



Metamorphosis of the Marginalized: Empowerment and Identity Reconstruction in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction *Jasmine*

Dr Savita Yadav

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Satyawati College (Eve.)
University of Delhi

Abstract: This paper investigates about the journey of a woman to empower herself through identity reconstruction. The central character, Jasmine, rebels against traditional belief system, stereotypical set up of the society. She, being marginalized, supposed to follow the path directed by male in the society since childhood. But Jasmine challenged her childhood prophecies, destiny, preconceived notions about female in male chauvinistic world. She begins her life as Jyoti, a spirited young girl, from rural Indian family. Later she migrated to United States after the murder of her husband. She tackled every adversity in a talented and boldly manner not merely in India but also on foreign land. She does not stagnate or surrender even after being a widow. She believes in herself and flexible enough to transform her identity, name as per the requirement of the outer environment. She undergoes the process of metamorphosis from her birthplace to United States. She transformed herself into Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jase-Jane in order to exist and survive in accordance with time, space, and culture. She accepted each change as a challenge. She strives to create her identity and attempts to come out of darkness of ignorance through the illumination of her own inner self by choosing appropriate options that lead to self-empowerment.

Keywords: Metamorphosis, Marginalized, Existential turmoil, Identity, Nostalgia, Disillusionment, Self-assured, Self-actualization, Emancipation, Empowerment.

Received: 18 July 2026

Received: 18 July 2026

Accepted: 24 July 2026

1. Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee's protagonists strive to adapt themselves to their situations. The diverse female characters endeavor to fit into the culture of their adoptive place while relinquishing feelings of nostalgia to fully enjoy their new environment. The novel, *Jasmine*, marks the commencement of a new phase in the creative journey of liberation and empowerment. In Bharati Mukherjee's first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife's* protagonists are defined by their ties with their father or husband, in contrast third novel *Jasmine's* protagonist possesses her own distinct and autonomous identity. Ralph J. Crane states, "Jasmine embodies all immigrant women who are free-spirited individuals prepared to determine their own fate" (Crane1). Jaiwanti Dimri states, "Dimple and Jasmine are antithetical. Jasmine supersedes Dimple . . . She is fleeing for her life, not evading life, which constitutes a positive progression" (Dimri 173). Numerous opponents assert that Bharati Mukherjee endeavors to depict "improved lives abroad," especially for ladies who are keen to emigrate in pursuit of their ambitions. Jasmine travels to America to surmount her unfavorable conditions and to seek an improved quality of life regarding "gender recognition, equality, and integration" (Naiker 11). Bharati Mukherjee's third novel, *Jasmine* (1989), commences near the conclusion of her second novel, *Wife*. In this work, the author illustrates how a girl is consigned to a marginal position even prior to her birth, whereas a guy is inherently accorded mainstream status. In her analysis of the dominant beliefs within the novel, she asserts: ". . . daughters were curses. . . . Gods with infinite memories visited girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations" (39). Jasmine's mother attempts to strangle her at birth, believing Jasmine would bring misfortune to the family. Various feminist existentialists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, have explicitly stated

that a woman's 'essence' is not determined by her 'biological, psychical, or economic destiny,' but rather shaped by societal constructs. Sartre posits that individuals must commit to a cause, create their own values, and consciously strive to realize them. In this context, Jasmine emerges as a formidable character, diligently working to establish her own identity in the world. She challenges the traditional societal framework by dismantling the patriarchal constraints of her upbringing.

Theoretical Overview of the Main Concepts

The concept of metamorphosis has emerged as a significant critical framework in understanding the experiences of a female protagonist in *Jasmine*, who manoeuvre social, cultural, and psychological marginalization. In literary discourse, metamorphosis refers not merely to external transformation but to a deeper process of self-renewal through which individuals redefine their identities and negotiate changing realities. For those situated at the margins of society, transformation often becomes a necessary response to conditions of exclusion, oppression, and displacement. It enables them to challenge restrictive structures and create new possibilities for selfhood and belonging.

Marginalization is a condition in which individuals or groups are denied full participation in social, cultural, or political life. This exclusion results in distorted identities particularly for women whose lives are shaped by patriarchal norms and cultural expectations. Here, metamorphosis works as a transformative force that allows marginalized subjects to move beyond imposed definitions and assert control over their own narratives. The process is not linear but dynamic, involving continuous adaptation, resistance, and self-discovery.

Empowerment is intrinsically linked to this transformative journey. It signifies the capacity of individuals to exercise agency, make independent choices, and challenge systems of domination that seek to silence or control them. Empowerment is achieved not only through social mobility or external success but also through the development of self-awareness and confidence. As marginalized individuals reconstruct their identities, they gradually shift from positions of dependency and subordination to positions of autonomy and self-determination. Thus, metamorphosis becomes a pathway through which empowerment is realized.

