Jasmine Study Guide

Jasmine by Bharati Mukherjee

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Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, the story of a widowed Punjabi peasant reinventing herself in America, entered the literary landscape in 1989, the same year as Salmon Rushdie's *Satanic Verses.* Rushdie, also an Indian writer, received international attention for his novel when a fatwa (or death threat) was issued against him. The fatwa essentially proclaimed it a righteous act for any Muslim to murder Rushdie. Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, Jill Ker Conway's *The Road to Coorain*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition*, Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* were all published around this time. Each of these writers is considered to be a contributor to the genre of postcolonial literature. Although there is considerable debate over the term "postcolonial," in a very general sense, it is the time following the establishment of independence in a (former) colony, such as India. The sheer extent and duration of the European empire and its disintegration after the Second World War have led to widespread interest in postcolonial literature.

Partly because of the abundance of such postcolonial works, some critics suggested *Jasmine* was part of a fad. *The New York Times Book Review,* however, named it one of the year's best works.

Mukherjee's time as a student at the University of Iowa's acclaimed Masters of Fine Arts program, the Writer's Workshop, almost certainly informed the setting of *Jasmine*. She began studies there in 1961 and took her MFA in 1963. She stayed on to earn a Ph.D. in English and comparative literature in 1969. Though Iowa City is a small college town, the state is 95 percent farm land. In the 1980s, when *Jasmine* is set, many family farmers on the outskirts of Iowa City faced the same dilemma as Darrel Lutz, a character in *Jasmine*. The hard life of farming coupled with tough times economically persuaded many farmers to sell out to large corporate farms or to non-agricultural corporations. Other farmers struggled on determined to save the farm their fathers and grandfathers had built up, as well as to preserve this unique way of life.

Author Biography

Mukherjee was born in 1940 into an elite caste level of Calcutta society. A Bengali Brahmin, Mukherjee grew up in a house cluttered with extended family, 40 or 45 people by her own count. In a 1993 interview with Runar Vignission in *Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, Mukherjee said she "had to drop inside books as a way of escaping crowds."

Mukherjee was educated as a proper Indian girl of a good family: she spoke Bengali her first three years, then entered English schools in Britain and Switzerland. Back in India, she attended the Loretto School run by Irish nuns, and subsequently universities in Calcutta and Baroda, where she earned a master's degree in English and Indian Culture. She immigrated to the United States in 1961 to attend, on scholarship, the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa. There, she earned her M.F.A. in fiction writing, and subsequently a Ph.D. in English and comparative literature. She also met and married writer Clark Blaise, thus avoiding a traditional Hindu marriage to an Indian nuclear physicist, arranged back home by her father. As of the year 2000, she has collaborated with her husband on three major writing projects.

Mukherjee's body of work, which includes three novels, two short story collections, and five works of varied nonfiction, returns to the theme of crossing cultural boundaries. Though Mukherjee has been a citizen of India, Canada, and the U.S., she clearly identifies herself as American. In *American Dreamer*, an essay published in 1997 in *Mother Jones*, she wrote, "I choose to describe myself on my own terms, as an American, rather than as an Asian-American. Why is it that hyphenation is imposed only on nonwhite Americans? Rejecting hyphenation is my refusal to categorize the cultural landscape into a center and its peripheries; it is to demand that the American nation deliver the promises of its dream and its Constitution to all its citizens equally."

Jasmine represented Mukherjee's return to the novel form. It had been fourteen years since *Wife*, her last published novel. *The New York Times Book Review* listed *Jasmine* as one of the best of 1989. Among others, Mukherjee has received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation (1978-79) and the National Endowment for the Arts (1986). She earned the National Book Critic's best fiction award for *The Middleman and Other Stories* in 1988, the same year she became an American citizen.

In the same *American Dreamer* essay, Mukherjee wrote, "As a writer, my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show that I (along with the hundreds of thousands of immigrants like me) am minute by minute transforming America. The transformation is a two-way process: It affects both the individual and the national-cultural identity. Others who write stories of migration often talk of arrival at a new place as a loss, the loss of communal memory and the erosion of an original culture. I want to talk of arrival as a gain."

Mukherjee has taught creative writing at Columbia University, New York University, and Queens College. She currently resides as professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley. She and Blaise have two children.

Plot Summary

Synopsis

Jasmine, the title character and narrator of Bharati Mukherjee's novel, was born approximately 1965 in a rural Indian village called Hasnpur. She tells her story as a twenty-four-year-old pregnant widow, living in Iowa with her crippled lover, Bud Ripplemeyer. It takes two months in Iowa to relate the most recently developing events. But during that time, Jasmine also relates biographical events that span the distance between her Punjabi birth and her American adult life. These past biographical events inform the action set in Iowa. Her odyssey encompasses five distinct settings, two murders, at least one rape, a maiming, a suicide, and three love affairs. Throughout the course of the novel, the title character's identity, along with her name, changes and changes again: from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazzy to Jassy to Jase to Jane. In chronological order, Jasmine moves from Hasnpur, Punjab, to Fowlers Key, Florida (near Tampa), to Flushing, New York, to Manhattan, to Baden, Iowa, and finally is off to California as the novel ends.

Opening Chapter

The novel's opening phrase, "Lifetimes ago. . ." sets in motion the major motif, or theme, the recreation of one's self. Jasmine is seven years old. Under a banyan tree in Hasnpur, an astrologer forecasts her eventual widowhood and exile. Given the traditional Hindu belief in the accuracy of such astrological forecasts, this is a grave moment in the young girl's life. It foreshadows her first husband's death and even her move to the isolated Iowa farm town of Baden.

Life in Iowa

The action shifts, at the end of the first chapter, into the most recent past tense. This clues the reader into the narrative strategy of the novel. The twenty four- year-old Jasmine currently lives in Baden,Iowa. The next four chapters provide details about her current situation. It is late May during a dry season, which is significant because the farm community relies on good harvests. She is pregnant. Bud, her partner, became wheelchair-bound some time after the onset of their relationship. Bud wants Jasmine to marry him. The neighbor boy, Darrel Lutz, struggles to run his family's farm, which he inherited after his father's sudden death a year before. Darrel entertains the idea of selling off the farm to golf-course developers, but Bud, the town's banker and thus a powerful figure to the independent farmers, forbids it. Bud has close, though sometimes strained, ties with all the farmers. Though change□technological, social, and sexual□seems inevitable, Bud resists it. Du, Jasmine and Bud's adopted Vietnamese teenaged son, represents this change. He comes from an entirely different culture than his sons-of-farmers classmates.

Jasmine describes her introduction to Bud and their courtship, introduces her would-be mother-inlaw, Mother Ripplemeyer, and Bud's ex-wife Karin. She hints at sexual tension between her and Du, and her and Darrel. When Jasmine makes love to the wheelchair-bound Bud, it illustrates the reversal of sexual power in her new life. Desire and control remain closely related throughout the novel. Du's glimpse of the lovemaking adds another dimension to the sexual politics: there are those in control, those who are helpless, and those bystanders waiting to become part of the action. This resonates with ideas later chronicled about Indian notions of love and marriage.

In these early chapters, the narrator, Jasmine, alludes to more distant events. These hint at important people and events: her childhood friend Vilma, her Manhattan employers Taylor and Wylie, their child and her charge Duff. These allusions begin to create the more complicated and full circumstances of the story, but remain sketchy until later, when the narrator gives each their own full treatment.

Childhood in Hasnpur

In Chapter 6, Jasmine dips back in time to her birth. She was born during a bountiful harvest year, which for a male would have signified enormous luck. But Jasmine was the fifth daughter (the seventh of nine children) in a poor family. What little money there was would go to the older daughters. She seems destined, since she would have no dowry, to become an old maid, a grim prospect in a male-dominated society. A dowry is money or property brought by a bride to a husband at their wedding.

Jasmine's childhood in Hasnpur is humble, maybe even impoverished. Her family had been forced to move there from Lahore after their village was sacked by Muslims during the Partition riots. This historical event, like others in the novel, is rendered true to actual events. The Partition riots of 1947 were a consequence of the attempt to create separate Hindu and Muslim states. More than 200,000 people died as Hindus .ed their homes in Pakistan and Muslims theirs in India. Her father, who wore fancy clothes despite having no money, clung to nostalgic notions of his past life. He, like so many Indians, exchanged relative wealth for squalor. In Lahore, the family lived in a big stucco house with porticoes and gardens. In Hasnpur, they live in mud huts. Jasmine, of course, never knew Lahore. She distinguishes herself during her Hasnpur childhood as beautiful and exceptionally smart, none of which seems to matter, given that she was a poor girl. Her first teacher, Masterji, and her mother lobby for her right to stay in school. With her mother and teacher's backing, Jasmine is allowed to stay in school six years, or twice as long as the average girl.

Jasmine fends off a mad dog with a staff. It's a scene filled with underlying meaning about the young woman's power to effect the trajectory of her life. This relates to one of the novel's philosophical questions, namely, "Does free will exist?" Pitaji, Jasmine's father, gets killed by a bull a short time later.

Marriage

Jasmine eavesdrops on the impassioned arguments of her brother and their friends: they speak of political and social turmoil in their homeland. She hears the voice of Prakash, whom she soon after marries.

Jasmine lives with Prakash Vijh in a twobedroom apartment, a break from the tradition of living with relatives. Prakash studies to be an engineer and works several demeaning jobs to save money. Jasmine and Prakash plot their move to the United States and a "real life." Their dreams of opening an electronics store are fueled by a letter from Prakash's old teacher Professorji, who pronounces America a land of vast opportunity and riches. Prakash's efforts result in acceptance to a technical college in Florida. They decide that Prakash will move to Florida to begin his studies, and Jasmine will follow in a few years. She is just 17 years old. On the brink of Prakash's departure, Sukhwinder, a political terrorist from her brother's circle of acquaintances, plants a bomb. Prakash dies, thus fulfilling the astrologer's prophecy of widowhood for Jasmine.

