

## **Exploring the Restless Journey: Weak Traits and Unsettled Identity in**

**Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine***

**RanjnaSharma(Asst.Prof.)**

**HRIT University**

*Research scholar*

*UTU Dehradun*

*ranjna.shurma@gmail.com*

**Dr.Rashmi Gupta, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor & Head*

*Department of English*

*COER Roorkee (Uttarakhand)*

*rashmigupta77@gmail.com*

**Dr.KavitaTyagi, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor*

Dept. of English & Other Foreign Languages

Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University Lucknow (UP)

*tyagi\_kavita 2004@yahoo.co.in*

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the character of Jasmine in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Jasmine*, focusing on the portrayal of her weak traits and their impact on her perpetual restlessness and inability to establish a stable identity. By analyzing specific instances and character development throughout the narrative, the underlying causes and consequences of Jasmine's constant movement and search for self will be uncovered. Drawing on textual evidence and critical analysis, several weak traits that contribute to Jasmine's restlessness will be identified. Her naivety at the outset of the novel leads her to leave her village in India for the dream of America without fully considering the challenges and complexities ahead. Furthermore, her consistent need to change names and identities reflects a lack of self-confidence and a desire to escape her past, preventing her from finding stability and genuine connection. Examining Jasmine's relationships with men will showcase her vulnerability and inability to discern their intentions perpetuate her unsettled state and how her perpetual state of passivity hinders her ability to settle down and find a sense of belonging will be discussed. Through this analysis, a light will be shed on the complex interplay between weak traits, identity formation, and restlessness in Jasmine's character. Findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel's themes and offer insights into the challenges faced by individuals navigating cultural displacement and the quest for self-discovery.

**Keywords:** Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine, weak traits, restlessness, identity, character analysis.

Bharati Mukherjee (1940-2017) was a prominent Indian-American author renowned for her compelling literary explorations of immigrant experiences and cultural assimilation. Born in Kolkata, India, Mukherjee moved to the United States in the 1960s to pursue her education, eventually settling and becoming a naturalized American citizen. Her personal journey mirrored the themes she would later explore in her writing - the intricate interplay between heritage and adaptation in a new cultural milieu.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee presents a protagonist whose identity is marked by weakness, uncertainty, and constant transformation. Jasmine's character embodies the restless nature of individuals who find themselves caught between different cultures, grappling with conflicting values, and struggling to establish a stable sense of self. Mukherjee's exploration of weak traits and an unsettled identity within Jasmine's journey invites us to critically examine the complexities of the immigrant experience and the transformative power it holds. *Jasmine* has received recognition and awards for its literary merit. One of the most notable awards it received is the "Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book" in 1989 for the Canada and Caribbean region. This award highlights the novel's significance and impact in the realm of literature.

In Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*, the protagonist's genetic fatal flaw, characterized by her perpetual unsettlement and inability to adhere to a singular identity, serves as a central driving force behind her tumultuous journey of self-discovery and cultural assimilation. This flaw, manifested through her frequent name changes, dependency on external validation, and inherent restlessness, shapes Jasmine's relationships and choices throughout the narrative. By examining this genetic fatal flaw, we aim to deepen our understanding of Jasmine's character and the complexities of identity formation

in diaspora literature. The hypothesis posits that Jasmine's genetic fatal flaw is not merely a character trait but a fundamental aspect of her being, influencing her actions and interactions as she navigates the challenges of cultural assimilation and the quest for belonging. Through this analysis, we seek to illuminate the nuanced layers of Jasmine's identity and the ways in which her genetic fatal flaw contributes to her unsettled identity, ultimately offering insights into broader discussions of diaspora, identity, and the immigrant experience.

In the existing scholarship on *Jasmine*, many critics have explored the complexities of identity and cultural displacement, often highlighting the protagonist's adaptability as a strength. However, this paper argues that Jasmine's apparent strengths are, in fact, manifestations of her underlying weaknesses—traits that lead to her restlessness and perpetual search for identity.

