

‘The Nowhere Man’ And ‘Jasmine’ - Cultural Perspective

Jayshree S Khade

Abstract: *Cultural alienation is reality today and it leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be called cultural shock. When a person leaves his own culture and enters into another his old values come in conflict with the new ones he finds. In the twentieth century, migration is one of the major factors that cause cultural conflict. The usual thematic core of expatriate writing is the conflict between the native culture and adopted culture. This finds a new richness as well as complexity in the novelistic vision of the novelists like Anita Desai, Ruth Parwar Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukharjee and so many. Anita Desai in ‘Bye Bye Blackbird’, and ‘Journey to Ithaca’, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala in ‘A Backward Place’, Kamala Markandaya in the ‘Nowhere Man’ and Bharati Mukharjee in ‘Jasmine’ speak about cultural collision.*

Kamala Markandaya’s The Nowhere Man and Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine deal with traumatic complexities of human behavior. Both of these novelists in their novels discuss the issues of isolation, alienation, dislocation, excitement. The protagonists of these novels have different experiences in the foreign land while managing with foreign culture, whether they assimilate in the alien land or make deviation from the foreign land, whether they face the problem of adjustment or turn to native roots will be comparatively discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *alienation, assimilation, isolation.*

Literature is the reflection of life. Human being lives in a particular community. Each community has a pattern of living life that includes ideas, beliefs, customs, and codes of conduct, rituals, ceremonies and symbol. The pattern of living life can be called as culture. Culture has played a very significant role in human evolution. Every human society has its own particular culture. An individual’s attitudes, values, ideas and beliefs are greatly influenced by the culture in which he or she lives. When an individual reluctantly or willingly puts in different milieu, there would be clash between cultures and various problems arising out of it.

While analyzing immigration and all its associated problems, Handlin states that the immigrants come from a society where they have been a part of a whole – the whole being the community. Everything is knotted into a firm relationship with every other thing. In the community, they have done everything together, grief, celebrations, festivals. The persons have never partaken of any of these alone. Relationships with relatives and neighbors and friends have regulated every aspect of their lives. When these people leave their original home land, they become really alone. Even while standing in a crowd of a hundred thousand people, such

persons feel alienated and totally alone. Though the new land is the land of promise, golden opportunities are waiting there, immigrants have to deal with people different from themselves, has to learn and understand alien ways, in short, they have to survive in a grossly foreign environment.

Many writers in their novels focus on the theme of East – West encounter like Anita Desai in *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Journey to Ithaca*, and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala in *A Backward Place*. Similarly Kamala Markandaya in *The Nowhere Man* and Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine* speak about cultural collision and state the reality which lie behind it. But each of their novels has different voice.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the most gifted novelists writing in English on the Indian literary scene. She is aware of the problems arising out of cultural clash and social discrimination as she lives abroad and has firsthand knowledge of it. It is quite true that the Indian writers living abroad are conscious of their Indianess more than the Indians living in India because they are confronted with the cultural conflicts. Her novels depict East – West encounter quite objectively. Her characters show that good people exist everywhere and they come from the Indian as well as the

English culture. Almost in all the novels of Markandaya, the cultural conflict exists between the English people and the Indian.

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian – American author is gaining increasing recognition in the U.S. Since 1970 Mukherjee has produced three novels and collection of short stories, her novels bring to light the lives of illegal immigrants, people who move to western land. Her novels are female centred though she uses quite skillfully the presence of a large number of male characters in order to portray the images of her female protagonists. Her characters are people on the periphery of the society in which they have chosen to spend their lives, they are all immigrants and they face problems while adjusting into the foreign culture.

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The East – West confrontation is once again the predominant theme in *The Nowhere Man*. It shows Markandaya's continued concern with cultural values in the context of racist attitude in England following the decline and defeat of the British imperialism. In this novel, Markandaya probes deeper than in her previous novel into the actual social interaction below the surface of inter – cultural tensions at personal and group levels.

