The exuberance of immigration: The immigrant woman in Bharati Mukherjee’s

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South Asian women and in this context Indian women have always suffered subjugation and rejection in a chauvinistic society restricting them to a life of domesticity. However, by migrating to a foreign country as spouses and participating in the labour market to get education and to live for their children, women migrants experienced social and emotional emancipation and financial independence for the first time. This paper aims to explore the concepts of assimilation and the melting pot theory through the experience of empowerment and liberation from conventional strictures that the Indian woman undergoes through the character of Jasmine in Mukherjee’s novel. The research further examines Mukherjee’s theory of the homeland that constantly exists in a dialogic and supplementary relationship with the new homeland, thereby opening up new ways of thinking about national-cultural formations. By situating her protagonist in a new American culture with her allegiance to her new home thereby rejecting the hyphenated status of an Indian-American, Mukherjee through the character Jasmine rejects Bill Ashcroft’s theory that diaspora disrupts the theory of national unity.

Key words: Immigration, transition, journey, assimilation, melting-pot, conventional, society.

INTRODUCTION

“We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate...we have experienced rapid changes in the history of the nations in which we lived. When we uproot ourselves and come here either by choice or out of necessity, we must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society. Our lives are remarkably often heroic,” (1989) claims Mukherjee while narrating the tale of her transition and transformation from an expatriate Indian to that of an immigrant American in an interview with Alison B. Carb, 1989. The experience of migration writes critic, Vijayasree is often projected via the “topos” of the journey. Physical sojourn across sea or land becomes an extended metaphor for a woman’s struggle “to come to terms with herself” (Crane, 2000: 127).

Rejecting fixed identities which is at once an “other,” and yet entirely “knowable and visible,” (Roberson, 1998:137), Mukherjee in nearly all her narratives, disrupts the biological notions of identity by challenging the static notions of ‘Otherness’. The protagonist of the novel, Jasmine too, in a Mukherjee-ian vein embraces America as a nation space in the process of articulation in order to escape the comparative “fixity,” offered by her original homeland; the stereotypical, male-oriented hegemonic India that she must quit for the sake of

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individualism, of emancipation and empowerment. Jasmine, like Mukherjee, masters the game of survival, of existence in a foreign territory, a fact testified by her unyielding will when she states later in the novel, “Adventure, risk, transformation, the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me reposition the stars I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove” (Mukherjee, 1989:240).

For ages in India, while men have been associated with mobility and the notion of progress, women have been fixated to home as a timeless space due to the cult of domesticity embedded deep within the Indian culture and tradition. In case of migration and diaspora as critic Ponzanesi notes, women as a preserver of “traditions, heritage, continuity,” (McLeod, 2000:245) are inevitably required to restore a traditional home in a new country. Mukherjee in her path breaking novel, Jasmine for the first time deconstructs this given notion of home, enabling free mobility and progress of women in a foreign soil. She is, as critic John K. Hoppe notes, “plainly disinterested in the preservation of cultures, the hallowing of traditions, obligations to the past...not interested in such nostalgic aspects of preservation” (1999).

In an interview with Shefali Desai, Mukherjee claims, “As [the characters] change citizenship, they are reborn,” and Mukherjee’s Jasmine in her third novel, Jasmine is no exception. From Jyoti the village girl of Hasnapur, to Jasmine the city woman, to Jazzy the undocumented immigrant who learns to talk and walk American, to Jase the sophisticated Manhattan nanny who falls in love with Taylor, to Jane the Iowan woman who marries the banker Bud Ripplemeyer, the “J” as critic Ketu Katrak observes “represents the element of continuity within transformation” (Sarkar, 2002: 241). The “J” in Jasmine signifies the journey undertaken by a muted subaltern woman. As Elizabeth Bronfen writes, “Jasmine’s dislocated Other speaks out of a self-conscious and self-induced effacement in the voice of a resilient and incessantly self-refashioning hibridity” (Ponzanesi 2004:41). Opposing rebirth to comfort, the characters in almost all of Mukherjee’s literary works embrace violence that accompanies cross-cultural revision and personal change. As Jasmine says: “There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake ourselves. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams” (Mukherjee, 1989: 25). It is the willingness of characters like Jasmine, Dimple and Tara to murder their past selves that enables them to actively advance into unknown but promising futures. The futures in which they propel themselves toward and even help to shape are not guaranteed to be successful, but do have the potential for personal, material and spiritual success.

