

## American Exceptionalism, and Jasmine's Agency and Self-identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

Dr. Pawan Baral\*

### Abstract

The paper examines the development of Jasmine's agency and self-identity in her all avatars – Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Jane and Jase – during her odyssey from Hasnapur to Iowa. Drawing and departing different critics and thinkers like James W. Ceaser, Johannes Thimm, and Stephen M. Walt, it shows whether American ideology fortifies her becomingness of a self-willed female protagonist in her troublesome life experience of poverty, exile and immigration. Hence, the paper argues that her the agency and self-identity to act on her own freewill remains all the same even to the end despite being exposed to the American ideals of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, republicanism, democracy and laissez faire economics. American exposure does not significantly change her determination and spirit that she has shown while boldly denying the prediction of her widowhood and exile by shouting at the astrologer. Hence, the paper argues that her the agency and self-identity to act on her own freewill remains all the same even to the end.

**Key Words:** American exceptionalism, Agency, Self-identity, metamorphosis, assimilation, New woman

American exceptionalism maintains that the United States is a unique among nations with respect to its ideas of democracy and personal freedom. Fortified with, this American ideology upholds that America is a place where everyone can fully explore their potential, and can change their fortune through fair struggle and hard work. In the same line of thought, Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* consistently shows America as the world of hope and progress in contrast to India as the world of stasis and oppression. While making Jasmine undergo such a place of fairness, Mukherjee attributes the protagonist with fluid quality so that she can tackle any situation ahead by continually transforming herself. In this continuous process of refashioning herself into multiple identities one after another, she does demonstrate her self-identity and agency in some respects, but not in full-fledged degree. Here, the expression 'self-identity and agency' signifies one's ability to make decision and to act accordingly on his/her own. she depends on others especially on American males, for whom she is an object of desire, a mysterious thing to possess. In this

\* Associate Professor of English,  
Bhaktapur Multiple Campus, Bhaktapur, Nepal  
Email: baralpawan@gmail.com

context, the paper seeks to explore the development of Jasmine's agency and self-identity to see whether it has been enriched by aforementioned American ideology. In the line with Usha Masram's opinion "Jasmine at every stage in her troublesome life, in all her identities as Jyoti, Jasmine, Jane and Jase, she seems to act boldly and unhesitatingly" (71), the paper ultimately argues that in spite of her change into many selves in the USA, the so-called American ideology fails to enrich her agency and self-identity, so she can completely act at her freewill.

The idea of American Exceptionalism is inherent in American culture of British colonial imperialism as the response of white British settlers to the lands and populations they colonized. It is also reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to achieve the Enlightenment ideals that European leaders could not. It upholds the notion that the United States occupies the distinctive, unique, or exemplary compared to other nations in the world. in terms of its national credo, historical evolution, and political and religious institutions and origins. Johannes Thimm says:

On the most general level, 'American exceptionalism' refers to the belief "that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions." As John Winthrop (1996 [1630]), one of the first settlers of the Massachusetts Bay colony, reminds with the famous phrase of the city upon a hill, the discourse on American exceptionalism goes back a long way, even predating the birth of the United States as a nation state. The phrase has ever since held a firm place in the American collective memory exemplified by its more contemporary resurrection in Presidential speeches. (3)

It presumes that America's values, political system, and history are unique and worthy of universal. Surveying the notion, it refers to "the idea that there is (a) something different about America or (b) something special about America" (Ceaser, 8). Since the beginning, the spirit reiterates in the speeches and writings of influential Americans. Stephen M. Walt writes, "Over the last two centuries, prominent Americans have described the United States as an "empire of liberty," a "shining city on a hill," the "last best hope of Earth," the "leader of the free world," and the "indispensable nation" (Walt). It implies that United States would provide a model of freedom, liberty, and democracy from which the rest of the world could learn. It would be an example of light.

*Jasmine* is a story of exile and immigration and the becomingness of a female protagonist from a poverty ridden traditional Indian village in the affluent modern western country like America. Its dominant motif is the transformation for adoption as the ethic of survival in the context of immigration. The protagonist Jasmine, who is now twenty-four years old and lives in Iowa, recalls distant events from her childhood in Hasnapur and narrates the story in flashback with some reflections on present events. Mukherjee endows

her with such a fluid character that her metamorphosis continues even on the last pages of the novel. This quality makes her a good adapter in any social setting that she comes across, and therefore she resists any social categorization. During her journey from Hasnapur to the West, she meets some males who catalyze her transformation into her becomingness in one way or the other.

