

Aspects of Enculturation and Acculturation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine: An Appraisal*

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ABSTRACT

*This paper aims at examining the function of literature in all life situations picturized from a global point of view taking the readers or lovers of literature to the global perceptions and cultural variations with an emphasis on the aspects of enculturation and acculturation Indian English fiction with particular reference to the projection of the same in the fictional world of Bharati Mukherjee, especially **Jasmine** focusing on the point that through this novel **Jasmine**, Bharati Mukherjee has created group variability among Asian-American families in terms of acculturation and enculturation.*

Keywords: Acculturation, Global Perception, Variability, Enculturation, Cultural Variations, Asian- American Cultural, Cosmopolitan Outlook.

Literature is an art which is nothing but is a form of human expression. Definition of the word *literature* tends to be circular. *Oxford Dictionary* defines literature as "writing that is considered to be a work of art" (840). Being a social, political, cultural, and post-colonial, literature in general reveals cultural transformation and a search for identity. The content of literature is as limitless as the desire of human beings to communicate with one another. Literature tends to concern itself more and more with the interior meanings of its narrative, with problems of human personality and human relationships. Literature reflects the current social conditions, prevailing in the society. Literature habitually reflects life both deliberately and unconsciously. All literatures do reflect life situations in some measure or the other.

Indian Writing in English was sown during the period of the British rule in India. It has blossomed into an ever green tree, fragrant flowers and ripens fruits. It is not only benefits for the native people, but also benefits for the foreigners. Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao are the prominent writers of Indian literature in English. In modern times, it is guarded by a number of writers winning awards and accolades all over the world. Indian writing in English has attained an independent status in the realm of World Literature projecting wide ranges of themes and obviously reflecting Indian culture, tradition, social values and many related aspects at levels trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern predicaments.

The novelists in India have concentrated on the freedom movements and contemporary social reality. Writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Toru Dutt, and Rabindranath Tagore focused on the social problems of their age. They dealt with the moral value and experience in the context of Indian traditions. In their hands, the age-old social values were replaced by new sense of social morality. Struggles for independence caste discrimination are against Indian unity was also major themes. The writers who focused on such themes are Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Bala Chandra Rajan, and Khushwant Singh. It is a wonderful experience to study some of the Indian women writers Bharati Mukherjee is one of these new writers with new perspectives on feminine sensibility and diasporic problems. For her, the world is one big family-"Vasudhaiv kutumbkam" and assimilation and acceptance are the ultimate keys to solve all racial, geographical conflicts. Bharati Mukherjee stands out among the writers of Indian origin who have settled aboard. She calls herself as a mainstream American writer. Her rejection of the title- Indian English writer does not among to the sense of superiority but declaration of her global outlook and rejection of hyphenation. **Jasmine** is a novel of rebellious spirit against such narrow demarcations and stifling traditions. The final message is that of tolerance, liberal outlook, love for all, and compassion for all living things.

What is generally held is that the Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes. The majority of novels written by Indian women writers depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively. Today, the

works of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

Women novelists have played a crucial role in enhancing the quality and quantity of the Indian English Fiction by adding the woman's perspective and feministic dimensions to the novels. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the major women writers living in America. As an Indian-born American writer she explored the internal culture clashes of her immigrant characters.

Bharati Mukherjee was born on 27, 1940, in Calcutta, she attended an English-style school until she was 8, when her father, took the family aboard. She studied at private schools in London and Basel for the next three years. When the family returned to Calcutta, she was enrolled in Loreto House, an elite Roman Catholic school run by an order of Irish nuns. The world of her childhood was tightly circumscribed. When she left the family, she was escorted by bodyguards. Until she left for the United States, she had never attended a party with boys. At the same time, she roamed freely through the vast storehouse of Indian folk tales and epics, made a close study of the endless family dramas around her.

She obtained a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and a master's degree from the University of Baroda, in Gujarat, in 1961. She earned an M.F.A. in 1963 and a doctorate in Comparative Literature in 1969 at Iowa. Writing was deep-rooted within her literary vein even from her prime age.

