

## The New Diaspora and the Transformation of America in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*(1989)

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### **Abstract:**

The current research at stake on the notions of new diaspora, immigration, and the study of feminist postcolonialism no longer hold the essential homogenized stereotype of the third world victimized immigrant women but rather consider these women as agents of change and transformation who are capable of subverting traditional gendered roles both in their native lands and America. Therefore, this essay argues that Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989) presents a strong immigrant female heroine who resists conscious and unconscious marginalization by mainstream white American society and who also transforms the lives of some of the Americans with whom she interacts while in America rather than a female character who is transformed by America and forced to shuttle between identities. Accordingly, despite the many names that *Jasmine's* heroine is known by and that supposedly refer to the different identities she has shuttled between, this essay claims that only one identity of the heroine exists. This identity is presented through a third dimensional level that represents her true, single, and growing identity, through which she has shuttled only on a naming level. The essay first discusses how the heroine presents herself in a third dimensional level in the midst of the different names given to her. Then it investigates the reasons that have led the heroine to accept the different names assigned to her. Finally, it investigates from a feminist perspective, how the heroine is able to partially transform the lives of some of the American men with whom she interacts in America.

**Keywords:** identity, multi-ethnic literature, postcolonial-feminism, resistance, third world

### Introduction

The current notions of new diaspora, immigration, and the study of feminist postcolonialism have started to shift from upholding the essential homogenized stereotype of the third world victimized immigrant women and began to consider these women as agents of change and transformation who are capable to challenge traditional gendered roles both in their native lands and America. These changes have taken place due to the effects of transnationalism, hybridity and globalization. Spivak (1996) is one of the major critics who fully discussed their impact on both literary writing and criticism. She urges women writers in particular to regard themselves “not as victims below but agents above, resisting the consequences of globalization as well as redressing the cultural vicissitudes of migrancy” (p. 251). Spivak (1996) also argues that a notion of what she coins as “new diaspora” has emerged and is shaped by the influence of transnationalism and globalization (p. 246). Furthermore, Almeida (2009) explains that:

The transnational flow of subjects and peoples beyond delineated borders, frontiers and spaces has led to the questioning of the belief in a fixed and univocal concept of a nation (as Benedict Anderson argues), in a centralized national identity and in the notion of cultural authenticity—beliefs that have been central to the establishment of a national literary tradition in many countries. Today, however, the notions of displacement and deterritorialization, often understood as, “the detachment of knowledge, action, information, and identity from a specific place or physical source,” as Hoffman defines it, have predominated in contemporary literary production, forcing a revision in the way we discuss national literatures (p.44)

In the same vein, Loomba (1998) also declares that it is no longer reasonable to continue holding generalized perceptions of postcolonial subjects especially women. She points to that:

many writings on postcolonialism emphasise concepts like “hybridity” and fragmentation and diversity, and yet they routinely claim to be describing “the postcolonial condition”, or “the postcolonial subject” or “the postcolonial woman”. At best, such terms are no more than a helpful shorthand, because they do not allow for differences between distinct kinds of colonial situations, or the workings of class, gender, location, race, caste or ideology among people whose lives have been restructured by colonial rule. (p. 15)

Therefore, it is important to for both literary writers and critics to present and discuss literary works that deconstruct the old generalized assumptions about postcolonial subjects following Young’s (1995) definition of deconstructive approach which “makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different” (p. 36).