On To America

Jasmine goes to America alone. She secures illegal immigration papers and journeys across the sea. She plans to kill herself on a makeshift pyre of Prakash's clothes. Eventually, she lands, alone, in a desolate Florida coast town. After docking, Half- Face, the deformed captain of The Gulf Shuttle, drives Jasmine to a seedy hotel called Flamingo Court, where he rapes her. Jasmine uses a knife given to her by Kingsland, another crew member, to kill her rapist. She burns the suitcase filled with her late husband's American suit and her bloody sari.

Reincarnation

As the narrative moves back to the most present past, Mary Webb, an Iowa acquaintance, talks to Jasmine of her past lives. She's part of a network of women who believe, literally, in rebirth. Mary believes she once was a black Australian aborigine. Mary's guru, Ma Leela, inhabits the body of a battered Canadian wife. The placement of this chapter is important: it raises the issue of literal rebirth just as Jasmine begins to tell her story of figurative rebirth in America.

Fowlers Key, Florida

Lillian Gordan, an elderly Quaker woman, rescues Jasmine and nurtures her back to health in an informal halfway house. Three Kanjobal women also stay there. Lillian teaches Jasmine American mannerisms to protect her against possible arrest and deportation. Lillian puts Jasmine on a Greyhound bus, destined for the New York home of Prakash's former teacher.

Flushing, New York

Jasmine stays five months in the Flushing apartment of Professorji, his wife Nirmala and his two octogenarian parents. A pseudo-Indian culture has been recreated in their neighborhood, particularly in their apartment building, where 32 of 50 families are Indian. Here, Jasmine is expected to live the life of an Indian widow. Professorji's family watches Indian movies and television, eats Indian food, socialize with other Indians of similar class. This life disappoints, even depresses, Jasmine, who is without money or a green card. Professorji finances and arranges for Jasmine's forged green card.

Manhattan

Through Lillian's daughter, Kate Gordan- Feldstein, Jasmine obtains work as an au pair for a young professional couple, Taylor and Wylie. She cares for Duff, and for the first time in her life earns a paycheck. Taylor and Wylie treat Jasmine with respect and love. Though there are minor tensions, Jasmine settles into a safe, happy existence. She eventually takes on extra work, making what seems to her to be fantastical amounts of money. Jasmine, the caregiver, learns from her charge. "I was learning about the stores, the neighborhood, shopping, from [Duff]." Jasmine feels part of the family, and may be a little in love with Taylor, who also might be a little in love with her. In the summer of her second year with the Hayes, Wylie leaves to be with another man. Jasmine and Taylor become even closer, acting very much like a family. Finally, at a park, Taylor declares his love, but seconds later, seconds from the realization of Jasmine's American bliss, Prakash's killer appears. Jasmine, in fear, makes the immediate decision to move to Iowa, the place she knows to be the home of Duff's natural mother.

Back to Baden

The Iowa narrative goes back to Jasmine's first fall, about a year after her move to Iowa. Two days before Christmas, Harlan Kroener comes to their home looking for Bud. Jasmine has a chance to alert police, but she fails to understand what is happening. Harlan shoots Bud twice in the back with a rifle, and then kills himself.

During this first year in Iowa, Jasmine encounters tension with Bud's ex-wife Karin. Jasmine still thinks about Manhattan. She remembers her final days. She and Taylor consummate their love and then she leaves for Iowa. She explains that "Iowa was a state where miracles still happened." Duff was born there, and her birth allowed her mother to attend college (the Hayes paid for it as part of the deal to adopt Duff), and thus gave Jasmine opportunity to break out of Flushing.

In Baden, Jasmine receives a postcard from Taylor saying that he and Duff are on the way to Iowa. Though this turns out to be a false alarm (several similar postcards follow), the novel's tension revolves around this impending visit. Will Jasmine stay with Bud or leave with Taylor?

Darrel invites Jasmine over to his house. He is in a strange mood. He has prepared, poorly, an Indian dish. He begs Jasmine to run away with him, to New Mexico, to run a Radio Shack. Jasmine flees, and once home calls Karin to convey her fears for Darrel's sanity. Du, meanwhile, plots to leave Iowa, to find his sister in California.

Karin goes with Jasmine to Darrel's, to see if they can help. But when they arrive, Darrel is hard at work on the hog house. Jasmine lies to Bud about Du's trip, says it's temporary, and he'll be back for school. Bud works out a loan for Darrel, but it's too late: he has hanged himself above the hogs.

Finally, Taylor and Duff show up. Though Jasmine is torn between her former family and her life in Iowa, and her obligation to Bud, she goes off with Taylor and Duff.

Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 Summary

Jasmine is the story of a young Punjabi woman named Jasmine whose life takes her from India to the United States, where she lives out many different destinies. As the novel begins, Jasmine is a seven-year-old girl. An astrologer informs her that she will be widowed and exiled one day. The astrologer tells the girl that one cannot challenge destiny. As Jasmine runs away from the astrologer, she falls and a twig cuts her forehead. This makes it appear as if she has what the Oracle calls a third eye, a way of seeing things that others cannot.

After being tended to by her sisters, Jasmine swims in a sun-kissed river until she bumps into the decayed carcass of a dog. A horrible stench arises from the dead dog, a smell that haunts Jasmine to this day, every time she takes a sip of water in her home in Baden, Iowa in the United States. Jasmine speaks now from the perspective of an adult woman who lives with a man named Bud Ripplemeyer, in a small house in Iowa. Bud is a banker in the small town of Baden, Iowa. He first met Jasmine when his mother took Jasmine to the bank because Bud was looking for tellers.

Bud runs the First Bank of Baden, which is located in a strip mall. Bud wants to marry Jasmine even though Jasmine is less than half his age and not of the same ethnic background. Jasmine is pregnant with Bud's child, and Bud would like to be married before the baby is born. From Jasmine's kitchen window, she can see Darrel Lutz in the cab of the monstrous tractor he rides through his farm fields. Darrel inherited the farm when his father died choking on some Mexican food while on vacation in California. Many Iowan farmers vacation in California in January after the money has come in and before taxes are due.

Darrel is a young man, and the thousand acres is an overwhelming challenge for someone his age to operate on his own. Speculators have offered Darrel half a million dollars for the land, which they hope to convert into a golf course like those operated in California. Darrel seeks Bud's advice on the financial aspects of the deal, and Bud cannot believe that Darrel could consider the family farm "land." The two men are friendly but at odds on this issue.

Darrel is also kind to Jasmine and tries to make her feel welcome in this part of the country, where most of the women are blonde from their German heritage and have their hair done at Madame Olga's beauty parlor. Darrel has even mail-ordered exotic spices so that he can try to cook some of Jasmine's cultural dishes. Jasmine and Bud have a seventeen-year-old adopted son named Du, a Vietnamese orphan who came to the couple when he was fourteen. Du and his friend Scott enjoy watching Monster Truck Rallies on TV, and Jasmine remembers that Du's first question to them was whether or not the family had a television.

One day, Jasmine sees Darrel exiting a convenience store in town. When she stops to talk to him, she realizes that Darrel's purchase is a case of beer. Bud has always talked about the warning signs of young farmers who take to drinking, so Jasmine offers to drive Darrel home. Jasmine can tell that Darrel has already had too much to drink, which probably accounts for his outburst about Bud's advice on not selling his land and also the reluctance to loan Darrel any more money. Jasmine thinks to herself that Bud must have his reasons, because in Iowa, those sorts of decisions are made on character. Bud is an excellent judge of character.

As Darrel continues to ponder the decision to sell the farm, he raises hogs and practices the exotic recipes Jasmine has shared with him. Du is growing into a fine young man, and Jasmine hesitates a moment to watch him through the crack in his bedroom door before entering. Jasmine offers to help with Du's homework, but Du is studying Teddy Roosevelt's presidency, a subject that is literally quite foreign to Jasmine.

Jasmine marvels at the objects that Du has managed to collect over the short time he has been here. She realizes that his bleak past drives him to accumulate things, just as Bud's mother collects pieces of aluminum foil because of the ghost of the Great Depression. Du gives Jasmine a rhinestone ladybug pin and tells her that she is meant to have nice things.

Tonight, Jasmine is not only a mother but also Bud's wife, as she tempts the man whom she loves and who is confined to a wheelchair due to a gunshot injury. Jasmine's rituals of seduction please Bud. She cannot help but remember the times when he was vital and impulsive, and she is filled with love for that man as well as the one in front of her now.

Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 Analysis

The author's style utilizes the first person narrative voice and moves back and forth in the history of Jasmine's life. Because the events are not chronological, it can be confusing until all the characters and their locations are introduced and their importance in Jasmine's life can be understood.

The author writes in a style of short sentences and paragraphs, which bring to mind the halting speech patterns of people who have learned English as a second language. Jasmine has much depth due to the spirituality of her childhood in India, and she adapts well to the farming lifestyle of Iowa. There is an element of foreshadowing in the beginning of the book, as the astrologer predicts Jasmine's widowhood and eviction from India. The story will unfold to reveal the truthfulness of the predictions.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Summary

Jasmine was born in a hut in Hasnapur, Punjab, India, in a bountiful harvest year, and had she been a boy there would have been much celebrating. Girl children are burdens to peasant farmers in this country, and many families end up penniless from providing dowries. Jasmine grows up to be a smart girl and goes to school for six years, which is three years longer than her sisters are allowed to attend.

Jasmine's village consists of farming people. This is different from the Lahore area, where her family lived before the Partition Riots drove people away. A few families have some modern conveniences, but mostly the families exist on grains and live in mud huts. Jasmine has had the opportunity to study some hygiene in school and tries to implement some procedures to sterilize the family's water supply.

Dida, Jasmine's paternal grandmother, is always looking for a suitable husband for Jasmine and thinks she has found one. He is a widower who needs a wife to look after his children. Jasmine does not want to marry this man, and she argues with Dida over the issue. Jasmine's mother, Mataji, allows Jasmine to defy Dida's wishes for the time being.

Jasmine's teacher, Masterji, comes to the house one day to discuss Jasmine's future with Pitaji, Jasmine's father. Jasmine admits that she plans to become a doctor and open a clinic like the one she has seen in the neighboring town, a revelation that surprises both men, but for completely different reasons.