The experiences of the protagonist in *The Nowhere Man* occur against the background of intercultural conflict in the social situation in England and expose the individual consciousness to an alien and hostile cultural milieu. In *Possession*, Val and in *The Nowhere Man*, Srinivas arrive England by chance.

The Nowhere Man clearly testifies to Markandaya's authentic experience as well as her mastery of the technique of fictionalising the outer reality. The novel has a greater degree of contextualized realism than *Possession*. In this novel, Markandaya does not dwell on the abstract cultural concepts of East – West but rather objectifies them into actual situations and incidents, thereby effectively dramatizing the theme. The dichotomy of the East – West axis becomes more prominent in this novel because it is shown through the underserved plight of an old Indian immigrant in England; the portrait of his misery is probably the result of a deep study of the helplessness of Indian expatriates in Britain. The main thread of the novel is related to the reality that people who come to settle in a strange country have difficulties while adjusting to a new way of life. Specially, Asians in Britain face acute problems. Strongly attached to their own religions, languages and customs, they feel that the western culture is a threat to their values and traditions and so they tend to become isolated. Hostility and racial discrimination from the host community further prompt Asians to seek support from their own groups. As they strive to preserve their culture and identify, it becomes harder for them to 'assimilate' to be accepted as British. The

protagonist problems as he tries to fit into the corpus of British society form the content of the plot. The cross cultural situation brings about the feeling of isolation.

The Nowhere Man is a fictional paradigm of the value of human commitments and connections. It underscores the need for racial integration and cross cultural understanding in order that man survives as a human being in the contemporary existential chaos. As the title itself signifies, 'nowhere man' is the man that has no specific place to go to because he has either lost his original identity or deliberately extended it in order to adopt himself to an adopted culture.

This novel is a remarkable work of fiction depicting the tragedy of bicultural living in its harrowing aspects. Srinivas, the victim – protagonist, is the prototype of the resigned victim of racial discrimination at the end of the novel but he is ironically a rebel against it in India. In the process of growth, he faces the conflict between rebellion and acceptance and this conflict forms the underline tension in the novel. It is not raucous and raging conflict but a seething and silent one that eventually resolved by his own effort.

The novel opens with Dr. Radcliffe diagnosing Srinivas's disease as leprosy which is symptomatic of his physical and emotional isolation. Thrown into an alien land as a stranger, he is condemned as an "unwanted man" and "intruder" and liable as a leper to be "ostracized further."¹ The structure of the novel is woven the past life of Srinivas. With the help of 'flashbacks' the novelist highlights the cultural clashes both in his homeland and in the country of his adoption. In India, due to the dominance and superiority of the British, the Indians suffer humiliation at different levels. An event can be described, when Srinivas's house is raided by the police in search of a youth who have been manufacturing country bombs, a young English police sergeant lifts Vasantha's skirt which dazes her and makes Srinivas's blood boil:

Momentarily, only split seconds. The time it took for the stunned Srinivas to come to life and throw himself at the English man and knock him down, his thin curved murderous fingers itching for the throat, nothing else whatever would do. (P.137)

This incident shows that Englishmen give unbearable treatment to the Indians thinking them as an object. There is no regret in their hearts for the bad deeds. The young English police burns with shame but not for what he has done but for he has lost command of himself and his men have seen it. Markandaya has given an account of pre and post independence setting and the encounter between English and Indian people in the native land as well as alien land.

Srinivas migrates from India to England. He lives there for fifty years. He comes to England with hopes because in India, as his father tells him that after the incident in the college, "there is no future left for you here, "you will be black – listed in every school and college throughout the country. Government service is out to."(P.148) He is more aware of fresh winds blowing, awakening ambitions and bringing opportunities which he believes he has lost forever. But here in this land his misfortune does not let him feel happy. As he has not completed his B.A. in British India, in Britain during the interviews "the joke would still have been there, it would merely have altered ground slightly to make the university its butt."(P.P.42-43)

Srinivas's quest becomes an existential search for meaning in the face of an absurd situation. All he wants is peaceful co - existence but peace evades him. Srinivas becomes more and more the baffled expatriate who attempts to reconcile East – West values and to make sense of his involvement in the alien society in which he has decided to reside as a means of escape from the worse situation in India. Srinivas's progress through these dilemmas to a stage of self – realization may be considered as his growth to a sense of identity. Srinivas becomes an outsider in an alien society, the homeless, the uncommitted outsider. He yearns for escape but his escape ends in a kind of restless freedom where even a return becomes difficult, if not impossible.