### *Jasmine’s Critical Overview*

Bharti Mukherjee is one of the diasporic writers who also promoted holding this notion of postcolonial experience in the new diaspora. Mukherjee clearly confirms to Edwards (2009) that her essay titled “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman” is definitely her “manifesto” of sorts (p. 172). In that essay, she claims the following: “my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show how I (and the hundreds of thousands like me) have transformed America” (p. 13). She further clarifies this statement to Edwards (2009) by declaring:

[i]n that essay I was saying to the mainstream white American: whether you like it or not, we non-white immigrants are here to stay, we are not visitors or transients. I was announcing my intention to resist conscious and unconscious marginalization of our citizenship status.” (p. 172)

Mukherjee’s literary agenda is clearly portrayed in her novel *Jasmine*, and there is wealth of scholarship that discusses the first part of this agenda; that is, how America and the Americans have transformed *Jasmine*’s heroine, an Indian immigrant, multiple times throughout her life, during her journey across many U.S. states, and through her interactions with American families. A large amount of scholarship has been dedicated to *Jasmine* to trace the amount of transformation its heroine experienced in America. On the one hand, some scholars have portrayed this transformation negatively: Ruppel (1995) claims that in *Jasmine* “name changes can be seen as a response to the still ongoing effects of colonialism. She must change to survive and to continue her journey” (p. 183). Moreover, Queiroz (2011) discusses the harsh scholarly criticism *Jasmine* has received and explains that many scholars accuse Mukherjee of her “compliance with a so-called project of re-colonization of third world people living in the first world” and “claim that the novel’s protagonist participates in the process of othering herself in order to belong to a mainstream society in the host country” (p. 11). In the same vein, Warhol-Down (2008) states: “among feminist and postcolonialist readers, practically everybody hates Jasmine” (p. 1). On the other hand, some articles have celebrated this transformation and considered it a positive one. Hazenson (2010) argues that the character of *Jasmine* exemplifies the ideal “New American’ maximalist, and her widely ranging cross continental experiences serve as a fable for the becoming process of a New American” (p. 6). However, until now, there has been no critical scholarly research exploring how the second half of Mukherjee’s literary agenda is portrayed in *Jasmine*, which involves showing how she (and the hundreds of thousands like her) have transformed America (Edwards, 2009, p. 13). Such critical analysis is in favor of the current research at stake on the notions of new diaspora, immigration, and the study of feminist postcolonialism which no longer hold the essential homogenized stereotype of the third world victimized immigrant women but rather consider these women as agents of change and transformation who are capable to subvert traditional gender roles both in their native lands and America. Therefore, the author of this essay would like to state that in *Jasmine*, Mukherjee undoubtedly presents a strong immigrant female heroine who resists conscious and unconscious marginalization by mainstream white American society and who also transforms the lives of some of the American men with whom she interacts while in America rather than a female character who is transformed by America, American men in particular, and forced to shuttle between identities. Accordingly, despite the many names that Jasmine’s heroine is known by and that supposedly refer to the different identities she has shuttled between or transformed into, the author claims that only one identity of the heroine exists. This identity is presented through a third dimensional level that represents her true, single, and growing identity, through which she has shuttled only on a naming level. Therefore, the changes her personality underwent were the natural results of growth and experience. For the purposes of this argument, the author will first discuss how the heroine identifies herself and how she presents herself in a third dimensional level in the midst of the different names given to her. The author will then investigate the reasons that have led her to accept the different names assigned to her. Referring to the current notions of new diaspora, immigration, and the study of feminist postcolonialism which no longer hold the essential homogenized view of the third world victimized immigrant women but rather consider

these women as agents of change and transformation who are capable to challenge traditional gendered roles both in their native lands and America, The author will specifically show from a feminist perspective through following the examples of her female role models, Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer, how the heroine was able to partially transform the lives of some of the men she interacts with in America: Half-Face, Bud, Du, Taylor, and Prakash, whom The author the author regards as passing as an American, an assertion that the author will discuss in detail later in the essay.