Hygiene is a big issue in the village, and only a few people have the luxury of toilets in their courtyards. Jasmine joins the village women each morning as they gather in local fields for their morning toilet routines. Jasmine's mother is too refined for this and stays home, but Jasmine enjoys being included in the morning ritual.

One morning, a rabid jackal approaches the women in the field, and Jasmine attacks it with a staff. The other women drag the animal's body to the river. Grateful that her life is saved, Jasmine becomes a heroine for the morning, but Dida comments that God does not think Jasmine is ready for salvation yet.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

The Partition Riots Jasmine mentions in this section were attempts to divide the province of Punjab into two separate countries, India and Pakistan. The division also separated two religious groups: the Muslims and the Hindu. This meant that families like Jasmine's were uprooted from relatively comfortable lives to live as peasants.

In particular, Jasmine's father suffers the loss of his home and his comfortable lifestyle. He still tries to maintain some semblance of a more refined life, He dresses in the clothes he was able to bring with him, and he relaxes in a hammock to recall brighter days.

Jasmine exhibits an independent spirit early in her life, and her education allows her to plan for unusual options. She does not want to marry, and she plans to become a doctor. Ironically, Mataji encourages Jasmine in her dreams, although Mataji herself was never allowed that option as a Punjab woman. Perhaps Mataji sees the life that Jasmine would have if she married a man who would require no dowry. Jasmine's potential husbands may be less than savory.

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Summary

Pitaji dies the next spring when he is unexpectedly gored by a bull on his way to a friend's home. Mataji is so grief stricken that she attempts to throw herself on Pitaji's funeral pyre, but her children pull her back. Mataji's grief is so overwhelming that she shaves her head and sits in a corner while Jasmine tries to spoon-feed rice water to her mother.

The novel springs forward to a conversation Jasmine has with a friend in New York. Jasmine tries to explain the concept of reincarnation and the individual purpose assigned to each life. The friend chides Jasmine for being too modern for such beliefs, and Jasmine feels trapped between two cultures and two worlds.

Because of Pitaji's death, Jasmine's two brothers must return from their technical training schools in the city in order to care for the family. The brothers invite many of their friends to the home for social events, with the intent of finding a suitable husband for Jasmine. Most of the men are repulsive to Jasmine, until one day she hears the voice of a new man outside the house. She knows before seeing him that this is the man she will marry.

After a courtship of only two weeks, Jasmine marries Prakash, an intelligent, sensitive young man who is training to be an engineer. Prakash has goals to study in America, and he receives letters from a former teacher in New York who wants Prakash to come and take advantage of the abundant life in America. Jasmine's concern is that she is not pregnant yet, and Prakash lectures her about being too provincial. He says that she is capable of doing more than just being a mother. Jasmine is only fifteen and has plenty of time to become a mother.

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

The theme of rebirth is important in this section of the novel and will be repeated as the story continues to unfold. The Hindu belief of reincarnation is explained through Jasmine's conversation with a friend, as Jasmine tries to explain the rationalization of her father's life. God has a purpose for each person and sends that person to earth. When the appointed task is completed, that person is recalled to God. A designated task could be as simple as moving a flowerpot from one table to another or as significant as introducing one person to another. It is not up to human beings to ask or question the individual's objective because the human mind cannot comprehend God's overwhelming wisdom.

Jasmine has begun her own rebirth in a way, as she suffers the death of her father and moves from his home to the home of her husband. Her life may soon take her even further away. Her husband is considering moving to New York with his new wife to start

a different life for both of them. Even Jasmine's name is new in this new life, as her husband names her Jasmine after the flower, discarding her tribal name, Jyoti.

Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17

Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 Summary

Jasmine and Prakash live in a small apartment in the city, where Prakash works long hours at two jobs. At home, Prakash studies for his new career in electronics, and he and Jasmine plan for their life as co-owners of an electronics store one day. Prakash reveals that he has been accepted in a trade school in Tampa, Florida, and he shows Jasmine the brochures of the Indian students standing in front of palm trees. Jasmine is not old enough to get a visa yet, so Prakash plans to work for a few years and then send for Jasmine.

One evening, shortly before Prakash is to depart for the United States, he and Jasmine visit a shop where Jasmine is to select some material for a new sari. With the fabric draped over her shoulder, Jasmine looks at her reflection in the mirror. She also sees some of the young men from a local gang. One of the men lays a music box at the door of the shop, and then all the men run away. Jasmine recalls how the explosion seemed to occur in slow motion, as she remembers Prakash dying in her arms as a result of wounds inflicted by the bomb.

Jasmine's life seems to be over, and her fate is now that of a widow living with her own widowed mother. Jasmine feels overwhelmed by the stench of death. She feels as if she is death incarnate, and she remembers the astrologer's prediction of widowhood all those years ago. Eventually, Jasmine's grief subsides enough that she can begin to think about her future, which includes going to America to visit the school where Prakash would have studied. Jasmine will use the money that Prakash had set aside for his own trip. She contacts Prakash's friend in New York to help arrange passage for her.

Jasmine describes the trip to America as a zigzag on black market planes and ships, where no passenger roster is kept and there are no amenities. Over the course of her journey, Jasmine travels to three different continents, always with one purpose in mind: to see Tampa, Florida, so that Prakash's dream will not have been in vain.

On the last leg of the journey, Jasmine stows away in the belly of a ship with a few other castaways, and she catches the eye of the ship's captain, a deformed man named Half-Face. Taking advantage of Jasmine's exhaustion and lack of knowledge, Half-Face befriends Jasmine on her first night in America with an ulterior motive. Half-Face rapes Jasmine in a deserted hotel room that serves as the office for his degenerate work.

Thinking her life is over after this brutal attack, Jasmine finds the courage to kill Half-Face by stabbing him repeatedly. She resigns herself to her fate. After cleaning up and wiping any fingerprints, Jasmine burns her suitcase and its contents. She begins walking down a deserted road to her new life in America.

Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 Analysis

Jasmine experiences many new lives on the way to America, each one providing some form of physical or spiritual education. The Hindu belief of reincarnation provides some solace to the grieving Jasmine after the death of Prakash, and Jasmine is determined to keep his dream of going to America alive by making the trip herself.

Jasmine remembers the astrologer's prediction about widowhood, and she wants to leave India where people live by ancient customs and rituals. It seems fitting that the shank of her trip should occur on the water, as she is ridding herself of Hindu restrictions and is baptized into a brand new life and culture.

Internally, Jasmine is learning how to exert her own free will, something that is denied to women in India. Something inside Jasmine pushes her on and makes her willing to let go of restrictions on her life. Jasmine will benefit from her new outlook as well as suffer some consequences. At least the choices will be her own. This liberating position coincides with the Women's Liberation Movement occurring in the United States at the time that Jasmine arrives, so she will be perfectly poised for even more enlightening experiences. The rape that occurs at the end of this section, and the murder of Half-Face, show the hardships and brutality that Jasmine will need to overcome. It also symbolizes her ability to fight back against the forces of abuse and oppression.

Chapters 18, 19 and 20

Chapters 18, 19 and 20 Summary

This section begins with Jasmine in present-day Iowa, and she remembers the day she met Dr. Mary Webb, a professor of sociology who lives in the area. Dr. Webb has asked Jasmine to attend a meeting at the University Club in Dalton, Iowa. Jasmine is both surprised and pleased at the invitation. Clearly, Dr. Webb is an accomplished person, and Jasmine is just a Punjab girl from a small village. When Jasmine arrives at the meeting, Dr. Webb shares that the purpose of the gathering is to channel past lives each of the group members has experienced.

Jasmine is a bit taken aback at first, but Dr. Webb thinks Jasmine is a natural for the group because of the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Eventually, Jasmine admits to having flashbacks of previous lives every once in awhile. As the two women continue talking, Dr. Webb reveals that the past life with whom she has the most vibrant connection is an aboriginal man from Australia.

According to Dr. Webb, she was this native warrior in a past life. She can name the children she had and can almost feel her right arm extend into the shape of a boomerang at times. Dr. Webb also has an overwhelming craving for kangaroo meat but has not been able to acquire any in Iowa.

Still speaking in an Australian dialect, Dr. Webb tells Jasmine about Ma Leela. Ma Leela is the group leader, and her spirit assumed the physical body of a dead woman from Alberta, Canada. Apparently, the Canadian woman attempted suicide, and Ma Leela, still in spirit form, made the transition to the woman's body. The doctors thought they had revived the Canadian woman, but in actuality Ma Leela now inhabits the body.

Jasmine is perplexed by Dr. Webb's story. She considers the possibility that each soul is eternal and cannot be destroyed by human forces such as fire and water. The spirit then would continue indefinitely until God tells it to stop. Jasmine muses about her own transitions from Jyoti to Jasmine, and now to Jane Ripplemeyer. Jasmine determines that anything is possible as she looks out over the other souls at the University Club luncheon.

The book now reverts back to the day that Jasmine sets out on foot on her first day in Florida. Penniless, starving and exhausted, Jasmine is rescued by the side of a road by a woman named Lillian Gordon. Lillian takes Jasmine home with her so that Jasmine may recover. Lillian provides not only food and clothing but also lessons in how to look and act like an American. Several other immigrant girls in the house are also under Lillian's care. Lillian instructs the girls in proper housecleaning methods so that they can find work as domestics and at least have some form of employment in their new country.

Jasmine, whom Lillian calls Jazzy, appears to have the skills and aptitude for jobs other than domestic work. Lillian suggests that Jasmine go to New York. Jasmine concludes her training at the end of a week. Lillian gives her a small sum of money and the Manhattan address of her own daughter, so that Jasmine can contact her if she is ever in trouble.

Jasmine receives a small amount of money and a pair of slippers every Christmas from Lillian, who sends the gifts via her daughter, Kate Gordon-Feldstein, a photographer in New York. Eventually the authorities discover Lillian's operation. Jasmine cannot testify in her dear friend's defense, for fear that her alien status may be discovered.