Narrating a traumatic yet fulfilling journey from an expatriate in Canada to an immigrant in the U.S, in her 1997 essay “American Dreamer,” Mukherjee’s sojourn from a non-entity to an individualized, liberated being, a transition that she experienced for the first time in the University of Iowa classroom is reflected in Jasmine’s journey from a village woman dominated by caste, religion and patrimony to an emancipated, self-made individual who is in full control of her life and destiny. Rejecting “cultural memory” and “biological identity,” Mukherjee uses the word “jasmine,” in her novel to evoke the flowering of possibilities. In a famous article that appeared in The New York Times Book Review, “Immigrant Writing: Give us our Maximalists,” Mukherjee professes her new philosophy on migration. Fight against the “static ghetto of little India,” she says, “don’t play the victim, you are a part of America and America is made out of you” (Ponzanesi, 2000:35). Assimilating herself within the melting pot model of America that obliterates the “us vs. them,” (Mukherjee, 1997) mentality, rejecting hyphenation that heightens the sense of nostalgia and alienation in an individual thus categorizing the “cultural landscape “into a center and its peripheries,”(1997) Mukherjee calls for “a total adoption of citizenship,” of going “the full nine yards of transformation”(Gabriel 2004:86); in other words, the model of immigration. Drawn to the narrative of assimilation her “immigrant” is prepared to discard the nostalgia for the past, as Mukherjee’s ‘immigrant’ heroine, Jasmine asserts, “I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bullet-proof vest, was to be a coward” (Mukherjee: 1997).

Unlike women of her generation trapped in the categories of mother, daughter and wife, upholding conventions and traditions, constrained by patriarchal strictures, Mukherjee’s Jasmine is portrayed as the New Woman questioning the accepted norms of society, passing through processes that symbolise transformations from weakness to strength and from restriction to freedom. A rebel from the very beginning, Jasmine rejects the ideal images of Hindu goddesses Sita and Savitri, the powerful cultural images of women in India. Instead she dons the image of goddess Kali of Hindu mythology, ready to avenge murder on those who exploit and taint her femininity. Mukherjee conjured the character of Jasmine in keeping with the lives of first generation divorced and widowed women, who in spite of “feelings of pain, anger, loneliness and alienation” struggled to rebuild and redefine their entire lives (Gupta, 1999:211)

Born in the feudal village of Punjab, eighteen years after the partition riots, Jasmine, the protagonist of Mukherjee’s novel, is presented as an unlucky child: female, intelligent and born too late down the line of daughters (fifth daughter and seventh of nine children of her parents) to use her beauty to her advantage. At the age of seven, Jyoti is the star pupil of her class and for Masterji, “the oldest and sourest teacher in [her] school” (Mukherjee, 1989:50). Through constant flashbacks to the past, Jasmine narrates to his readers, the academic progress of her early life, something that set her apart from the girls of her age who dedicated their lives to
domestic chores and catering to the needs of the breadwinner, the patriarch of the family. Jasmine, as she recollects was a "whiz in Punjabi and Urdu, the first likely female candidate for English instruction [Masterji] ever had. He had a pile of English books, some from the British Council Library...The British books were thick with more words per page." “I remember,” Jasmine remembers, “Jane Eyre which I was forced to abandon because [it] was too difficult’ (53).

It is interesting to note that Jasmine’s rejection of Victorian novels like Jane Eyre and Great Expectations with a voice of an "ostensibly progressive cultural authority, addressing issues of gender and class formation," is symbolic of Mukherjee’s promotion of multiculturalism, in the novel, Jasmine. In her search for an American selfhood, Jasmine in a similar vein as Mukherjee, discards the postcolonial expatriate identity in lieu of a life of an American immigrant, a life of a liberated self-made individual in the U.S. By favouring “immigrant” over “postcolonial,” as a leitmotif of her novels, Mukherjee, as critic Ketu Katrak observes, “goes beyond the conventional periodizations presupposed by the term “postcolonial,” which scholars like Ella Shohat have critiqued for its relatively binaristic, "fixed and stable mapping," of power relations between colonizer/colonised and centre/periphery (Sarkar.De:236) Thus, to resist the workings of this binary, Mukherjee conceptualises the melting pot assimilation as something genetic rather than hyphenated, something that is constructed through constant reformation, transmogrification of both the migrant and the nation state.

