closed the door, grabbed her, and began kissing her. He slammed her head against the TV screen which cracked. He opened her heavy suitcase and brought the image of sandalwood Ganpati, her photo album, her sari, clothes and the blue suit. He wondered why she was carrying all those things around half the world. She told of her mission of burning her husband’s suits in the school to which he was admitted. She went to the bathroom and stood under the shower. There she grasped the knife and sliced her own tongue. She then stabbed him. She came out and burned the suitcase. She walked out of the motel to the highway.

Jyoti of Hasnapur, Jasmine in Jullundhar, Duff’s day mummy and Talyor and Wylie’s companion in Manhattan and Jane Ripplemeyer in Baden were the various transformations through which Jasmine passed. Jasmine found Taylor and Wylie through Lillian Gorden. The kind lady Lillian Gordon rescued Jasmine from a dirt trail about three miles East of Fowlers Key, Florida. Jasmine was in her American jacket, Salwar-kameez, and Julludhari sandals, with only a Ganpati and forged documents. She demanded water through her gestures but an old white lady shouted out commands. A woman brought some food and when Jasmine tried to eat it, her tongue was in pains. The Lady-Lillian Gordon took Jasmine home with her. Lillian Gordon was a Facilitator and accommodated Jasmine in her daughter’s room. Lillian Gordon taught her how to walk the American way. Lillian Gordon called her Jazzy and made her talk and walk in the American manner. Lillian taught her to cook hamburgers, roasts, to clean toilets and to scrub pots and pans so that she could be hired as a domestic help. Jasmine showed her Professor Vadhera’s address. The nineteenth chapter has three sections. Lillian Gordon made certain that Jasmine’s name and address never appeared in her files. Jasmine arrived in New York City at ten in the morning on a Monday.
Jasmine lived with the Vadheras’ for five months. Flushing was safe like a cocoon but she got bored there and left. The family consisted of his aged parents and his recent wife Nirmala, a girl of nineteen from a village in the Patiala district. Professorji and Nirmala had no children. When he answered the phone he sounded his name Devidner Vadhera just as David O’Hara, making Devinder Dave. Nirmala was nineteen. Jasmine was a widow but Nirmala was in the game. Pleading lab work, Professorji was out of the house by seven o’clock, five days a week. They both—Professorji and Nirmala—came back at six o’clock. Nirmala worked in a sari store and the adjacent shop rented video cassettes. Every night Nirmala brought home a new Hindi film cassette. After dinner they watched that and then Jasmine would unroll her sleeping mat. She felt her English deserting her. Jasmine felt she was deteriorating. She cooked, shopped and cleaned, tended the old folks. Professorji had a good mood but Jasmine was spiraling into a depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness. She told Professorji she wanted a green card more than anything else in the world, that a green card was freedom. She begged him to arrange for a green card as she was dying in the limbo. Even then, a week later, Jasmine found calling herself Kate Gordon-Feldstein.

Jasmine became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory. She was the caregiver to Duff. She was to be paid a salary of ninety-five dollars every week. They did not ask her for references as Lillian Gordon’s word was enough for them. She was to be part of the family. Jasmine was to stimulate her with questions, engage her with stories, read to her, to go museums, puppet shows, galleries. Wylie told her that Duff was adopted. Taylor had low sperm count on account of hockey injury. What Jasmine felt for Taylor that first day had nothing to do with sex. She fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. Jasmine wanted to become humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate, not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful. Jasmine took in everything, the morning news, language and the street, the television and the dinners. Wylie referred to Jasmine as caregiver; Taylor called her Jase. She worked six hours a day at six dollars an hour. She was used as a perfect Jullundhari Punjabi speaker in
the Languages Department of the Columbia University. She paid back Professorji Vadhera in a single check. In the early summer of Jasmine’s second year, Wylie fell out of love with Taylor and into love with an economist Stuart Eschalman. For Wylie, this time it was the real thing, Wylie told Jasmine to stay on with Duff and Taylor as he loved and needed Jasmine. One Sunday, they took supper to the park. Duff went to buy a hot dog and told Jasmine that the hot-dog seller was making inquiries about her. Jasmine saw who the seller was. She was breathless. Taylor asked her what was wrong and she told him that the hot-dog seller knew her and he was the man who had killed her husband. She was illegal there and so decided to go to Iowa.

There was Harlan Croner who asked about Bud. Bud was Fifty three, a big, hearty man, daterminded to remain fit. He greeted Haylan but Haylan wanted him to go with Haylan. Then Haylan Kroner maimed Bud. Bud’s ex-wife Karin called Jasmine a gold-digger; Mother Ripplemayer met Jasmine in the Personnel office of the University Hospital. Jasmine was asking for a job and then Mother said to Jasmine that she needed both a job and a meal. She took Jasmine to Bud. Taylor wanted Jasmine to stay until Wylie had decided between lover and husband. Taylor asked her to sleep with him and Jasmine led him to the bed. Jasmine remembered that it was Bud who was trying to make her happy. Bud’s ex-wife Karin met Jasmine and told her that she was ashamed of what she did to Jasmine. She did not go away, she lived alone in the two-storey brick and wood house with white colours that Bud built for her. It was the kind of large, neat, comfortable house. Then Karin called Jasmine asking her how Jasmine could force Bud to go through the trouble to make her pregnant with the baby. Jasmine got a post-card posted from New York from Taylor who informed her that Duff and Taylor both were heading towards Jasmine and asked her not to run away.

Bud was busy preparing for the team of state inspectors due next week to inspect each loan. Bud would be late for supper and Jasmine told him that she would wait as Indian wives did not eat before their husbands. Bud again asked her to marry him before the baby came.
Jasmine found Du with another Vitenamese in the living room. Du introduced him as John. He was taking a bus to L.A. to see his married sister who fed him on live worms and lizards and crabs so he survived. Du was confident that he had mastered his demons. Jasmine realized that Du was like her, a striver and a saver, a prudent investor. Karin came to comfort Jasmine and to tell her that both of them would go to Darrel. In the Kitchen, Karin saw bottles and tubes of medicine with Bud’s name on them. Karin moved and picked things she recognised. Karin accepted that she was wrong in calling Jasmine a gold-digger. Jasmine realised that Karin was still in love with Bud. Both of them drove to Darrel’s. Jasmine noticed that one way of life was coming to an end. Therefore Darrel was to be released from the land. They found Darrel’s body twisting from the raffer. Darrel had killed himself. She received the third postcard from Taylor about his planning to come to Jasmine. The moment she had dreamed had finally arrived. A girl in blue Jeans Duff came out. Duff asked Taylor to ask Jasmine what he was practising to say. Jasmine told them she could not go back to New York with them. Taylor told her they were heading west to California. Jasmine was confused and was in a dilemma to choose between Bud and Taylor. She made a phone call to Karin. Karin told her that Jasmine knew what she could live with. Adventure, rise and transformation gave her a call. She was out of door and in the driveway, greedy with wants and reckless from hope, she readily went with Taylor.