Jasmine, who was christened as Jyoti, possesses a rebel-like spirit despite the fact that she was born into a traditional family in a small traditional Indian village in Punjab, where “bad luck dogged dowryless wives, rebellious wives, barren wives. They fell into wells, they got run over by trains, they burned to death heating milk on kerosene stoves” (41). Her grandmother wants to marry her off at the age of 11. She goes against fate from an age as early as seven years as she boldly denies the prediction of her widowhood and exile by shouting at the astrologer himself “You’re a crazy old man. You don’t know what my future holds!” (3). Hence, she accepts the scar made by the twig sticking out the bundle of firewood on her forehead as her “third eye” (5). In this context, John K. Hoppe points out her rebellious spirit, “From the beginning, Jyoti rebels against her cultural inscription” (140). Similarly, Usha Masram observes, “Raging against the fate and the norms of society which tried to condition her existence, Jasmine asserts that she is not just nothing. Renamed as Jasmine, joyously sharing the ambition her husband, she looks forward to going to America, a land of opportunities” (71) (My emphasis). Here, Masram displays Jasmine’s tireless spirit in her bold assertion of her self-value and her enthusiasm to share her husband’s dream. The process of her metamorphosis begins from her very village Hasnapur, where the mothers are blamed and accused of sinful life if they give birth to baby-girl. Her English teacher Masterji, “who loved things American” (45), sows the seeds of remaking process by urging Jyoti to continue with her education by lending “his own books” to “the first likely female candidate for English instruction he’d ever had” (40). Her mother wants to make her “fifth daughter beautiful instead of the first” (40) by sending her to school. She struggles hard to keep Jyoti in school for six years and to prevent her from being married at the age of eleven to a widowed landlord. She has fulfilled her mother’s expectation by showing her brightness and talent at school. Her brothers Hari-parr and Arvind-parr sometimes joked that they would take her into the examination hall so that she could write their exams. And they were proud of her because they heard Masterji saying that she “wrote the best English composition,” and she had them “translate instruction manuals and write school or job applications” (46).

Despite her spirit, brightness and talent, Jasmine refuses to continue with her studies. When Masterji insists her to “learn more English and also shorthand” so that she can work as “steno in the State Bank” (51). Her denial is due to the traditional mindset that she acquires from her society. In this context, her father replicates the mindset when he says to Masterji, “The thing is that bright ladies are bearing bright sons, that is nature’s design” (51). This makes her agree to marry with Prakash at the age of 15 immediately after her

father is killed in a bull's attack. When Prakash comes into her life, he not only takes her to the town from Hasnapur but also gives her a new name Jasmine. Being a city man inspired by Gandhi and Nehru, Prakash plays an important role in building up her confidence and in transforming her feudal mindset into a modern one. In contrast to her wish to get pregnant immediately after the marriage like "the Mazbi maid's daughter, who had been married off at eleven, just after me, and already had had a miscarriage" (70), Prakash teaches her that marriage is not the form of patriarchal control and enforced obedience, and pregnancy is not the only way to prove worth and to validate identity for newly married women. Prakash incites and shapes her journey of remaking herself into many selves by becoming the pioneer of the process as he is the first to change a traditional Jyoti into a modern Jasmine. She recollects his contribution into her remaking when she says to Taylor, "I had been until that time an innocent child he'd picked out of the gutter, discovered, and made whole, then fallen in love with" (189). Suchismita Banerjee opines, "Prakash insistently encourages his wife, Jasmine, to throw away feudalism" (175). Jasmine herself realizes Prakash's influence "to make me a new kind of city woman" (70), a new woman for his new India. F. Timothy Ruppel observes, "Prakash is entirely determining Jyoti's new identity-- --is first defining Jyoti's role in the new political landscape of India, and then he is telling Jyoti how to be this new woman" (184). He also initiates a new identity by encouraging her in the path of becoming independent so that she can become her own bread-winner. With him, she starts selling detergent to make money, read and understand technical manuals, repair a VCR with an equal division of labour. Jasmine herself realizes that she has changed in many ways due to Prakash. She narrates, "My life before Prakash, the girl I had been, the village, were like a dream from another life" (91). Suchismita Banerjee outlines Prakash's contribution in her transformation as: "Prakash inspires her to challenge destiny, empowers her to continue her self-education even after marriage (an act which seems quite revolutionary in the novel), and instils in her the desire to relocate in America, which to him, is a land of hope and freedom" (16). Thus, Prakash tempts the adventurous spirit of Jasmine and empowers her to make the decision of migrating to the US. After he receives a letter from Professor Vadhera who encourages Prakash to study in America. He makes plans to move the two of them to Florida.