Markandaya highlights the cultural conflict through the portrayal of different characters. Vasantha, the wife of Srinivas, settles down on alien soil with her husband. Their ties with India are more or less severed. Shyam Asnani expounds: "With typical Indian habits, temperament dress and opinion, they form a micro India around themselves in an alien country." As a human being Srinivas longs to belong to a "wider citizenship" but Vasantha a typical Indian woman, refuses to assimilate into the culture of her adopted land. A handful of the Indian soil and a bottle of the holy water of the Ganga that Vasantha assume symbolic significance and effectively suggest that Vasantha's faith in Indian values and ways of life are unshakable she sticks to her Indian ways of living, dressing, eating and even dying on foreign soil. The sprinkling of the drops of the Ganga water on her ashes after her death is again both realistic and symbolic of performing the Indian rituals.

Laxman and Seshu, Srinivas's sons brought up in foreign environment and educated in Christian schools embody most of the British characteristics. They are examples of the second generation of immigrants who are neither here nor there and their alienation is complete in that their roots are completely cut and their adoption into the new environment is rather tenuous. In fact they are in real sense "nowhere men." Laxman is a hard – headed realist and familial sentiments, typical of Indians, have no value for him. He has acquired the cold commonsense of the British with an eye on personal advantage and with stubbornness that does not see the other person's point of view. He strongly disapproves of the way of life of his parents and slowly disassociates himself from them.

It is also significant that after a successful war service, Laxman marries an English girl and settles down at Plymouth as a businessman. Vasantha his mother, who has planned for her son, is all the sadder for not being able to choose the bride for her only living son. The separation from both her sons, one dead, and the other living apart from her, makes her a pathetic figure. A child is born to Laxman and the parents aren't invited on the plea that there is no spare bed – room for them. This gives Vasantha a rude jolt and her heart cries in despair: "Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere. In a corridor, or the kitchen just to see the baby".(P.35) This incident not only shows her deep longing to see the new born baby but it also asserts the emotional ties of Indian joint family where the individual's sentiments are given priority over physical comforts. But Laxman cannot understand it because he has no trace of Indian sentiments in him. His outlook is absolutely materialistic or commercial and very

matter of fact. When his mother fall sick and his father wants to get her treated by a private physician, his immediate reaction is, "you get first class treatment on the National Health. All you get by paying is a few fancy frills. These one can do without".(P.36)

The problem of uprooting is a common phenomenon among immigrants. Immigrants like Srinivas appear to be rooted in the alien land. But they are held by natural tangible ties to their real, to the country of origin and to the relatives that remain there. These people regard themselves as being away from home only temporarily. Their country is still a living reality, a social area of activity and spiritual shelter. Although the tie to their world has been cut outwardly, they are unimpaired within.

Markandaya's insight into immigrant psychology deserves acclaim of the highest order. Srinivas, initially is shown as being filled with the thought of returning to his homeland. He thinks it as misgiving to purchase home in adopted country for it spelt permanence in England: "so long they were mobile, he liked to believe the way back to India, from which event and people had driven them lay open."(P.20) Srinivas considers his stay in England as temporary. This creates in him a sense of inner security, which enabled him to project a façade of being rooted. In other words, it encourages adjustment by creating a feeling of being away from home only temporarily. It is this hope of return that sustains him when his initial attempts at securing a scholarly profession were rebuffed by the English. He turns to trade which he looks upon as a means to keep him going through his temporary sojourn in alien land. Srinivas is averse to the idea of the house because it would shatter the illusion which fills him with an inner security. Vasantha's death intensifies his thought of returning. But he cannot actually return back.