4.2 Reflecting the East

The reflection of the Oriental life-style is noticed in different episodes. Jasmine’s remarks on different occasions reflect the atmosphere of her state, her home, her village and the atmosphere in a country like India.

i. “I dragged my bundle to the river bed. I hated that river bed. The water pooled there, sludgy brown, and was choked with hyacinths and faeces from the buffaloes that village boys washed upstream.” (Mukherjee, 1989:04). Jasmine’s widowhood and exile was predicted by an astrologer under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur. Jasmine shouted back that
she did not believe him. The astrologer categorically, stated that what was
to happen would certainly happen as fate meant fate. The astrologer then
directed her to join her sisters. He pointed to the river trail. She dragged
her bundle of firewood to the river bed. The river bed was sludgy brown
and was choked with the growth of hyacinth plants and the faeces of the
buffaloes. This is a peculiar scene on the river beds in India. Jasmine-Jyoti
observed the landscape on the river bed. She saw that cleaning of
household utensils, the washing of clothes and drawing water from the well.
These activities of cleaning pots, washing clothes and drawing water are
characteristic in the villages on the river. This landscape is noticed in India
and the other Eastern countries. Jasmine’s elder sisters were bathing on the
steps on the river bank. This reflects the life style of the East in particular
in India and many other south-East Asian countries. The reflection of the
Oriental life-style is noticed here.

ii. “I broke away from their solicitous grips “It’s not a scar”, I shouted, “It’s
my third eye.” (Mukherjee, 1989:05). The astrologer under the Bunyan
tree foretold Jasmine about her widowhood and exile. Jasmine protested
against that. Jasmine fell and her teeth cut into her tongue. One twig that
was sticking out punched a star-shaped wound into her forehead. The scar
bleeds. The astrologer repeated that whatever was destined to happen
would take place in whatever way a person would try to avoid it. Behula’s
bridegroom was predicted to die of snakebite on their wedding night. A
steel fortress was built, solid walls were constructed to prevent. Nothing
could prevent the death by snakebite. She told them it was not a scar but it
was her third eye. The mythological reference is to the third eye of Lord
Shiva. The belief that the scar would make match-making difficult and the
third eye of Lord Shiva reflect the characteristic features of the life in the
Eastern countries.

iii. “In the stories that our mother recited, the holiest sages developed an extra
eye right in the middle of their foreheads.” (Mukherjee, 1989:05). The old
stories that had the oral tradition were told by mothers to children. These were the folktales in which the holy sages through their spiritual power and circuit energy developed an extra eye in the middle of the forehead. They developed their mystic powers through this third eye. The reference to folk-tales is a reflection of the oral tradition of telling stories by elderly persons to children. That reflects the culture of the East of India. With the third eye, the ancient holy sages saw the invisible worlds.

iv. “Taylor didn’t want me to run away to Iowa. “How can anyone leave New York”, he said, “how can you leave New York, you belong here. Iowa’s dull and it’s flat”, he said, “so is Punjab”, I said.” (Mukherjee, 1989:06). Jasmine lived in New York for two years as a day mummy of Duff, the adopted daughter of Taylor and Wylie. Wylie decided to part with Taylor and began to live separately. One Sunday, Taylor, Jasmine and the adopted daughter Duff went to a park. After some time, Duff wanted a hot-dog and she went to buy one. She came back with a hot dog and told Jasmine that the hot dog seller inquired if she was Duff’s mother. Jasmine found that he was Sukkhi who had recognised her. In order to save both Taylor and Duff, Jasmine decided to leave New York. Taylor objected to that saying it was impossible for one who had lived in New York to leave New York. Taylor stated that Iowa was dull and flat country. Taylor resisted her going to Iowa and then Taylor insisted on her belonging to New York. Upon this Jasmine replied that her home state Punjab too, was dull and flat. In New York, Jasmine remembered her native country and the atmosphere of her state Punjab vividly. Her remark reflects the atmosphere of her state, her home, her village and the atmosphere in a country like India. It reflects the life in the countries of the East as a whole.

v. “You deserve better,

There are many things I deserve, not all of them better.” (Mukherjee, 1989:06). Taylor did not want Jasmine to leave New York and to go to Iowa. He commented that Jasmine deserved better things. Thereupon
Jasmine answered that she deserved many things and it was not necessary that those things should have been better, even dull and flat things were acceptable to her. Her attitude reflects the life style of the East.

vi. “Taylor thought dull was the absence of action not dull is its own kind of action. Dullness is a kind of Luxury.” (Mukherjee, 1989:06). In Taylor’s opinion, dullness was absence of action. Dullness was inaction. In Jasmine’s opinion, dullness is its own kind of action. For her, dullness is a kind of luxury. The opposing views towards dullness as expressed by Taylor are indicative of the Western perspective while the perspective taken by Jasmine is the Oriental perspective of the people of the Eastern countries like India.

vii. “But daughters were curses. A daughter had to be married off before she could enter heaven, and dowries beggared families for generations. Gods with infinite memories visited girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations.” (Mukherjee, 1989:39). In the Eastern countries like India, daughters are considered to be curses. Dowries are to be given to marry off the daughters and giving dowries made families beggarly. It was believed that women who committed sin in their earlier births were punished by giving them daughters as children. Such beliefs, such treatment and superstitions reflect the culture of the countries of the East in particular, that of India.

viii. “I remember sneaking into my friend Vimla’s house and clicking the light switch on-off/on-off when electricity came to the brick houses of the rich traders down the road.” (Mukherjee, 1989:44). In the village of Hasnapur, the rich had brick houses, the poor lived in huts. The gap between the rich and poor was very wide. The traders were rich. Vimla was a trader’s daughter but she was Jasmine’s friend. Jasmine went to her house. She turned on and turned off the switch by clicking it. She was delighted to see electricity coming and going through her clicking of the light switch. Her brother called Vimla’s father potatoes babu but Jasmine did not care. She
observed the game of light shining and light going through her clicking of the light switch. Electricity was a miracle, a wonder for Jasmine and she played with it. This is how the average Indians looked at the wonderful gifts of science and modern life style dominated by science and its equipment.

ix. “Have you forgotten what the Muslims did to Sikhs in partitions?” (Mukherjee, 1989:66). Prakash asked Sukkhi if he had forgotten what the Muslims in Pakistan had done to the Sikhs. This is a relevant question as the movement for Khalistan was supported by Pakistan in order to destroy the integrity of India as a nation. The seeds of separation were sown in the inflammable minds of fanatics like Sukkhi: Therefore Prakash reminded him of the recent happenings during the days of partition. This is the reflection of what Indians think of the partition days. This social impact of the partition had been tremendous and the same is reflected here. Prakash now questioned Sukkhi to remember the historical facts. The Ten Gurus of the Sikhs were harassed by the Moghuls. Emperor Jehangir and Emperor Aurangzeb of the Moghul dynasty were in the forefront even in the killing of the Gurus. Prakash argues in the way the Indians generally think about these developments.

x. “His uncle fussied. In the old days we had big houses and big families. Now nobody cared for old people, and his aunt wept. Your wife is so fancy that our place isn’t good enough for that? The Prime Minister was destroying ancient values with her vasectomy program and giving out free uterine loops.” (Mukherjee, 1989:76). Prakash married Jasmine in the Registrar’s house. Jasmine’s friend Vimla and her fiancé were holding off their marriage till the fiancee was twenty because of their horoscopes. Vimla was ready to make a sacrifice of little bliss for a guarantee of lifetime. Prakash on the other hand was a modern man, city man. Right from the beginning he gave up some traditions. His uncle expected him to move in with his family but Prakash took an apartment of two rooms on rent. His uncle complained about nobody caring for old people. His aunt blamed Jasmine for being too
fancy. The then Prime Minister of the country was destroying ancient values. The vasectomy programme and free distribution of loops was being carried out. The changes in Indian life style in the years after Independence are noticed. Ancient values and old traditions were being replaced. Registered marriages, family planning programmes and single family accommodation were the changes introduced then. The changes in life in India are reflected.

xi. “But Prakash remained impatient. There’s no room in modern India for feudalism, he declared.” (Mukherjee, 1989:76). Prakash pointed out that the days of feudalism were over. Modern India did not need the old fashioned traditional feudalism. Prakash was a man of progressive views and he had given up many traditional customs. These changes reflect the way in which India has moved from the traditional feudalism to modern rationalism in some of the areas of social life. Prakash, being a city man was in favour of progress, science and modernity. That is the changing Indian life style.

