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Feminine Resilience and the Critique of Universalist Feminism in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines feminine resilience in Jasmine (Mukherjee, 1989). The research explores how patriarchal norms lead to women's identity crises as the protagonist transforms her identity from Jyoti to Jasmine and Jase to Jane under colonial, patriarchal, and migratory pressures. This research investigates how feminine resilience catalyzes cyclical identity crises, drawing on Chandra Talpade Mohanty's theory of feminine resilience. The present study fills this gap by addressing how feminine resilience is interrogated in Jasmine. Patriarchal oppression reveals dowry economies, ritual widowhood, and mother tyranny, which lead to psychological fermentation but also provoke resistance. Gender violence, from rape to forced marriage, results in a dramatic break that culminates in the perpetrator's death. It also reveals the implied universalist feminism suggesting that all women across the globe share core human experiences, rights, and needs, transcending cultural, racial, and national boundaries. The analysis highlights the idea of human rights, shared sisterhood, and universal legal equality. It shows how masculine oppressive strategies evolve ecologically in response to women's transformation by interpreting the plot of the novel from socio-political and socio-domestic perspectives. The study sets the pathways for future interdisciplinary studies and comparative literary criticism, and substantiates Jasmine's continued relevance in examining resilience.

Keywords*: Patriarchal oppression, gender violence, feminine resilience, identity crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The present study explores how feminine resilience is defined as the ability of women to face the challenges of poverty, discrimination, and violence. It is a powerful phenomenon that shows how women face the challenges (Castro, 2024). Women are labelled as the "weaker sex," and this was repeated for years (Castro, 2024). Female resilience is rightly a response to all the labels and discrimination they face; they have shown a remarkable resilience in the face of these challenges. Resilience is a challenge in women's empowerment because it builds confidence in women, enabling them to pursue their goals and maintain their determination. In addition to this, female resilience not only benefits women individually but also enables them to bring about social change (Castro, 2024).

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Feminine resilience is defined as a woman's strength to redefine her identity by challenging and resisting the gender roles and societal expectations imposed on her (Butler, 1990). Feminine resilience refers to women's continuous struggle against the patriarchal system, where survival becomes a powerful form of political resistance (Mohanty, 2003). Feminine resilience categorizes the collective and individual strength of women who resist marginalization and evolve their self-worth (Hooks, 1984).

Jasmine was written in the 1980s. It is about a young Indian woman who moves to the United States and adapts to the American way of life in order to be accepted there.

Research Questions

1. How does Jasmine's character portray resilience in Mukherjee's *Jasmine?*
2. What are the different forms of gender oppression in the character depiction of Jasmine?
3. Why do American feminists overshadow Eastern feminism?

Research Objectives

1. To explore feminine resilience through Jasmine's character in Mukherjee's *Jasmine*.
2. To analyse the socially constructed oppressive strategies against Eastern women in the novel.
3. To unravel the disparities underlying the general notions of American feminism.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As gender identity and violence have been a debatable topic in postcolonial studies, the study highlights these themes through Jasmine's character to portray female resilience. In the postcolonial world, the pressure of patriarchal oppression, gender violence, identity crisis, and alienation are the root causes of feminine resilience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Majumdar and Sarkar (2024) explored Jasmine's transformational journey in which her transformation within different social contexts reflects her agency. By appealing to Mohanty's critique of Western feminism, the authors note that Jasmine's flexibility is not an act of assimilation, but a complex process of interpreting identity in the face of multiple surrounding forces of culture, gender, and displacement.

The article being reviewed, titled *Breaking boundaries: Reincarnation, feminist rebirth, and cultural identity in Jasmine* (2024), written by Bharati Mukherjee, addresses Jasmine's personality transformation as well as assimilation. However, it does not explain the foregrounding reasons behind the biased approach of the West towards the women of the East.

Dash (2022) discusses that she chooses to break free from conventional norms and sets out to discover herself and transform. Dash, the author of the article being reviewed, Existential Experience in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (2022), provides an insight into the thematic

analysis of the novel. It offers a gap for the investigation of different cultural dynamics in terms of gender studies.

Borgohain (2023) points out that Western feminists tend to see Jasmine's transformations in *Jasmine* as a deterioration of her original identity, whereas critics should recognize these changes as survival strategies.

Borghain's presentation titled "Women's Rights for an Equal World: Issues and Challenges (2023)" illuminates the coping mechanisms of Eastern women in a patriarchal society but does not explicate how these mechanisms shape their cognitive wiring in response to male dominance. Moreover, it does not highlight the evolution of oppression going through different strata of the society.

Haleem (2024) argues that the feminist resilience approach developed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty rejects Western stereotypes of Third World women by demonstrating their active resistance against oppression. Therefore, Haleem (2024) describes that Western feminism frequently portrays Third World women as defenseless victims in a singular stereotype that dismisses their multiple life experiences besides their fighting approaches.