She has to her credit publication of such notable novels as *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave it to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughter's* (2002), and *The Tree Bride* (2004) and two works of non-fiction, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1997) and *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987) out of which *Jasmine* is her third novel depicting the experiences of an expatriate in a multicultural society.

Bharati Mukherjee's evolution as an author indicates various themes. The various themes are unraveled with delicacy; the tightly woven structure makes an impact on the reader's mind. The style of the writer adjusts and adapts to the new environment in each novel and mark the emerging and evolving personality of Bharati Mukherjee as an immigrant in America.

The learning of culture takes place through language. The use of language is derived our collective memory, as well as writing, art, and all other that shape human consciousness, store, and transmit knowledge. According to Panopio, "Language is an integral part of culture and human culture cannot exist without it. All human societies have languages. In some simple societies where people cannot read or write, they have a spoken language. Through the use of language, wide vistas of reality have been opened." If culture can affect the structure and content of its language, then it follows that linguistic diversity derives in part from cultural diversity.

Every society has a culture, no matter how simple the culture maybe and every human being are cultured in the sense of participating in some culture. Allan Johnson said that Culture is the sum total of symbols, ideas, forms of expressions and material products associated with a collective way of life reflected in such things as beliefs, values, music, literature, art, dance, science, religious ritual and technology. The essential characteristics of Culture are learned, it must be commonly shared by group of individuals, cumulative, change of culture, and it stems from cumulative quality. No culture is ever in permanent state. It is constantly changing of new ideas and new techniques are added and old ways are constantly modified and discarded. Culture as a whole, is a system of with mutually interdependent parts.

Culture helps the individual to fulfill their potential as a human being. It provides rules of proper conduct for living in a society. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another generation during the process of socialization and disseminated among members of society.

Atkinson described Culture as consisting of "values and behaviors that are learned and transmitted within an identifiable community. It also includes the symbols, artifacts, and products of that community.....Thus, people commonly associate specific food, language, music, art, and rituals with particular cultures". Culture can be observed in the various aspects of psychological and social functioning that are shared among a group of people. Culture is a fluid construct that can undergo reconstruction over a period of time. It follows; the processes of change in these aspects of functioning can be represented by the constructs of acculturation and enculturation.

Enculturation and Acculturation are the terms related to culture in the Sociological field. Enculturation can be simply defined as the individual acquisition of a particular culture by them. Once a person is born into the world, they invariably follow the culture that surrounds them and the process of gaining these cultural traits is enculturation. Acculturation, in contrast, happens when two different cultures

meet together. This is also known as the cultural change. The amalgamation of two cultural items can be defined as the process of acculturation. The **main difference** between enculturation and acculturation is that **enculturation is the acquisition of one's own culture** while **acculturation is the merging of two cultures**.

When a person is born into the world, they need to learn how to live in the society in which they live. This **acquisition of social values and norms** of culture through unconscious repetition is known as the **process of socialization**. Thus, enculturation is a similar word for socialization. This is not a deliberate or forced teaching to an individual. Culture includes social values, norms, arts, beliefs, customs, traditions, food patterns, clothing styles and many more things that are needed in order to survive in that particular society. Throughout our lifetime we learn several cultural traits and try to adhere to those. Thus, enculturation teaches an individual roles, expectations and behaviors of the particular culture in which they live.

Enculturation is the acquisition of one's own culture. It is an essential requirement for survival and familiarization process, in which the adaptation of the behavior patterns of the surrounding culture. It can be conscious or unconscious, which helps mold a person into an acceptable member of society. The term enculturation offers a more comprehensive description of incorporating and maintaining one's ethnic cultural norms, in comparison to the "cultural maintenance" concept within the acculturation construct. The term enculturation is that, it places an equal level of focus on the process of socializing into and retaining one's Asian cultural norms as compared to the process of adapting to the norms of the U. S. culture. Acculturation is defined as the process of adapting to a new culture, including the behavioral and other internal changes that take place during the process. The first step towards assimilation is called acculturation. In other words it is cultural modification.