xii. “For the uncle, love was control. Respect was obedience. For Prakash love was letting go, independence, self reliance. I learned the litany by heart. But I felt suspended between worlds.” (Mukherjee,1989:76). The difference between the attitudes of Prakash’s uncle and Prakash himself revealed the difference between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. Love was control and respect was obedience in the uncle’s opinion. These old world views were still held by the older persons. Prakash thought love and independence to be freedom and self reliance. Jasmine was still suspended between these two worlds of tradition and of modernity. The reflection of changing life styles in India is noticed here.

xiii. “Pygmalion wasn’t a gay I’d seen or read then, but I realize now how much of Professor Higgins there was in my husband.” (Mukherjee, 1989:77). Jasmine had not then read nor seen the play Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw. The play is about transformation. In the play the flower girl Lizzy is transformed into a high born society lady. She used to speak Cockney
belonged to the lower class of society. She spoke arrogantly in the language of the uncultured. Professor Higgins, the Professor of Linguistics, improved her speech, her pronunciation and taught her the social manners of a lady belonging to the aristocratic family. What Professor Higgins was to the flower girl, Prakash was to Jasmine. He transformed her completely. A husband changing the life styles of a wife is a pattern generally noticed in the Indian society.

xiv. “He wanted to break down the Jyoti I’d been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman.” (Mukherjee, 1989:77). Prakash thought of changing Jasmine through the process of transformation. He wanted to completely break down what she was in the village of Hasnapur. Then he wanted to reshape her completely. From the girl in a village he wanted to transform her to a woman in a city. He wanted her to be a city woman as he himself was a city man. He wanted her to be modern like him. The transformation is reflecting the changing Indian social life during the last century.

xv. “To break off the past he gave me a new name: Jasmine he said, “You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You’ll quicken the whole world with your perfume. Jyoti, Jasmine; I shuttled between identities.” (Mukherjee, 1989:77). Her name was Jyoti in Hasnapur and now in the city Prakash gave her a new name Jasmine. He wanted to break with the past through the change of her name from Jyoti to Jasmine. He gave her this name because she was small sweet and heady. He wanted her fragrance to spread through the whole world from Jyoti to Jasmine. That was the change which made Jasmine shuttle between identities from a village girl to city woman. That reflects the changing Indian life-style.

xvi. “That evening was a turning point in our marriage. He had read aloud from the manual as he worked “Here”, He said, “your hands are smaller. Lift this.” He gave a pair of delicate pliers and guided them through a maze of tiny lines and wires.” (Mukherjee, 1989:89). Jasmine started reading one of
the manuals that Prakash had collected. She found it an exciting reading. That evening became a turning point in their married life. He worked and simultaneously read the manual. He told her to hold the pliers and guided her how to fix the parts. The husband taught his wife how to work on the electronic equipment. He found her quite pliable. He found her to be impressionistic. She could be moulded in the manner he desired. He was glad to notice her traits. Her obedience, he found to be rewarding. In a new vocation, Prakash and Jasmine shared their activities in the true Indian Style. The companionship of husband and wife with one mind, one action one goal is considered ideal in the Indian way of life. The same ideal is reflected in the relationship between Prakash and Jasmine.

xvii. “Bigger than Jagtiani and son”, I laughed, “Vijh and Wife” my husband said from deep inside my embrace, May be even Vijh and Vijh.” (Mukherjee, 1989:89). Jasmine agreed with him and said that their shop would be bigger than that of Jagtiani. Prakash too responded. He suggested ‘Vijh and wife’ and later ‘Vijh and Vijh’ as the names to be given to their own shop. The bonds of goal have joined them both in embrace and in mind. The ideal husband wife relationship is reflected here in the world of Indian way of life. Prakash told Jasmine about the visas to be obtained from the American embassy. He would be required to give proof of their marriage. These documents and activities for Visa and foreign exchange were essential for the Indians who wanted to migrate to the US for higher education and better employment opportunities. This trend too reflects the dreams which the people of the Eastern countries cherish and do whatever is required for achieving their target.

xviii. “I can’t live without you”, I said. I realised the moment I said how true it had become. My life before Prakash, the girl I had been, the village was like a dream from another life.” (Mukherjee, 1889:91). Jasmine told Prakash that she could not live without him. That was a reality, she realized its truth. Life before Prakash the girl she had been in the village, were like a dream
from another life. Life with Prakash was her life. Such a union of lives is another peculiarity of the life of an Indian wife. Even then Jasmine could not tolerate the separation. This trait is noticed among the Indian wives and the same is reflected here.

xix. “If you leave me, I’ll jump into a well.” (Mukherjee, 1989:92). Jasmine told Prakash that she would jump into a well as an expression of the unbearable grief that is experienced by an Indian wife at the time of her separation from her husband. It may appear an exaggerated statement but such hyperboles are commonly expressed by a wife in such a situation. He reminded her that now she was Jasmine and not Jyoti. A forward looking progressive Jasmine of the modern times could never jump and should never jump into any well. Jasmine was not to commit suicide. Prakash brought out the significance of her role as Jasmine. The progressive Indian husband’s view is reflected here.

xx. “I felt rich, prized a queen. A sari for the co-owner of Vijh and wife.” (Mukherjee, 1989:93). On the hot cloudless April evening Prakash took Jasmine on his Bajaj scooter to the fanciest sari shop in the bazaar. He ordered the shop assistants to show them wedding sairs and asked Jasmine to make her pick. Jasmine felt rich. She felt prized. She felt like a queen. It was the sari for the co-owner ‘Vijh and wife’ the dream shop that both Prakash and Jasmine were to set up. Prakash and Jasmine married in the Registrars office. It was a marriage without dowry and without any pomp and show. Prakash was now in a mood to celebrate and decided to purchase a wedding sari for Jasmine. That made Jasmine feels rich and prized like a queen. This reaction of hers is peculiar to an Indian wife.

4.3 Mirroring the West

The cultural encounters between the East and the West mirror the life style of the West, the US.
i. “Last night they said that two fellows had come up from Dalton in Jinson country with plans for putting in a golf course on his father’s farm”. (Mukherjee, 1989:10). The Lutz farm was the neighbouring farm of the Ripplmyers. Gene Lutz had suddenly died and his wife Carol Lutz moved to California. Now Gene’s son Darrel Lutz was talking of selling the farm. He told Jasmine that two persons from Dalton had come up with plans for putting in a golf course on his father’s farm. The agricultural land was to be put up for Non-agricultural purposes. This change from the scenario brings in development. In the industrialized society, the role of agriculture gets reduced and more non-agricultural use of land is promoted. The same phenomenon was taking place in Iowa as the case of Lutz farm illustrates. The Western lifestyle is reflected and the mirror upto the Western culture is held in these changes from agricultural to non-agricultural use of land.

ii. “In the kitchen today, as on all Sundays, Mother Ripplemeyer is in charge.” (Mukherjee 1989:12). Mother Ripplemeyer prepared her Sunday roast for Bud and Jasmine and other visitors every Sunday. It was a family custom to do so. It was a fine house. Visiting the parents on a specific day of the week or the year is a practice followed in the Western countries. The sons and daughters began to earn and live separately as soon as they became adults. Single and separate families here become the norm. This is a peculiar trait of the lifestyle in the Western countries in which parents live separately in their individual capacity.