Srinivas, at this juncture, when he is in the mood of depression, meets Mrs. Pickering, middle aged divorced woman who reduces his loneliness to some extent. She has sound good nature, benevolent disposition and liberal attitude. She moves into Srinivas's house and in her company, Srinivas feels that new vistas of life have opened up to him and once again he starts responding to the beauty of nature and starts celebrating Christmas and other festivals – all "alien occasions." (P.67) Mrs. Pickering looks after Srinivas with gentle care when leprosy strikes him. She says "I would care for you, I am trained."(P.195) Uma Parameswaran appropriately interprets the relationship between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering as on "between the best of India and the best of Britain." It was Mrs. Pickering who drew him out of his cocoon and became a sort of "common law spouse" (P.153) to him.

Markandaya presents the reality of the relationship between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering. The theme of this relationship transforms the novel into a perceptive work of art and not just a documentary. Personal relationships here are on the East – West axis. The Srinivas – Pickering relationship is founded on a firm commitment to human values. It is based on true freedom. True freedom means commitment without compulsion. This novel holds forth the possibility of an inter – cultural meeting point in this relationship where the basis of friendship is deep human empathy and compassion. The vital influence of personal relationships even in teaching greater

awareness is perceived, as Srinivas begins to realize his responsibilities to Mrs. Pickering in whose care he places himself "In the warmth of human commitment" (P.46) and progresses to an awareness of the responsibility to the country he adopts. But unfortunately he becomes victim of racial discrimination.

In the novel, *The Nowhere Man*, Markandaya states two contradictory reactions concerning racial attacks from the men of same community. Srinivas who tries fully to assimilate into the mainstream culture of his adopted land and now at the later part of his life feels happy by the thought that England has now become his own country, collapses when he reads the man-sized message of hate, "Blacks go home", on the signboards. The messages show hatred and English men's insistence to leave their country to Srinivas. As realizing the hopelessness of the situation, Srinivas cries in despair:

It was my mistake to imagine that I am in England.

The people will not allow it except physically. I am to be driven outside, which is the way they want it. An outsider in England. In actual fact I am, of course, an Indian -----.

I cannot pretend why should I? My wife never did. (P.231)

It is seen that Srinivas is baffled for his identity. He cannot decide from where he belongs to. But on the other hand Srinivas' son Laxman also faces the same situation and he also seems to be confused by the reaction of Joe. But he unlike his father, seeks total integration with the British society as essential to his living. He tenaciously wishes "to belong to the country in which he born and lived and labored, not in same reservation rusted up within it". (P.259) His determination raises hope of his survival in the alien land even if at the face of adverse situation. But in Srinivas' case, though he tries to adjust and be one with the alien culture, adverse situation compels him to think about his own existence. But the western culture is deeply rooted in the mind of Laxman, his son, as he born and brought up there. He does not face the problem of existence; reflection of culture can be seen in the reactions of these two characters. Srinivas though pretends to assimilate cannot accept the alien culture in true sense.

The situation of Srinivas validates the generalization that the alienation and existential angst of the intellectual is one of the themes of the Indo-English novel. As A. V. Krishna Rao points out:

The return to society is a recurrent pattern and Markandaya has evolved a fictional technique which keeps in balance the reality of the world outside and that of the individual within. She lets her characters grow in their society, participate at depth in its changes and transformation and after the initial recoil and withdrawal from society, return and rehabilitate themselves within its more permanent and enduring values and solaces.

There is no actual physical return to India for Srinivas, where as the actual returning is possible to Valmiki in *Possession*. Srinivas cannot go back to his native land because he has exiled himself. However, in his later mental progression to silent resignation and acceptance of his condition, he moves back to the philosophic attitude of his culture.

The pattern of Srinivas' escape, struggle and return is more a mental progression, it is only paralleled by the concrete external situation of rejection. His life is a search for new

values, and eventually he chooses detachment as the best solution. When filth is laid at his door as a result of racial attack, he silently cleans it, when a dead mouse is laid at his door, he removes without protest. His walking about barefoot in dhoti in England becomes only an assertion of his freedom. He says Mrs. Pickering : "These are the clothes, I would wear, were I in India". (P.231) His death is also an example of the detachment he cultivates, seeing the flames, he goes to set the ladybird free and is himself taken out in a state of coma.