Mukherjee, it seems has taken great care in creating Jyoti or Jasmine as a stereotypical village girl who scavenges firewood in the forest, who perceives her role model in Vimla who widowed at the age of twenty-two, doses herself with kerosene thus imposing upon herself the traditional ritual of sati (an ancient Indian ritual that required women to burn themselves alive in the funeral pyre of their husbands). Unlike in her previous two novels, wherein Mukherjee depicts the aristocratic and middle-class values and practices in the characters of Tara and Dimple respectively, in Jasmine, the author explores and acquaints her readers to the reality of a woman’s life belonging to the low class agrarian community in a village in Punjab (McLeod, 2000:212). Jasmine’s mother proves herself a “feminist hero,” preventing the thirteen year old Jyoti from being married off to a widower with three sons. Instead, she ensures the education of her daughter despite being tormented and tortured by her mother-in-law who as Jasmine recollects ”made a fuss about my staying in school” (Mukherjee, 1989: 47) and secretly hoped that her daughter-in-law would be beaten by her husband for her violating the strictures of patriarchy.

Despite attempts of educating her, Jyoti like the girls in her village is married off at the age of fourteen to Prakash Vijn who insisted on a "no dowry, no guests Registry Office wedding." With marriage to Prakash, the first phase of Jyoti’s journey begins, from feudal Hasnapur to urban Jullunder (Faymonville, 1997). A “modern man, a city man” Prakash trashed traditions right from the beginning. A progressive Prakash shared his vision of studying and opening an electronic business in the U.S., with his wife Jasmine when he says, “I want for us to go away and have a real life” (Mukherjee, 1989).

After marriage, even though the city of Jullender, with its modicum of Westernization brings home the amalgamation of the Indian and the Western, Jyoti, renamed Jasmine by her husband to “break off the past” (77) remains the traditional obedient and dutiful wife willing to dedicate her entire life to domestic chores and in service to her husband. At this point, it can be said that the rebellious sparks that we had seen now and then in Jasmine’s disposition is further aggravated when Prakash instils within her the values of modernity. Rejecting the conventional modes of wifely behaviour Prakash thwarts her traditional cultural desire to have children when he says, “We aren’t going to spawn! We aren’t ignorant peasants...you are still very young and foolish...you are confusing social and religious duty with instinct” (Mukherjee, 1989: 78). Instead he teaches her to read VCR manuals, repair all kinds of electric goods and with him dream of a liberated and individuated life in U.S.

Set in the backdrop of a war torn Punjab, at the heart of Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine lies the Khalistani Movement of the 1970s that took its toll over Canadians of South Asian ancestry in the terrorist attack in 1985 on the Air India plane which killed all 300 of its passengers. In Jasmine, Mukherjee depicts the Sikh war for Khalistan in Punjab, wherein a bomb kills Prakash because he happens to be with Jasmine, his Hindu wife. Violence, a leitmotif of Mukherjee’s novels, be it in the form of political strife, the Naxalite Movement of the 1970s in Calcutta as portrayed in The Tiger’s Daughter, or Dimple’s schizophrenia which culminates in the murder of her husband at the end of the novel, Wife; while it manifests the inner turmoil of Mukherjee’s protagonists, in Jasmine, it prepares the protagonist for risk taking in order to progress in America, “the risk necessary to make a leap into a truly new future, a leap [which] Mukherjee figures as specifically and quintessentially American” (Hoppe, 1999).

Widowed at the age of seventeen as foretold by the village astrologer, a confused Jasmine reverts to the conventional Hindu value system of wifely dutifulness and subservience when she decides to go to America to commit Sati, burning herself along with her husband’s suit at the site of the university where Prakash was to study. Although Jasmine’s sojourn to the U.S is induced by socio-religious duties that require her to terminate her life with her husband’s death, deep down in her subconscious, the ambition and the dreams of a new life in America that Prakash had seeded in her begins to bloom. Soon after her husband’s death, Jyoti is haunted
and reminded of Prakash's words, “Think Vijh and wife! Prakash exhorted me from every corner of our grief-darkened room. There is no dying. There is only an ascending or descending, a moving on to other planes. Don’t crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism” (96). Even though Prakash works as a catalyst, initiating her journey into selfhood and self discovery, the fact that, the war “between [her] fate and [her] will,”(of which she remains unaware in the beginning ) begins once she undertakes the journey of travelling to the west, to the U.S, a land of opportunities.