Identity reconstruction forms the core of this process. Contemporary theories of identity reject the notion of a fixed and essential self. The focus is on choice, freedom and responsibility. As existentialists, emphasizing that identity is fluid, evolving, and shaped by historical, cultural, and personal experiences. Identity reconstruction involves the reinterpretation of past experiences and the creation of new meanings that enable individuals to adapt to changing environments. In diasporic contexts, this process becomes particularly significant, as migration and cultural encounters compel individuals to reframe their sense of belonging and selfhood.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* provides a compelling illustration of these interconnected concepts. The protagonist's journey from a traditional village girl in India to a self-determined immigrant woman in America reflects a continuous process of transformation. Faced with gender oppression, cultural dislocation, and personal trauma, Jasmine repeatedly reconstructs her identity in response to new circumstances. Her changing names and roles symbolize not fragmentation but growth, adaptability, and the determination to redefine herself beyond socially imposed limitations.

Therefore, metamorphosis in *Jasmine* can be understood as a transformative process through which marginalization is confronted, empowerment is attained, and identity is reconstructed. Mukherjee's portrayal of Jasmine underscores the idea that identity is not a static condition but an evolving process shaped by experience, resilience, and agency. Jasmine originates as an exuberant young girl from a rural Indian family who defies her predetermined fate from a tender age. Paralleling the heroine of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Jasmine possesses an adventurous spirit and continuously adopts various identities in pursuit of autonomy. Her remarkable resilience and potential enable her survival in foreign lands. The narrative primarily revolves around evolution, growth, and existence, akin to Darwinian principles of survival. When her existence is threatened, the struggle for survival ensues. It is a narrative of a village girl's insurrection against the regressive conventions of Indian society, striving to redefine her destiny to

live with dignity and attain happiness. As one critic notes, Jasmine "is an individual who makes a lot of mistakes, but who has the courage to choose and take risks" (Tandon 134). Jasmine's struggle epitomizes the relentless pursuit of a woman motivated by an overwhelming sense of isolation. Jasmine narrates the tale of an Indian female heroine, raised in India, who lands in the United States after her adolescence. Through the protagonist's journey, the novel celebrates the capacity of marginalized individuals to transcend boundaries, reclaim their voices, and create meaningful lives on their own terms.

2. Methodology

This study employs qualitative and interpretative research methodology based on close textual analysis of *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee. The research paper examines the protagonist's metamorphosis from a marginalized woman to an empowered individual through the lens of existentialism, supported by feminist and postcolonial perspectives.

The study uses existential concepts such as freedom, choice, responsibility, authenticity, selfhood, and being to becoming. It chases primarily the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Jasmine metamorphosed her identity from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jase, and Jane is analyzed as a process of existential self-creation, where identity is not fixed but continuously reconstructed through conscious choices and lived experiences.

The primary source is the novel *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee while secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and critical studies on existentialism, migration, diaspora, feminism, and identity. A thematic analysis is employed to examine key incidents, character development, symbolism, and narrative techniques that illustrate the protagonist's existential journey from being to becoming toward empowerment through self-reinvention.

This methodology presents how Bharati Mukherjee employs metamorphosis not merely as a physical or cultural transition but as an existential process in which the marginalized individual overcomes imposed identities and constructs an authentic self.

Discussion

Jasmine originates as an exuberant young girl from a rural Indian family who defies her predetermined fate from a tender age. Paralleling the heroine of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Jasmine possesses an adventurous spirit and continuously adopts various identities in pursuit of autonomy. Her remarkable resilience and potential enable her survival in foreign lands. The narrative primarily revolves around evolution, growth, and existence, akin to Darwinian principles of survival. When her existence is threatened, the struggle for survival ensues. It is a narrative of a village girl's insurrection against the regressive conventions of Indian society, striving to redefine her destiny to live with dignity and attain happiness. As one critic notes, Jasmine "is an individual who makes a lot of mistakes, but who has the courage to choose and take risks" (Tandon 134). Jasmine's struggle epitomizes the relentless pursuit of a woman motivated by an overwhelming sense of isolation. Jasmine narrates the tale of an Indian female heroine, raised in India, who lands in the United States after her adolescence.