The article being reviewed, Unmasking Post-truth Narratives: Interpreting Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse through the Prism of Distorted Realities (2024) by Haleem highlights the origins of the essentialist stereotypes related to the Third World feminism. However, there is a gap in terms of the in-group versus the out-group struggles in the Third Word and the Western societies which could be an important factor in the constructivism of a woman's identity.

Miñoso and Espinosa (2022) postulate that Mohanty challenges dominant feminist perspectives, which separates resilience into an individual character trait, distinct from patriarchal oppression and colonial context. Therefore, Miñoso and Espinosa (2022) argue that through her work, she critiques universalist feminism by insisting that resilience requires analysis grounded in the historical and cultural dynamics of post-colonial oppression.

Miñoso and Espinosa, the authors of the article being reviewed, Ethnocentrism and Coloniality in Latin American Feminisms: The Complicity and Consolidation of Hegemonic Feminists in Transnational Spaces (2022), illustrate the complex dynamics of gender relations in a post-colonial discourse. Nevertheless, there is a space for exploration in terms of the relativity of such variables in the context of the current global scenario and the validity of the novel.

Mansour and Seif, (2021) describe that Mohanty's principles have led researchers to evaluate Western media texts about Muslim women's experiences, demonstrating that resilience is ideologically structured in the light of cultural factors and religious traditions rather than global feminist beliefs.

Mansour and Seif, the authors of the article being reviewed, The Veil in Western Eyes and the Politics of (mis)representation in *The Breadwinner*: A Graphic Novel (2021), point out the religious and cultural factors in shaping the motivation for resilience. There is a possibility for an exploratory study based on the analysis of acquiring gender-based personae as defense mechanisms in order to counter the cultural shock in a foreign land. Rather (2023) argues that

through the Resilience Theory, Mohanty sets a paradigm for the decolonization of feminist discussions wherein focus is shifted from Western liberation standards towards localized resistance and survival methods. It fills the gap by addressing the literary representation of feminine resilience, interrogated within Jasmine's character.

Rather, the author of the article being reviewed, Challenging Eurocentric Narratives: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of the Lives and Experiences of Third World Women (2023) examines the experiential journeys of the Third World women with reference to the transition from a westernized mind-set to an indigenous adaptation, permeating through the echelons of the society. The current research is aimed at contextualizing such narratives, considering the psychological evolution in the light of the novel.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study uses a qualitative research method. A thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is applied to examine Jasmine's feminine resilience. Codes are generated by referring to specific excerpts which reflect resilience. They are further classified into two major themes identified as patriarchal oppression and gender violence.

Theoretical Framework:

According to Mohanty (1984), the application of a Western feminist perspective suffered from inadequacy in comprehending the experiences of non-Western women. It contended that resilient non-Western women are contextual and must account for social, cultural and historical forces. Mohanty (1984) critiques Western perspectives for generalizing women of the Third World as a homogeneous and oppressed group, without considering their complexities and strengths in navigating these challenges. She criticizes Western feminists for not analyzing the background, challenges, oppression, socio-cultural aspects, and the histories of societies that played an important role in shaping the identity of the Third World women (1984). Moreover, Mohanty (1984) argues that both cultural and historical backgrounds should be taken into account before conducting a feminist analysis of any region.

Feminist resilience theory acknowledges the complexities of women's lives in postcolonial societies. These complexities are derived from the social and cultural backgrounds of women in postcolonial societies, where they adopt different strategies in order to become adoptable. Many scholars belong to the same school of thought, Pujolras-Noguer and Hand (2024) argue that Mohanty's (1984) work is for understanding resilience. It is not a linear or Westernized form of empowerment but complex and adaptive survival strategy rooted in her socio-cultural making. Scholars also highlight women's resilience by including realities women face such as the negotiation of cultural norms which require women bring themselves to meet the standards of cultural values and how they are resisting oppression and trying to shape their own identity in this challenging world through different practices.

ANALYSIS

Patriarchal Oppression

Patriarchal oppression is defined as discrimination, subjugation and exploitation of women by men in a system of social, political and economic structures and practices. Patriarchal oppression is the central theme of Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), as Jasmine is subjected to conventional gender roles and experiences different forms of patriarchal hegemony and violence that affects her identity and transformation throughout the novel.

Jasmine, a Hasnapur village girl born in a cohesive patriarchal structure, where women are subjugated by men, defines women through their obedience and chastity, "A woman in India must be pure, obedient and silent. If her husband dies, she has no name or place" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 66). This statement illustrates the societal expectation that a woman's identity is based on the ontology of her husband. Widows are rendered socially invisible, thereby symbolizing the complete dependence of women on male figures for their identity. "In Hasnapur, a woman may be old at twenty-two" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 16). This statement reflects that women in patriarchal societies are considered old if they are not married by the age of twenty-two.