A few years later, Kate writes to Jasmine in Iowa that Lillian's Florida home has been sold to be converted into a vacation destination. Also included in the real estate deal is an abandoned neighboring hotel, and Jasmine wonders if it is the one where Half Face raped her on her first night in America. Jasmine is in constant awe of the fluidity of American transformations.

As Jasmine remembers her first day in New York, she cringes from the sensations of the street beggars clawing at her and calling her foul names when she denies requests for money. Eventually, Jasmine finds her way to the home of Devinder Vadhera, Prakash's beloved professor, who goes by the name of Dave now that he is living in America. Dave and his young Hindu wife, Nirmala, welcome Jasmine into their home, and Jasmine is glad to be among people who have the same culture and language.

Jasmine soon tires of the repressive life with Dave and Nirmala and the extended family who live in the small apartment. Because of her alien status, Jasmine is not able to leave the apartment and has no way to earn an income. She is essentially trapped in a lifestyle like the one she left in India. The only difference is that here in New York there are modern conveniences like light, heat and videos.

One day, Dave's ailing father severely cuts his head on the bathtub faucet, and Jasmine needs to contact Dave in order to get the old man some medical care. There are no phone numbers at the apartment for Dave's work, so Jasmine calls all the local colleges to no avail. There is no one named Dave Vadhera working at the schools.

In desperation, Jasmine leaves the apartment to find Nirmala at her job at a sari shop. Nirmala can provide only a street address, which leads Jasmine to a dingy little shop where she finds Dave working as an importer of human hair. Apparently in America there is a great market for the hair of Indian women for wigs and other scientific and practical purposes. Dave in not a professor at all, and Jasmine is disappointed for Prakash, too, who revered this man.

Jasmine understands that people need to do what they need to do in order to survive, but her own well being is severely challenged by living in her current circumstances. Imprisonment in this apartment is not the lifestyle she had envisioned, and one day her frustration overwhelms her. Dave catches Jasmine is an outburst of weeping.

Jasmine needs documentation to work and move about freely in this country, but the papers will cost three thousand dollars, an outlandish sum that even Jasmine's brothers could not provide. Dave offers to put up the money for processing the papers in exchange for Jasmine's silence about his secret, that he is not a university professor.

Chapters 18, 19 and 20 Analysis

The author continues to use the technique of reverting back in time to explain Jasmine's story, as her memories rush back when triggered by something in the present. Now that some of the characters have been established, it is easier to understand the plot told in this style. The flashback technique provides information without the need for dialogue and efficiently fills in the blanks of Jasmine's history. It makes thematic connections between Jasmine's past and her present.

The style also mirrors the overriding theme of transformation, which Jasmine experiences physically and which is explored from the spiritual perspective in the Hindu beliefs. Jasmine admits to Dr. Webb that she has memories of past lives, but she does not explain what those memories are. In direct contrast, the verbose Dr. Webb can remember intimate details of an aboriginal life and can still channel the dialect she spoke. The doctor assumes that Jasmine is a kindred spirit because of Jasmine's Hindu heritage. Jasmine never elaborates, though, and it is not clear whether Jasmine's comments about past life memories refers to her changes in geography or if she truly has lived as other people in other times.

Jasmine's independent spirit is evident to Lillian Gordon almost immediately when Jasmine is rescued in Florida. This same spirit is the source of Jasmine's discontent while living with Dave and Nirmala and will propel her out of that restrictive environment. Jasmine's strong sense of herself and her exhibition of free will conflict with the strict Hindu teachings in which she was raised. This in itself is another form of life transformation Jasmine experiences, in addition to the more obvious ones of death and geography.

Chapters 21, 22 and 23

Chapters 21, 22 and 23 Summary

Jasmine looks in on Du, who is tinkering with another one of his many electronic projects in his bedroom. Having been orphaned in Vietnam, Du has had no training in electronics, but he possesses a natural ability to mend scavenged items. There is a bond between Jasmine and Du based on their respective survival skills, and for the first time Jasmine tells her son that she has killed a man. Du barely acknowledges this fact because he himself has killed many men in his short life.

Bud is in Des Moines this weekend for another banking industry convention, where he has been asked to speak. Jasmine can tell that something has unnerved Bud when he calls this evening, because there is a tremor in his voice. Bud tells Jasmine that a radical threatened him after the speech tonight. This incident is part of the conflict raging between financiers and landowners in Iowa. Bud's warning to Jasmine to be careful at home is unsettling, but Jasmine has survived many incidents filled with danger.

Jasmine's memories now take her back to her first day in New York, at the apartment of Lillian's daughter, Kate, who is a photographer. Kate and her husband live in a loft apartment that Jasmine notes could hold several Punjab families. The spaciousness and the glorious sight of sunlight flooding in through two walls of windows fills Jasmine once more with joy and hope that anything is possible in America.

Kate tells Jasmine about Taylor and Wylie Hayes, the couple who will soon employ Jasmine as a nanny for their child, Duff. Taylor is a professor, and Wylie works for a publishing company. They live in an apartment across from Barnard College in New York. The Hayes' daughter, Duff, is a small intelligent girl whom Taylor and Wylie adopted from an unwed girl in Iowa.

The Hayes couple is extremely gracious and thrilled to have Jasmine in their home. They do not require any references other than Lillian Gordon's word. Before long, Jasmine is acclimated to the household, and Duff begins calling Jasmine Day Mummy. Wylie is perplexed about how to handle this new situation. She wants Jasmine and Duff to be close and build a bond, but she also resents that Jasmine may be taking over the mother's role.

Wylie is also jealous of the way Taylor seems to have grown so fond of Jasmine. One day, Wylie reveals to Jasmine that she herself has fallen in love with another man named Stuart and plans to leave Taylor. Wylie tells Jasmine that Taylor is in love with her and has been from the day the girl entered their home, two years ago.

When Taylor leaves to live with Stuart, Jasmine, Taylor and Duff evolve into a new family unit. Taylor hopes that Jasmine will continue to stay. One day during an excursion

to the park, Jasmine spots a hotdog vendor who stares at Jasmine very intently. Duff returns from purchasing a hot dog and says that the vendor has asked if Jasmine is Duff's mommy. Fear clutches Jasmine's body, and she can barely walk away from the sight. Taylor needs to support her.

Prompted by Taylor's pleas as to the source of Jasmine's distress, Jasmine reveals that the hot dog vendor is the man who killed her husband, Prakash. Now that the man knows where Jasmine is, her life is in danger. Taylor offers to move the family to another part of New York for Jasmine's security, but Jasmine will never be safe as long as this murderer knows she is in New York. Jasmine tells Taylor that she will move to Iowa because it sounds safe. To Taylor, Iowa just sounds flat.

Chapters 21, 22 and 23 Analysis

As Jasmine matures into an Iowa housewife and mother, she realizes that not everything in America is hopeful and positive. It is still not clear how Bud received his paralyzing injury, but his terror from the Des Moines hotel incident provides a clue that an overwhelming fears remains with him. Jasmine and Du each reveal that they have committed murder in their lives. This fact binds them, representing their bleak existences before they became a family.

The author's use of flashbacks continues to mirror the pace of Jasmine's fragmented life. The plot moves from Iowa back to Jasmine's time in New York, where she experiences things she had never before imagined. Amazingly, Jasmine adapts well to metropolitan life, which is vastly different from the village life she left not so long ago.

There are universal challenges that Jasmine encounters that would probably have entered her life no matter where she lived, specifically the abundant attention from men who are drawn to Jasmine's exotic beauty. Jasmine notes repeated abuse and rapes that have occurred throughout her life, although she does not provide specifics. By the time Jasmine is living in New York, she is still accosted and propositioned by men with inappropriate overtures, but Jasmine is savvier now and can thwart any negative attentions.

Jasmine's beauty and pleasing demeanor have drawn Taylor to her as well. Before any significant bond can be forged, Jasmine's life is once again jolted out of its pattern. She sees her husband's murderer from India, and the murderer recognizes Jasmine. Jasmine has come very close to achieving security with Taylor and Duff, but that security is elusive. She is no longer safe in New York City.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Jasmine recalls the day that Bud is shot by a farmer named Harlan Kroener, and she speculates how things could be different if she had reacted more appropriately. The fateful day is December 23, and Jasmine has been in Iowa a little over a year. Bank loans are hard to come by because the bad economy has caused so many defaults. Bud's relationships with the farmers have been strained, since he holds their futures in his decisions on loans. Harlan Kroener is a long-time acquaintance of Bud's, but he can no longer keep his farm operating without more funds. Bud has denied him a loan.

Jasmine remembers Harold knocking at the front door. She sees the rifle in his hand, but that is not odd for a farmer in Iowa. Harold comments on the festive and cozy atmosphere in Bud and Jasmine's home. He wants Bud to accompany him to his own home, where the situation is bleak. Bud agrees to go with Harold, leans over to kiss Jasmine goodbye and whispers in her ear that Harold is going to shoot him. Jasmine cannot understand what he has said, and Bud walks out the door for the last time.

Harold has parked his truck down the road, so he and Bud must walk a bit to reach it. When they get to the truck, Harold shoots Bud twice in the back. He then turns the gun on himself, committing suicide. Jasmine is wracked with grief for Bud's paralysis. She chastises herself for her own role, for not being more proactive and understanding what Bud needed from her in those moments before he left the house with Harold.

To make a difficult situation even more trying, Bud's first wife, Karin, begins to stalk Jasmine. Eventually, Karin confronts Jasmine at a crafts fair and tells Jasmine that she is trying to forgive the young woman for taking Bud away from her. Jasmine does not understand, because Bud and Karin are divorced and Bud's lifestyle has been diminished due to the resulting financial situation. Jasmine's only interest in Bud is love. She is not driven by material things, as Karin seems to claim. More and more, Jasmine understands that there is nothing flat about being in Iowa.

