

Understanding the Self of Enlightened Feminists

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Abstract

The British colonies have introduced the feminist attitude in the Indian women, which each protagonist interprets in her own way. Indian women now express themselves and challenge the patriarchal society for better or worse. They are sowing the seeds of feminist attitude for the next generation.

Keywords: colonies, express, interprets, patriarchal, sowing

It has been long since the British colonies have left India. Yet their impression can be seen and felt on Indian culture. Indian women watched how the British treated their wives with respect. They valued her decision. The British women expressed their views and took decisions for their self. They were self integrated, independent in thought, work and way of leading their life. While the patriarchal Indian society bound women in their rules and were masters of her life. The protagonists observe this and choose to differ. They defy the patriarchy and try to become the masters of their own life for better or worse. They decided to follow their dreams.

Bharati Mukherjee's novel Jasmine unveils the struggle of Jasmine to belong to the new culture. Jyoti lives in a small village of Punjab, Hansapur. She is the fifth daughter whom her grandmother wishes to strangle to death for being a girl child. She soon learns that she must rebel against the traditions for survival. A girl child is unwanted as she does not carry the lineage name forward. Jyoti has to rebel when her grandmother wants to stop her education and get her married. Educating a girl is thought of as an unnecessary expense. She marries an intelligent man-Prakash, of her choice, thus breaking the patriarchal rule. Women have no voice in patriarchy, they only follow their elders. Prakash renames her as Jasmine. They plan to move to America, the land of dreams and opportunities. He gives her complete freedom to foster her spirits. He installs in her the seeds of free thinking. When they are about to depart, Prakash gets killed in a bomb blast. Jasmine decides to continue the journey. Anything would be better than to live a life of widow and be denied of all happiness of life. She forges documents and reaches the alien land unescorted. The Indian patriarchal culture was unacceptable to her. In it there is

practically no place for women other than inside the four walls of a home. As for a widow she is reduced to a non-living thing by denying her participation in all types of rituals, customs and festivals.

Jasmine wishes to live for herself. Alone and weak Jasmine cannot protect her body from Half-face, captain of a trawler. Jasmine's self is mutilated with her body. She wishes to commit suicide. Then she decides to wash the scar on her soul by changing her mission. Earlier she wanted to complete her husband's dream, now she decides to reincarnate herself by revenging her rapist. She draws strength from her Indian culture and takes on the form of Goddess Kali, out to kill evil. She moves forward in life drawing strength from the American life around her. Soon she transforms herself. From a helpless immigrant Jasmine changes into a confident working woman, unwed mother, a reckless lover and a self which is ever ready for a new adventure. Each time she shuts her past or moves forward she takes on a new identity, from Jyoti to Jasmin, then Kali, Jazzy, Jase and Jane.

Kali becomes Jazzy when Lilian rescues her and introduces her to American culture. Jazzy is frustrated by the lonely and empty people of the industrial society. Jazzy moves to another city to take up a job of babysitter. They slowly transform her into a sophisticated American and name her Jase. Earlier Jase is not comfortable with her sexuality now she explores it. Fed up with her meaningless exploration she moves on to another place. She takes on new identity- Jane and decides to begin anew.

On the path of her journey Jyoti loses all that she valued most back in India. In America chaste body, virginity, love, emotions, relations were mere meaningless words. Jyoti moves from place to place to kill some memories leave pain behind and enjoy life. This empty enjoyment of life makes her more restless. She has moved so much forward that now there is no turning back. Her soul and mind is empty. She now lives only in the present trying to forget both the worried past and the worry of the future. She has adapted the American life and culture, but for the Americans she still is an outsider. The Kali who was out to destroy evil now does not seem to be affected by it.

Nothing was evil now. Her spirit enjoyed complete freedom but her consciousness has no solace. It was ever surrounded by loneliness and emptiness. Nothing could bind it not even happiness. She had become rootless. Her soul was dislocated with change of place, city, country, culture, tradition and people. She felt like a tornado which had arisen from nowhere and which may evaporate into a cloud. Ultimately, she transforms into a woman with a strong identity but inside she feels like a fallen woman. Whenever something goes wrong in her life she shifts to another city in an attempt to forget it and begin her life all over again. New surroundings, identity and people no longer worry her. She lives a disillusioned life.