Markandaya finds out the root of the conflict between cultures and races. It is that of intolerance and egoistic feelings. Due to the egocentric and intolerant behavior of the British, immigrants like Srinivas are suffered from the emotional alienation, the feeling of displacement and extreme humiliation.

Within the fictional structure of Srinivas' ironical movement from political rebellion against the colonial rule to his migration to the ruler's own country, his deliberate socio-cultural integration into its mainstream culture and his tragic existential ennui as the outsider in the wake of the sudden eruption of racial violence, Markandaya presents the aspects of cultural conflict like alienation identity crisis, assimilation, deviation and displacement in the light of reality.

Like Kamala Markandaya Bharati Mukherjee's novels deal with cultural conflict and the reality lies behind it. Markandaya's protagonist in *The Nowhere Man* tries to adopt the foreign culture, tries to adjust in it but fails to assimilate into the adopted culture, and longs for native roots. Comparatively, while talking about Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* questions arise, whether the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine* faces the problem of adjustment in alien land or she succeeds in her attempt of assimilation. These questions will be discussed in this part through the experiences of the protagonist of the novel.

Bharati Mukherjee, "the clear eyed but affectionate immigrant in American society" has become a celebrity for her distinctive approach to expatriatehood as a metaphysical experience of exile and as an agent of attitudinal change both in the minority and majority cultures. Her concern transcends the issues of culture shock and adjustment problems to encompass existential angst. Diasporal dream figures prominently in all her fictions but its treatment after her setting in America seems more assured and more comprehensive in its coverage of the many moods of expatriation –nostalgia, frustration and hope than in the Canadian phase of her life where uncertainty and despondency prevailed.

In Mukherjee's earlier novels *The Tiger's Daughter and Wife*, heroines are shown with pathetic faces. They face the problems of isolation, rootlessness, alienation because of their ambivalent attitude to their native tradition as well as the culture of the new world. But in her next novel *Jasmine* the heroine enjoys the assimilated status of immigration by a sheer will to bond herself to her adopted land. Mukherjee's shifting to America wrought a sea-change in her personality and gave a new fillip to her literary aspiration. Her own acknowledgment of this is worth noting: "For me it is a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation to the exuberance of immigration." Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* is written in this frame of mind. It seems vibrant with Bharati

Mukherjee's eager savoring of the bracing typical American reverence for the autonomy of the individual. This novel has about it the authentic ring of experience tested against the pulse of the author's existence. This does not mean that the novel is autobiographical. Mukherjee explains, "Jasmine contains the shape of my life and my desires. But no incident is at all autobiographical." Bharati Mukherjee's own background in real life is different from her heroine, Jasmine, top family, top school, top caste, and top city. On the other hand, her heroine, Jasmine, lives in a shabby dwelling, devoid of minimum amenities like water and electricity. The similarity, therefore, is in the shape of her life and of her desires. Bharati Mukherjee's fictional canvas seems to underscore a curious guiltlessness consciously mustered as a strategy to survive and to make well. Mukherjee is concerned about making her picture of Indian life interesting to the American readers. Instead of writing of backwardness as an area of darkness, she focuses attention on her characters growing awareness of the dark spots in their lives and their courageous efforts to discover areas of light. This search for light, for happiness and fulfillment is subtly linked in her fiction to her protagonists' struggle for existence.

The destiny of Jasmine, the protagonist of the novel, *Jasmine* bearing the same name, best illustrates this. Jasmine first introduced as saucy heroine of a short story and later made, with modifications, the protagonist of a frontier the novel *Jasmine*. Jasmine is not only prototypically Indian but is shown harboring a desire for independence and a respect for success that appear incongruous in her Indian setting of poverty, gender discrimination and rigid social conventions. Jasmine's yearning for these from early childhood marks the beginning of her struggle for self actualization or the realization or concretization of ardently cherished ideals.