One day, Jasmine receives a postcard from Taylor, telling her that he and Duff are on their way to Iowa to see her. Duff remembers Jasmine with fondness, and Taylor hopes to rekindle the budding relationship initiated in New York. Jasmine hangs the postcard on the refrigerator door, and Du comments on the picture of a woman who is known for being a revolutionary who lived among strangers. Du seems pleased with the irony of the image and wonders if Jasmine is going to leave. He hopes that she will stay.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Jasmine marvels at the concept of conflict and how it seems to follow her and take different shapes. Never in her life did she imagine that she would enter into arguments with a woman like Bud's ex-wife, Karin. This type of situation never happens in the

village where she grew up. Jasmine's naivety can be charming but also disastrous, as evidenced by the shooting incident where Bud is severely wounded and Harold dies.

In hindsight, Jasmine thinks about seeing Harold on her doorstep on that awful day in December and chastises herself for not seeing the signs of desperation and imminent tragedy. Having encountered so much tragedy and violence in her life, Jasmine wonders about her instincts. She rationalizes that she thought Iowa was safe, and it did not occur to her that a wife's role in this country is to watch out for assassins.

Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

Bud is at the office tonight meeting with the state banking inspectors during one of their routine visits. Bud used to enjoy these meetings, but the issue of farm loans is so explosive these days that the discussion of each loan wears on Bud. Jasmine is holding dinner until Bud arrives home, because a good Punjabi wife never eats before her husband does.

Jasmine thinks about the reports from Du's school that Du seems to be doing well considering everything. Jasmine wants to scream that Du has lived through horrors and deprivations that none of these people can even imagine. She wonders what the school officials would think if they really knew the obstacles that Du has surmounted.

A phone call interrupts Jasmine's thoughts. It is Darrel, who insinuates that he is in a desperate state of mind. Jasmine rushes over to Darrel's farm. As Jasmine walks in the back door, she can smell the spices of her homeland and realizes that Darrel has prepared a meal for the two of them. Darrel is desperate to be relieved of the burden of the farm. In this state of mind, he pleads with Jasmine to leave Bud and run away with him to New Mexico, where he can open a Radio Shack store and they can be happy.

Jasmine warns Darrel that he is going too far and that leaving Bud is not an option for her. She begs him to please stop his insane ranting. Jasmine leaves in a hurry, mindful that there is a shotgun in Darrel's house, too. She pulls out of the driveway as if nothing has happened. Upon arriving home, Jasmine calls Karin, who runs the mental health crisis hotline. She explains the experience at Darrel's house. Jasmine and Karin make plans to return to Darrel's to investigate the situation further.

In the meantime, Jasmine realizes that a strange man is sitting in her living room speaking to Du. This stranger is Vietnamese like Du, and Jasmine cannot understand what the two are saying. Jasmine's first thought is that this flashily dressed man is a drug dealer, but the man's fine manners sway her from her first assumption.

After the man leaves, Du reveals that the man is a friend of his from the refugee camp. He has brought Du information about Du's only remaining sister, who now lives in Los Angeles. Du has decided to move to Los Angeles to be with his sister. He thanks Jasmine for everything she and Bud have done for him. Even though Jasmine and Bud have been good parents, Du feels a longing to be with his sister and with people of Vietnamese heritage. The stranger returns a short while later to pick up Du for the trip to Los Angeles, and with a kiss to his adopted mother, Du steps out the front door and into a new life with people who are more like him.

Jasmine sits in Du's room for awhile and muses over the things that the boy has collected over the years he has lived there. She speculates on the desperation that

makes a person hold onto anything and everything, when having nothing is a not-too-distant memory. Jasmine also finds a bankbook, indicating that Du has accumulated two thousand dollars for his trip. This gives Jasmine a little bit of comfort, but she realizes it would hurt Bud to know that the bank is one from another town.

When Karin arrives, she lingers in Jasmine's living room, aimlessly touching the things that are Bud's life now. She asks Jasmine about Bud's physical status after the shooting. Jasmine is cordial and has empathy for Karin, who still loves Bud but is no longer in a position to do anything about it.

Arriving at Darrel's farm, Jasmine and Karin see Darrel walking the rafters in his hog barn, preparing to do some repairs. Jasmine thinks that Darrel's earlier behavior must have been a fluke, because a distraught or drunken man could not navigate the rafters as facilely as Darrel is. The two women offer help to Darrel, whose only request is that somebody get Bud to understand how badly Darrel needs a bank loan.

When Bud finally comes home, Jasmine explains that Du has gone to California to see his sister. She implies that the trip is just a visit, not a long-term situation. In her heart, Jasmine knows that Du will not return, but she cannot bring herself to present that reality to Bud tonight.

Before retiring for the night, Bud and Jasmine scour their finances and determine that they can offer a loan to Darrel. They make plans to let him know in the morning. Darrel does not answer the phone the next morning, so Bud and Jasmine get in the car to drive over to Darrel's, thinking he must be working outside. Neither one of them is prepared for the sight of Darrel's body swinging from the rafters in the hog barn, where just last night he had so nimbly climbed.

Soon after, Du sends a letter, saying that he is not coming back and has dropped out of high school in order to work and help take care of his sister and her family. Jasmine also receives another postcard from Taylor that he and Duff are still trying to get to Iowa as soon as the custody issue is resolved.

With three more months to go in her pregnancy, Jasmine looks out her kitchen window and sees a strange car pull into the driveway. Initially, she fears that the passengers are immigration agents. Jasmine is relieved to see Duff and Taylor emerge. The old feelings she had toward both of them come rushing back at her, and she is overwhelmed with emotions.

Duff pleads with Taylor to ask the question they have driven all this way to ask. Taylor wants Jasmine to come with Duff and him to live in California, where unorthodox families are the norm. Jasmine thinks for a minute about Du being in California, and this thought buoys her spirit.

Jasmine protests that she cannot leave Bud because it is not proper, and Jasmine wants to do the right thing. Taylor urges her to pull down the shade in her head and block out any thoughts that prevent her from utilizing her own free will. Jasmine goes to the bedroom to call Karin and let her know of the situation now that Taylor has arrived.

Karin can tell by Jasmine's voice that Jasmine has already made up her mind to leave. Karin urges Jasmine not to blame herself, but Jasmine does not feel guilt, only relief. Jasmine realizes that her time with Bud, who called her Jane, is now over, and she leaves with Taylor and Duff, heading out into her next life.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

The theme of unending transformations and rebirths continues to the very end of the novel, with so many changes for all the characters. Bud's injuries, Darrel's suicide, Du's move and Jasmine's move to California are all points of transformation. Nothing is static in life. Everything is in a continual state of flux, and a person can choose to fight change or lean into it with hope and the anticipation of further knowledge.

The concept of transformation has particular significance for Jasmine because of her Hindi background, which allows her to have a different perspective on the endings and beginnings that humans experience. Jasmine learned early that God determines a human being's purpose on the earth and that circumstances are placed in someone's path by destiny.

It is easier for someone of Jasmine's religious background to understand this way of thinking than it is for people who subscribe to the dogmatic beliefs that surround Jasmine in Iowa. There is an element of karmic appeal for Jasmine in the fact that Taylor has entered into her life two separate times, and she is not going to let the opportunity to be with him slip away.

Contrary to what people in the farming community in Iowa will think about Jasmine's leaving Bud, Jasmine believes that she has served her purpose with him. She has made him happy, and she has helped provide a home for the orphaned Du. Now it is time for Jasmine to move on to another phase, to see what comes next and to hopefully do good and get further removed from tragedy and sadness.

Characters

Arvind-prar

Jasmine's brother co-inherits the responsibility of caring for his large family upon his father's death. He quits technical college in Jullundhar, sells the family farm, and opens a scooter repair shop. His political activism brings Jasmine in contact with her future first husband, as well as her husband's killer. He is given no character traits which distinguish him from his brother.

Astrologer

Under a banyan tree, he tells the young Jasmine's fate of widowhood and exile.

Sant Bhindranwale

Leader of all fanatics.

Dida

Jasmine's maternal grandmother aggressively supports traditional Indian values. Dida opposes Jasmine's efforts to extend her formal education. When Jasmine is 13, Dida unsuccessfully tries to arrange a marriage with a Ludhiana widower. In reference to Jasmine's bleak prospects, she says, "You're going to wear out your sandals getting rid of this one."

Stuart Eschelman

Stuart, an economist, has an affair with Wylie Hayes. Eventually, it breaks up their comfortable family, and allows Taylor to pursue Jasmine. He is tall, extremely thin, and pleasant.

Kate Gordon-Feldstein

The photographer daughter of Lillian Gordon, Kate puts Jasmine in touch with her friends Taylor and Wylie Hayes.

Lillian Gordon

The kind Quaker lady rescues Jasmine from a road just east of Fowlers Key, Florida. She lives in a wooden house on stilts and runs a sort of halfway house for refugee

women. Three Kanjobal women who lost their husbands and children to an army massacre stay in her daughter's old bedroom. She earns the description "facilitator" of ordinariness by coaching Jasmine on being American: the clothes, the walk, the attitude. Lillian continues to be Jasmine's benefactor, sending money and gifts long after her departure. She is arrested for harboring undocumented immigrants.

Hari-prar

Jasmine's brother co-inherits the responsibility of caring for his large family upon his father's death. He quits technical college in Jullundhar, sells the family farm and opens a scooter repair shop. His political activism brings Jasmine in contact with her future first husband, as well as his killer. He is given no character traits which distinguish him from his brother.

Duff Hayes

Duff is the adopted daughter of Taylor and Wylie. Jasmine is hired to be Duff's au pair. Through Duff, Jasmine learns about their Manhattan neighborhood. She sleeps with Duff at night. During this time, Jasmine, due in large part to her attachment to Duff, develops a sense of family. Duff's natural mother accepted the price of tuition at Iowa State University as a kind of adoption fee. Jasmine eventually moves to Iowa because she knows it as Duff's birthplace.

Taylor Hayes

Taylor, a Columbia University physics professor, falls in love with his au pair, Jasmine. When his wife Wylie leaves Taylor for another man, he expresses his love to Jasmine. Eventually he drives to Iowa and convinces her to go with him to California. He is in his early thirties, with crooked teeth and a blonde beard. He convincingly speaks to Jasmine of a person's ability to create change. His advice to Jasmine to pull down the imaginary shades and block out the evil world beyond is a recurring image.