iii. “The house he bought after divorce is low and squat, a series of additions.” (Mukherjee, 1989:13). After the divorce with Karin, Bud bought another house for himself and settled on the farm. In that low and squat house many additions were made. Mother Ripplemeyer’s house would be theirs but till then they were satisfied with the house on their farm of three hundred acres. The present accommodation was small but eventually they would get mother’s house. The arrangement mirrors the accommodation of persons in the Western countries which is a part of Western culture.
iv. “Kiss an old fool for love? He grins; I bring my face down close to his big face.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 21). The gathering of the rain clouds and the possibility of the storm make Mother Ripplemeyer upset and she expressed concern over the safety of her husband Vern. Disturbed Bud was calmed down by Jasmine with the gentle touch of her hands. Bud asked her to kiss him and she brought her face close to his face. The memories of the past were revived and Mother Ripplemeyer remembered her husband Vern, Bud asked Jasmine to kiss and she obeyed him. The changes in weather have affected the change in mood. Nature and mood are fused together to reflect the West. Bud kissed Jasmine on chin, cheeks, eyelids, temples and forehead. The cold pale star of her scar, her third eye was touched and warmed. Bud as well as Jasmine was happy. Jasmine comforted Bud and Bud kissed her. Both were happy, in the Western lifestyle they were pleased to touch and to kiss.

v. “I wanted to shout to the lady, Mrs Steve, Two years ago Bud got shot and will never walk again, Are you listening?” (Mukherjee, 1989: 27). Jasmine wanted to tell the lady that Bud Ripplemeyer was shot two years ago. He would never walk again. She wanted to know if Mrs. Steve was listening to what Jasmine said. Violence is another fruit of life in the US which is reflected in what happened to Bud. Jasmine questioned Mrs. Steve connecting Mexican immigrants and their problems with her personal problem about the difficulty in making the payment of car loan instalments. She now referred to the Vietnamese orphan, adopted by Baden, Du. What about Du? Was not war mongering the cause of Du’s condition? Jasmine too wanted the President to listen to this. War, Violence, Unemployment and Illegal immigration are the problems troubling the social life of America and the same is mirrored in the exact from the novel ‘Jasmine.’

vi. “Bud’s eye are closed, Face contorted, “Sweet Jane” he mutters, “I have brought you to this. The big old bead tricks,” (Mukherjee, 1989: 37). Bud was no longer a whole man but desire had not deserted him. Lust deprived
him of spontaneous fulfilment. That shamed him. Otherwise, once he had been an impulsive pursher, Jasmine prepared him for bed. He tried but then Jasmine took the charge. Bud’s eye was closed and face became contorted. He muttered that he had brought Jasmine, his Jane, to that stage. He blamed himself in the mood of self-abuse. The coming together of Bud and Jasmine through Mother Ripplemeyer flourished. They came together in their minds and then their bodies too came together. Though he suffered, Bud kept his spirit high. This spirit of never say die is peculiar to the Western lifestyle that is mirrored here.

vii. “I hush him with my lips. I do not know the pain he suffers, if any, if bliss lies this close to agony, if he is on a different plane.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 37). Jasmine made Bud quiet with her lips. She could not guess if he suffered or was in bliss or was close to agony or was on a different plane. She could not know it exactly if that was pain or bliss. She responded to him not knowing whether he suffered or rose to a higher plane. Making the most of the present was practised by Jasmine and Bud. That reflects a trait in the lifestyle of the West.

viii. “On the train I weep at the beauty of the visa stamps Hari-prar has bought me. I feel renewed, the recipient of an organ transplant.” (Mukherjee, 1989:103). Jasmine was delighted that after scrutiny of her travel documents, she was allowed to proceed on her journey to the US. Though the documents were not regular, it was found after scrutiny that those documents were permissible. She remembered her brother’s effort in procuring the documents. The Western life-style is mirrored here.

ix. “Then suddenly in the pinkening black of predawn, America caromed off the horizon.” (Mukherjee, 1989:107). Jasmine was on the trawler out of Europe. Then she smelled the unrinsed water of the distant shore. In the pink and black shades of pre-dawn, Jasmine suddenly noticed America on the horizon. She had reached her destination. She was about to touch the land of America as she was almost on the shores of that country. This was
the place her husband wanted to bring her. She was now there to complete his task. She reached America through her sheer will-power facing so many odds, ups and downs, pains and sufferings. At last she was there passing through on the American horizon.

x. “The first thing I saw were the two cones of a nuclear plant, and smoke spreading from them in complicated but seemingly purposeful patterns, edges lit by the raising sun, like a gray, intricate map of an unexplored island continent against the pale unscratched blue of the sky.” (Mukherjee, 1989:107). Jasmine saw the two cones of the nuclear plant. That was the first American construction she saw. Smoke was spread in complicated but purposeful pattern. The edges of the nuclear plant were lit by the rising sun. Against the background of the blue sky, it appeared like a map of an island. The sight of America was characterized by the appearance of the nuclear plant. The nuclear energy is one of the highlights of the West. Its mention is the reflection of the Western lifestyle and the wonders of the West.

xi. “I waded through Eden’s waste; plastic bottles, floating oranges boards, sodden boxes , white and green plastic sacks, tied shut but picked open by birds and pulled apart by crabs.” (Mukherjee, 1989:107). Jasmine went through the water on the sea-shore. It was like going through Eden’s waste. The garbage contained plastic bottles, sodden boxes, plastic sacks and other objects. The sacks were opened by birds and pulled apart by crabs. This is the peculiar landscape; the garbage too is noticed on the shores. This mirroring of the West is seen here in this description of the landscape. Jasmine has reached the shores of the US - the Western world. This side of America too mirrored the West—the side of violence, crime, and illegitimate transactions.

xii. “Empty swimming pools and plywood panels in the window frames grip my guts.” (Mukherjee, 1989:109). Jasmine observed in that dubious location swimming pools that were empty and the window frames were fixed by the panels of plywood. The sight of these structures made Jasmine
surprised and shocked. This location of America was full of garbage, was ugly and detestable. It reflected the violent criminal lawlessness on the other side of the materially advanced countries of the West. Jasmine had to spend her first night in America in such a motel which had windows fixed with plywood and which had garbage filled pool and dirty parking lot. This side of America too mirrors the dubious financial transactions.

xiii. “She came to me and put her hands on my shoulders. “Child! What is it? You’re trembling”, she led me to the stairs and sat me down on the middle one, What in God’s name is this country coming to!” (Mukherjee, 1989:130). Jasmine, after her encounter with Half-face started walking. She saw a man teaching the others to drive an old sedan. She demanded water but the man snapped at her. At that moment an old white lady came out in a straw hat, dark glasses, black pants and a T-shirt. She scolded the man for behaving in such a despicable fashion. That woman Lillian Gordon put her hands on her shoulder. She made her sit on the stairs. Lillian Gordon wondered what the country was coming to. The woman herself proved to be a good Samaritan for Jasmine. The kind-hearted lady presented the goodness, the decency and the generosity in the land of America. The cardinal virtues were as if personified in Lillian Gordon. She mirrored the good side of the American society.

xiv. “She stood and clapped her hands and shouted out a series of names or commands in a rapid language. Soon, a woman appeared with food on a paper plate and a plastic fork.” (Mukherjee, 1989:130). Lillian Gordon clapped and commanded to help Jasmine. Soon she was given food in a paper plate with a plastic fork. Lillian Gordon’s gesture of kindness helped Jasmine to recover; she did not just scold the driver but ordered that food be given to Jasmine. She proved to be both a woman of kind loving words and of generous noble actions. Mother Ripplemeyer and Lillian Gordon represent the nobility of high values of humanitarianism. The humanism that
is cherished by the people in the countries in the West is mirrored in the words and deeds of Lillian Gordon.

xv. “We drove into a mall in Clearwater for the test. Time to try out my American talk and walk.” (Mukherjee, 1989:133). Lillian Gordon took Jasmine home with her. It was a wooden house on stilts on a blackish swampy ground; Jasmine was given her older daughter’s clothes. She told Jasmine to conduct herself like the Americans. She exhorted her to walk like an American and also to talk like an American. She gave her some training. After completion of the training in American way of talking and walking, the same needed a test. They went to the mall to test her skills in talking and walking in the style of Americans in the true sense of the word. The reflection of the American way of walking and talking is mirroring the West.