Srinivas in *The Nowhere Man* by Kamala Markandaya leaves his homeland for future opportunities in England. Similarly, the protagonist of the novel, *Jasmine*, leaves her native land for the fulfillment of her husband's dream in America. Both leave their native places and come in contact with dominant culture in different situation. Jasmine's experience in foreign land is noteworthy.

Jasmine is a novel of emigration and assimilation both on physical and psychological levels. In this novel, Mukherjee fictionalizes the process of Americanization by tracing a young Indian woman's experiences of trauma and triumph in her attempt to forge a new identity for herself. The story is told from the first person point of view by the female protagonist who undergoes multiple identity transformations in her quest for self empowerment and happiness. Mukherjee uses flashback technique to fuse all the various elements and aspects of the novel together.

The novel begins with the astrologer's prediction that Jyoti, a village girl from Hasnapur, Punjab, who later becomes Jasmine, would become a widow and would be in exile. In response to the astrologer's prediction Jyoti whispers: "I don't believe you." She further says: "You are a crazy old man. You don't know what my future holds!"^(P.3) The astrologer's definition of Jyoti as nothing but a speck in the solar system raises her voice in protest right from the beginning. Mukherjee lays stress on the protagonist's strong will. The protagonist confesses that she feels guarded by she

ghosts and does not feel she is nothing what is seen as a maiming scar by her sisters is seen as the "third eye" by Jyoti. During her encounter with the stench of a disintegrating dog's carcass in the river, she is determined to take her fate into her hand and knows what she does not want to become.

When Jyoti marries Prakash Vih, she is on the first wrung of her cultural transformation. Prakash is a modern city man who believes in letting traditions go. He wants Jyoti to call him by his first name. He gives her new name. Jyoti states: "To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities"(P.77) This identity change of Jasmine continues when her world collapses around her by the death of her husband.

The novel is historically set in the years of tension preceding the events, Sikh terrorists going round Punjab on scooters, planting bomb. Prakash becomes a target because he had told his Sikh friend Sukhawinder that "There's no Hindu state! There's no Sikh state! India is for everyone".(P.66) And is, therefore, murdered for his secularist vision on the eve of their departure. At the age of seventeen Jasmine becomes widow. Her plan to move with her husbands who dream of his own Vih & Wife Shop to the United States spoils. Her husband dream to get admitted into the Florida International Institute of Technology scatters. In her confusion she can only find direction in her old Indian dutifulness. Grief stricken after his death, Jyoti hears his voice exhorting her from every corner of her room: "There is no dying there is only an ascending or a descending a moving on to other planes. Don't crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism."(P.96) That is why Jyoti, a mere seventeen – years old, can decide to take control of fate and look for realities. This shows her spirit to change the fate and her strong determination.

Jasmine decides to go to America at any cost to fulfill the dream of her husband. Here it is pointed that Srinivas, the protagonist of Kamala Marakandaya's *The Nowhere Man* enters into alien land along with his wife for the fulfillment of his dream. Prof. Pat makes all the provisions for it. In contrast, Jasmine takes illegal entry into the foreign land, where she knows nobody. She fights against situation and decides firmly to go ahead. Jasmine's passage to America is characterized by a traumatic experience, the first and the worst, in the long series of adaptation, which requires her to improvise morality in order to survive. The transformation of identity from dutiful, submissive widow into assertive criminal and individualistic American woman is in full swing.

After having harsh experience in the alien land, her Indian identity leaves her. The desire to fulfill the mission, which she had seen through the difficult passages to America, is abandoned, she says: "My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded."(P.120) What she discards is her Indian psyche and is reborn in America as Jase and Jane. Shuttling between the past and present, Jasmine reaches its turning point. She is reborn several times. Jasmine makes her long journey lone. She realizes that America, the land of opportunity has many disillusion for her. While going through many brutal experiences, she meets Lillion Gordon, a kind Quaker lady in Florida, who represents the best America, who introduces Jasmine to the first concept of American life: no backward glance which entails the loosening of concepts

of origin, language and belonging and survival which means to go America. Lillian Gordon has low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia. Lillian Gordon plays a vital role in full transformation of Jasmine. She teaches her how to survive in America, to dress and walk like an American.