Cultural determinism of patriarchal oppression appears when Jasmine's mother laments, "God's cruel, my mother complained, to waste brains on a girl" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 32). Here, the narrative critiques the gendered allocation of value whereby intelligence is deemed wasted on a female child.

The quote "All over our district, 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" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 33) further demonstrates the lethal consequences of gendered economic structures. Women without sufficient dowry face social neglect and often fatal "accidents," which are culturally sanctioned punishments for not conforming to patriarchal material expectations.

Patriarchal oppression, where factors like women's chances in society, free-thinking and ability to determine their physical orientation are greatly restricted by prominent cultural beliefs. In Hasnapur, Jasmine faces family control, silence imposed by gender norms and prejudiced rituals.

Gender Violence

Gender violence is defined as any type of injury - physical, mental, sexual or social - that results from gender, rather than from an individual's actions.

In *Jasmine*, patriarchy is depicted as a regular part of the story, appearing throughout the society with both local and diasporic people. According to her sisters, when the midwife presented her, she had bruises around her neck and blue handprints on her collarbone, "When the midwife carried me out, my sisters tell me, I had a ruby-red choker of bruise around my throat and sapphire fingerprints on my collarbone" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 32). This image of Jasmine reflects the cultural devaluation of women's lives.

Jasmine's mother, upon her husband's death, attempts sati and later lives in ritualized mourning, "When Pitaji died, my mother tried to throw herself on his funeral pyre. When we wouldn't let her, she shaved her head with a razor, wrapped her body in coarse cloth, and sat all day in a corner. Once a day I force-fed spoonfuls of rice gruel into her" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 45). These acts reflect the cultural expectations of widowhood as a life of self-erasure and denial.

One of the most brutal depictions of violence occurs during Jasmine's migration when Half-face rapes her. "You know what's coming, and there ain't nobody here to help you, so my advice is lie back and enjoy it. Hell, you'll probably like it. I don't get many complaints" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 81). This event at this point serves as an intense psychological rupture.

Other subtler forms of gender violence also punctuate Jasmine's life when she talks about her mother's conversation with her father, "You're going to have to wear out your sandals getting rid of this one." She spoke only to Pitaji. Sometimes she changed to "Some women think they own the world because their husbands are too lazy to beat them," but Mataji just went about her cooking with her mouth zipped and her veiled head down" (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 37) which seems to imply that domestic abuse is widely accepted. It emphasizes that even these small acts of verbal and psychological abuse help men to keep their domination over women by shaping how women think about themselves (Mohanty, 1984). In Jasmine's case, this domination affects her from a young age and persists even after she moves to America.

Women's oppression by men and by the entire socio-political institutions including family, culture, patriarchy, migration system and class structure is manifested across cultural, physical and symbolic domains. Each time she experiences violence, such as patriarchal violence, domestic violence and sexual violence in her life, Jasmine takes the chance to rethink her life and start anew. She does this by showing that such a subject becomes empowered by challenging violence and by reclaiming her identity through surviving it.

CONCLUSION

Jasmine, changing identities from Jyoti to Jasmine, then Jase, and finally to Jane, highlights a fusion of experiences, including loss, survival, adaptation to new situations, and the formation of a new identity. The present study uses Mohanty's idea of feminist resilience. Mohanty claims that mainstream feminist stories usually argue that all women are oppressed, neglecting specific aspects of non-Western women's lives. From this understanding, Jasmine's survival is presented as a sequence of local, strategic moves rather than a traditional Western road to freedom. She finds her resilience not by cutting her past off, but by incorporating elements of it into how she discovers coping mechanisms with her different identities. From Mohanty's lens, it is possible to analyze Jasmine's ability to adjust as resistance rather than submission to many forces against her. By transforming herself into Jase, she tries to accept American urban life, helped by her connection with Taylor. There, Jasmine tries to become more independent and reinvent herself; but cannot let go of her previous experiences. Her becoming Jane in Iowa with Bud is the highest point in her evolution into American home life. Likewise, this identity does not stay the same forever. By leaving Bud and choosing Taylor again, Jasmine shows that she did not want to be restricted to a specific way of being. Here, Jasmine demonstrates Mohanty's idea of a "locally produced" feminist, whose approach to survival is determined by immediate real-life circumstances rather than by abstract beliefs. As she experiments different identities, her sense of self only grows stronger from the experiences she gains through losing, desiring and becoming strong. *Jasmine*

aids in the campaign to decolonize feminist theory. It addresses that mainstream feminism often leaves out the connections between race, migration and colonialism.

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