xvi. “Lillian called me Jazzy. In one of the department stores I saw my first revolving door. How could something be always open and at the same time always closed?” (Mukherjee, 1989:133). Jasmine was taken to a mall by Lillian Gordon to test her American talk and walk. In the department store Jasmine saw for the first time the revolving door. She wondered how that revolving door could be always open and at the same time always closed. It was a matter of surprise for Jasmine that the revolving door remained open and also closed at one and the same time. She felt that it was one of the wonders of the West. With her rural background in India, she found it wonderful to watch a door that automatically opened or closed. The mirroring of the Western life-style in an advanced country like the US is illustrated through the revolving door.

xvii. “At Paradise place a one-bedroom until with Gulf front, bath, and balcony costs $ 280 a night that would be Kate’s old room and mine.” (Mukherjee, 1989:138). The house on the stilts was owned by Lillian Gordon, who helped the undocumented. After her death, her daughter sold it to retired ortho-dentist from Tampa. He had already purchased the barracks and the
land around and with Lillian’s property; he was advertising a “Key West-style Cottage” for people accustomed to “a slower more gracious time.” He transformed a sanctuary into a hotel, hell turned into paradise. That was characteristically American. At Paradise Place, what was Kate’s room and for some time Jasmine’s room was advertised as a room with Gulf front. It’s charges were two hundred and eighty dollars per night. The transformation of the house on stilts into a well developed beach resort is an example of the tendency quite familiar with the American way of living. It reflects the Western lifestyle as it illustrates the onward move towards development in the peculiar American fashion.

xviii. “The Kanjobal women’s room is described as having a “Gulf Breeze” During our cut-rate residence with Lillian, we stayed away from the windows.” (Mukherjee, 1989:138). The house on the stilts was sold by Lillian’s daughter to a developer from Tampa. He converted the entire area into a beach resort named Paradise Place. Kate’s room was advertised as having gulf front and the room that used to be occupied by the Kanjobal Indian women was advertised as having the pleasure of Gulf breeze. Jasmine and others had never opened the windows and stayed away from them when they stayed in that house. Commercialization is one of the peculiar features of life in the Western countries. This feature is duly mirrored here.

xix. “At ten in the morning on a Monday I arrived in New York city. There were scores of policemen swinging heavy nightsticks, but none of them pounced on me at the bottom of the escalator.” (Mukherjee, 1989:139). Jasmine reached New York. After all the difficulties and risky adventures Jasmine entered New York. She remembered that she was told that the active and alert policemen of New York would detect her to be an immigrant without valid documents. They would find her out and would catch her at the bottom of the escalator. There were indeed many policemen. They were swinging their heavy night sticks. They did not pounce on her. Jasmine
attained her destination. She came to New York and found that the police did their duty. Jasmine’s American experience is mirrored here.

xx. “They were, indeed, watching, a black man in shredded pants asked me for handout. Beggers in New York! I felt I ’d come to America too late. I felt cheated.” (Mukherjee, 1989:139). The policemen were watching and regulating the heavy traffic. Jasmine was shocked to find that a black man asked her to give something. She was shocked to find that the man was begging. She was surprised to find beggers even in America, and that too in New York. She felt that she had came to America rather late as even begging was found in New York. She felt that she was cheated by those who told her that America was a prosperous country, the land of money and honey. This is mirroring of life in the West but of a different, rather unexpected side of its life.

4. 4 The Phase of Alienation

The sense of cultural and social alienation is found in the following examples.

i. “We’ll go to America, I said, helping him out of his clothes and into bed. I laid a dampened washcloth over his eyes and forehead and sprinkled cologne on it.” (Mukherjee, 1989:84). Prakash brought an aerogram out of his trousers. That was a letter from Professor Devinder Vadhera, Prakash’s benefactor in the technical college. Prakash read the letter which informed about Florida International Institute. Professor Vadhera had appealed to him to enrol in the American Institute. Even the dullards from his college had settled in America with their wives. Prakash was Professor Vadhera’s best student. How could he lag behind! Prakash and Jasmine both thought of settling in America. They decided to leave India and to go and settle in America. The couple felt alienated from India. The attraction of happy, comfortable life and higher studies and better jobs for both made them aliens in their home country, India.
ii. “My husband was obsessed with passing exams, doing better, making something more of his life than fate intended.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 85). Jasmine realized that her husband Prakash was really ambitious. He wanted to pass his examinations. He desired to do better than what he could do in India. He wanted to change, to prosper in life. Going abroad was one of the steps to achieve his goal. He was determined to go to the institute of Florida. Jasmine found that her brothers too aspired to go the Emirates. Changing circumstances prevented them. The case of Prakash was different because he was both imaginative and ambitious. He was willing to struggle. The fascination for America is an indication of alienation from his native country India.

iii. “Dida, I said, if God sent Sukkhi to kill my husband, then I renounce God, I spit on God.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 98). After the Bomb kept in the music box by the Khalsa Lions led by Sukkhi exploded, its victim was Prakash, Jasmine’s husband. Dida, Jasmine’s grandmother, blamed Jasmine for marrying Prakash in a government office. Dida’s talk became unbearable to Jasmine. She exploded saying that she renounced such God that sent Sukkhi to murder her husband. She gave up such God. The seeds of alienation from the society in which she was born and brought up were sown by the treatment given to Jasmine in her widowhood and the talk by women including her grandmother Dida.

iv. “I blame the Muslims”, she cried. “If we had all stayed in Lahore, you would have married a prince!”

“Blame the Mahatma,” I shot back, “Prakash would have been proud of me.” (Mukherjee, 1989:98). Dida, then blamed the Muslims for the partition riots. In Dida’s opinion, if the family had been in Lahore, Jasmine would have married a prince. Jasmine replied that in that case Dida should blame the Mahatma. Prakash would have been proud of Jasmine. The pangs of partition were still nursed by Dida. The note of alienation continued since then. Dida blamed God but did not want to blame the Mahatma. She again
went on talking that her son’s house had become a house of widows and therefore of sorrow and misfortune. Jasmine had every cause to feel alienated from the house, the society, the country.

vi. “He stopped the car and got out. He put his hand over mine on the handle of the suitcase and waited for me to withdraw it.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 108). Jasmine started for the United States in order to complete the wish Prakash maintained even at the hour of his death. She crossed three continents and many hurdles to reach the shores of America. She had to travel with the undocumentes as she was one of them. She reached the shores but there was nobody to pick her up to further destination. This was noticed by the hawk-eyed captain of the trawler-Half Face. He saw her walking alone with her heavy suitcase. He stopped the car near. He got out and put his hand over Jasmine’s hand on the handle of the suitcase. He waited to see if she withdrew her hand. She was almost transfixed by him. Her alienation was complete.

vii. “Then he picked up the suitcase and slung it into the back seat of the car, “Get in”, he said. “(Mukherjee, 1989: 108). Half-Face judged that Jasmine was helpless and would require his help. He picked up her suitcase and threw it in the car. He commanded her to get into the car. This shows that Half-Face knew Jasmine’s helplessness. He took her suitcase and pushed it into the car. He was confident of Jasmine’s dependence and acted shrewdly. Her alienation from the native land is clearly noticed and follow-up action was being taken by Half-Face.

viii. “Yes,” I say,” I do believe you, we do keep revisiting the world. I have also travelled on time and space. It is possible.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 127). Jasmine contemplated about the story of Mary Webb about the transformations. She should have died after the death of Prakash so she would not have become Jane Ripplemeyer. Lord Yama, the God of Death should have claimed her then. She told Mary Webb that she believed her story as she had travelled herself in time and space. Revising the world was
indeed possible. The transformations through time and space confirmed Jasmine’s alienation from the country in which she was born, in which she grew up and in which she married Prakash and in which she lost him through that traggaic explosion. The transformations of her life confirmed her alienation.