Arriving at the Amsterdam airport with forged immigration papers, Jasmine begins to acknowledge her uprooted identity and her minority status in the big airport lounges when she reflects, “we are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines...we are roughly handled and taken to waiting rooms where...custom guards await their bribe. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season... We ask only one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue” (Mukherjee, 1997). Intimidated by her foreign surroundings, Jasmine’s predicament is reminiscent of Mukherjee’s own situation, who, soon after she arrives the city of Iowa on a “summer evening of 1961,” to pursue a study in Creative Writing, is “cut off forever from the rules and ways of upper-middle-class life in Bengal, and hurled into a New World life of scary improvisations and heady explorations” (Mukherjee, 1997). For Jasmine, nothing is rooted; her life is in constant motion as we see her moving from the swamps of South Florida to an Indian enclave in Queens, from Columbia University in upper Manhattan to an Iowa farming town. Like the eponymous narrator of the novel, Jasmine, Mukherjee too has changed citizenship and culture with disorienting rapidity transforming from an expatriate in Canada to a committed immigrant in the U.S.

Immigration, as opposed to expatriation as Mukherjee explains is a process of gain, contrary to conventional perspectives that construe immigration and displacement as a condition of terminal loss and dispossession. However assimilation or cultural fusion as Mukherjee puts it deconstructs the centre/periphery binary that occurs not without the “preponderance of violence” (Crane, 129) for assimilation is a cultural looting, a cultural exchange, a costly negotiation that the immigrant has to pay for the sake of self-transformation. Mukherjee’s Jasmine, an alien in an uncharted territory confronts violence in the form of ‘rape,’ soon after she arrives in the U.S. The captain of the ship, known as Half Face who had “lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam” (Mukherjee: 104) remorselessly rapes Jasmine despite her requests and pleas. Donning the garb of a vengeful Goddess Kali, Jasmine who had been cast in the mould of the “Sita Savitri stereotype,” (Fludernik: 263) to devote herself to her husband through loyalty and self-sacrifice,” is out to defy and destroy the devil who violates her chastity. With blood oozing from her sliced tongue, the rebellious Jasmine asserts her individuality and freedom by murdering Half Face as she narrates the incident, “The room looked like a slaughter house. Blood congealed on my hands, my chin, my breasts... I was in a room with a slain man, my body blooded. I was walking death, Death incarnate” (119). In killing Half Face, observes critic Deepika Bahri, [Jasmine] experiences an epistemic violence that is also a life affirming transformation” (Roberson:140). Paradoxically, this act of revenge frees her from the desire of death: “My body was merely a shell soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for” (119). The process of Jasmine’s rebirth or rehousement in the West begins.

Despite the initial horror, the land is not without saints. After her encounter with violence and evil within the American society, a starving and shattered Jasmine is rescued by the saintly Lilian Gordon, a Quaker lady who acts as a saviour of the undocumented. Discarding the self that belonged to the village of Hasnapur, Jasmine learns to talk, walk and dress like an American, thanks to her mentor, Mrs. Gordon who identifies her as a “special case ” (Mukherjee, 1989:134) way apart from the expatriates who sentimentally attached to the distant land, their home, unable to ‘rehouse,’ themselves in a new country. With a new name and her first American identity, Jasmine moves away from the past against all odds, for the sake of self-empowerment, for a stable identity, “I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation; jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords and running shoes. I couldn’t tell if with the Hasnapuri side I’d also be abandoned by Hasnapuri modesty”(133). At this point, Lilian’s advice to Jasmine, “...do not let the past deform you...”(131) is in line with Mukherjee’s belief that “there is no sense in holding on to the past that does not qualify one’s reality with meaning” (Kumar, 2001:140). Like the protagonist of her novel, who instead of migrating back to her country decides to move further on in life and make her fortune in America, Mukherjee as critic Sandhya Shukla puts it, decided that India is a place she could not live in, for in India to be a woman “was to be a powerless victim whose only escape was through self-inflicted wounds” (Shukla 2003:163).