### Postcolonial-Feminist Identity in the New Diaspora

Brah (1996) explains that:

[t]he idea of identity, like that of culture, is singularly elusive. We speak of ‘this’ identity and ‘that identity. We know from our everyday experience that what we call ‘me’ or ‘I’ is not the same in every situation; that we are changing from day to day. Yet there is something we ‘recognise’ in ourselves and in others which we call ‘me’ and ‘you’ and ‘them’. In other words, we are constantly changing but this *changing illusion* is precisely what we see as real and concrete about ourselves and others. And this seeing is both a social and a psychological process. Identity then is an enigma which, by its very nature, defies a precise definition. (p. 20)

From one end of this continuum, Mukherjee’s heroine recognizes the presence of her own singular identity within her despite the different names she has been referred to through declaring a third dimension of her identity. She actually cleverly presented at the beginning of the novel while she was narrating the story of how she had received the scar on her forehead: she tripped and fell on a rock as she was ‘physically’ running away from the astrologer and ‘psychologically’ escaping from the doomed fate he said was assigned to her. The heroine regards the scar as her “third eye” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 5). Here, for the purpose of this argument, the author regards this “eye” to stand for her true self, which is presented through her third dimensional level identity using the pronoun “I” in the novel. In *Jasmine*, the heroine who is the narrator of the novel narrates while assigned the name ‘Jane.’ However, she always disassociates herself from the name ‘Jane’ and from all of the other names that supposedly represent examples of her multiple identity shifts. Thus, in the narration process, she uses the pronoun ‘I’ or ‘me’ to refer to her real self, and these terms do not refer to Jane or any of the other names or identities whose stories she is telling. The heroine’s separation approach to all the assigned names reinforces the author’s argument that she does not experience any identity shifts, as the only change she experiences is on the naming level. Therefore, the changes she undergoes on the identity level indicate the novel is a form of bildungsroman. At the beginning of the novel, *Jasmine*’s heroine states that “in the white lamp light, ghosts float towards me. Jane, Jasmine, Jyoti” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 21). She makes this statement in the portion of the novel in which she is supposed to be Jane, as she is in Iowa with Bud. Therefore, it is obvious that she distances herself from most of the names that have been used to refer to her in the past, as well as the one she is called by at that time. In fact, she further distances herself from the ‘Jane’ name and asserts the following: “Bud calls me Jane” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 26). Thus, the heroine does not see herself as Jane. The heroine also distances herself from another name by saying that “Lillian called me “Jazzy” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 132). The other assigned name, “Jase”, is no different since the heroine also states that “Taylor called me Jase” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 176). She further

distances herself from this name by explaining that Jase “was a woman who bought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 176). Thus, it was only a name and had no effect on her real identity. This act of distancing herself from given names occurs again while she is elaborating on her past in India, both in the village and the city. She explains that Parkash:

wanted to breakdown the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break of the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. He said, “You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume.” Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities. (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 77)

As with all the names she is assigned in America, both Jyoti and Jasmine are other names and supposed identities given to her in India, and she disassociates herself from them as well. She explains that “my grandmother may have named me Jyoti,” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 40) and Prakash had given her the name Jasmine. Therefore, she again does not see herself according to the names assigned to her by others or through their different supposed identities. In mentioning names or identities throughout the novel, there are nearly always three versions of the heroine: the name she is talking about, Jane the supposed narrator, and the pronouns ‘I’ or ‘me’ that refer to the heroine’s true identity. For example, while she is Jane and talking about either Jyoti or Jasmine, her true third dimension is expressed as follows: “Bud’s and *mine* and Du’s. Jane Ripplemyer has a bank account. So does Jyoti Vijn in a different city” (italics mine, Mukherjee, 1989, p. 7). However, one might argue that the heroine herself asserted that she had “shuttled between identities” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 77), and most of the scholarly research that is in favor of such a claim primarily refers to the heroine’s following statement:

I should never have been Jane Ripplemeyer of Baden, Iowa. I should have lived and died in that feudal village, perhaps making a monumental leap to modern Jullundhar. When Jyoti's future was blocked after the death of Prakash, Lord Yama should have taken her. (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 127)