In the Acculturation process, we must adapt to: New languages, Different culture, Value and beliefs, Communication systems, Non-verbal, body language, and conversational styles. According to Redfield,

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals sharing different cultures come into continuous first- hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups....Under this definition acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which it is but one aspects, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation . It is also to be differentiated from diffusion, which while occurring in all instances of acculturation is not only a phenomenon which frequently takes place without the occurrence of the types of contact between people specified in the definition above, but also constitutes only one aspects of the process of acculturation.

Acculturation is the **second socialization process** of an individual. Cultural modification **of an individual, group, or people by adapting or borrowing traits from another culture is called acculturation**. It happens when **two or more cultures meet together** and there is a possibility for **cultural interchange and** also exchanges in beliefs, customs, traditions, clothing styles, food types etc. This change could be visible and affected to both cultures. In addition, group acculturation can occur when a whole group adopts the customs, traditions, and change the social institutions. In individual acculturation, not only material aspects but also a big psychological change is also involved. The refugees and immigrants also go through the acculturation process in adjusting to a new place. Acculturation is an unavoidable and universal. Assimilation occurs when an individual absorbs the culture of the dominant group while rejecting the native culture. Hence, individuals in this status are highly acculturated but not enculturated. Asian Americans in this status typically maintain Asian cultural norms that are important in the mainstream U.S. culture but have no interest in adhering to Asian cultural norms. Separation occurs when an individual does not absorb the culture of the dominant group and maintains the culture of origin. Hence, individuals in this status are strongly enculturated but not acculturated. Asian Americans in this status typically maintain Asian cultural norms but have no interest in adhering to the mainstream U.S. cultural norms.

Marginalization is the most problematic of the four statuses because marginalized Asian Americans will tend to reject both sets of norms. *Jasmine* is a novel of emigration and assimilation, both on physical and psychological levels. Bharati Mukherjee fictionalizes the process of Americanization by tracing a young Indian woman's experiences of trauma and attempting to make an own new identity for them. Mukherjee explores the themes of identity and assimilation. Jasmine literally changing her name based on different situations. The immigrants were compelled to perform according to the norms of their new homeland.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee wants to convey the changes, transformation, fluid identity, adaptability, and assimilation are the key to survival for immigrants. After the death of her husband Prakash Vih, then emigrates to the States, rescued by Lillian Gordon, her decision to flee to Iowa, her life with Bud and their

adopted son Du, and finally her decision to go away with Taylor and Duff in search of a new life show the immigrant quality of Jasmine. Jasmine speaks about fusion between two or more cultures which paves way for assimilation. This also shows Mukherjee's own gradual assimilation into American ways and sensibility, and which makes her declare: "I am one of you now". Despite all these assimilating efforts, Jasmine succeeded to maintain her identity as Indian-American in an 'ethnic high fashion'.

The state of exile, a sense of loss, the pain of separation, and disorientation makes Jasmine, a protagonist of the novel undergoes several transformations during her journey of life in America. Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane, and often experiences a deep sense of alienate resulting in a fluid state of identity. This journey becomes a tale of moral courage, a search for self-awareness and self-assertion. Uprooted from her native land India, Jyoti does her best to introduce herself into the new and alien society as an immigrant. Jasmine changes herself constantly, ferrying between multiple identities in different spaces and at different times, brings the sense of instability into the novel. She is seen against the backdrop of the rigid and patriarchal Indian society in which her life is controlled and dominated by her father and brothers who record female as follows, "village girls are cattle; whichever way you lead them that are the way they will go" (46). Jyoti seeks a modern and educated husband who keeps no faith in dowries and traditions, and thus finds a US based modern-thinking man, Prakash. Prakash encourages Jyoti to study English, and symbolically gives Jyoti a new name Jasmine, and a new life.