Jasmine's development into a new woman abruptly halts half a way through when Jasmine becomes a political target of regressive forces because her aspirations pose a threat to the feudal social order. Sukhwinder and his friends, who want to establish the new, separatist state of "Khalistan, the Land of the Pure" (57), kills Prakash by a bomb meant for Jasmine as his assassin yells "'Prostitutes! Whores!'" (85). Her husband's murder puts an end to Jasmine's dream of furthering her self-identity as a new woman by establishing a company named Vijn & Vijn with her husband. Completely disappointed, she surrenders to the feudalistic social order as she thinks of joining her mother in enforced widowhood "I am a widow in the war of feudalisms (88). Therefore, she plans her journey to the USA to commit ritual suicide, Sati, where Prakash intends to go to school: she follows the footpath

of her contemporary Vimla, who “doused herself with kerosene and flung herself on the stove” at her prime youth of twenty-two after her husband dies of typhoid fever, though “In Hasnapur, Vimla's isn't a sad story” (12), and prepares herself with the forged passport and Prakash’s paper, his clothes specially blue suit and her white sari to become Sati, an idea deeply absorbed in ancient Indian culture. When Jasmine leaves Hasnapur for the USA as an illegal immigrant traveling on a forged passport with “refugees and mercenaries and guest workers” (90), her agency and spirit resurrects, maybe due to the necessity of struggle for survival. The subsequent paragraphs examine her agency and self-identity in her struggle to survive and adopt in the foreign land.

Though Half-Face represents “the underworld of evil” (103), Jasmine’s encounter with him exerts a very positive contribution in her identity formation. Here, “Violence thus becomes a catalyst in fabricating immigrant identity” (11) as observed by Suchismita Banerjee. Knowing her vulnerability, he tells Jasmine, “You know what's coming, and there ain't nobody here to help you, so my advice is to lie back and enjoy it” (102). Eliminating any possibility of resistance from Eastern women, Half-Face drinks, rapes, and then falls asleep. Strongly conditioned by the society into which she was born, the act at first makes Jasmine contemplate killing herself as it is a consequence “personal dishonor” for her. All of sudden, her hibernated rebellious spirit to challenge the sage, who forecasts her widowhood and exile, resurrects and she decides to kill her attacker transforming herself in the form of Kali, the goddess of destruction. Therefore, she first thoroughly cleanses her body, purifies her soul through prayer, and cuts a strip across her tongue with a small knife she has had. And then she kills the offender with the small knife the way the young Jyoti kills a rabid dog in her village. Ruppel opines, “this gesture of marking and naming reclaims her body. It is an active intervention in the relations of ruling that provided the justification of her rape and her subsequent conception of herself as a victim” (186). For Sara Falda and Yousef Awad, this act of violence is an act of self-empowerment and agency. She turns her anger into power. In an image similar to the Mythic Kali, Jasmine triumphantly wants Half-Faced to see her transformation to a goddess” (178). “With [her] mouth open pouring blood, [and her] red tongue out” (118), She wants him to see her powerful transformation from the helpless village girl into the destructive goddess. Losing her chastity from Half-Face, she now gives up the idea that has driven her to the USA. Then she burns Prakash's suit that she has carried with her, and leaves the motel. The act of burning shows her significant transformation in her previous intent to go to the USA to burn herself at the school where Prakash intends to go. Ruppel highlights the significance the episode of Jasmine’s encounter with Half-Face and her burning of Prakash’s clothes as:

With the killing of Half-Face, Jasmine passes from innocence and enacts a radical break, suggesting a form of resistance that is contingent, disruptive, and strategic. Rather than reifying a past that is continuous and identical with itself, Jasmine

suggests a history dislodged from origins and a self-fractured from organic wholeness. (187)