First, it is important to note to that this statement is a part of the heroine’s conversation, when she is supposedly Jane, with Mary Webb about the belief of ‘revisiting the world’, in which the heroine believes and confirms earlier by saying that “I have been reborn several times, and that yes, some lives I can recall vividly” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 126). The heroine questions herself in silence and with wonder at the beginning of this conversation about the belief of having an eternal soul:

what is if the human soul is eternal- the swamis say of it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot drown it, winds cannot bend it- what if it is like a giant long-playing record with millions of tracks, each of them a complete circle with only one diamond- sharp microscopic link to the next life, and the next, and only God to hear it all? I do believe that. And I do believe that extraordinary events can jar the needle arm, jump tracks, rip across incarnations, and deposit a life into a groove that was not prepared to receive it ... (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 126-7)

Thus, regarding the human soul, the heroine believes that it has an eternal nature that gives it the ability to exist and continue across many lives, as well as throughout the person’s own life. In other words, she believes that without the validity of such a belief, and without



believing in it, she would not have been able to come to America and survive the predetermined fates of exile and widowhood and exile, let alone death. At the same time, she asserts that despite the different names given to her and all the conditions she had to endure and live under in both India and America, she is still the same person who was able to persevere under these different conditions of place and time because of her genuine quality of survival, which the author of this essay discusses later in detail. Thus, the heroine is saying that due to the belief and her ability to maintain a single identity, she was able to endure the harsh conditions she faced in India after the death of Prakash. Otherwise, she would have never been able to come to America and resist the different forces of widowhood and exile. Thus, she undoubtedly answers Mary and states: "Yes," I say, "I do believe you. We do keep revisiting the world. I have also traveled in time and space. It is possible." (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 127). However, she again asserts to herself that:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 127)

This is also one of the quotations to which many scholarly critics refer when talking about the different identities between which the heroine shuttled. However, the author of this essay believes that this statement, when aligned with what the heroine states about the belief of the soul's eternity, indicates that she refers to the different situations that she encountered with each of these names. These names are connected to different times and places, but she was still able to maintain her identity throughout her journey. Despite the metaphorical forces of fire, water, and wind, she had referred to while thinking about the soul's eternity, she remained the same person. In fact, the author of this essay believes that these forces according to the heroine's life could refer to the following: fire to the fate of sati, that the water could be linked to the heroine's sea journey and Half Face's threat and the incidents of rape and murder, and that the wind refers to her life in Iowa, in which the heroine's influence has been compared to that of a 'tornado' (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 215) by Bud's ex-wife, Karen.

Furthermore, the author of this essay believes that this quotation and all the other previous quotations included in this section should not be evaluated separately but rather critiqued in aggregate with all the other similar statements in the novel concerning the issue of identity and naming in order to acquire a clear, holistic vision of the heroine's perspective regarding these concepts. The heroine considers these names and supposed identities as mere roles in her life. She states that "plain Jane is a role, like any other" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 26). Asserting this opinion about the narrator's supposed name serves as strong evidence regarding how the heroine considers these names and identities that are assigned to her mere roles that she has to act out. Thus, like the heroine herself, the author of this essay will not associate her with any of the assigned names but rather continue to refer to her as the 'heroine' of the work. Most importantly, the heroine states that "owning is rebellion,..., it means survival" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 30). Thus, the heroine knows that to survive she must own her own identity despite the different names and identities assigned to her. She considers these new names only as vehicles for survival. She also states that "we murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dream" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 29). Here, she again metaphorically describes the act of continuously accepting new names as murder and rebirth, which does not extend the premises of

dreams to reality; they only stand for new names that she does not allow to reach the level of her identity. Hoppe (1999) states, "Jasmine murders herself in order to recreate different selves, but she can never wholly deny, forget, or escape the previous ones" (p. 139). Dlaska (1999) also states that "Jasmine's multiple transformations are represented in the uncompromising terms of death and rebirth but on a psychological level also reflect a desperate search for selfhood in the context of immigration" (p. 128). Furthermore, she explains that "I had a past that I was still feeling. Perhaps still am" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 34). Indeed, she is still her first and past true character who naturally grows and develops over time and with experience.