ix. “Jyoti of Hasanpur was not Jasmine, Duff’s day mummy and Taylor and Wylie’s au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn’t this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 127). She went through transformations like Jyoti, Jasmine, Kali, Jase and Jane in the brief period of her life. She was born as Jyoti in Hasnapur. She studied there and then married Prakash who brought about her Pygmalion-like transformation to Jasmine. Though all was lost after Prakash’s death, Jasmine could raise herself to become Kali for Half-Face. Lillian Gordon helped her get a job in New York to become Duff’s day mummy and Taylor and Wylie’s help in Manhattan. Sukkhi’s appearance there sent her to Iowa. In Baden, Iowa, Mother Ripplemeyer made possible her transformation as Jane Ripplemeyer. The change of lives in a life brings out the fact that Jasmine was alienated from India and was on her way to become an American.

xi. “And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms?” (Mukherjee, 1989: 127). Jasmine wondered in which of these transformations she murdered Half-Face, in which she held dying Prakash and in which she was raped in different places. She was reminded of her being Kali that killed Half-Face, of her being Jasmine who mourned over Prakash’s dead body and the undocumented traveller that was subjected to rapes. Her transformations proved her alienation from her native country India.

x. “My daughter calls them Third World heels, Lillian said, laughed, after the Tea had calmed me down. “Walk American”, she exhorted me, and she
showed me how.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 132). Lillian Gordon took Jasmine to her home and gave her Kate’s room and clothes. She told Jasmine that shoes were the biggest giveaways of the undocumented aliens. She told her that her daughter Kate called them Third World heels, the footwear put on by the people from the Third World countries. She told Jasmine to walk in the American way. She demonstrated to her how to walk in the American style. In her alienation it was essential for Jasmine to start walking and talking in the American manner.

xii. “I worked hard on the walk and department within a week, she said, I’d lost my shy slide. She said I walked like one of these Trindad Indian girls, all thrust and cheekiness. She meant it as a compliment.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 132-133). Jasmine practised hard. She improved her walk, her gait and her deportment. With a week’s practice, she lost her shy slide and began to walk with all thrust and cheekiness. Lillian Gordon paid her compliments for making such a changeover in about a week. Her shy slide was what she had carried as an Indian feature. Now she lost it. Her alienation from Hasnapur, from India is noticed in her transformation, in her changed style of walking and talking.

xiii. “I got out of Flushing within few months. Flushing was safe, a cocoon to hatch out of.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 142). Jasmine got out of Flushing after a stay of five months. It was a safe place. It was almost a cocoon. It was closed, secure but Jasmine could not stay there longer. She could not adjust with her surroundings, her alienation is noticed here. In Flushing she was with the Vadheras but could not continue to stay with them after five months. The stage of alienation made her leave the company of the members of the Indian family; this was a clear break from the past. This separated Jasmine from the Indian background of the Vadheras and that made her liberated to get assimilated in America.

xiv. “Professorji and his family put me up for five months-and it could have been five years, given the elasticity of the Indian family-just because I was
the helpless widow of his favourite student.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 142). Jasmine was staying with the family of Vadheras for five months. Professorji and his family would have kept her even for five years and more. Jasmine knew the elasticity of the Indian family. The Vadheras would have kept Jasmine in their family for longer period because she was the helpless widow of Professor Vadhera’s favourite student-Prakash Vijh. Inspite of this being the situation, Jasmine’s stay there lasted for five months only. It was Jasmine who decided to pick up her belongings and it was she who took up the train to come out of the ghetto. She felt alienated in those surroundings and therefore she herself terminated her stay in the family of the Vadhera’s.

xv. “I want to be fair. Professorji is a generous man, Somehow the trouble is in me. I had jumped a track. This kind of generosity wasn’t good enough for me.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 142-143). It was not the Vadhera family that caused her to leave Flushing. The trouble was with Jasmine. It was her nature, her temperament. She therefore jumped the track. Professor Vadhera was generous but his generosity was different from Prakash’s generosity or Lillian Gordon’s generosity. Professor Vadhera’s generosity was not enough for Jasmine. Therefore she left. She was passing through the phase of alienation and that is emphasized in this incident.

xvi. “Flushing, with all its immigrant services at hand, frightened me, I, who had every reason to fear America, was infringed by the city and the land beyond the rivers.” (Mukherjee, 1989:145). Flushing provided all immigrant services but Jasmine was frightened by the city and the land beyond the rivers. Flushing frightened and infringed Jasmine. It was because of its artificial Indianness that Flushing caused such an impact on Jasmine. It indicates Jasmine’s sense of alienation. The Vadheras were capable of buying an apartment in Astoria. Their savings enabled them to do so, Yet the Vadheras lived in this ghetto of Indians. This caused a sense of alienation from all things Indian in the mental make up of Jasmine.
xvii. “This was the tenor of all the old people’s complaints-. We have followed the children to America and look what happens to us! Our sons are selfish, our daughter wants to work and stay thin”. (Mukherjee, 1989:147). The old people gambled, complained about their sons and daughters-in-law. They followed their children to America and what had happened to them was this. They suffered on account of the selfishness of their sons. Their wives too went to work and they wanted to stay fit and slim. They practiced family planning. The Indian parents in America who came with their sons felt cheated, were disillusioned, they felt alienated from the country of their birth.

xviii. “Flushing was a neighborhood in Jullundhar. I was spiraling into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness.” (Mukherjee, 1989:148). Jasmine realized that though Flushing was in America geographically, it was an Indian ghetto. It was more or less a neighbourhood of Jullundhar. She was depressed on account of the high fortress of Punjabiness of the atmosphere in Flushing. The other Indians including the members of the Vadhera family found the Indianness and in particular the Punjabiness of the locality satisfying. Jasmine did not find it so. She was depressed on account of the spiraling heights of the fortress of Punjabi features in Flushing. Jasmine experienced the sense of alienation from India and Punjab. When the Vadhera couple would be out for work and the old parents sleeping in the afternoons, quite often Jasmine cried alone in the bathroom. She sobbed from unnamed frustration that made her weep. She felt choked, she felt alienated in this Indian ghetto in America and even from Punjab.

xix. “One Monday after a particularly boisterous Sunday. Professorji came home around two in the afternoon and caught me crying as he barged into the dark bathroom. He seemed helpless before my grief.” (Mukherjee, 1989:149). Professor Vadhera found Jasmine weeping in the dark bathroom. He appeared helpless before her grief. Professor Vadhera did not know the cause behind her crying in this manner. She tried to stop sobbing
but the more she tried, the more uncontrollable her grief and her sobbing became. Professor Vadhera did not know how to comfort her grief. He did not know how to stop Jasmine’s sobbing and weeping. He found himself helpless before her grief. Jasmine’s sense of alienation caused her to express her grief through her sobs and tears.

xx. “Professorji turned on the light and with it the, noisy, Hateful fan, “You’re like a daughter to me, he said, in his stiff, shy way. “Has anybody been treating you like a servant?” (Mukherjee, 1989:149). Jasmine’s sense of alienation in the Indian ghetto made her cry in the dark bathroom on same afternoons. On one such occasion, Professor Vadhera found her weeping in the dark bathroom. He did not understand the reason behind this. He guessed that Jasmine was weeping because somebody gave her a treatment that was given to a servant. He considered her to be his daughter. She was his favourite student’s widow. He felt it his duty to protect her, he gave her shelter in his apartment. It was not the treatment but it was the sense of alienation that made her weep.