Here, Ruppel suggests that the episode represents a breakthrough in enacting her agency as it is “a form of resistance that is contingent, disruptive, and strategic” suggesting “a history dislodged from origins.” But she has displayed similar spirit and boldness not only in her shouting at the astrologer “You don’t know what my future holds!” (3), but also in her acceptance of the scar made by the twig as her third eye. She says to her frightening older sisters: “It’s not a scar,” I shouted, it’s my third eye.” In the stories our mother recited, the holiest sages developed an extra eye right in the middle of their foreheads. Through that eye they peered out into invisible worlds. “Now I’m a sage” (5). The quote proves her boldness in her declaration of being a sage. Moreover, she shows no sign of fear when she happens to touch “the soft waterlogged carcass of a small dog” whose “eyes had been eaten” (5) while swimming across the river in contrary with Ruppel’s analysis of her encounter with Half-Face episode as a milestone in her identity formation.

She meets Lillian Gordon as she leaves the motel after surviving the inhumane experience of the rape by Half-Face. she takes the injured Jasmine home to nurse her back to health, and gives Jasmine an American name, transforming her into “Jazzy” (4) by making her dress up in American “Peter Pan collars, maxi skirts, T-shirts with washed-out pictures, sweaters, cords, and loafers” (132). At this point she undergoes a physical transformation as well. Gordon advises her to adopt American way of life in her manner of walking, dressing, talking etc. because Americans are hostile toward the non-American Other. With Lillian, Jasmine gradually gets used to American lifestyle: she starts visiting department stores and for the first time in her life goes through revolving doors. Everything to Jasmine is new and it does not frighten her at all. Instead Jasmine is eager to open her eyes and experience the new excitement. This New American identity and American getup brings a new feelings and confidence in her personality. After checking herself in the mirror, she feels “shocked at the transformation. Jazzy in a t-shirt, tight cords and running shoes. I couldn’t tell if with the Hasnapuri sidle I’d also be abandoned by Hasnapuri modesty” (133). After helping her assimilate in American, she also helps Jazzy get to New York to meet with her husband’s Professor Vadhera, who lets her stay with his family because she is the widow of his favorite student. With the Vadhera family, she once again falls back into the traditional lifestyle similar to her village that she resents. She finds that despite being a renowned Professor in India he fails to find a job in a university and now he supports his family as an importer and sorter of human hair. Gradually she becomes fed up with the traditional Indian life in Brooklyn’s Indian ghetto due to, as Anjana Sukumary notes, “strong urge in her to re-invent herself and her eagerness for independence and self-reliance” because “Her only option there was total silence and she finds herself losing herself in the superficial rituals and cultural adherence” (71) there. Therefore, she asks Mr. Vadhera to arrange a green card for her so that she can fly to a new terrain.

After becoming Lillian Gordon's Jazzy, Jasmine gets a new identity "Jase" from Taylor Hayes. With the help of Kate Gordon-Feldstein, she begins working for Wylie and Taylor to take care of their adopted daughter, Duff. While Jasmine continues to take care of Duff, Wylie leaves Taylor after falling in love with Stuart. Gradually, she falls in love with Taylor because Taylor acknowledges her liminal state. She contemplates over the smooth relationship with him as:

Taylor didn't want to change me. He didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness. My being different from Wylie and Kate didn't scare him. I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward. On Claremont Avenue, in the Hayeses' big, clean, brightly lit apartment, *I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase.* (185-186, my emphasis)

This passage summarizes Taylor's contribution in remaking her into an "adventurous Jase" from a shy girl of Indian feudal village. Sara Fadla and Yousef Awad note, Taylor "embraces her foreignness and differentness" (179). With this identity, she not only gets rid of Vadhera family's traditional Indian lifestyle but also, she regains her path of becoming a working woman similar to her conjugal life with Prakash in India. With this new avatar "Jase," she can live on her own earnings, and therefore becomes "a woman who brought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants" (176). With Taylor, the "hardest lesson" she learns is that everything including a human relationship is ephemeral, so "In America, nothing lasts" and "the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate" (181). According to Gunjan Gosain Oberoi and Jyoti Sharma, Jasmine transformation this time is "from her very own yearning for personal change." They further note, "In becoming Jase, Jasmine gets increasingly comfortable with her sexuality which she always tried to repress earlier, more so, after her traumatic experience. At this juncture, Sara Fadla and Yousef Awad further point out Taylor's contribution in her remaking as:

Taylor does not insult her intelligence. He stimulates her critical thinking by generating philosophical debates and involving her in his studies. In one incident, she tries to explain her belief of what she calls assignment logic of the universe. She spells out that "a whole life's mission might be to move a flowerpot from one table to another" and maybe her "assignment was to bring [Taylor] enlightenment". (179)

This feeling of comfort, contentment and understanding lasts till the day the three of them are at the park, Jasmine spots Sukhwinder, the man that killed Prakash. This makes her leave Manhattan for Iowa, where Duff's birth mother lives.

Despite being exposed to American ideology of individualism and freedom, she still fails to act on her own. She still needs male's assistance in her path of transformation

and her acquiring of agency. This manifests at the end of the novel when Jasmine pregnant with Rochester's child is preparing to leave Bud for another avatar with Taylor:

*I cry into Taylor's shoulder; cry through all the lives I've given birth to, cry for all my dead.*

*Then there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble-maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out the door and in the potholed and rutted driveways, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope. (241, my emphasis)*

In these final lines of the book, she renounces agency once again as she acknowledges her helplessness in her struggle of moving forward to meet an unknown fate and a frontier already "pushing indoors" (240). Here she is moving to California with Taylor, uncertain of what the future will bring but nevertheless confident in her decision to leave. She demonstrates similar sort her conviction in an unknown power or agency that predetermines and orders the course of events when she announces her departure to Iowa to Taylor, "In my life, I have never dithered. *God's plans have always seemed clearly laid out*" (189, my emphasis). These instances show she is unable to cast off the strong influence of all her past in her transformations. Kristin Carter-Sanborn remarks, "she seems finally to begin acknowledging the strength of her former "attachments"" (590). In this context, John K. Hoppe states, "she never fully escapes, but does successfully negotiate, her various pasts" (144). In addition, she does show some traditional-feminine-like attributes in her relationship with Taylor. When she goes to Manhattan as a caregiver in the Wylie household, her sole purpose is to make herself acceptable to the family and desirable to Taylor. She says, "I fell in love with [Taylor's] world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. I wanted to become the person they thought they saw..." (171). For Suchismita Banerjee, this submissive trait in her characteristics reveals "a paradox of feminist agency where individual choice is prioritised over cultural constructs," and therefore she reads Jasmine's transformation "as a response to the dominant culture" because "she enacts the expectations that others (men) have for her and (re)creates her selfhood in their image and fantasy" (21).

After fleeing from New York to save herself from Sukhwinder, Jasmine finally comes across Bud Ripplemeyer, an American Banker in her odyssey of identity formation. In Baden County, Jasmine becomes more American as her ethnic identity entirely changes. Her distinction from others is recognized but not understood and freely accepted. She feels at home in Iowa, as she says, "The farmers around here are like the farmers I grew up with. Modest people, never boastful, tactful and courtly in their way" (11). Bud renames her 'Jane' and her Americanization is complete. Anjana Sukumary observes, "She becomes a new individual in Iowa where she enjoys her new liberated self and her new role allows for ambition, curiosity, talent and sexuality and she becomes a part of the American society" (72).