Ketu H. Katrak argues that Jasmine's violent acts are crucial to her identity formation, reflecting the brutal forces shaping her life. However, this paper expands on Katrak's analysis by positing that these violent acts are not just external forces but are also internal manifestations of Jasmine's impulsive and unstable nature. Sameer Dayal contends that violence in the post-colonial diasporic context is both self-destructive and transformative. This perspective is crucial in understanding Jasmine's internal conflict, where her actions are both a rebellion against and an affirmation of the identities imposed upon her.

Further, Inderpal Grewal's examination of cultural displacement provides a foundation for understanding Jasmine's constant reinvention. This paper builds on Grewal's work by showing that Jasmine's reinventions are less about empowerment and more about a

desperate attempt to escape the weaknesses she perceives within herself. By revisiting these and other scholars, this paper positions itself within the broader academic conversation, offering a fresh perspective on Jasmine's character as one deeply flawed by her own traits

Scholarship on Bharati Mukherjee's works has provided valuable insights into the thematic concerns and narrative techniques evident in *Jasmine*. Researchers such as Agarwal (2007), Dhawan (1996), and Nelson (1993) have offered critical perspectives on Mukherjee's portrayal of immigrant experiences and the complexities of identity formation. These studies provide a foundation for our analysis of Jasmine's character and the exploration of weak traits and unsettled identity in the novel. In *Redefining American Identity in the Context of Changing Global Realities: Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine* (2015) Ann D. Wallace's essay examines how Jasmine's journey reflects the changing nature of American identity in a globalized world. She discusses how Jasmine's vulnerabilities shape her attempts to establish a new identity. On the other hand Sameer Dayal in *Violence in Jasmine* declares:

The protagonist of the novel is both a victim and a agent of the violence and she is not the only such figure. The violence is the other face of the power: gaining the understanding of it involves grasping the pay and staging the power structures particularly in the post colonial diasporic context. Moreover, violence manifests itself not only in social and political but also in psychosexual and psychosocial realms. The novel is an account of Jasmine's coming into her own as a woman. (Nelson Emmanuel S, *Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Perspective* - 65-66)

Ketu.H..Katrak in *South Asian American Literature* is also of the view that Jasmine's act of violence is necessary in remaking of new life when he speaks Harold Bloom's *Asian American Writers*:

In her struggle to remake herself, Jasmine does not resist several renaming by others, and moves fluidly among new identities thrust upon her .....The novel presents a disturbing ideology of violence as part of remaking oneself in American Culture .Jasmine is intent upon murdering her own past as the only way to make a new life. (24)

Indian writers and critics have engaged with *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee in various ways, discussing its themes, characters, and impact on literature. Some says, Bharati Mukherjee portray the immigrant experience, resonating with individuals who have themselves migrated or have family members who migrated. The challenges faced by Jasmine as she navigates a new culture and attempts to establish her identity are relatable to many in similar situations. Some readers have found Exploration of identity and the shifting of identities reflecting the broader cultural shifts and changes in the global landscape. The concept of reinventing oneself resonates in a society that's undergoing rapid transformations.

The analytical framework for this paper is grounded in postcolonial theory, which serves as a lens to examine the intersections of identity, displacement, and power in *Jasmine*. Postcolonial theory is particularly apt for this analysis, as it addresses the complexities of cultural identity and the effects of colonial history on personal and collective identities. The close reading of *Jasmine's* narrative focused on identifying moments where her weak traits, such as impulsivity and

dependency, were most evident. These traits were analyzed in the context of her interactions with other characters, her internal monologues, and the significant transformations she undergoes throughout the novel. By examining these elements, this paper uncovers how Jasmine's weaknesses drive her actions and contribute to her restlessness.

The paper examines *Jasmine* from the perspective of Protagonist having some weak traits which trigger her expression of being a wanderer, restless, and lost. Below given quote reveals her vulnerability and lack of a stable identity. It portrays her as someone who is searching for a sense of belonging and grappling with her place in the world. Her constant feelings of being out of place and not fitting in showcase her restlessness and contribute to her characterization as someone who is still evolving and struggling to establish a stable personality. We have solid evidence when she says:

I still think myself as a caregiver, recipegiver, preserver. I can honestly say all I wanted was to serve ,be allowed to join but I have created confusion and destruction wherever I go. As Karin says I am a Tornado. I hit the trailer Parks first, the prefabs the weakest links. How many more shapes are in me. How many more husbands? (*Jasmine* 215)

Again she asserts in the novel,

I cry into Taylor's shoulder, cry enough 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 driveway, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hopes (241)

Through the character of Jasmine, the author portrays a protagonist whose journey is marked by vulnerability, dependency, and a constant quest for self-discovery. By examining the various aspects of Jasmine's weak traits, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of her character.