Bharati Mukherjee presents Jasmine as a rebellious spirit. Jasmine's rebellious spirit does not let her to hang between cultures. This may be the reason that she feels uncomfortable in Professor Vadherar's, house, which they have converted into a Punjabi slum. She wants to get away from the breathless traditional "Indianness". Here Bharati Mukherjee brings out the contrast between Professorji's wife, Nirmala and the protagonist Jasmine. Nirmala only takes, Jasmine both takes and gives. Due to this, she can escape the Indian ghetto in Flushing and adopt herself to the pattern of dominant American culture which is modern. But it does not mean that Jasmine throws to the wind her race, her religion, her beliefs.

Jasmine's story is a story of a woman from Punjab who takes her life into her hands and makes herself an American. Ameena Meera alleges:

I think of Jasmine and many of my characters, as being people who are pulling themselves out of the very traditional world in which their fate is predetermined, their destiny resigned to the stars. But Jasmine says: I'm going to reposition the stars.

Her story is really the making of an American mind. She is an individual who has courage to choose and take risks. And in this sense, Jasmine is different from other immigrants. As Lillian Gordon says: "You're different from these others." (P.134)

The next chapter of Jasmine's life in America starts with Hayes' family. Jasmine is renamed Jase by Taylor. Again she has to change her identity with Hayse's family. The transformation of Jyoti is now halfway. Jasmine works in Taylor and Wylie's household as a 'caregiver', a position of respect, where her job is to look after their young daughter, Duff. In Taylor's family she stays for two years and learns the ways of American family-life, husband helping in the kitchen, wife working for longer hours outside and that the young couple could adopt a daughter and not wail for the natural child Jasmine says, "Adoption was as foreign to me as an idea of widow remarriage." (P.170) For the first time in her life she could know this aspect of culture which is far from the culture of tradition bound Indian society. She loves and admires the American world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. Jasmine refuses her identity as an illegal immigrant, as a murderer and wants the right position in alien land.

A true expatriate, Jasmine, does not hold fast to nostalgia that is dead but maintain certain basic traits of Indian culture even after imbibing American culture. Now she has become Duff's day-mummy-in Taylor's household. Even after this, her traditional roots leap out again and again. Here is an example. Duff is an adopted child-non-genetic, Jasmine's reaction for it is: "I could not imagine a non genetic child. A child that was not my own or my husband's struck me as a monstrous idea. Adoption was as foreign to me as the idea of widow-remarriage." (P.170)

Jasmine is shocked by the switching of relationships in America. She cannot understand what Wylie's problem is. She does not seem happy with Taylor. 'But she looked happy, sounded happy, and acted happy'. Here Jasmine cannot understand "What did happy mean? Her only chance? Happiness was so narrow a door, so selective?" (P.182) When Jasmine observes the reality of happy family, she is shocked. She says: "I realized for the first time in at least a year that America had thrown me again." (P.181) Even though, Jasmine likes Taylor and his world and wants to be a part of his family, she appeals Wylie for not to leave Taylor and Duff. But when Wylie moves out of the family home to move in with the wealthy Stuart Eschelman, Jasmine comments: "In America, nothing lasts." Taylor also confesses his love for her and his emotional need of her after Wylie deserts him. But again past comes back to destroy her present, in the form of Sukhawinder, the Khalsa Lion who killed her husband, Prakash, in India. She sees him in the park and comes to the conclusion that he must be searching for her. She also thinks that he would be dangerous for the lives of Taylor and Duff as she is living with them.