Wylie Hayes

A tall, thin, serious woman, Wylie leaves her husband Taylor in favor of her lover, Stuart Eschelman. This creates an opportunity for Taylor to pursue Jasmine. In her early thirties, Wylie is a book editor for a Park Avenue publisher.

Mr. Jagtiani

Prakash's boss at Jagtiani and Son Electrical Goods. He forces Prakash to doctor the accounting books on his illegal income.

Karin

Bud's ex-wife remains in Iowa after her husband leaves her for Jasmine. She answers phones for a Suicide Hot Line, the existence of which shows the desperation and tension in dry farm communities like Baden. She lives in the house Bud built.

Harlan Kroener

Harlan expresses his sense of betrayal toward Bud with two rifle shots to the banker's back. His dramatic action represents the frustration, anger, and helplessness of the Baden farmers. He kills himself just after shooting Bud.

Don-jin Kwang

The artificial inseminator of Jasmine.

Orrin Lacey

An advisor to Bud, Orrin suggests ways to solve Darrel's problem.

Ma Leela

Mary Webb's thirty-six-year-old guru.

Carol Lutz

The Ripplemeyers' neighbor moved to California after her husband's death. When she returns to sell the farm after her son Darrel's death, she blames Bud for the tragedy.

Darrel Lutz

Darrel struggles to manage the 1,000-acre, 150- hog farm he inherited from his father Gene. Just twenty-three years old and alone, Darrel variably thinks about modernizing the farm and selling it off to a golf course developer. Bud, Darrel's neighbor, family friend, and the town's banker, appeals to his sense of tradition. Some community members, such as Bud, consider it almost sacrilegious to give up farm land for non-agricultural uses. Darrel, a shy young man, secretly longs for Jasmine. With an awkward presentation of poorly prepared Indian food, Darrel declares his love and lays out all his desperate plans. Jasmine rejects him, and shortly afterwards Darrel hangs himself to death above his hog pit. The hogs chew his feet to stumps.

Gene Lutz

The 300-pound father of Darrel is dead prior to the start of the action. Gene choked to death on a piece of Mexican food one year before the novel begins, during a vacation with his wife. His farm goes to his son Darrel.

Masterji

An elderly teacher in Hasnpur, Masterji advocates Jasmine's continued education. He loves America, and has a nephew in California. A gang of boys humiliate and kill Masterji in front of his school children.

Mataji

Jasmine's mother, she begs Pitaji to let their daughter study English books. Her pleas help Jasmine stay in school six years, as compared to the customary three for girls.

Nirmala

Professorji's nineteen-year-old wife, who works in a sari store.

Pitaji

Jasmine's father, Pitaji remains nostalgic for Lahore, the village in which his family lived before the Partition Riots, right up until his death. He lived in relative prosperity in Lahore before being forced to move Hasnapur. He gets gored from behind by a bull in a country lane.

Potatoes-babu

Vimla's father.

Bud Ripplemeyer

Bud hires Jasmine to work in his bank, a family business started by his father, and soon after leaves his wife to be with her. Bud is the pillar of Baden, Iowa, a small farm town experiencing drought. He wields the power to loan farmers money. As a result, he creates some resentment, particularly from Harlan Kroener, who cripples him with two rifle shots in the back. Bud wants Jasmine to marry him, especially now that she carries their unborn child. He is twice Jasmine's age, and an avid Cardinal's baseball fan.

Mother Ripplemeyer

The seventy-six-year-old gets Jasmine a job at her son Bud's bank. Bud is one of her nine kids. Jasmine compares Mother Ripplemeyer favorably with Lillian Gordon as a representation of kindness.

Vern Ripplemeyer

Vern, Bud's father, is dead before the start of the novel.

Scott

Du's friend.

Vancouver Sing

A land prospector, Vancouver Sing buys Jasmine's family farm in Hasnpur and some of the neighbors' land as well. He attended agriculture school in Canada. It is rumored, by the village's political activists, that his newly acquired land is being used as a haven for drug pushers and gunmen.

Mr. Skola

Du's teacher.

Sukhwinder

A political extremist, Sukhwinder, or Sukkhi, kills Prakash in an Indian sari shop. He turns up later in a Manhattan park as a hot dog vender. His threatening presence drives Jasmine away from an idyllic, American life, to Iowa.

Du Thien

The adopted Vietnamese son of Jasmine and Bud, Du came from a large family in Saigon. He survived refugee camp, and therefore shares with Jasmine memories of torture, violence and a fight for life. Jasmine and Bud got Du when he was fourteen, three years prior to the start of the novel. He is called Yogi in school. Du hoards things and experiments with electronics. He feels unloved by Bud. As the novel ends, Du leaves Iowa to find his only living sister, the one who fed him live worms and lizards and crabs to keep him alive in the detention camp.

Professorji Devinder Vadhera

Prakash's benefactor and teacher during first year of technical school, Professorji lodges Jasmine during her five months in Flushing, New York. Professorji fueled Prakash's dreams of American riches. He lent Prakash money to bolster his efforts at procuring an education. He preceded Prakash to America, and in his letters back to India exaggerated the vast potential for riches and employment in the country. Professorji poses as a professor at Queen's College, but really works as an importer and sorter of human hair.

Jasmine Vijh

Jyoti is a beautiful, smart, dowryless girl born eighteen years after the Partition Riots in a makeshift birthing hut in Hasnapur, Jullundhar District, Punjab, India. She is the fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children. An astrologer tells the young Jasmine's fate of widowhood and alienation, and both predictions come true. She attends school twice as long as most Indian girls, and impresses her teachers with her intelligence. Jyoti's name and identity change and change. Her grandma names her Jyoti, meaning "light." Prakash, her Indian husband killed by a terrorist bomb, calls her Jasmine. Lillian Gordan calls her Jazzy, Taylor names her Jase, and Bud Ripplemeyer gives her the moniker Jane. Jasmine originally shares Prakash's dream of an American life of prosperity. After his murder, she travels abroad to burn herself on his pyre. Upon landing in America, Half-Face, the captain of the boat that carried her over, rapes her. She then kills him. Lillian Gordan saves Jasmine, coaches her, and sends her to Flushing, New York. There, she spends five oppressive months with Professorji, an Indian immigrant, and his family. From there, she goes to Manhattan to be Duff's au pair. She falls in love with her employer, Taylor, who eventually entices her to run away to California with him. In Iowa, she is Bud's lover Jane, a caregiver to a crippled man. She becomes pregnant through artificial insemination. Du, their adopted teenaged child, also flees to California.

Jyoti Vijh

See Jasmine Vijh

Prakash Vijh

Prakash marries Jasmine two weeks after they first meet. He is twenty-four and she fifteen at the time. She had already fallen in love with his voice, overheard during a conversation with her brothers. She is called Jyoti until Prakash gives her a new name and identity: Jasmine. Prakash lost his parents when he was ten. A modern man, Prakash rents a two-bedroom apartment rather than live with his family. He studies engineering and works several demeaning jobs in pursuit of his dream to move to America. Just prior to leaving India to attend Florida's International Institute of

Technology, Prakash is killed by a bomb. Sukhwinder, a Sikh extremist, probably intended the bomb for Jasmine. With Prakash, so too die Jasmine's American dreams.

Vimla

Jasmine's rich childhood friend Vimla has the fanciest wedding in their village. Her husband dies of typhoid when she is twenty-one, and a year later she burns herself to death. Her suicide, or sati, illustrates the culture's gender politics: a widow's future seems endlessly gloomy.

Dr. Mary Webb

Part of a group of women who believe in past lives. In one past life, she was a black Australian aborigine.

Themes

Rebirth

The major theme of rebirth plays out literally and figuratively in *Jasmine*. In literal language, every word is truthful, whereas figurative language is used for a certain effect. Figurative language might be exaggerated, or embellished, or used to help access otherwise difficult-to-grasp concepts. The opening line, "Lifetimes ago," hints at all the transformations the title character has undergone. Mukherjee consistently highlights this theme, making authorial connections between the fictional action and its significance as a subject under investigation. The narrator says, "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself." And, "I picked [Sam] up and held him. Truly I had been reborn."

Jasmine undergoes life transformations, or metaphorical rebirths. Dr. Mary Webb shares with Jasmine her belief in literal rebirth, or reincarnation. Mary claims to have been a black Australian aborigine in a past life. When channeling this past life, she speaks tribal languages. Ma Leela, Mary's guru, inhabits a battered, suicidal Canadian wife's body. Mary has presumably confided in Jasmine because she is Hindu. Mary understands that Hindus keep revisiting the world. Jasmine admits that, "yes, I am sure that I have been reborn several times, and that yes, some lives I can recall vividly."

This further blurs the distinction between the figurative and the literal. Jasmine never gets into details of these rebirths. When Jasmine, the narrator, considers the concept of an eternal soul, she thinks of distinct stages of her present twentyfour- year-old-life: her youth in Hasnpur, her blissful time in Manhattan, her life in Baden, Iowa. Are these the past lives she means to confide to Mary Webb?

This melding of literal and figurative underlines the importance of the metaphors. It's as if Mukherjee means to say that the experience of a person's self-reinvention is so powerful as to be real.

Identity

Tied to the theme of rebirth is the theme of identity. This is the most persistent motif in *Jasmine*, infiltrating every aspect of the story. The most obvious manifestation of identity comes in the title character's name.

When Jyoti marries Prakash, a modern Indian man, she becomes Jasmine. Lillian Gordon calls her Jazzy, Taylor names her Jase, and Bud Ripplemeyer gives her the name Jane. With each name comes a new identity, a rebirth of sorts, replete with new personality traits.

The narrator says, "I shuttled between two identities." Other characters, and Jasmine herself, even speak of these splinter personalities in the third person, as if they really did exist independently. She says, "Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine."

