

## Identity Crisis in Bharathi Mukherjee's Novels *Jasmine and Desirable Daughters*

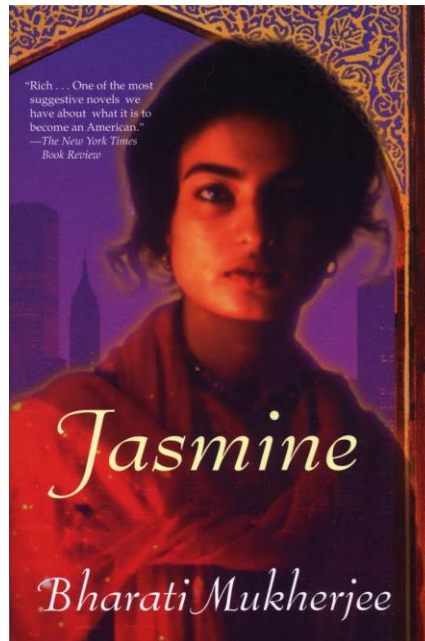
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### Bharathi Mukherjee

Bharathi Mukherjee is a writer who deals with the problems of the Indian immigrants mainly, women. She writes about the struggles and Problems faced by Indian women. The problem of cross cultural crisis and the decisive search for identity is also one of her important themes. In the novel *Jasmine*, Bharathi Mukherjee writes how the female protagonist tries to tackle the problem of loss of culture and endeavors to presume a new identity in the U.S. The protagonist Jasmine leaves her country to accomplish her wishes. On reaching the U.S., she begins to search for self-independence. She struggles hard to achieve it and at last she realizes that self-independence is not to be an Indian or American but to be at peace with herself.

### *Jasmine*



### Protagonist Jasmine Search for Identity

In this novel the main protagonist Jasmine's search for identity and her true self began from the day she was born. She was born as Jyoti in the village of Hasnapur. As a girl child she was almost strangled to death so that her parents might free her from the problems of marriage. But she survived that attack. In fact, her childhood memories became the instrument in her fight against fate and her search for self-identity. She was predicted of widowhood and separate by an

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astrologer when she was only seven years old. She was not troubled down by fate. She always tried to raise herself above blind beliefs and fallacy. *“Fate is Fate, When Beulah’s bridegroom was fated to die to snakebite on their wedding night; did building as still fortress prevent his death? A magic snake will penetrate solid walls when necessary.”* She learnt identifying “permissible rebellion” against the standard of the society which she would later use to her own advantage. In spite of the strength and willpower Jyoti had, she was threatened by dangers, challenges and many barriers in her quest for identity. And this was the main reason which made her to disguise her true identity most of the time and live accordingly to the images fashioned by others. But the eruption of her father to comply with rules did not discourage Jyoti from expressing a small part of her dream or ambition. She achieved a small part of her dream by falling in love and marrying Prakash, a very young and ambitious engineer. He wanted Jyoti to shed off her past and make a new kind of woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: “Jasmine”. And this was the beginning of a new journey for her. After getting a new identity, Jasmine also took care of her husband’s driving goal. Renamed as Jasmine, she was looking forward to going to America with her husband to pursue his further education. She was sharing the ambition of her husband happily. But her husband Prakash was killed by the terrorists on the eve of their departure. This made Jasmine grief-stricken and frustrated. And her dream was shattered. Instead of spending the rest of her life as a helpless widow at Hasnapur, she decided to go to America. This kind of inner will in such kind of situation helped her to fulfill her mission successfully.

### **Jasmine Went to America**

Then Jasmine went to America on a forged passport. She left India to survive against the forces of destiny but unfortunately her American journey began on a sad note. She was raped by Half-Face who had *“lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam”*. (P.104) Half-Face was the captain of the ship in which Jasmine reached America. But after reaching America, Half-Face raped Jasmine in a hotel. After Half-Face raped she did not kill herself as she felt that her mission was not yet over. And she killed Half-Face by becoming Kali, personified, the Goddess of Destruction. She also performed a kind of death for her by burning her dishonored clothes symbolically. It was the death of her old self and the birth of a new self. Thus, she began her journey into America. From that journey of Jasmine to America to fulfill her mission came out her interior pursue – to unfold her true self and identity. Jasmine was modern girl who faced the challenges of life boldly and struggled hard to survive against all odds. Then Jasmine met Lilian Gordon who entered into her life as a hope. It was Mrs. Gordon who educated her, made her free from her past memories and strengthened her will to survive.