Jasmine's flight to Iowa country on sighting her husband's assassin in New York and living with the Ripplemeyers marks the next phase in her transformation. Now she becomes Jane in Bud's home. In the process of assimilation, the greatest ambition of Jasmine is to belong. She wants to have an identity which is American. With this motif, she enters in the life of Bud. Jasmine is carrying Bud Ripplemeyer's baby. And Bud wants her to marry him before the baby is born. But Jasmine thinks that Bud is not like Taylor, he never asks her about India as it scares him. He wouldn't be interested in the forecast of an old fakir under a banyan tree. Jasmine does not wish to marry him as she further explains: "Bud was wounded in the war between my fate and will. I think sometimes I saved his life by not marrying him. I feel so potent, a goddess." (P.12) Here again it is seen that for the sake of Bud's life, Jane decides not to marry with him.

Taylor's arrival at his juncture is a welcome relief to her and when he in his winning way convinces her that there is nothing wrong in her leaving Bud, she feels reassured and consents to go with him and Duff to the West coast, may be California referring herself as "greedy with wants and reckless from hopes." (P.241)

Jasmine's sense of relief at leaving Bud rather than guilt underscores that she was happy to be doing what she had been wishing to do from a long time back, a wish strengthened by her sincere concern that the astrologer's prediction should not take a toll of Bud's life. Jasmine's linking her life to that of Taylor is to be seen as a validation of her avowed belief, "Treat every second of your existence as a possible assignment from God." (P.61)

Jasmine observes the American approach to intra personal relations, the relationship between Wylie and Taylor, Karin and Bud's emotional conflict, she ponders on inevitability of attitudinal change corresponding to outer change in cultural habits. She also realizes that every culture is a concrete totality whose aspects are interrelated within the whole. Change one aspect and you must change others. The cultural change is seen in Jasmine. She may or may not appear

as a 'rabblemaker' by everyone stepping into the orbit of her life, but at every stage in her trouble torn life, in all her identities as Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane she seems to act boldly and unhesitatingly, thrilled at the prospect of "adventure, risk, transformation." (P.241)

The word 'transformation' together with her words of farewell to the mental image of the astrologer which has been haunting her all these years, "Watch me reposition the stars", suggest that Jasmine has indeed adopted the culture of America- the only land on earth that gives one ample opportunity to work at making a dream a reality.

It is relevant to note here Bharati Mukherjee's own comment on American impact on her character's approach to life:

My characters want to make it in the new world.

They are filled with a hustlerish kind of energy. Although they are often hurt or depressed by set-backs in their new lives and occupations, they do not give up. They take risks they would not have taken in their old comfortable worlds to solve their problems. As they change citizenship they are reborn.

Thus, Jasmine becomes truly Americanized not just in peripheral social or cultural mores but in a primal intensity of spirit.

The deviations from the process of acculturation are really very few in the case of Jasmine. She brings to fold her inherited cultural qualities and makes them work for her to develop an entirely new identity by carefully merging these with the ones she acquires through her American experience. Despite her adaptations and accomplishments, she forges familial ties at various levels with different people.

Jasmine is neither passionate but passive like Tara nor crazed and left a shadow without feeling like Dimple. She seems to combine gentleness with tenacity in making her diasporal dream a reality. Jasmine creates several identities for herself and is able to mould herself in each of the roles she plays.

Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee focus on the bi-cultural experience of their protagonists. Markandaya highlights the cultural clashes and its aspects through the delineation of different characters in *The Nowhere Man*. Srinivas, the protagonist and his wife Vasantha settle down on an alien soil but their ties with India are more or less severed with typical Indian habits, temperament around themselves in alien country. Though Srinivas longs for wider citizenship, he

cannot fully absorb into alien culture. Vasantha, a typical Indian woman refuses to assimilate into the culture which is not hers. She remains as typical traditional Hindu wife. On the other hand, Mukherjee's protagonist has the guts to forsake a predictable life in order to throw herself into a new one. In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee celebrates both the undaunted spirit and enthusiasm of a village girl who blossomed out of a bruised past into a challenging personality and a complete individual. Thus, Markandaya and Mukherjee highlight cultural confrontation and its aspects- alienation, identity crisis acculturation, assimilation, deviation on the basis of reality.

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