The second phase of Jasmine’s transformation begins in the Hayes household. As a caregiver to the adopted daughter of University professors, Taylor and Wylie, Jasmine felt liberated from her past and the role of a widow. With a new name Jase, Jasmine becomes Americanized, confident of her proficiency in English. America, a synonym for modernisation, overwhelms Jasmine as she finds herself a part of the Hayes family instead of being treated as a subordinate as done in Indian societies to domestic employees and caregivers, a fact testified by Taylor’s treatment of Jasmine as an equal when she comes to their house for the first time for the job of a caregiver, “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” (Mukherjee: 167). She appreciates the Americans for their liberal views and their sense of respect for even those doing menial jobs when she compares her present situation with that of the Mazbi woman who worked in her house in Hasnapur, “In Hasnapur the Mazbi woman who’d stoke our hearth or spread our flaking, dried out adobe walls with watered cow dung had been a maid servant. Wylie made me feel like her younger sister. I was family, I was professional. (Mukherjee: 175).

On the other hand, Jasmine comes to realise the fluidity and transience of human relationships in America when Wylie decides to leave her husband Taylor for the economist Stuart Eschelman in search of “real happiness” (Mukherjee: 180). She later contemplates, “In America nothing lasts... We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled.” Nothing is forever; nothing is so terrible or wonderful that it won’t disintegrate (Mukherjee: 181). The fleeting nature of relationships portrayed in the novel Jasmine is symbolic of the lives of Third World migrants and of Jasmine in particular, fleeing poverty and socio-economic oppressions, moving in America from coast to coast from small towns to big cities in search of an identity, an individuality that seems to elude them (Fludernik, 2003:325). In Mukherjee’s imagination, America is a place in flux, a metaphor that represents freedom from Indian values and practices. Like Wylie who barters her husband and child for true happiness, Jasmine too needs to give up a certain kind of home, home-as-comfort, home-as-talisman for regeneration into an American immigrant (Drake, 1999).

With Jasmine being absorbed within the Hayes family as Duff’s “day mummy” (174) and Taylor’s love interest, the process of re-housement finally begins.

While Jasmine tries to re-root herself within the American melting pot, absorbing the American culture and lifestyle, her harrowing past begins to haunt her in the form of the assassin who had murdered her husband in Jullundur whom she spots in the Central Park in Manhattan. However, her escape from Manhattan to Iowa from her past as critic Nagendra Kumar puts it is not an act of cowardice but life affirming. “She is running away for life not escaping from life which is a positive step” (Kumar 2001:114). Jasmine’s life in Iowa begins with her chance meeting with Mother Ripplemayer, the Iowan counterpart of Lilian Gordon who helps her to get a job in Bud’s rural bank as a teller girl and within a span of six months Jasmine succeeds to become the live-in companion of Bud, a man twice her age. In this novel, a new name and a new image operate as clearly demarcated milestones in the process of one’s identity formation. With each new name, from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane and now Jane as Bud prefers calling her, the protagonist of Mukherjee’s novel is reborn several times, transforming herself in every phase of life.

In reconfiguring the American political and cultural fabric as the site of ongoing contestation and definition, Mukherjee implies that while America transforms all those who make their home in it, America itself is being transformed (Sharmani, 2005). In an interview with Alison Carb Mukherjee reveals, "I'm saying we haven't come to accommodate or to mimic; we have changed ourselves, but we have also come to change you"(1988). In other words, just as America's melting pot transforms non-traditional immigrant communities, Mukherjee maintains that mainstream culture and values, too, are shaped and moulded, "unavoidably and ongoingly", by the presence of these new immigrants (Tandon 2004: 152). Mukherjee’s theory of cultural assimilation and fusion is well depicted in the symbiotic relationship shared by Bud and Jane. To Bud who is twice her age, Jasmine is warm and supportive. Even when Bud becomes a cripple, she patiently serves him while bearing his child in her womb. While absorbing the ways of American living, Jasmine brings home the flavour of India in the food she cooks for Bud and their adopted son Du, a victim of the Vietnamese war, “I took the gobi aloo to the Lutheran Relief Fund last week. I am subverting the taste buds of Elsa County. I took out some of last night’s matar panir in the microwave. It goes well with pork, believe me” (Mukherjee: 19). For Mukherjee who has often been criticized by critics for her “unapologetic embrace of American citizenship, in spite of professing allegiance to an ‘American,’ identity has however never promoted the dominant definition of national identity. For Mukherjee, the Indian homeland always exists in a dialogic and supplementary relationship with the new homeland of America, opening up new ways of thinking about national-cultural formations (Gabriel, 2004:92).

In Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine too adopts a similar process wherein the newly arrived illegal immigrant from India draws upon the Indian concepts of Sati and reincarnation, linking them with the co-ordinates of self-will and resilience, thus recasting herself as Kali, to avenge herself after being raped in a cheap motel in Florida or adopting the categories of wife, mother and daughter self-sacrificing and loyal yet assertive and individuated bringing home the virtues of Indian culture while discarding traditional social values and strictures that have chained Indian women to a life of domesticity and child bearing (Hussain, 2005:53).

While the minor cultures in America is represented as the other, objectified with violence, exploitation and commodification, as exotic and interesting, the central character of Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine as an immigrant from the Third World considered as “special,” by Lilian Gordon and later “exotic,” by Bud, guarantees her upward mobility by making strategic use of her difference as an Asian in order to acquire maximum visibility and privileges. Mukherjee and consequently Jasmine, as critic Sandra Ponzanesi observes practices Left-liberal Multiculturalism, a theory that resists the idea of erasing cultural differences. Instead it enables one to establish
individual identities within the host country. Although Jasmine is haunted by the past which confronts her in the form of the Sikh terrorist, Sukhwinder in Central Park or the shape of traditional Indian values embedded deep within herself, both Mukherjee and Jasmine "makes of [their] mother country an India of the mind" (Shukla, 2003:235). They barter their Indian fate, immobility and oppression," with the American "destiny, change and empowerment," in order to establish themselves as individual emancipated beings in the west. Mukherjee who has always rejected the centre/periphery binary as earlier discussed in this chapter, subverts Bud’s American dominance when his innate racism, that had led him to acquire an Asian wife and to adopt a Vietnamese refugee as a son, to be deserted by them both. The undermining of his American dominance and values are symbolised by his becoming crippled and having to live in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

In the essay “American Dreamer," Mukherjee writes, “I choose to describe myself on my own terms, as an American, rather than as an Asian-American. Rejecting hyphenation is my refusal to categorize the cultural landscape into a centre and its peripheries; it is to demand that the American nation delivers the promises of its dream and its Constitution to all its citizens equally” (Mukherjee, 1997). In the novel, Jasmine, it is Du, the Vietnamese refugee who embraces a hyphenated identity while Jasmine discards her past completely for the sake of her future. Towards the end of the novel while the hybrid Du departs for the frontier in search of his family, his community, Jasmine heads for the future with her lover Taylor to California pursuing adventure, risk and transformation leaving behind her crippled husband Bud. Critic Andrienne Rich observes that in deserting Bud and choosing Taylor, Jasmine does not exchange between men but transforms her world. Like Wylie, like a true American, Jasmine goes out in search for true happiness, for individualism and selfhood as she confides, "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness" (Mukherjee: 240).

**Conclusion**

Thus, Mukherjee in *Jasmine* has carved out the assimilation of Third World immigrants into the American melting pot which is itself enriched by those she describes as “new pioneers.” Jasmine, as critic Deepika Bahri, 1998, perceives is one of those pioneers, a survivor with courage, wryness and a hopeful streak, at odds with her fatalism (Roberson:140). Jasmine’s attempt to reshape her destiny and to establish it as the foundation of her development of her potential is realised by the force of her indomitable will which surfaces in adverse moments and helps her reconstruct her mission with determination and zeal. In each of her metamorphoses, Jasmine thus rewrites new ways of being and knowing; she engages in “new recognitions of roles, identities and enactments of migrant behaviour,” which she can choose to replay or discard. Throughout the novel, Jasmine chooses to discard old selves in order to make choices that enable agency thus enabling her to “phantom [her] way through... continents” (101).

In all her novels, Mukherjee’s migrants seem to struggle indeterminately with questions crucial to diaspora and exile, be it preserving or rejecting identities, to create a new self by discarding the old, for, as Mukherjee perceives, "in this age of diasporas, one's biological identity may not be one's only identity. Erosions and accretions come with the act of emigration" (Mukherjee, 1997).

**Conflict of Interests**

The author have not declared any conflict of interests

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