Given all that has been stated above, it is important now to discuss how the heroine defines herself. The author of this essay believes that she presents herself as a genuinely strong person beginning from the time of her birth, which she describes in the following statement:

when the midwife carried me out, my sisters tell me, I had a ruby-red choker of bruise around my throat and sapphire fingerprints on my collarbone... My mother was a sniper... I survived the sniping. My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter. (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 40)

Here, the heroine associates herself with the strong female character Jane in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* because she has also survived the harsh conditions she had to face so early in her life just for being a girl born into a class-based and male-oriented society. She survived her mother's attempt to kill her the moment she was born, an act of mother's despair and necessity to save her child from the possible doomed fate of becoming a poor girl without a dowry. Nevertheless, the heroine understands her mother's distress and does not judge her action; she affirms that her mother "wanted to spare me the pain of a dowryless bride. My mother wanted a happy life for me" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 40). However, it is worth noting that she continues to compare herself with Jane Eyre during her relationship with Bud and states, "I think maybe I'm Jane with my very own Mr. Rochester..." (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 230), which further proves that she distances herself from the mere name given to her by Bud. It is the quality of survival that links her to Jane Eyre from the day of her birth.

Being a survivor also required the heroine to escape the fate of exile and widowhood that would be cast upon her according to the astrologer's prophecy, which she narrates at the beginning of the novel in the following passage:

Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hanspur, an astrologer capped his ears- his satellite dish to the stars- and foretold my widowhood and exile. I was only seven then, fast and venturesome, scabrous- armed from leaves and thorns. "No" I shouted. "You're a crazy old man. You don't know what my future holds!" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 3)

To begin, it is worth noting that the heroine cleverly ceases every attempt to continue reinforcing the fact that she is a genuinely strong woman who, although a seven-year-old girl, was able to talk back to the astrologer and deny his ability to foresee the future, as well as his prophecy. The author of this essay believes that to survive any possible threat that might put her at risk of being doomed by the astrologer's prophecy, the heroine does not mind having a new name occasionally. In fact, having a different name serves as a vehicle for the heroine to survive the fate of widowhood and exile. The heroine's determination to escape the fate of widowhood and exile is evident in her following statement: "I'm twenty-four now, I live in Baden, Elsa

County, Iowa, but every time I lift a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it. I know what I don't want to become" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 5). Here, the heroine refers to the incident of falling into the lake that has a dead dog in it, which continues to haunt her because it reminds her of her past in India and, most importantly, of the astrologer's prophecy. Thus, she repeatedly affirms to herself that she does not want to become a widow in exile. Therefore, to escape this possible doomed fate she must continue being a survivor every time a threat occurs.

Accepting the many names given to her by different men and women in America is a way for the heroine to avoid exile and widowhood while she is with them in America. Near the end of the novel, the heroine asks herself how many more times does she need to survive the possible fate of exile and widowhood by accepting new names and how many other wife and husband relationships must she have with men: "How many shapes are in me, how many more selves, how many more husbands? (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 215). Again, making such a statement near the end of the novel confirms that the heroine uses the renaming strategy to survive. Furthermore, the end of the novel reconfirms the author's argument concerning the heroine's acceptance of new names as a vehicle for survival; since after successfully escaping the predetermined doom of exile and widowhood, the heroine addresses "the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 241) and tells him that she had falsified his prophecy and whispers "watch me re-position the stars" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 241). The author of this essay believes that although the heroine does not mention the astrologer until the end of the novel, the way he easily floats cross-legged around her and the fact that she whispers to him indicates that the astrologer and his prophecy were constantly on her mind; these all serve as clear evidence that her ultimate goal from the beginning was always to survive the condemned fate of exile and widowhood. Therefore, it goes without saying that such a strong woman with a fixed aim would never allow others to force her to shuttle between identities.