When Jasmine first arrives in America, her vulnerability becomes evident as she struggles to navigate the complexities of this new world. She experiences a cultural shock that highlights her lack of preparedness for the challenges ahead. Her weak traits, including her self-doubt and lack of a stable identity, further amplify her vulnerability. She grapples with questions of who she is in this new context and how she fits into American society. This uncertainty leaves her susceptible to manipulation and external influences, as seen in her relationships with mentors and romantic partners.

Jasmine's fragile personal background is a significant aspect of her character in the novel. Her traumatic past shapes her vulnerabilities and influences her journey. Jasmine's personal background is marked by significant trauma and loss. Her experiences in India, including the loss of her family and the violence she witnesses, contribute to her vulnerabilities and play a pivotal role in her restlessness, her lack of self-confidence, and her struggles with identity. Her fragile personal background and traumatic experiences become a driving force behind her actions. Her inability to overcome the emotional scars of her past is a testament to the lasting impact of her background on her vulnerability and



- Jasmine often relies on men to provide her with stability and direction. She marries Prakash to escape her limited life in the village, but the relationship quickly becomes oppressive and abusive. She finds herself dependent on Prakash for survival and lacks the agency to stand up against the mistreatment she endures and it is evident in her tendency to rely on others for guidance, decisions, and a sense of direction. Her dependency on external figures showcases her vulnerability and her struggle to assert herself independently.

After Prakash her Reliance on Taylor as a Protector is visible in the novel, Jasmine's relationship with Taylor highlights her lack of agency. After arriving in the United States, she becomes dependent on Taylor, a kind man who offers her protection and stability. She relies on him to navigate her new surroundings and make decisions for her. This dependency on Taylor stems from her lack of self-confidence and her fear of being alone in an unfamiliar environment. She seeks his guidance and protection as a way to counter her vulnerabilities.

Again she shows her dependence on Du for Identity. She becomes entangled with him, and their relationship is marked by a power imbalance. She leans on him for a sense of identity and stability, even as he makes decisions on her behalf. Her lack of agency in this relationship stems from her weak traits and her desire to find a foothold in a changing world. She allows Du to shape her identity, reflecting her ongoing struggles with self-confidence and autonomy.

Another weak trait of *Jasmine's* Jasmine is her lack of emotional resilience, which is evident in her responses to traumatic events. After witnessing violent deaths in India and experiencing personal loss, she becomes emotionally fragile. Her difficulty in processing

and recovering from these traumas contributes to her restlessness. She seeks change and a fresh start in America as a means of escaping the emotional weight of her past. Her lack of emotional resilience is also reflected in her relationships. In her romantic partnerships, such as with Bud Ripple and Du, Jasmine's emotional vulnerabilities lead to insecurities and doubts.

Mukherjee's portrayal of Jasmine's weak traits and unsettled identity prompts us to challenge traditional notions of strength and to recognize the resilience and agency present even within vulnerabilities. The novel ultimately emphasizes the importance of embracing and navigating these complexities, as it is through the exploration of weakness that individuals can find their own path to empowerment and self-realization.

Through her restless journey, Bharati Mukherjee invites readers to critically examine the complexities of identity formation, the immigrant experience, and the transformative power of self-discovery. By delving into Jasmine's weak traits, we gain valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals caught between cultures, and we are reminded of the resilience and agency that can emerge from embracing vulnerabilities. The novel serves as a poignant reminder that strength can often be found in the very weaknesses that shape our identities.

The study offers several contributions and benefits to readers, scholars, and society as a whole. By delving into the challenges faced by Jasmine as an immigrant, this study deepens our understanding of the complexities involved in adapting to a new culture and negotiating multiple identities. It highlights the diverse pathways through which individuals construct their sense of self. It challenges traditional notions of a fixed and stable identity,

emphasizing the fluidity, adaptability, and transformative nature of personal identities. This recognition promotes acceptance and appreciation of diverse identities in a multicultural society. The study also sheds light on the gendered experiences of women navigating between cultures. It prompts critical analysis of societal expectations, patriarchal structures, and the struggles women face in their pursuit of self-realization and empowerment.