The narrative begins with Jyoti, a seven-year-old girl from the village of Hasnapur in Punjab, India, who is the fifth daughter and the seventh child in a family of nine siblings. She has been audacious and gifted since childhood and aspires to engage in reading and writing. In her Masterji's perspective, Jyoti is a "lotus flourishing in excrement" (46). He regards her as an exceptional student, suitable for English education, and introduces her to the broader Western world. Dida, Jyoti's grandmother, was opposed to women's education. Bharati Mukherjee, in her writings, highlights the pervasive gender discrimination within society and advocates for equitable educational possibilities for her female protagonists, which can facilitate their autonomy. The struggle between destiny and volition commences for Jyoti when the village astrologer beneath the Banyan tree forecasts 'widowhood and exile' for her. She is enraged and harshly questions the astrologer's prophecy: "You are an insane old man." "You are unaware of what my future entails." (3) She possesses greater faith in her potential than in her fate, exhibiting an intrinsic ability for growth that empowers her to make decisions and determine her own destiny. She defies all that she

perceives as unjust and confronts life's adversities with unwavering courage and resilience.

Jyoti's defiance of the astrologer's forecast irritates him, prompting him to strike her forcefully on the head. She collapses and sustains a star-shaped laceration on her forehead. Her sisters express concern, stating that her facial appearance has been irrevocably altered: "How will the family ever secure a husband for you?" (5). Jyoti, however, is composed of distinct material and chooses to swim against the current: "The fury within her against superstitious beliefs and her audacity to challenge the customs that constrain her are the sources of her strength" (Stephen 59). She confronts the traditional notions and social stigmas, exclaiming: "'It's not a scar... it's my third eye... Now I'm a sage'" (5). Her perception of her scar as her 'third eye' and her sense of metamorphosis into 'a sage' would facilitate her exploration of the new unseen realms. Jasmine declines to be a subordinate or a marionette controlled by others, whether by the astrologer or the purportedly inflexible societal norms. Her endeavor is toward genuine existence. She possesses the confidence to alter destiny and refute the prophecy. She would pursue her dreams relentlessly to reaffirm the existentialist notion that human nature is constituted by the exercise of choice.

Jasmine differentiates herself from those who unthinkingly adhere to norm by using her autonomy in decision-making. She excels academically and becomes the first girl in her village to receive a high level of education in English. She rejects the widespread belief that "Village girls are akin to cattle; they will follow whichever direction you guide them" (46). She declines to marry the widower chosen by her grandmother, Dida, and asserts her own potential: "I was a sister without dowry, but I didn't have to be sister without prospects" (70). Following her father's demise, she assumes full responsibility for the household. She falls in love with Prakash Vijh, an articulate young man, and marries him legally. They establish a nuclear family in Jullundhar city. Prakash, a self-made individual with contemporary sensibilities, engages her in discussions and decision-making, aiding her in severing ties with her past and ultimately transforming feudal Jyoti into Jasmine—a semi-liberated, modern, and independent urban woman. Prakash instills the seeds of liberation in Jyoti, who embraces the change wholeheartedly: "To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. He said, 'You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume.'" (77). Through the unwavering support and mentoring of Prakash, Jasmine has evolved from a naive country girl, Jyoti, into a self-assured, discerning adult, emboldened to confront various injustices. He regards Jyoti as an equal partner in life and assists her in recognizing her personality. Through her transformative process, she acquires a lesson that subsequently "empowers her voice with speech" (Parekh 111). Jasmine's tribulations commence with the assassination of her husband by Sukhwinder Singh, an activist of the Khalsa Lions, as Prakash was preparing to attend Florida Technical School in the USA. The demise of her spouse relegates Jasmine to a widow's dwelling with her mother. Jyoti is discontented in the presence of the other widows in the community. She experiences a sense of suffocation and discomfort in their company. She resists the constraints imposed upon her under the guise of widowhood. Her indignation towards feudal customs is articulated as follows: "I felt lifeless in their presence, adorned in my long hair and schoolgirl attire. I yearned to cry out, 'Feudalism! I am a widow in the conflict of feudalisms'" (97). Stanley M. Stephen aptly asserts that one cannot confine a girl 'with a special mission': "Nothing can quell the rage in her heart; nothing can extinguish the fire in her soul; nothing can stop her quest for liberation and nothing can deter her stride towards freedom, fulfilment and self-realisation" (51). Despite being a widow, her resolve to lead a fulfilling life remains unwavering, and Jasmine is resolute in fulfilling her husband's mission.