Furthermore, another way of perceiving the heroine's acceptance of the new assigned names relates to Mukherjee's literary agenda of showing how her and the hundreds of thousands like her have transformed America (Edwards, 2009, p.3) and their determination to resist the unconscious and conscious marginalization practiced by mainstream white Americans. More importantly as has been discussed earlier the current research at stake on the notions of new diaspora, immigration, and the study of feminist postcolonialism no longer hold the essential homogenized stereotype of the third world victimized immigrant women but rather consider these women as agents of change and transformation who are capable to subvert traditional gendered roles both in their native lands and America.

### **The Transformation of America**

It is worth noting here that Mukherjee specifically shows that most of the American men in the novel straightforwardly ask the heroine to help them to either become better people or navigate a difficult time safely, both of which fall under the category of transforming into better people and having better lives. Thus, she clearly declares that "I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 171). Furthermore, she asserts that despite the different names given to her along with their different supposed identity shifts. She declares that she still thinks of herself as caregiver, recipe giver, and preserver. She can honestly say all she wanted was to serve, be allowed to join" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 215). Most importantly, through following the examples of her female role models Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer she also strives to be considered a strong influential



woman who could transform the lives of others for the better and specifically states that one day I want to belong to that tribe of Lillian Gordon, Mother Ripplemeyer (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 197). These two women specifically helped the heroine transform her life for the better and prevent her from falling into the fate of exile and widowhood. According to her, Lillian is “a facilitator who made possible the lives of absolute ordinariness that” the heroine and other women like her “ached for” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 131), and Mother Ripplemeyer is “a woman with the curtness and directness of Lillian Gordon who got the heroine the job in the bank (Mukherjee, 1989, p.196).

Furthermore, Queiroz (2011) also argues that while “it is indeed true that the protagonist is named by most men she encounters in the novel, but it does not mean that men are the ones responsible for helping her shape her subjectivity.” (p. 97). She also claims that the heroine does not have

a passive character that she needs men to actually shape her identity. The protagonist is the one who is mostly responsible for her own transformations. She moves to the USA in spite of all the risks, murders Hal-Face, decides not to commit sati, leaves Flushing, gets her own jobs, flees to Iowa, leaves Bud and then chooses to reunite with Taylor. Even though she does not perform all these actions without other people’s help, she is the one who makes her life decisions. (p. 97)

The author of this essay also strongly promotes Queiroz’s view of Mukherjee’s heroine concerning her possession of a strong feminist character that cannot be shuttled by men. Thus, in the following sections, the author will discuss how throughout her life, the heroine is able to resist the forces of marginalization, survive the predetermined fate, and most importantly similar to her female role models, Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer, partially influence a considerable positive transformation of some of the American men with whom she interacts while in America.

Jasmine is the first new name given to the heroine by her husband Prakash. The author of this essay regards Prakash as passing as an American in the novel because he exhibits more American qualities than Indian ones with respect to his opinion about women, children, marriage and life in general. In fact, he is the one who introduces the heroine to America and the opportunity to go and live in America. Accepting the name Jasmine that Prakash gives her is a way for the heroine to avoid exile while she is with him and while she is in America. Thus, although she still lives in India, the exile the heroine wants to escape in India is cultural rather than geographical. Most importantly, in accepting her name, Jasmine, the heroine also helps to transform Prakash’s life, a request that he made through the following statement: “Jasmine, Jasmine....help me be a better person” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 79). “You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You’ll quicken the whole world with your perfume” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 77). Sadly that the terrorist attack in India ended Prakash’s life; however, interestingly, the heroine insisted on persevering with Prakash’s mission and dream. She states that “Later I thought, we had created a life. Parkash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash. Vijn & wife” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 97). So, she decides to travel to America. It is true that her main mission was to carry out the sati tradition on the University of Florida campus where Prakash wanted to study to honor his dream and his hope for a positive transformation there with the heroine’s help, however, in travelling to America, the

heroine also wants to escape the fate of exile and marginalization that widowed Indian women faced in a male-dominated society; a fate that the astrologer had already assigned to her.