4.5 The Phase of Assimilation

The following examples show how Jasmine gets assimilated with Western culture. Her cultural transformation moved towards complete assimilation in the American society.

i. “Bud wants me to marry him, “Officially”, he says, “before the baby comes. People assume we’re married.” (Mukherjee, 1989:07). Jasmine at an early age married Prakash who worked in a shop in the city. After his death, Jasmine moved to America as an undocumented. She came across Half-Face who tried to exploit her but she became Kali to eliminate the demon out of her path. Lillian Gordon sent her to New York. She lived with the Vadheras for about five months in an Indian ghetto in Flushing. She worked as a day-mummy to Duff, the adopted daughter of Taylor and Wylie Hayes.
After realising Sukkhi’s presence in New York, Jasmine fled to Iowa. Mother Ripplemeyer brought her to her son Bud Ripplemeyer, a banker; Jasmine was pregnant with Bud’s baby. Bud wanted her to get married “Officially”, though most of the people of the area assumed that they were as close as a couple. Jasmine’s Americanization is revealed here in clear terms.

ii. “Going for me is this: he wasn’t in a wheel chair when we met. I didn’t leave him after it happened.” (Mukherjee, 1989:07). Jasmine met Bud when he was not in a wheel chair. He was not maimed then. She knew him before the farmer shot Bud in his back. After Bud became a crippled person moving in a wheel chair, Jasmine did not desert him. She remained with him, lived together, got pregnant with his baby. Jasmine was on her way to total assimilation through her Americanization. Her cultural transformation moved towards complete assimilation in the American Society.

iii. “Sam was an animal I couldn’t name. A small dinosaur? A giant Lizard? She let him down. He stared and stretched, turning his head in every direction, yawning and hissing, his long black tongue flicking like a whip.” (Mukherjee, 1989:162). Lillian Gordon who gave shelter to Jasmine in her house on the stilts sent her to New York to her daughter Kate. Kate arranged for her a job as a day-mummy. Behind a partition in Kate’s room, Jasmine heard some rattling and scratching which Kate said was Sam scratching. She brought out Sam in the centre of the room. That was a small dinosaur like animal. He was like a giant lizard. That was a marine iguana. Kate let Sam down. The creature yawned and hissed. He turned his head in every direction, stared and stretched. His long black tongue flicked like a whip. No Indian would show such fascination for large reptile like that marine iguana called Sam. Jasmine picked him up and held him. That indicates her Americanization—her willingness to handle a large lizard-like animal.
iv. “I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Bornard dormitory.” (Mukherjee, 1989:165). Kate and Jasmine took a bus all the way up Broadway to 116th street, at the gates of Columbia teachers. Here Jasmine was brought to the apartment of one of the teachers. She was to work there as a day-mummy to a girl. Her American job in an American apartment in the University apartments in New York entitled Jasmine to claim that she became an American in the true sense of the word. Her Americanization that started with her training in talk and walk culminated in this job of being a day-mummy to a true American girl.

v. “I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years.” (Mukherjee, 1989:165). Though a day-mummy, Wylie Hayes treated Jasmine almost like her younger sister. Wylie and her husband Taylor Hayes were in their thirties. Taylor treated her with equality and due decency and genuine respect. That was his broad democratic American spirit. Being a part of the family of Taylor, Wylie and their adopted daughter Duff was part of Jasmine’s progress in Americanization. Her Americanization duly signalled her assimilation in the American society. In the Hayes household, Jasmine was accommodated as a legitimate member. She was the day-mummy to Duff, the adopted daughter of Taylor and Wylie Hayes. Wylie Hayes called her caregiver. Due respect, genuine love and tender care was given to Jasmine by every member of the family till she fled from them on her own due to the threat posed by Sukkhi’s presence in the area. For two years she lived as an American in an American family. Her Americanization and her assimilation are noticed here.

vi. “He smiled his crooked-toothed smile, and I began to fall in love. I mean, I fell in love with what he represented to me, a professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her, and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she didn’t understand it.”(Mukherjee, 1989:167). Jasmine genuinely fell in love with Taylor Hayes on account of his
humanitarian treatment. He smiled at her. He represented the Americanized way of life and perspective to her. Though a professor, Taylor offered her biscuits. He treated her as an equal. He smiled at her. He admitted her to the broad democracy of his jokes. These gestures were those of a man of decency and refined sensibility. His generosity of attitude, his broad-mindedness, his liberal perspective and his gentleness of conduct represented a true American. Jasmine’s appreciation of these qualities and her understanding of a true American’s nature bring her very close to her total Americanization, to her total assimilation in the American culture.

vii. “It seemed entirely American. I was curious about his life, not repulsed.” (Mukherjee, 1989:167). The way Taylor Hayes treated Jasmine revealed his genuine American spirit. His broad-mindedness, his democratic liberalism, his generosity of approach, his gentleness and his decent conduct spoke highly of his cultured personality. Jasmine thought it to be entirely American. She was curious to know about him. She was impulsive to that. This indicates her Americanization and her desire of assimilation in American culture. Jasmine wanted to watch the way a man like Taylor Hayes lived in America. She wanted to know about it. She wanted to be a part of such a kind of life in America. Jasmine desired to be assimilated in the American culture. She considered Taylor to be an ideal to be followed. Her Americanization would be complete by becoming a part of such a life as Taylor’s.

viii. “Wylie showed me around, Sixteen hundred square feet, she said, so I don’t think either of us will feel crowded.” (Mukherjee, 1989:169). Jasmine became Duff’s day-mummy. Duff was adopted by Taylor and Wylie Hayes. Wylie took Jasmine around the apartment. It was a sixteen hundred square feet apartment, quite a large one for four persons. They would not feel crowded in such a spacious apartment. Though Jasmine was to stay with them as a servant, both Taylor and Wylie accepted her as a member of the family and were determined to give Jasmine her due space in the family.
Equality, human touch, mutual respect and individual space were reserved even for a day-mummy of the girl-child they had adopted. This indicated their American characteristics of broad democratic viewpoint. Jasmine herself was willing to become a part of the family. She was willing to get assimilated with the American life society and culture.

ix. “If you have a thing about radiation, you don’t have to use it”, she said, “you just let us know when we upset you, all right? I don’t have a thing about radiation,” I said. (Mukherjee, 1989:169). Wylie told Jasmine to inform if she was allergic to radiation. Jasmine was not. Wylie told Jasmine to tell if anything upset her. The care to be taken was indicated by Wylie. Jasmine was willing to get adjusted with the life in the apartment in Claremont Avenue in New York. Jasmine’s taking a job in the Hayes household indicates her acceptance of the new set-up of life in America. She is getting assimilated.

x. “I wanted to become the person they thought they saw humorons, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murder not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful.” (Mukherjee, 1989:171). Jasmine did not want to reveal the negative aspects of her life and her temperament. She did not want to live as an illegal immigrant, not as a murderer though she had killed Half-Face for her own defense. She did not want them to know that she was widowed and that she was raped often. She did not let them know that she was destitute and fearful. She wanted to be what they thought her to be. Taylor and Wylie thought that Jasmine was a humorous, intelligent, refined and affectionate person. Her sense of humour, her intelligence and her refined affectionate temperament were considered to be her features by Taylor and Wylie Hayes. Jasmine therefore wanted to become an individual that would suit such a personality. That would be her assimilation with the American lifestyle.

xi. “In Flushing, I had lived defensively in the midst of documented rectitude; I did not want to live legally if it also meant living like a refugee.”
(Mukherjee, 1989:171). Jasmine in Flushing lived defensively. She knows her documents were not adequate then. She did not want to live like a refugee. She wanted to live legally. Her desire to be assimilated in American culture was uppermost and the same is disclosed here.