Her grandmother attributes Jasmine's widowhood to her destiny, asserting that Jasmine's choice to marry without consulting horoscopes displeased God, who subsequently sent Sukhwinder Singh to carry out the murder. Jasmine, however, responds vehemently to her grandmother's perspective: "Dida." If God dispatched Sukkhi to eliminate my spouse, then I repudiate God. She expresses disdain for God (98). She challenges the conventional norms of feudal society and seeks an alternative path. Existentialists dismiss the notion of the self (woman) as a mere instrument governed by external influences, asserting that an individual must not be subjected to forces beyond their control. Instead, one should aspire to be a 'actor' or 'subject' capable of directing their own fate and transforming their environment.

Jasmine resolves to realize her husband's aspirations by visiting the Institute to which he was meant to gain admission. She exhibits courage by obtaining a counterfeit passport and departing the country on fraudulent documents to perform sati at the location where Prakash intended to enroll. Upon her arrival at the Florida Coast as an undocumented immigrant, her initial experience in America manifests as "regeneration through violence" (Lal 59). The ship's captain, a Half-face, escorts her to a secluded motel in Florida and makes inappropriate advances towards her. Jasmine endeavored to convey to him that she is a Hindu widow and her objective is "to transport my husband's suit to America. I intend to incinerate it at his school, the place where we were meant to reside" (114). He derided her concept as 'a fool's thought' and callously assaulted her. This affront to modesty is overwhelming for an Indian widow, leaving her engulfed in shame and terror. She promptly resolves to cleanse her body with a new bar of soap in the bathroom and to purify her soul with every prayer she can recall. She struggles to liberate herself from her altered image of violated chastity; hence, to resolve the conflict, she resorts to violence, initially directed at herself, "to balance my defilement with my death" (117). Nevertheless, she chooses to oppose it, recognizing that she exists to accomplish her objective: "I could not allow my personal disgrace to impede my mission" (118). This atrocious conduct by the Half-Face monster incites Jasmine's authentic revolutionary aggressive persona, manifesting as Goddess Kali, intent on annihilating the 'devil' for transgressing her chastity. She protruded her tongue and "incised" it. Blood immediately pooled in the sink after she killed the Half-Face demon, leaving her momentarily unsettled amidst the carnage: "Just me and the man who had raped me, the man I had murdered. The room resembled a slaughterhouse. Blood congealed on my hands, my chin, my breasts . . . I was in a room with a slain man, my body bloodied. I was walking death. Death incarnate" (119). Jasmine's act of vengeance appears to be bolstered by her identification with the reincarnation of Kali, "possessed and transformed by the rage of Goddess Kali" (Ponzanesi 89).

Jasmine lacks the opportunity to contemplate the ramifications of murder and must therefore focus on her objective to depart from the site of bloodshed. Her symbolic act of incinerating Prakash's clothing and her white sari outside the Florida Motel signifies Jasmine's resolution to eradicate her disfiguring past and endure in a foreign nation. Jasmine transforms into a new individual, liberated from the burdens of two millennia of history" (Stephen 52). She prepares to embrace the contemporary values of the modern world. She commits to forging her own path in America and undergoes a self-affirming metamorphosis distinct from her previous expectations with Prakash, who recognized her as an independent and autonomous individual. Her initial suicidal contemplation reflects a woman bound by the memory of her deceased husband, heavily influenced by societal norms, whereas the woman who kills Half-Face is motivated by her harsh experiences on the Florida coast, which compel her to pursue an entirely different existence. She incinerates the mementos of her former life and anticipates new aspirations to pursue: "I buttoned up the jacket and set by the fire." At the break of dawn, marking my inaugural full day in America, I exited the motel's front drive onto the highway and commenced my journey, traveling lightly. Jasmine's identity is paradoxically shaped not only by constructions but also by the deconstruction of her former self. This paradox manifests as a recurring theme in Jasmine's development as she experiences a profound transformation in her identity: from a dutiful, lost widow to a liberated murderess in pursuit of multiple reincarnations. . . . "She transitions from antiquated ethical paradigms of submission, helplessness, and despair to the exhilarating new ethics of adventure, risk, and transformation" (Ponzanesi 89). For Sartre, it entails the reclamation of one's identity. Her seduction by the Half-Face does not inflict any psychological anguish, and Jasmine appears to accept it as a mere American malevolence destined for defeat. As a strong-willed individual, she anticipated an adverse situation in an unfamiliar territory. She is prepared to confront challenging situations and possesses sufficient capability to surmount them. She contemplates: "We are the pariahs and exiles, peculiar pilgrims journeying to foreign sanctuaries." . . . "where irritable, scarcely awakened customs officials anticipate their gratuity" (101). As Jasmine collapses, seemingly lifeless from shock, Lillian Gordon enters her life as the subsequent catalyst for her change. She is a compassionate Quaker woman who empathizes with her circumstances and instructs her on how to thrive in New World America. As a survivor, she embarks on a new journey, charting her own paths and establishing new parameters in America. Similar to Prakash, who converted her into a city woman, Lillian Gordon metamorphoses her into Jazzi, an American girl. Her hospitality and her counsel, "Allow the past to instill