Kali, the second name given to the heroine, is bestowed by the heroine herself, which strongly proves the author's argument that she has accepted and actually used renaming as a vehicle to survive the fate of exile and widowhood. First, it is important to note that the heroine regards her relationships with the men she encounters in America as that of husband and wife. She states that "I have had a husband for each of the women I have been...Half face for Kali" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 197). Therefore, the author of this essay believes that she assigns herself another name to avoid the fate of widowhood. At the same time, the author also believes that she chooses an Indian name to avoid the fate of exile because she wants to consider herself an American while in America. Therefore, the acts of rape and murder and her experience of widowhood in exile are not associated with her but instead are associated with the Indian, Kali. Of course, the heroine did not transform Half-Face's life; instead, she ended it. Wikramagamage (1996) discusses this episode of killing Half Face in detail while opposing critics who criticize Mukherjee for presenting a "neo-colonial endorsement of the idea of the 'west'" (p. 63). By referring to Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" essay, she strongly defends Mukherjee's novel and praises it for challenging the stereotypical perception of third world subaltern women that need to be saved by white men. She claims that:

as a post-colonial novel, Jasmine contests a certain stereotypical profile of the "ethnicized" woman as victim – the "Hindu" woman, the "Third World" woman – a profile that has an enduring legacy in "western" feminist writings on "other" women. As a feminist novel, Jasmine presents itself as a challenge to the patriarchal definitions of feminine subjectivity and life-options that seek the protagonist's compliance in the two national-cultural locations in which she finds herself. (64)

She further argues that this rape scene deconstructs the Western feminists' view of the "image of the white man as the 'savior' of brown women" (p. 73). She also explains that the heroine's murdering of Half Face also challenges Western feminists assumption that third world women are typically "without agency and voice, and the object of privileged white feminist discursive interventions," (p. 75) because she "refuses to remain a silent raped body" (p. 75). Moreover, it could also be argued from a feminist perspective that she did not only help herself but also helped to save other women from the risk of being sexually harassed by a criminal rapist who scornfully told her while she was trying to avoid him "you know what's coming, and there ain't nobody here to help you, so my advice is to lie back and enjoy it. Hell, you'll probably like it. I don't get many complaints" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 102). So, she was not the first one and would never have been the last one if she had not killed him. Interestingly, she indirectly justifies the act of killing Half-Face as acceptable and required by asserting that if she had told Lillian Gordon, her role model, that she had "murdered a man last night" then Lillian would have answered, without any hesitation, "I'm sure you had an excellent reason" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 131). Assuming her savior's, Lillian Gordon, approval she positions herself from a feminist perspective as a savior of other women. Following her role model and taking a step ahead, she was able to transform other women's lives for the better without knowing or meeting them.

Jazzy is the other name given to the heroine by Lillian Gordon. It is a name that the heroine accepts to change her fate of being Prakash's widow and simultaneously become more

Americanized, thus escaping the fate of marginalization and exile and entering the phase of assimilation and fitting in the society. The heroine describes Jazzy as a person “in a t-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 132). Like the name Jasmine, Jazzy is used as a vehicle to survive the fate of exile in America since it includes transforming the heroine’s outer appearance helps her fit into American society and pass as an American. Lillian Gordon teaches the heroine how to enter through revolving doors, get on and off escalators, and eat and cook American food in order to help her to pass as an American and thus avoid marginalization. “Now remember, if you walk and talk American, they’ll think you were born here. Most Americans can’t imagine anything else” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 132). The heroine indirectly confirms that the name did not have any influence on her identity and that she was only shocked when she saw herself in the mirror; she and states that “I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 132).