In her book *Desirable Daughters*, Bharti Mukherjee has well stated the dilemma of such new generation who are growing in hybrid culture. These migrants unending quest for identity and forgeries with oneself has been well brought out in the following words.

"No one behind, no one ahead. The path the ancients cleared has closed. And the other path, everyone's path, easy and wide, goes nowhere. I am alone and find my way." (Mukherjee, *Desirable Daughters*12)

In India a person is bound with spiritualism, social customs and duties towards elders. These also guide them when one is distraught. Indian tradition has its loopholes still it cannot be completely discarded nor can the foreign culture of liberty and equality be completely accepted.

Tara in *Desirable Daughters* shows great boldness by breaking away from the bond of marriage from her multimillionaire husband. Tara is a docile wife when she moves to America. She builds a mini India in her home. But when her husband works for fourteen hours in the office, she decides to divorce him and move on. This feminist tries to explore her individuality. In *The Immigrant* by Manju Kapur, we see Ananda begins his practice in Halifax, Canada. Feeling lonely and bored he marries Nina a school teacher from India. Nina is carried away by the pomp and show of wealth and a rich husband. Nina's degree is useless here in Canada, so she decides to study to secure a job at a local library. She is a pious Indian girl who detests non-vegetarian food and western outfits. Ananda sees her dilemma of displacement, but is least bothered. He feels her life revolves around his.

Nina is a committed Hindu wife. She tries to create Indian life in her new surroundings and accept it as home. She brought all the old values and tradition with her. She wanted a baby to get settled in this new place. With a baby she feels she would easily be busy for twenty years.

Women immigrants find it difficult to adjust. They have to seek work, prepare them self with the degrees for the work and till then feel isolated and think of the bright future they had back at homeland. Soon everything blurs and memories of taste and smell become only a legend.

Soon Nina also undergoes transformation. She tries to blend in with the country people. She changes her traditional dress, food and also her views. She feels more liberated as no one is here to judge her actions. She feels her body belongs to her and feels liberated to explore its virility. She enters into a liaison with her classmate. Her need to be herself expresses itself boldly. After she discovers her husband's infidelity and hears of her mother's death there is nothing to stop her from being autonomous. She decides to migrate on to further lands with her new found confidence, independent spirit and now her new feminist attitude. She packs her bags, takes a bus to Fredericton and fully well knows that she shall surely get a job in this new place with her education.

These immigrant feminists see no cause to return back to motherland. When their roots become shallow they easily uproot them to enter the hybrid culture and make it their own. They migrate further and further. Nina overthrows the traditional values, lessens dependence on others and becomes autonomous to find happiness for her liberated body and spirit. Migration gives her an opportunity for a better education, better job, improved quality of life and an independent spirit. It builds up her confidence that if she could do it once she can do it again - settle in a new land with new people and build new relations again. Once you have changed into a westerner you find it difficult to return to the eastern culture. These protagonists follow their dreams to foreign lands and feel alienated. They do not belong to the place they shift or to the homeland they left. The impact of patriarchy differs in foreign country. It takes different shape. To blend in the translocation brings about transition in culture. This is difficult, even though they accept different culture, they can't free themselves from the roots of their home culture. This so happens as their home culture has some lasting values while the western culture is as fickle as our thoughts.

It takes a lifetime effort to get included in the natives for the migrants. Even after this transformation they are still an outsider among them. This behavior brings in longings for homeland, feelings of being dislocated and loneliness. These feminists are in the position where they wish to be. They seem to be waylaid more than promising torch bearers. They are not afraid of the uncertainties that life presents. They adapt the new culture, society and

surrounding but are unable to surrender to it. In their consciousness they know they are wrong. They long for a society where they shall be known for their work, good deeds, respected and recognized as someone.

These women who migrate often remove all taboos of life and lead a wayward, rootless life. Loneliness is just a part of other bad habits like drugs, smoke, wine, illicit relations, which they practice for bodily satisfaction. As we see in America nothing anymore is a taboo. Physical attraction and satisfaction are short phases of life. Mutual understanding, care, respect form a powerful base for love and have lasting values. These feminists wish to achieve

these lasting values of their Indian tradition but their surrounding culture prevents them.

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