caution, certainly. However, do not permit it to distort your character" (131). It assists Jasmine in comprehending and acclimating to the American lifestyle. Lillian Gordon provided Jasmine with her daughter's high school attire and footwear, and upon seeing at her reflection, Jasmine was alarmed by her metamorphosis into Jazzy, clad in a T-shirt, fitted cords, and athletic shoes. Kierkegaard asserts, "not only is subjectivity the essence of man, but the accompanying freedom and responsibility are the essences of subjectivity . . ." (qtd. in Sinha 17). Jasmine embraces the American lifestyle, which affords her personal liberty alongside a feeling of accountability. She metamorphoses, in alignment with temporal and spatial contexts, from 'feudal Jyoti' to 'liberated Jasmine' to 'American Jazzy' in pursuit of her authentic identity and to attain personal significance in a strange place.

With Gordon's assistance, she endeavors to contact Professor Devinder Vadhera, the individual who played a crucial role in Prakash's entrance to an Engineering program. His residence in Flushing, Queens, New York, is situated among a Punjabi immigrant enclave. She resides at Vadhera's residence as a servant and caretaker for his old parents, however perceives her own decline within Vadhera's artificially sustained Punjabi traditional culture. She remembers: "I was descending into depression behind the stronghold of Punjabi identity." . . . A fictitious brick wall crowned with barbed wire severed my connection to the past and impeded my entry into the future. I was an inmate serving an interminable sentence" (148). This lifestyle becomes frightening for her: "I sought to detach myself from all things Indian, everything reminiscent of Jyoti" (145). Jasmine comprehends the immigrant's dislocated existence and their liminality between two realms through Vadhera's societal framework, thereby justifying Vadhera's immigration with the assertion: "He needed to work here, but he didn't have to like it. He had sealed his heart when he'd left home. His real life was in an unlivable land across oceans. He was a ghost, hanging on" (153). Jasmine recognizes her significant latent potential and refuses to take anything passively. Her unwavering determination fuels her ambition to advance and redefine her fate.

Jasmine recognizes that her residence in Vadhera's apartment will hinder her pursuit of self-development and genuine existence, since their "'artificially maintained Indianness'" (145) compels her to live as a widow. To the Vadheras, she remains Jyoti rather than Jazzy, despite her contemporary perspective and demeanor, even after having "burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida" (176). Following five exasperating months in Flushing, motivated by "unfulfilled wants" (148), Jasmine abandons the Vadheras and escapes the immigrant enclave of Queens for Manhattan to liberate herself from the restrictions of traditional culture: "Jasmine's protest." . . is not opposed to Indian culture itself, but rather to its 'retentiveness' and its 'specific manner of partially understanding the world'" (Padma 165). Her refusal to reside with Vadhera's family signifies a phase in her evolution from conventionality to autonomy. She consequently starts on an existentialist journey where a person's true identity is not predetermined by external influences but rather forged by the individual's deliberate choices.

Kate Feldstein, the daughter of Gordon, assists Jasmine in gaining entry into the family of Taylor and Wylie Hayes as a babysitter for their adopted daughter, Duff. Taylor is a Professor of Physics at Columbia University, and Wylie is employed at a publishing business. This is the most favorable phase of her residence in the United States, and she reacts enthusiastically to the warmth and camaraderie exhibited by Wylie and Taylor, who refer to her as their 'caretaker' rather than a 'maid servant'. Taylor adopts the name and identity 'Jase,' and through part-time employment—such as answering phones, tutoring graduate students, and serving as a reader in Punjabi at the university—she ultimately achieves self-reliance and confidence. In the new environment characterized by personal friendliness, Jasmine gets increasingly Americanized. She starts to perceive that: "For every Jasmine, the dependable caregiver, there exists a Jase, the wandering adventurer. I reveled in the pull of contrasting forces. I hoped my role as Duff's 'day mummy' would endure indefinitely" (176-177). With the encouragement and support of individuals such as Lillian Gordon, Kate, and Taylor, who exhibit confidence in her intellect and authenticity, this "tugging between the opposing forces does not intimidate her; rather, it excites her" (Indira 170). Unlike other immigrants, she "feels proud that she is getting rooted in the new world" (181). However, Wylie's disillusionment with Taylor and her decision to leave her husband for her lover in pursuit of genuine happiness leads Jase to realize that no relationship, regardless of its strength, is guaranteed permanence. It was a novel experience