Jase is the name given to the heroine by Taylor. Again, the heroine accepts it to distance herself further from exile. However, it is evident that Taylor did not want to compel the heroine to shuttle between identities, he only meant to call her by a name that would create more intimacy between them. The heroine makes this clear by stating the following: “Taylor did not want to change me. He didn’t want to scour and sanitize the foreignness” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 185). She actually confesses that “I changed because I wanted to” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 185). In fact, it is in this period of her life that she undergoes the most psychological growth and gains the most experience in America. She clearly states that “on Clermont Avenue, in the Hayes’s big, clean, brightly lit apartment, I bloomed from a different alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 186). It was the only name that, while distancing herself from it, she still feels that she knew before; she explains that “I whisper the name, Jase, Jase, Jase, as if I’m calling someone I once knew” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 215). Furthermore, just as in the other relations and other name change incidents, the heroine does not mind this new name because it is a way to help Taylor transform into a happier person, particularly with respect to his unstable relationship with his wife, which ends when Taylor’s wife leaves him for another man. Indeed, like Prakash, Taylor reveals to the heroine his need to navigate this difficult situation and confirms to her that “It won’t be okay by itself. But you’ll make it okay, Jase. If you hadn’t been here, I’d have gone crazy” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 183). He also asks her the following: “Sleep with me tonight,... ‘Jase, please.’” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 197). He also insists to her once more that her presence with him and his adopted daughter is very important to them as they undergo this difficult time and simultaneously attempt to remain a family; this is evident in the following conversation: “‘Jase,’ he said... ‘what would it take to make you stay on?’ ‘If Duff needs me, I’ll stay.’ ‘Sure Duff needs you...I think maybe I need you’” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 186). Taylor’s and Duff’s need for the heroine is portrayed in their continuous attempts to find her after she has left them until they finally locate her address and travel to Iowa to ask her to come back to join them to transform their lives for the better.

Jane is another name given to the heroine by Bud Ripplemeyer, and it is supposedly the name of the heroine while she is narrating her story. However, as with the other names, she accepts the new name assigned to her as a vehicle to help her survive the fate of widowhood and exile. Once again, the heroine accepts this name and agrees to help Bud, who confesses to her the direct affect she had on him in the following statement: “I saw you walking and I felt my life was just opening to me.... ‘Jane,’ he likes to say, nuzzling this head between my breasts, ‘you

brought me back from the dead” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 200). Similar to Prakash and Taylor, Bud also asks for the heroine’s help to “Put this old bull [referring to himself] out of his pain” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 213). He actually, straightforwardly proposes to her, saying, “...marry me, Jane ...Marry me ...” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 213). In all of these relationships, the heroine never asks for help from these men. On the contrary, they are the ones who are continuously asking and begging for her help. Furthermore, to fulfill her desire to be included in Mother Ripplemeyer’s and Lillian Gordon’s tribe, the heroine also helps Du, the Vietnamese child she and Bud adopted. She describes her reaction to Du’s decision to leave to California and live with his biological sister, in stating: “I am in Du’s room, trying to think like Lillian Gordon. She put me on the bus that Florida morning gave me money and a kiss. She didn’t cry, didn’t even stay to wave goodbye. I want so much to be like her” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 224). She did not object or attempt to stop Du because she knew that his life would be transformed for the better by being with his original family. Like Lillian Gordon, the heroine here, the author of this essay believes, is considered a “facilitator who made possible the life of absolute *ordinariness* that [Du] ached for” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 131). Furthermore, the author of this essay affirms believe that Karen’s critique and comparison of the heroine’s influence to that of a “tornado” (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 215) by the end of the novel represents strong evidence of the degree of influence, positive or negative, that the heroine has had on the transformation of others, rather than the other way around.

### Conclusion

The concepts that have been discussed above along with the ending of the novel reinforce the author’s argument that in *Jasmine*, Mukherjee undoubtedly reveals the second part of her literary agenda, which is showing how female immigrants have transformed America which promotes Spivak’s (1996) assertion to women writes to present themselves “not as victims below but agents above, resisting the consequences of globalization as well as redressing the cultural vicissitudes of migrancy” (p. 251). Indeed, *Jasmine* presents the journey of a strong immigrant female heroine who resists conscious and unconscious marginalization by mainstream white American society and who also through following her female role models positively transforms the lives of some of the American men with whom she interacts while in America rather than a female character who is transformed by American men and forced to shuttle between identities.

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