xii. “They thought I wanted a room of my own. I had no way of telling them it wasn't necessary, that I worried about Duff all alone with her animal paintings and stuffed dolls.” (Mukherjee, 1989:173). Taylor and Wylie Hayes thought that Jasmine wanted a room of her own. They thought that a separate room for an individual like Jasmine was necessary. They were thinking so from their peculiar American viewpoint in which even a child was supposed to have a separate room and particularly that arrangement was duly made in every family. Then a grown-up person like Jasmine needed and they felt wanted a room of her own. Jasmine could not tell them that it was not necessary. In her peculiar Indian way, she was worried about Duff remaining alone in her room surrounded by the toys and her paintings. The difference between the American view of individual space and the Indian view of protection to the young is noticed here. Jasmine’s moving on the path of her own Americanization is rapid and she is being assimilated with the American life style. Jasmine was pleased with her ward for whom she was a care giver.

xiii. “For her, I was a wise adult without an accent. For me, she was an American friend whose language I understood and humour I could laugh at, and she laughed at mine. I did have a sense of humour.” (Mukherjee, 1989:173). Duff and Jasmine was attached to each other. Jasmine was a wise adult in Duff’s opinion. For Jasmine, Duff was her American friend. Jasmine understood whatever Duff expressed and laughed at her sense of humour. Duff too gave the same response to Jasmine’s speech and humour. Knowing Duff was getting to know America and Americans better. Jasmine could do that and her Americanization steadily moved ahead. She got assimilated with the American way of life, society and culture.
xiv. “I took in everything, every morning the news sank into my brain, and stayed. Language on the street, on the forbidden television, at the Hayess’ dinners, where I sat like a guest and only helped with the serving (and increasingly, controlled the menu), all became my language.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 174). In her curiosity and eagerness to become an American, Jasmine absorbed everything. She took in whatever came across her way. The morning news sank in her brain and she remembered that. She gathered whatever she observed, whatever she watched and heard and whatever she heard she absorbed completely. Her learning of language began with the language on the street, on the television and at dinner. She learned whatever came to her in the form of language in use. She learned like a child. She absorbed whatever she learned. This is another indication of Jasmine’s preparedness for getting assimilated into the American way of life.

xv. “This time his face is smiling, confident. He mastered his demons. For the first time in our life together, he bends down, over the rifle to kiss me. “You gave me a new life. I’ll never forget you.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 223). Du was confident and he smiled with firm determination. He had silenced the doubts, he had mastered his demons. His confidence, determination had conquered his hesitation. He kissed her and told her he would always remember her. Jasmine’s feelings for Du were the same. Her life was renewed in his company. Du and Jasmine both were sailing in the same boat. They had to forget the past and go ahead in life. Du was determined to do what he desired and inspired Jasmine to do the same. Jasmine’s Americanization materialised through this.

xvi. “Bud has changed my life. I am grateful. I am carrying his child. I want to tell him that when I was a girl in Hasnapur only playboys in Bombay movies wore bathrobes.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 231). Jasmine’s life was changed in Baden, Iowa. She was grateful to Bud for this changed life. She was now pregnant with his baby. She put a blanket on Bud’s bathrobe. She
was reminded that when in Hasnapur, Jasmine the young girl, knew that only playboys in Bombay movies put on bathrobes. The memories of the past moved through the present. Her changed life was glamorous as she desired it to be. She was not now a girl from Hasnapur. She was now an American in Baden, Iowa. With her Americanization, the girl from Hasnapur was nowhere to be found. She was assimilated with the American life-style.

xvii. “I have triumphed. But how can I explain such small old triumphs to Bud?” (Mukherjee, 1989: 231). Jasmine had won the glamorous objects in Iowa, in America. Those were small triumphs. She could not tell these to Bud as both Bud and Mother Ripplemeyer were uneasy with the tales of Hasnapur. They considered it a sign of disloyalty to mention or remember Hasnapur. That indicates Jasmine’s assimilation with the West. She felt that she was now going to be with Bud in the Elsa Country. She was about to settle in this region as a partner in life of Bud Ripplemeyer, her Americanization was now certain as a person settled in Iowa.

xviii. “I think maybe I am Jane with my very own Mr. Rochester and may be it’ll be okay for us to go to Missouri where the rules are loose and yield to the impulse in a drive in chapel.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 236). Jasmine decided that she had met her Mr. Rochester as she was Jane for him. Jasmine was referring to the pair Jane and Mr. Rochester. Perhaps Bud and Jasmine would go to the state of Missouri where the laws of marriage were rather loose. Perhaps they would get married in a chapel. She was now thinking in favour of marrying Bud to settle in Iowa. Her Americanization would be officially complete with this marriage with Bud. Jasmine was due to give birth to Bud’s baby in about three months. The doctor assured her of safe delivery. This birth would make her a mother of an American baby. That would certainly assimilate her in an American society.

xix. “I cry into Taylor’s shoulder, cry through all the lives, I’ve given birth to, cry for all my dead.” (Mukherjee, 1989: 241). Jasmine was informed by
Taylor that he would be coming. Jasmine was almost willing to get married to Bud. Du’s choice of his future made her realize that she should make the choice of what would be right for her future. Karin, Bud’s wife, too comforted her in the same way. Taylor told her that they were going all the way to California and not to New York. She was caught between Bud and Taylor. There was the obligation to duty. She was obliged to Bud. There was Taylor with the offer of a worthy life of a care-giver. There was promise of life in America. She decided to reposition herself. She stopped of thinking of herself as Jane. Then she wept over Taylor’s shoulder. She was crying for all the different lives she passed through from Jyoti, Jasmine, Kali, Jane and Jase. She let the past go and decided to welcome future in Taylor’s companionship. Her Americanization prompted her to choose what was right for her to choose.

xx .“Then there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble-maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud”. (Mukherjee, 1989: 241). Jasmine realized that time alone would indicate who she was. She might be a tornado or she might be a rubble-maker. She might arise from nowhere. She might disappear into a cloud. What was in the store of future Jasmine did not know. She could not do anything else but to follow the judgment made by her conscience. She decided her action her course for the future in the light of her American experience, her Americanization. Jasmine came out. She left Bud’s house. She came to the driveway. She was departing from Baden, Iowa. She was moving ahead of Taylor. She had decided to go with Taylor and Duff to the West. She walked ahead aware of her wants and becoming greedy for fulfilling her wants. She walked ahead with hope, with abandon, with recklessness of being hopeful. Her future called her and she followed the call of her conscience, the call of her Americanization, the call of assimilation into the American culture.
4.6 Summing up

The novel Jasmine is the risky, adventurous journey of Jyoti Vijh through different experiences. In the village of Hasnapur when she was just a young girl, it was predicted that she would become a widow and she would be in an exile from the land of her birth. Her husband Prakash Vijh repaired electronic machines but was ambitious and studious. The dream of Vijh and Wife was replaced by the dream of both of them settling in America and working together. Prakash’s death shattered these dreams. Widowhood was thrust on Jyoti who was named Jasmine by Prakash. Jasmine decided to fulfil Prakash’s dream. She travelled with the undocumenteds to the America. Half-Face attempted to take advantage of her helplessness but she moved ahead as triumphant Kali that destroyed the demon.

The journey makes the four phases of her Americanization. The reflection of the East is noticed in the initial phase of her Life. Life in Hasnapur and in Jullundhar presented the glimpses of Indian culture. The traditional values of the East and the common features of the land, the people, their traditions and customs are reflected in Jasmine’s life prior to her departure towards America. The mirroring of the West is highlighted through the sections that presented the scenes of material glory in the Western culture. The facilities that are available in America make it a land of plenty, of money and honey, of prosperity and happiness. The Western life-style is mirrored in the novel Jasmine. The phase of alienation shows how Jasmine steadily moves out of the shadow of the impact of the Eastern, Indian culture. The slackening of the dominance of the Eastern culture indicates how Jasmine got alienated from the clutches of the Oriental tradition, slowly and steadily. Jasmine became modernized, Americanized. The phase of assimilation demonstrates her dilemma of choosing between the two equals. Jasmine follows her instincts, her judgment and her hope for the future.