for Jase to witness a husband allowing his wife to depart for another without resentment, leaving Jasmine once again bewildered: "America had thrown me again." Jasmine struggled to comprehend Wylie's actions and motivations, feeling that there was no source of guidance available to her. The notion that a wife could so effortlessly sever her marital ties was inconceivable to her. Ultimately, Jasmine grapples with a profound realization regarding interpersonal relationships: "In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. . . . Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate." Despite this, she harbors no grievances against Wylie, who treated her as if she were "her younger sister, I was family, and I was professional." Jasmine remains there with Taylor and Duff as a family member. Taylor conveys his affection for her, and she also desires to relinquish her past and be Duff's 'day-mummy' indefinitely to immerse herself in the American lifestyle. She holds American ethos in high regard and values individuals for their democratic mindset, particularly as demonstrated in their work culture, which affords dignity to even those in menial positions.

Taylor's autonomy at home enables her to harness her potential to enhance her English communication skills, thereby equipping her to navigate life with dignity. Simultaneously, a significant chapter unfolds in Jasmine's tumultuous life as she is forced to abandon Taylor and Duff for safety concerns, prompted by the looming threat of death represented by Sukhwinder the Khalsa Lion, who previously murdered her husband Prakash in India. Her flight from New York to Iowa is, thus, a 'life-affirming' endeavor, as she seeks to save her existence and attain tranquility devoid of dread. Taylor acknowledges his impact by her personal intrigue and remarks in a measured tone: "for you Jasmine, I will be homeless" (qtd. in Stephen 60). On the day Jasmine arrived in Baden, she encountered Mother Ripplemeyer, the Iowan equivalent of Lillian Gordon, who assisted her in securing a position as a teller at her son Bud Ripplemeyer's bank. After six months, she becomes a live-in companion to Bud and a stepmother to his adoptive son, Du. Bud not only provides her with a new existence but also a new name—Jane Russel—and assists in her transformation in accordance with her new identity: "There are no benign, compassionate methods to reinvent oneself. We annihilate who we were to be reborn in the likeness of our aspirations" (29).

Jane establishes a tranquil existence in Bud's residence, content with her newfound financial stability and her role as a stepmother to Du, a sixteen-year-old victim of the Vietnam War adopted by Bud. His adult boys have vacated the residence, and he is estranged from his wife, Karin. Violence reemerges in her life when a farmer, Harlan Kroener, shoots Bud at point-blank range due to the refusal of a bank loan. Not only Bud but the entire area, together with the tranquility of rural existence, falls prey to such senseless acts of terrorist aggression. Bud had never inquired about her enigmatic past and had instead felt revitalized by her identity. Jasmine, now Jane, has always demonstrated courage, utilizing her 'third eye' to explore several options in the new world of America. Each of Jasmine's actions represents a deliberate progression towards Americanization, and every advancement signifies a significant alteration in her behavior. She is an authentic dissenter who resists at every juncture against the prescribed trajectory. She is an adaptor, a survivor. Du is also a fighter who has lived by eating worms and mice in the refugee camp. Jasmine profoundly relates to Du, as both are immigrants who have endured significant hardships for survival: "we've hurtled through time tunnels. We've seen the worst and survived. Like creatures in fairy tales, we've shrunk and we've swollen and we've swallowed the cosmos whole" (240). Similar to Jasmine, Du had conditioned himself to endure challenging circumstances devoid of options, and he too had repeatedly persevered: "they come from the same 'Third World' and share a common legacy of suffering and survival" (Kumar 116). Both aspired to assimilate into American society to escape the traumas of their pasts. Thus, when Du abruptly declares his intention to depart for Los Angeles to join his sister, Jasmine is devastated: "How dare he leave me alone out here? How dare he retreat with my admiration, my pride, my total involvement in everything he did? His education was my education" (223). Jane had regarded Du as her silent confidant during both her joyous and sorrowful moments. However, she comes to the realization that she does not 'own him' and that his departure for Los Angeles was ". . . inevitable. Even healthy" (224). As an exile, she observes him depart in silence.