He wanted to break down the Jyoti as I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. 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. (77)

Transformation starts from a village girl under the shelter of her father and brothers, wife of an American traditional husband who gives her all liberties. Jasmine's happiness is short-lived. She is widowed and she has to now choose between the rigid traditions of her family and perform Sati, or continue to live the life of Jasmine in America. Jasmine sways between the terms with the two worlds, one of "nativity" and the other as an "immigrant". Jasmine sets off on an agonizing trip as an illegal immigrant to Florida, and thus begins her symbolic trip of transformations, displacement, and a search for identity.

Jasmine undergoes her next transformation from a dutiful traditional Indian wife, Jasmine to Jane when she meets the Taylor and then moves on to become Bud's Jane. The author depicts this transformation and transition as a positive and an optimistic journey. Jasmine creates a new world consisting of new ideas, values, and constantly unmasking her past to establish a new cultural identity by inculcating the new desires, skills, and habits. This transition of culture is defined in the changes in her attitude, but also a relationship with men.

She deals with the ethics and culture of two dissimilar worlds and her occurrence with different identities of Jyoti and Jasmine, where Jasmine feels hanging between the traditional and modern world. Jasmine then meets Lillian Gordon, staying with whom begins her process of assimilation by learning how to become American. Lillian gave the nickname "Jazzy", a symbol of her entrance into and acceptance of American culture. Jasmine make herself and resists completely isolated from everything American. The progression of a new life, she tries to separate her from all that is Indian and forget her past completely.

The novel *Jasmine* deals with the theme of immigration and transformation. It shows interchangeability of an Americanized cultural identity. The astrologer had foretold, but Jasmine is defiant, a survivor, a fighter and adapter. Her journey of life leads her through many transformations – Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, and Jane through different geographical locales like Hasnapur, Jullundhar, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally California. The transformation and assimilation in the alien culture is not very easy as Jasmine says, "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams" (29). Mukherjee does not provide the inner consciousness of the protagonists and projects the deeper struggle that Americans undergo in relating to each other. The novel looks at American life from an immigrant's point of view, leaving aside their legal and illegal entry into their country and its consequences.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee projects and appreciates the determination and spirit of a village girl who evolved from a timid, modest girl into a strong and independent Americanized woman. Mukherjee herself has experienced the exuberance of immigrant existence. Obviously, an immigrant's ideal is to get assimilated into the mainstream culture. Jasmine undergoes the process of transformation into Jazzy-Jane in order to get assimilated into the new culture. Mukherjee claims in her interviews that immigrants transform themselves and in the same process transform America. Through her transformation and assimilation into the American culture, Jasmine has realized herself. Jasmine does not disregard Indian values and culture, but defies the

norms and tradition of the Indian society, which oppress women. She also dislikes the moral corruption in America. Thus, the definitions of acculturation and enculturation gets explored in the life of immigrant as an Asian-American. Through this novel *Jasmine*, Mukherjee created group variability among Asian-American families in terms of acculturation and enculturation. Asian American families, they engage in adapting to the norms of the dominant US culture while trying to retain the norms of their Asian ethnic culture. To conclude, Bharati Mukherjee as a diaspora writer stands apart highlighting the struggle for survival and acculturation rather than nostalgia for homeland and sense of displacement and rootlessness. She is fully aware of the threats and problems expatriation involves but she believes that in a multicultural, global world, assimilation is not only desirable but inevitable. No doubt, her theme of expatriation involves the voyage from unhousing to rehousing, uprooting to re-rooting and merging with a new type of culture and creating a new set of global society. In a globalized world, open-minded acceptance of other people, their culture, their way of life is the need of the hour. There is no question of losing one's ethnic identity but creating a new identity that paves way for true democratic way of life, multiculturalism and tolerance towards other people's religion, political ideology and way of life. In this respect, Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Jasmine* do anticipate new global and cosmopolitan world of 21st century.

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