### **Professor Vadhera**

With her help, she went to meet Professor Vadhera who helped Prakash in securing admission in an engineering course. In the beginning, she stayed at Professor Vadhera’s house. She was not earning by the strict ethnicity in the house that she was to follow as a widow. So she decided to leave that house. This move indicated that self-actualization was developing in her life and it might be due to the acculturation to the American way of thinking and dressing. After a short time, Jasmine worked in the house of Tylor and Wylie Hayes in Manhattan as a care giver to their little daughter Duff. There her name was changed from Jasmine to Jase. While she worked as a care-giver, she also took up part time jobs like answering phones and tutoring

graduate students in Punjabi in the University. She absorbed the alien culture rather greedily. At this phase of her life, Jasmine had been able to gain a personality and became very confident about her personality.

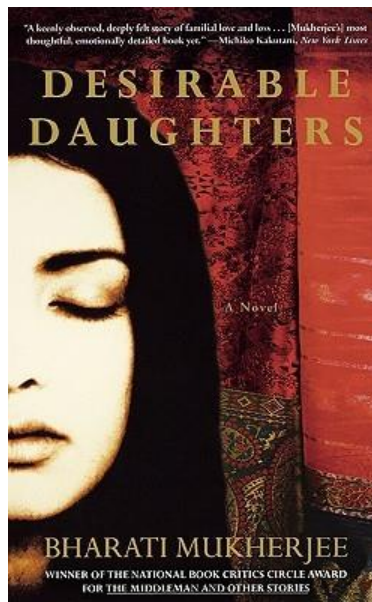
### Two Opposite Forces

The pulling between these two opposite forces, i.e., the Indian and the American did not frighten her, but it made her thrilled. The alien country taught her to live with ease and confidence. There she got a job in Iowa's bank. She also made a place in the heart of the banker Bud Ripplemayer. Jasmine had a peaceful life in Bud's house. There she assumed a new identity and she became "Jane" from "Jase". She considered herself to be a catalyst and not the reason for the divorce of Bud and Karin. She tried to comfort him and make him confident. And she became pregnant carrying Bud's child but did not wish to marry him she made Karin understand that she was not her enemy but it was Bud's happiness that mattered to both of them. Jane had fully accepted the American family, but she was waiting for real love. Then suddenly she got a letter from Taylor informing her that he would shortly come to take her. And it was a welcome surprise for her.

### Achieving True Identity

Hence, Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is the movement of Jasmine's life towards achieving **true identity**. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. At every step of her life, Jasmine is a winner, she does not allow her troubles and struggles to frustrate her progress in life and she is finding a place for herself in the society. In other words, she is a true feminist who fights every challenge in life to establish herself in the society. Jasmine realizes that the true identity of a person does not lie in being an Indian or an American but it lies in the inner spirit of the person to be at peace with her. Bharati Mukherjee has employed metamorphosis transformations in the life of Jasmine in the process of her search of her true identity.

### *Desirable Daughters*



The novel mainly focused on how the women faced many obstacles in other country. The identity of the protagonist is highly assimilative, can adopt and hold herself both to her traditional Indian way of life and to her newly adopted American ethos. She tries to move away from the constrained identity and vacillates between two lives: “*maybe I really was between two lives.*” Tara reconstruction of identity is rooted in her nostalgic and romantic recollection of her past. It is based on her thoughts about the past coming to her mind in the past coming to her mind in the present but in fragments, and not whole. She tried to reconstruct her identity through her diasporic experience. She was attempting to redefine the importance of cultures through space and time. Loneliness had made Tara a little wanton and wantonness had made her very lonely.

### Home and Migration

The concept of home and migration is very much embedded in the narratology that Bharathi Mukherjee presents in *Desirable Daughters*. It is the sense of migration which brings about a change to the identity of Padma, who has finally made New York her home, her land of choice. But her indisputable attachment to her home makes her the sustainer and preserver of Bengali tradition in America. The alien culture thus fails to subvert her traditional identity

### Portrayed in the Liberated Form

The characters in the novel are not portrayed in the liberated form, they are trapped into different set of emotions trying into different set of emotions trying to carve out a new identity for themselves. Tara is projected as a character who more of a status conscious tries to uphold the values of traditional society although falling for different allurements in the present. In the end, the novel, tries to come back from where it started, where and the legend of Tara Lata the tree bride, but this device doesn't quite work either. The denouement somehow goes slack and does not yield a satisfying end to the story. The novel seems to be a family which could not bring out the desirable characteristics in the characters of the novel, that portray them as a dominant in any sphere. The end is quite dynamic and complex where the description of motherland may be magical but symbolic purpose was lost.

### A Liquid Society

Bharathi Mukherjee depicts a liquid society in her novels, a society in her novel, a society in flux. It is a society of constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of power structures, flow of people and supplies. In the novel *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee has struck a balance between tradition and modernity by representing past and present which is achieved through the female protagonist- Tara, who served her links with tradition but remains tied to her native country. Tara influenced by ancient customs and traditions, but is rooted to modern customs. Tara is alienated from the society as she oscillated between the nostalgic fascinations of a traditional past and the romantic and daring allurements of the present. The Diasporic qualities exhibited by Tara establish the merging of the East and west which shows the clash.

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