Synopsis of the Main Research Outcomes

Jasmine undergoes a transition into Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jase-Jane to exist and thrive within the

parameters of time, space, and culture. The author asserts that this transformation is a reciprocal process—her protagonist undergoes personal change while simultaneously, America is also transformed. Jasmine experiences numerous significant transformations, embracing each as a challenge: "... from a naive village girl to the wife of a man in India, to a widow striving to defy societal norms, to the spouse of a man in the 'New World' (New York), and finally to an American adventurer in Iowa engaged in a third relationship with a divorced man twice her age" (Mittal 74). Sandra Ponzanesi claims that her metamorphosis "... from a compliant, submissive widow to an assertive criminal and individualistic American woman is in full progress" (88). A call from Jane's ex-lover Taylor paves the way for her ultimate adventure. Taylor and Duff arrive to escort her to California, where the new world and the promise of America eagerly await her arrival. She is expecting a child with Bud. Her affection for Taylor and obligation to Bud engenders internal turmoil; yet, she resolves to cohabit with Taylor in pursuit of newfound happiness. By abandoning Bud and selecting Taylor, Jasmine transforms her entire existence. Jasmine's decision is less influenced by men and more by her conflict between the traditional values of duty and the vast opportunities of the modern world. This is her method of self-creation. Jasmine endeavors to escape the abyss of ignorance by illuminating her inner self, discovering meaning in life by the selection of choices that align with her real identity: "I want to do the right thing. I don't mean to be a terrible person" (239). Her realization of self "is unrelated to the guilt associated with 'sin'" (Padma 167). She is enthusiastic about pursuing what she perceives as proper for herself, devoid of moral reservations: "It isn't guilt that I feel; it's relief." . . . "Adventure, risk, transformation" (quoted in Lal "Bharati Mukherjee" 34). Jasmine has neglected her history and undergone nearly total transformation and assimilation in America: "Jasmine becomes genuinely Americanized, not merely in superficial social and cultural customs but in a fundamental 'intensity of spirit', and discovers tranquility neither in India nor America, but in the 'American dream'" (Padma 168).

The novel specifically delineates "the evolution of a female protagonist from childhood through diverse experiences and crises, culminating in maturity and, more significantly, her self-identity and position in the world" (Crane 2). Jasmine in India, like Jyoti, defies patriarchal standards and "posits a norm of self-development" (Grewal 182). Jasmine's existential makeup is evident from her childhood as she dismisses the predictions of the village astrologer. She rejects the unfounded forecast of her destiny, as she has faith in her efforts and capabilities: "her beauty and her aptitude for acquiring foreign languages bolster her conviction that she could defy fate" (Alam 103).

It is unsettling that, ultimately, it is the force of violence that catalyzes her change. The author illustrates in the brutal devastation a transformative reproductive aspect: "Jasmine is simultaneously the victim and the perpetrator of violence. Violence embodies power . . . the novel chronicles Jasmine's emergence as a woman, resorting to killing for survival" (Dayal 66). The novel articulates a troubling philosophy that associates violence with self-reinvention within American culture (Katrak 21). Jasmine resorts to aggression for her survival.

She metamorphoses the injury on her forehead into a mystical third eye to assert her identity as a sage in reaction to the astrologer's aggression, and she eliminates the rabid dog in active self-defense. In reaction to the assault by Half-Face and the potential for further violence, Jasmine once more metamorphoses from a victim into a spiritually formidable entity, embodying Kali, the most perilous goddess. She also engages in violent actions in self-defense to eliminate the malevolent Half-Face (Edwards 180).

Conclusion

The protagonist's inconsistent journey, characterized by her changing names and relocations from Hasnapur to Jullundher, Florida, Manhattan, and Iowa, serves as a metaphor for an immigrant woman's 'process of uprooting and re-rooting'. These events emancipate her from a distorted history, empower her, and provide her with an independent voice. She possesses the guts to actualize her aspirations and serves as a self-assured trailblazer, exemplifying leadership for all women seeking emancipation from the constraints of antiquated doctrines (Myles 312). Her success is evident in the concluding section of the tale, where she asserts her strength and softly declares, "Watch me reposition the stars," to the astrologer who levitates cross-legged above her kitchen stove (240). It posits that "Jasmine has truly attained self-

actualization in America—the sole nation on earth that provides abundant opportunities to transform a dream into reality" (Padma 168). She dismisses regressive ideas related to culture, colour, creed, and race, favoring a more expansive viewpoint of the American liberal lifestyle, informed by her own moral compass. Her identity extends beyond the Indian subcontinent; she is a global citizen. Jasmine, thus, surpasses the immigrant experience depicted in previous novels, where protagonists remain in existential turmoil, and attains her inherent state of self-discovery and genuine existence.

Limitations, Implications, and Further Directions of Research

The present study examines the metamorphosis of the marginalized individual in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, focusing on the interconnected themes of empowerment and identity reconstruction. Despite its critical exploration of Jasmine's transformative journey, the study acknowledges certain limitations. As the research is based on a qualitative interpretation of a single literary text, its observations are restricted to the experiences and representations presented within the novel. Hence, the findings cannot encompass the diverse realities of all marginalized women or diasporic experiences.