It fosters an understanding of how multiple facets of identity shape individuals' experiences and challenges us to consider the intersecting systems of privilege and marginalization that influence people's lives. Further it contributes to the broader field of literary scholarship, particularly within the realms of Diaspora literature, postcolonial studies, and feminist theory. It adds to the existing body of research and critical analysis, expanding the discourse surrounding themes of identity, migration, and cultural hybridity.

In conclusion, the exploration of Jasmine's weak traits reveals the complexities of her character and the broader challenges faced by individuals navigating multiple cultural identities. Jasmine's impulsivity, naivety, and dependence are not just personal flaws; they are symptomatic of the larger struggles of cultural displacement and identity formation in a multicultural world. These traits contribute to her restlessness and her continuous search for a place to belong.

This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how personal vulnerabilities, often overlooked in favor of more apparent strengths, can profoundly shape the immigrant experience. Jasmine's story underscores the importance of acknowledging these weaknesses to fully grasp the psychological and emotional toll of cultural displacement.

Future research could further explore the role of gender in cultural displacement, particularly in how it influences the formation and expression of identity in diasporic literature. Additionally,

examining the psychological impact of constant identity transformation in such narratives could provide valuable insights into the immigrant experience. By broadening our perspectives and enriching our understanding of these complex themes, this study has the potential to foster a more inclusive and empathetic society.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Kavita Tyagi and Prof. Rashmi Gupta for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this research. Their insights and feedback have been instrumental in shaping the direction of this paper. I also extend my thanks to HRIT University for providing the resources that made this study possible, including access to critical literature and academic databases.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the support of my family and friends, whose encouragement and belief in my work have been a constant source of motivation. Their patience and understanding during the many hours spent on this research have been greatly appreciated.

Finally, I am inspired by the works of Bharati Mukherjee, whose exploration of identity and displacement has provided a rich tapestry for analysis and has deeply influenced my approach to this paper.

## Works Cited

Agarwal, Malti. *New Perspectives on Indian English Writing*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers 2007

Bloom Harold: *Asian American Writers*. New York, Bloom's Literary Criticism Published 2009  
Dhawan R.K: *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium*, New Delhi, Prestige Publishers 1996.

Grewal, Inderpal. *Becoming American: The Novel and the Diaspora*. Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalism, Duke UP, 2005, pp. 65-74.

Katrak, Ketu H. *South Asian American Literature*. An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature, edited by King-Kok Cheung, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 192-218.

Kumar, Nagendar. *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers 2001.

Mandal, Somdatta, ed. *Asian-American Writing Vol.2*. Prestige Publishers 2000.

Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*, New York: Grove Publishers 1989

Nelson, Emmanuel, ed. *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Garland Publishers 1993. (Violence in *Jasmine* by Samir Dayal)

Nityananda, Indira. *Three Great Indian Women Novelists: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee*. New Delhi: Creative Publishers 2000.

## Web Sources

Alison B. Carb. 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee,' *The Massachusetts Review*, Winter 1988, p. 650. (Accessed on 10 July 2022)

Bharati Mukherjee. "American Dreamer",

<http://www.mojones.com/motherjones/je97/mukherjee.html> (Accessed on 1 July 2022)

[https://www.academia.edu/1553776/\\_Routes\\_of\\_Identity\\_In\\_Conversation\\_with\\_Bharati\\_Mukherjee](https://www.academia.edu/1553776/_Routes_of_Identity_In_Conversation_with_Bharati_Mukherjee) (Accessed on 4 June 2022)

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780394588469> (Accessed on 22 June 2022)

Ron Hogan: The Beatrice Interview: Bharati Mukherjee (1997)

<http://beatrice.com/wordpress/interview-bharati-mukherjee/> (Accessed on 30 November 2022)

<http://localhost:8081/xmlui/handle/123456789/232> (Accessed on 30 November 2022)