Prakash says, "You are Jasmine now. You can't jump into wells." Prakash characterizes Jyoti as feudal. Prakash wants Jasmine to call him by his first name, rather than the pronoun used in traditional address between women and men. This identity helps create a semblance of equality between husband and wife in the male-dominated society.

Jasmine seems to like most the name Taylor gave her. "Jase was a woman who bought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants." Indeed, each of Jasmine's identities has distinct characteristics. "Jyoti would have saved. . .Jasmine lived for the future, for Vijh & Wife. Jase went to the movies and lived for today. . ."

The theme of identity also pertains to place. Jasmine's name, her identity, changes with each locale. The notable exception to this is Flushing, New York, where the narrator's name is never mentioned. Whereas Jasmine forged a distinctive identity in every other place, the Flushing apartment building filled with Punjabis did not represent significant change.

Free Will vs. Predestination

Hinduism and Western notions of self-reliance oppose each other in this debate. Believers in predestination accept the idea that a higher power designs all events. Believers in free will think that each person has the power to change the course of events. In the opening chapter, the astrologer accurately predicts Jasmine's fate of widowhood and exile. This seems to support predestination, which is sometimes loosely referred to as fate. As the novel ends, however, Jasmine boldly decides to change her life, to exert free will.

Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing
indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me
re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who
floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove.

Jasmine's childhood is a time when she seeks to break free from her inherited circumstances. In one dramatic scene, Jasmine kills a mad dog with a staff. A Westerner would surely credit Jasmine for having saved her own life. Dida, however, knows God willed it to happen that way.

The scenes in which Jasmine's partners are assaulted heighten the debate. Prakash, an Indian, gets killed by a bomb. During the death scene, a voice shouts "The girl's alive. This is fate." Later, Dida claims that God, displeased with Prakash and Jasmine's modern ways, sent Sukkhi to murder him. Jasmine, even at this early stage of her development, shows an unsteady relationship to fate. She says, "if God sent Sukkhi to kill my husband, then I renounce God. I spit on God." Before Bud gets shot, he tries to communicate covertly his grave situation to Jasmine. But she doesn't understand that

Harlan Kroener is about to shoot her partner, and cannot process any of the signals. In retrospect, she realizes that her son Du or Bud's ex-wife Karin would surely have summoned the sheriff and halted the assault. In other words, an act of free will would have changed Bud's fate.

Jasmine clearly exerts free will in her decision to join Taylor and Duff on their trip to California. Earlier in the novel, Jasmine and Taylor disagree about that very topic. The narrator takes a humble position, though the question marks indicate that she leaves room for error. "The scale of Brahma is vast, as vast as space in the universe. Why shouldn't our lives be infinitesimal? Aren't all lives, viewed that way, equally small?" Taylor believes that Jasmine's take on the subject is a formula for "Total fatalism."

Gender and Sexual Politics

Sex and power are closely linked in Jasmine's life. As a Punjabi peasant woman, Jasmine would naturally have a servile relationship to men. She would be expected, in her homeland, to make herself useful to the male society. We see this even in her relationship to Prakash, a modern Indian man. There is never a thought that Jasmine will pursue an education, get work, and in that way help the couple realize their dreams. Rather, she plays a supporting role to Prakash's education and work. Jasmine carries this attitude with her to America, where she spends five months in Flushing living the life that Professorji plots for her. She even kisses his feet when he agrees to help her get a green card.

Jasmine says, "I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine. Taylor for Jase. Bud for Jane. Half-Face for Kali."

But Mukherjee depicts sex as being an act that somehow shifts the power balance. Prakash encourages a free exchange of ideas with Jasmine. He is nine years older, however, and always demonstrates a superiority in reasoning. Mukherjee juxtaposes a scene in which Jasmine is defeated intellectually with a scene of the couple in the throes of sex. Prakash says, "Jasmine. . .help me be a better person."

Taylor, another sensitive and liberal man, pays Jasmine's salary. He provides her food and shelter. Though he promotes equality, Jasmine cannot treat him as anything but a superior until the night when they consummate their relationship: "I am leading Taylor to a bed as wide as a subcontinent, I am laying my cheek on his warm cheek, I am closing his eyes with my caregiving fingertips, I am tucking the mosquito netting tight under his and Wylie's king-sized mattress." Here, again, Jasmine wrestles the power away from her male counterpart.

Bud, despite his disability, manages to be the head of the household. He manages, still, to be a leader in the community. When it comes to sex, however, Jasmine is entirely in charge. "It shames Bud that now, for sex, I must do all the work, all the moving, that I will always be on top."

With sex comes power and with power violence. Half-Face rapes Jasmine on her first day in America. He surely will rape her again. She might not survive his brutality. She kills him not out of revenge, it seems, but rather fear.

Alienation

The astrologer predicts Jasmine's exile. Throughout the novel, Mukherjee reminds the reader of Jasmine, the immigrant's, alienation in a foreign land. The most dramatic example of this is when Taylor sends her a postcard of a revolutionary's wife who ended up living among strangers.

Fear

Mukherjee returns again and again to the imaginary window shade Jasmine pulls down to close out the world: "Taylor the Rescuer is on his way here. He taught me to yank down that window shade."

Style

Setting

In Jasmine, the time, place, and culture of the action constantly shifts. The narrator tells of events that happened in the past (thus the use of the past tense), but not in chronological order. Some events happened in a distant past, some in a more recent past. The reader understands the order of events partly in relation to place. Events in Hasnpur, Punjab, happened during Jasmine's childhood, and references to Lahore indicate events that happened before her birth. When the setting shifts to Florida, the reader knows the action is set during Jasmine's first weeks in America. Scenes in Flushing, New York, precede scenes in Manhattan, just as scenes in Manhattan come before scenes in Iowa.

To what purpose does the narrative timeline shift back and forth? There is a sense of urgency in the Iowa scenes because Jasmine's life is moving forward, possibly in the direction of monumental change. The past events are critical to the reader's understanding of Jasmine's dilemma, but they are not as urgent. The narrative strategy, then, is to maintain this sense of urgency through the Iowa story line, while working in all the important people, places and things from prior times.

Foreshadowing

This device, used in literature to create expectations or set up an explanation of later developments, is used frequently throughout Jasmine. The astrologer's forecast of Jasmine's widowhood and exile operates in this way. It alerts the reader to future events. Viewed in hindsight, Prakash's death seems linked to this forecast. Were it not for foreshadowing, however, the reader would not make the connection between the theme of fate and the death.

In other instances, foreshadowing is used to build tension. Jasmine says, "That day I found the biggest staff ever, stuck in a wreath of thorny bush. I had to crawl on stony ground, and of course thorns bloodied my arms, but the moment my fist closed over the head of the staff, I felt a buzz of power." The strong imagery and language□the blood, the thorns, the fist□clue the reader into the importance of this scene. It insists that the reader wonder, "What's she going to do with that staff?" In due time, Jasmine kills the mad dog with the staff.

The knife Jasmine receives from Kingsland operates in the same way. There's an old adage that if a writer puts a gun into the story, then he or she better make the gun go off later. That's because a weapon, like the knife, signifies great danger and makes the reader expect future violence. In other words, it foreshadows danger. Jasmine's knife goes off, so to speak, when she kills Half-Face.

Symbolism

A symbol is something that suggests or stands for something else without losing its original identity. In literature, symbols combine their literal meaning with the suggestion of an abstract concept. Mukherjee uses symbols to help reader's understand a complex fabric of ideas.

Jasmine grasps a drowned dog in a stench-filled river and as she does it breaks in two. The reader accepts the literal action, the breaking apart of the dog. Given Mukherjee's treatment of the theme of identity, the reader must also associate the broken body with the splitting apart of life. The dog becomes two parts from one, just as Jyoti splits into Jasmine and Jyoti.

One symbol repeats itself throughout the novel. The narrator explains that when a pitcher breaks, the air inside is the same as outside. The author returns to this symbol when Vimla sets herself on .re, and in a discussion of Jasmine's father. "Lahore visionaries, Lahore women, Lahore ghazals: my father lived in a bunker. Fact is, there was a difference. My father was right to notice it, and to let it set a standard. But that pitcher is broken. It is the same air this side as that. He'll never see Lahore again and I never have. Only a fool would let it rule his life."

Another, more subtle, symbol is the small crack in the television set at the Flamingo Court hotel room. A reader detects symbols due to their placement and importance in the context of a scene. The highly charged rape scene, on Jasmine's first day in America, shows an ugly, imperfect aspect of the country. The television represents a medium of Hollywood fantasies and fables. The crack in the television, then, can be read as a crack in the American dream. That Jasmine's head causes the crack lends even more power to the symbol.

Irony

Irony is the use of words to express something different than and often opposite to their literal meaning. Mukherjee uses irony to show Jasmine's confusion with American culture.

Jasmine finds irony in the revolving door. "How could something be always open and at the same time always closed?" Also in the escalator. "How could something be always moving and always still?"

Metaphors

A metaphor is a figure of speech that expresses an idea through the image of another object. Metaphors suggest the essence of the first object by identifying it with certain qualities of the second object.

Sukkhi's appearance in the Manhattan park terrifies Jasmine. The image of him behind the hot dog cart stays with her even after she moves to Iowa. She says, "Sukkhi, the New York vendor, pushes his hot dog cart through my head." The reader does not think that there's an actual hot dog cart in Jasmine's head. Rather, the reader understands that Sukkhi, and all the violence and fear he represents, constantly invades Jasmine's thoughts.

A persistent metaphor derives from Taylor, "Just pull down the imaginary shade, he whispers, that's all you need to do." Again, Jasmine does not literally pull down a shade. Rather, she mentally blocks out all the outside infiuences that cause her fear.

Historical Context

The Partition Riots

Jasmine, the title character and narrator of Bharati Mukherjee's novel, was born 18 years after India's Partition Riots, or approximately 1965, in a rural village called Hasnpur. The time of her Indian birth would have been one of political and social upheaval. Two wars between Pakistan and India were fought that year.