The study primarily concentrates on Jasmine's individual transformation and her struggle to redefine herself amidst social, cultural, and personal challenges. Consequently, the perspectives of other characters and the larger historical and socio-political circumstances influencing migration and identity formation have not been explored in detail. Furthermore, the existential framework employed in this research emphasizes concepts such as freedom, choice, and self-creation; however, alternative theoretical approaches may provide further insights into the complexities of Jasmine's identity formation and transformation.

The limitations of the present study also suggest possibilities for future research. Further investigations may examine the theme of metamorphosis in Bharati Mukherjee's broader fictional works to understand recurring concerns related to migration, displacement, gender, and cultural identity. Comparative studies of diasporic women writers can also offer wider perspectives on how marginalized identities are shaped, challenged, and reconstructed across different cultural contexts.

Future scholars may adopt an interdisciplinary approach by combining existential philosophy with feminist theory, diaspora studies, trauma studies, and cultural criticism to explore the multifaceted nature of identity reconstruction. Such research can contribute to a deeper understanding of how marginalized individuals negotiate social boundaries, assert agency, and create new identities while navigating complex cultural landscapes.

References

1. Alam, Fakrul. *Bharati Mukherjee*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-
2. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany- Chevallier. New York: Alfred a Knopf, 2009.
3. Crane, Ralph J. "Of Shattered Pots and Sinkholes: Female Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Journal of South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Languages Studies* 36 (1993): n. pag. Murdoch, 12 Dec. 2001. Web. 4 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/litserv/SPAN/36Crane.html>>.
4. Dayal, Samir. "Creating, Preserving, Destroying: Violence in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Garland, 1993. 65-88.
5. Dimri, Jaiwanti. "From Marriage to Murder: A Comparative Study of Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife and Jasmine*." *American Literature Today*. Ed. Suman Bala. New Delhi: Intellectual Pub., 1994. 170-180.
6. Edwards, Bradley C. "Autobiography and Art: Transfiguration of Fact into Fiction in *Jasmine*." *Mandal* 173-187.
7. Grewal, Gurleen. "Born Again American: The Immigrant Consciousness in *Jasmine*." Nelson 181-196.
8. Indira, S. "*Jasmine*: An Odyssey of Unhousement and Enhousement." *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: Symposium*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige, 1996. 169-172.

9. Katrak, H. Ketu. "South Asian American Literature." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. Ed. King-Kok Cheung. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 192-218.
10. Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Ed. and trans. A. Hannay. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. 182.
11. ---. *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*. Trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong. Princeton: UP, 1985. Print.
12. Kumar, Nagendra. *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2001.
13. Lal, Malashri. "Bharati Mukherjee: The 'Maximalist' Credo." *Contemporary Indian English Fiction*. Ed. Kamal. N. Awasthi. Jalandhar: ABS Pub., 1993. 55-64.
14. ---. "Bharati Mukherjee: The 'Maximalist' Credo." Mandal 25-37.
15. Mittal, Swati. *Bharati Mukherjee: A Diasporic Odyssey*. New Delhi: Authors Pride Pub., 2016.
16. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. 1989. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990.
17. Myles, Anita. "Progression from Feminine to female in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee." *Perspective on Indian English Fiction*. Ed. Jaydipsinh K Dodiya. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2006. 308-316.
18. Naiker, Kamala. "Changing Names, Changing Places: the Transformation of Female Identity Through Translocation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." IARJ 1.2 (2015): 7-11. Web. 8 Sept. 2017. *Jasmine*." *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan.
19. Padma, T. "From Acculturation to Self-Actualization: Diasporal Dream in Bharati Mukherjee's New Delhi: Prestige, 1996. 161-168.
20. Parekh, Pushpa N. "Telling Her Tale: Narrative Voice and Gender Roles in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." Nelson 109-126.
21. Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*: The Exuberance of Immigration, Feminist Strategies and Multicultural Negotiations" *Studies in Indian Writing in English*. Vol. II. Eds. Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Piciucco Paolo. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001. 79-89.
22. Sinha, M.N. *A Primer of Existentialism*. Delhi: Capital Publishing House, 1982.
23. Stephen, Stanley M. *Bharati Mukherjee: A Study in Immigrant Sensibility*. New Delhi: Prestige, 2010. .Tandon, Sushma. *Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: A Perspective*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004. Print.
24. Tirkha, Pradeep. "Quest for Self and the Immigrant Experience in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction." *Women Writers in the Twentieth Century Literature*. Ed. Monika Gupta. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2000. 153-166.