In addition to her assimilation in rural American society, her life in “Iowa,” as Sara Falda and Yousef Awad confer while charting out her self-becomingness, “symbolizes a deterioration of her becomingness journey” (179). For her, Iowa is just a kind of sanctuary from potential danger that Sukhwinder may pose to herself and her loved ones. She contemplates, “Bud has kept me out of trouble” (210). She has felt boredom and isolated due to a life of passivity there, so she calls “Taylor, the rescuer” (210) in her excitement after receiving a card from Taylor that he and Duff are coming to take her to California. Bud asks Jasmine to marry him time and again and talks of “discipline, strength, patience, character” (23). This shows he wants to shape her personality in his own way. Here, Sara Falda and Yousef Awad link how her self-identity and agency is “tested through gendered discourse” when she says, Bud calls her “Jane . . . Calamity Jane. Jane as in a Jane Russel, not Jane as in Plain Jane. But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other” (26). They further write, “Feeling her rebellious and adventurous spirit, Bud wants to chain Jasmine down by proposing marriage” (179). He wants to marry her “to be able to say, Bud and *Jane Ripplemeyer* [emphasis in original]” (7). After marrying, Jasmine would be his property so that he can define her and her identity becomes totally dependent on his. This shows that Bud’s renaming of her is an attempt to re-shape her beingness and re-define her subjectivity. Similarly, Suchismita Banerjee questions “Her individuation and agency” in her sexual roleplaying with the physically handicapped Bud because there is an intense “conscious split between who she is and who she has to be become” (22) when she says: “After I prepare him for bed, undo the shoes, pull off the pants, sponge bathe him, he likes me to change roles, from caregiver to temptress, and I try to do it convincingly, walking differently, frowning, smiling. . . . Now I must do all the playing, provide the surprises. I don’t mind” (36). Here she seems satisfied performing all her traditional wifely roles on the surface. But later at the end of the chapter 5 her inner- self feels “torn open like the hot dry soil, parched” (38) because of his failure to satisfy her sexual desire. Even at the end of the novel when Taylor announces they are heading for California, Jane says than she cannot leave Bud, “I can’t leave, how can I” (239). Jane is once again caught in conflicting emotions between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness. She becomes ready only after Taylor insistence, “why not, Jase? it’s a free country” (239) and Karin’s comforting, “Don’t blame yourself, Jane” (240). Then she walks out feeling completely uncertain of her ability that time will tell if she is “a tornado, rubble maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud” (241).

Despite fact that she has shown her courage and her exhilarating energy, the discussion till now has pointed out some spots in Jasmine’s odyssey that she has failed to enact agency and self-identity in full-fledged degree in all her avatars. Nevertheless, Jasmine’s is a story of success for a third-world woman immigrating to the USA as she has enjoyed good mobility, financial security and social status there. In this context, it calls for examining what makes her achieve such success in the foreign land. Some critics opine that her success is because of her exoticness as a third world woman. Susan Koshy finds her reliance on men and “her exotic sexuality” a problem in interpreting the novel

as a specimen of women empowerment (141). Similarly, Suchismita Banerjee locates “a complicitous exoticism of the “Third World” women” in her avatars Jasmine/Jase/Jane, and therefore her “identity creation is dependent on her Otherness which she manipulates to create *power* in her relationship with men” (22). The subsequent paragraph examines how American males other her and how Jasmine manipulate their racist ideology to empower her agency during her American odyssey.

At the end of chapter 18, Lillian Gordon hints at the inherent racism among Americans when she reminds jasmine to “walk and talk American” (134) so that people should think that she was born there. She becomes victim of this ideology from the very moment she steps into the Gulf Coast of Florida. When Half-Face takes Jasmine to his motel room, He is surprised. “I thought you'd be different from the others. A spark, you know?” (112). It is her categorical difference from others, i.e., her “Indianness” has captivated him. For him, according to Kristin Carter-Sanborn, she is something inaccessible “exotic” due to “her unknowability, her otherness” (588). Similarly, Bud Ripplemeyer foregrounds her otherness when he first glimpses her with his mother, “*It felt as if I was a child again, back in the Saturday-afternoon movies. You were glamour, something unattainable*” (199, emphasis in the original). She also realizes the same when she remarks, “Bud courts me because I am *alien*, I am *darkness, mystery and inscrutability*” (200, my emphasis). Jasmine observes similar kind of othering from Taylor’s friends in New York when they look at her and say, ‘You’re Iranian, right?’ If I said no, then, ‘Pakistani, Afghan, or Punjabi?’ They were strikingly accurate about most things, and always out to improve themselves” (33). While forwarding a feminist-materialist approach to racialized beauty in Mukherjee’s paradigmatic South Asian immigrant narrative of national belonging, Vanita.Reddy notes, despite being “a global city such as New York, where her ethnic identity must be properly named and nameable, Jasmine’s sense of belonging in Baden is tied to her racialized strangeness” (359).

With key motifs of emigration and assimilation on both physical and psychological levels, Bharati Mukherjee plots Jasmine in the process of Americanization by depicting her experiences of trauma and triumph. In her attempt to forge a new identity for the protagonist, Mukherjee casts Jasmine into multiple avatars to empower her with self-identity and agency. Despite being fortified with American ideals of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, republicanism, democracy and laissez faire economics, she does demonstrate her self-identity and agency in some respects, but not in full-fledged degree. In this context, she puts on a new avatar whenever she comes across with different American males one after another, for whom she is an object of desire or a mysterious thing to possess. Here, her exotic personality provides her with extra-terrestrial glamour to acquire their attentiveness. In this context, American exposure does not significantly change her determination and spirit that she has shown while boldly denying the prediction of her widowhood and exile by shouting at the astrologer. Hence, the paper argues that her the agency and self-identity to act on her own freewill remains all the same even at the end when she becomes ready to leave her handicapped husband Bud Ripplemeyer only after Taylor’s insistence.

**Works Cited**

- Banerjee, Suchismita. "Interrogating the Ambivalence of Self-Fashioning and Redefining the Immigrant Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Asiatic*, vol. 6 no. 1 June 2012, pp. 10-24. [journals.iium.edu.my/asiatic/index.php/AJELL/article/view/232](http://journals.iium.edu.my/asiatic/index.php/AJELL/article/view/232). Accessed 29 July 2018.
- Carter-Sanborn, Kristin. "We Murder Who We Were: *Jasmine* and the Violence of Identity." *American Literature*, vol. 66 no.3, 1994, pp. 573–593. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2927605](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2927605). Accessed 1 June 2018.
- Ceaser, James W. "The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism." *American Political Thought*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 3-28, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/664595](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/664595). Accessed 10 December 2015.
- Fadla, Sara and Yousef Awad. "Transcending Patriarchal and Cultural Borders in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *International Journal of English and Education*, vol. 7 no. 2, 2018, pp. 170-180, [www.researchgate.net/publication/324506529](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/324506529). Accessed 1 June 2018.
- Hoppe, John K. "The Technological Hybrid as Post-American: Cross-Cultural Genetics in *Jasmine*." *Asian American Literature*, vol. 24 no. 4, 1999, pp. 137-156. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/468178](http://www.jstor.org/stable/468178). 15-04-2018 15:49. Accessed 1 June 2018.
- Koshy, Susan. "Sex Acts as Assimilation Acts: Female Power and Passing in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* and *Jasmine*." *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004, pp. 132-158.
- Masram, Usha. "Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*: A Fluid Identity." *International Journal of English: Literature, Language & Skills*, vol. 2 no. 4, Jan. 2014, pp. 71-74. [www.ijells.com](http://www.ijells.com). Accessed 1 July 2018.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. Grove Weidenfeld: New York, 1989.
- Oberoi1, Gunjan Gosain, and Jyoti Sharma. "Cross-Cultural Conflicts and Pursuit of Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, vol. 4 no. 1, Feb. 2015, pp. 192-197. [www.ajssh.leena-luna.co.jp](http://www.ajssh.leena-luna.co.jp). Accessed 15 Sept. 2018.
- Reddy, Vanita. "Beauty and the Limits of National Belonging in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 54, no. 2, Summer 2013, pp. 337-368. *Project Muse*, [doi.org/10.1353/cli.2013.0018](https://doi.org/10.1353/cli.2013.0018) Press. Accessed 1 Jun 2018.
- Ruppel, F. Timothy. "Re-Inventing Ourselves a Million Times": Narrative, Desire, Identity, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *Third World Women's Inscriptions*, vol. 22 no.1, Feb. 1995, pp. 181-191. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/25112173](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25112173). Accessed

1 Jun 2018

Sukumary, Anjana. "An Analysis of the Identity Transformations and the Survival of an Immigrant in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*." *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, vol. 1 no. 1, March 2015, pp. 70-73. Doi: 10.7763/IJLL. 2015.V1.15. Accessed 1 June 2018.

Thimm, Johannes. "American Exceptionalism – Conceptual Thoughts and Empirical Evidence." A paper Paper für die Tagung der Nachwuchsgruppe "Internationale Politik" der DVPW 13./14. July 2007 Darmstadt, [www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/fachpublikationen/AmericanExceptionalism\\_tmm\\_07\\_07.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/fachpublikationen/AmericanExceptionalism_tmm_07_07.pdf)

Walt, Stephen M. "The Myth of American Exceptionalism." *FP*, 11 October 2011, [foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/the-myth-of-american-exceptionalism/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/the-myth-of-american-exceptionalism/), Accessed 22 September, 2022.