The Partition Riots, which play such a key role in Jasmine's family's plight, were an attempt to create separate Muslim and Hindu States. More than 200,000 people died as Hindus .ed their homes in Pakistan and Muslims theirs in India. The province of Punjab was divided between India and the newly-created Pakistan. It became the home to many Hindus.

Jasmine's family, like many Hindus at the time, left behind relative riches in exchange for squalor during the Partition Riots. It was a time of violence and upheaval. Families abandoned not only material wealth, but established roots. The Muslim-Hindu religious divide continues to be a source of tension in India. Nearly 80 percent of Indians are Hindu, and Muslims constitute 11.4 percent of the population.

The Sikhs are a religious group that made up about two percent of India's population in 1991. After India gained independence in 1947, virtually all Sikhs wound up on the India side of Punjab. They have a social identity separate from other Punjabis. The new Punjabi-speaking Punjab, established in 1966, had a Sikh majority. In *Jasmine*, there would have been natural tensions between Sukhwinder, the Sikh extremist, and Prakash Vijh.

The Green Revolution

Punjab, like many Indian states, cherishes its own subnational identity, including its own language. A Punjabi would possess a much different cultural identity and characteristics than, say, a Bengali. India has some 46 officially listed mother tongues, seventeen of which have achieved the status of recognized languages. Of these, Hindi is spoken by the largest number of people, though not by a majority. Jasmine spoke Punjabi, Hindi, and, of course, English. The first two were natural to her culture and the other made possible, in part, by pre- Independence British influence and rule.

Punjab is a largely agricultural province, much like Iowa is to the United States. The majority of India's wheat is grown in Punjab. During Jasmine's childhood, rapid technological advancement was being made in the agricultural sector. She says, "When I was a child, born in a mud hut without water or electricity, the Green Revolution had just struck Punjab. Bicycles were giving way to scooters and cars, radios to television. I was the last to be born to that kind of submission, that kind of ignorance."

The green revolution of the late 1960s brought in some gains in productivity and made the country self-sufficient in food grains. Poverty, however, remains a chronic problem in India. As of 1991, approximately forty percent of the nation's 800 million people were classified as poor. Life expectancy was 54 years and the annual per capita income approximately $300 U.S., ranking India among the very poor countries of the world. Paradoxically, India also possesses a sophisticated scientific, technical, and financial infrastructure.

This paradox is embodied in Jasmine's family. Though they lived in a mud hut with no electricity or plumbing, her brothers attended technical college and later repaired scooters. Television, which first came to India in 1959, was becoming a common household item in Jasmine's Hasnpur.

Women's Position in Indian Society

India, during Jasmine's childhood and today, is a male-dominated society. Men hold economic and political power. Dowries have been officially banned, but in reality the practice of giving them remains a prevalent practice. The debate over the wisdom of dowries is discussed openly in newspapers and in government. A dowry is money or property brought by a bride to a husband at their wedding. Essentially, a dowry acts as an incentive package to entice prospective husbands. The better the dowry, the better the husband, at least in theory. Jasmine entered young womanhood in the late 1970s, when her family would have been expected to offer a dowry to her perspective husband. For somebody like Jasmine, whose little family money would go to the older four daughters, the future seemed grim.

A Hindu wife, indeed, saw her role as subservient to her husband. When her friend Vimla burns herself after her husband's death, she is following a now-illegal Hindu practice called sati, or suttee. The widow cremates herself on her husband's funeral pyre in order to fulfill her true role as wife. Jasmine intended to follow the same ritual after Prakash's death. She brought his suit to America in order to make a pyre.

She says, "I had not given even a day's survival in America a single thought. This was the place I had chosen to die, on the first day, if possible. I would land, find Tampa, walking there if necessary, find the college grounds and check it against the brochure photo. Under the very tree where two Indian boys and two Chinese girls were pictured, smiling, I had dreamed of arranging the suit and twigs. The vision of lying serenely on a bed of .re under palm trees in my white sari had motivated all the weeks of sleepless, half-starved passage, the numbed surrender to various men for reward of an orange, a blanket, a slice of cheese."

Divorce in India is becoming more common, but it is highly stigmatized.

Literary Heritage

Though not particularly interested in being known as an Indian writer, Mukherjee has placed herself in the long tradition of immigrant writers such as V. S. Naipaul and Bernard Malamud. She claims to have learned much from their fiction. She dedicated *Darkness* to her friend Malamud and even named one of her sons after him.

The predominant mode of American fiction in the 1980s was a minimalism exempli.ed by such writers as Raymond Carver. Minimalism used short sentences, understatement, and very little elaboration. Mukherjee positioned herself against this style, preferring instead a more elaborate one that allowed her to explore the layers of meaning and signifi- cance in the layered lives of her immigrant characters. She believes that a writer's status as immigrant gives her a great subject about which to write, and the subject deserves a great style.

Critical Overview

When Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* was published in 1989, it received wide critical praise in the mass media, but less kind treatment among academic scholars. Mukherjee had just had her greatest success in becoming the first naturalized American citizen to win the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. She won that award in 1988 for *The Middleman and Other Stories*.

The New York Times Book Review called *Jasmine* "One of the most suggestive novels we have about what it is to become American." At the year's end, it named the book one of the best of 1989. *The San Francisco Chronicle* and *The New York Times* praised the author's poetic writing style. *The Library Journal* said, "The novel has delicious humor and sexiness that make it a treat to read." The *USA Today* and others chose to focus more on its importance in raising awareness of both Indian and American cultures.

"A beautiful novel, poetic, exotic, perfectly controlled," *The San Francisco Chronicle* wrote.

In *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives, Jasmine* is seen in less generous terms. Debjani Banerjee, in an essay published in *Perspectives,* indicates that Mukherjee fails "to contextualize the historical and political events of India" and is unable to "perceive the complex workings of postcolonial and neocolonial forces." In this article, Banerjee articulates a backlash among South Asians to Mukherjee's work. She writes that Mukherjee represents Indians in such a way that implies "one must escape from the disillusionment and treachery of postcolonial history." In sum, Banerjee accuses Mukherjee of "catering to a First World audience while stilling mining the Third World for fictional material.

" Gurleen Grewal, another critic writing in *Perspectives,* accuses Mukherjee of perpetuating certain lies about the American Dream. She claims that Mukherjee overlooks the barriers of education, race, and history that would have prevented Jasmine, a Punjabi peasant girl, from becoming a liberated and articulate New World woman in a relatively short time. Grewal further indicts Mukherjee for perpetuating stereotypes of Indian-American speech patterns and other social and psychological aspects of immigration.

Still another *Perspectives* writer, Alpana Sharma Knippling, takes offense with Mukherjee's perspective on immigration. Knippling feels Mukherjee's views are skewed by her own upperclass background.

Other critics insist that Mukherjee is exploiting a fad of postcolonial literature. Despite these criticisms, Mukherjee is generally well regarded in literary America. Wendy Lesser, writing on the United States in 1997's *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing,* credits Mukherjee with a "talent for cultural mimicry that verges on ventriloquism." She does, however, point out that, "Mukherjee is known for her novels but her best writing is in her short stories."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

Evans is a novelist, journalist, and instructor of writing. In the following essay, he explores the conflict between duty and desire inherent in Jasmine.

Desire is the root of American fairy tales: desire for riches, desire for fame, desire for better this different that. Duty suppresses desire. Jasmine, the Punjabi heroine and title character of Bharati Mukherjee's novel, debates whether to act according to desire or duty. The Indian consciousness in which she was raised, embodied by Dida, her grandmother, supports duty. In her culture, there is a greater connectedness, a sense that individual acts affect so much more than the individual. The Western consciousness, embodied by her Manhattan employers Taylor and Wylie Hayes, encourages desire. The notion of America as a free country seems, in this mindset, to be an invitation to pursue one's wildest inclinations, with little respect for those left behind.

The novel opens with the phrase, "Lifetimes ago. . ." This phrase seems deliberately ironical, recalling the classical fairy tale phrase, "Once upon a time." The ensuing scene, in which an astrologer predicts Jasmine's widowhood and exile, frames the discussion of whether fate or free will dictate one's life trajectory. This is the core of existential philosophy: a focus on the conditions humans create for their existence, rather than those created by nature. This relates closely to the idea of desire and duty: does one necessarily follow the prescribed path, or can one make their own path?

The young Jasmine, due to her religious and cultural orientation, has been programmed to believe in predestination. She knows, "Bad times were on their way. I was helpless, doomed." Outwardly, however, she whispers to the astrologer, "I don't believe you." That she whispers□rather than says, or states, or shouts□indicates the tentativeness of Jasmine's position as an agent of change. The astrologer plays an all-important role in the novel: he is there, under the banyan tree, as the story opens, and he is there, in Jasmine's thoughts, as the novels ends.

Dida, the grandmother, firmly believes in duty. Dida knows that a girl must marry, that she must bear a son. It is the family's burden, their duty, to ensure that the girl find a husband. To tinker with this tried-and-true formula requires a certain amount of arrogance and, in Dida's mind, disrespect. Her pronouncement that, "Some women think they own the world because their husbands are too lazy to beat them" demonstrates her unflinching belief in the social order.

When Jasmine fends off a mad dog with a staff, Dida refuses to credit her granddaughter, claiming, instead, that God didn't think her ready for salvation. "Individual effort counts for nothing," she says. Later, Dida explains Prakash's death according to religious beliefs. "God was displeased" that Jasmine did not marry the man Dida chose for her, that she called her husband by his proper name, that they spent money extravagantly, that her husband planned to go abroad. Reward and retribution: God controls it all.

But Jasmine all along shows an inclination to veer from the prescribed path. She tells her father she wants to be a doctor. This is the first hint that she harbors fantastical Western-like dreams. For Dida, education for a woman seems frivolous, and even dangerous: it defies her future duty.

Jasmine eventually marries a modern Indian man. On the surface, it seems like her life merely represents a breaking of tradition, an exchange of new values for old. Certainly, that's part of it. But in the deeply ingrained mindset of the Hindu Indian, change puts the whole culture at risk. Who will care for Prakash's uncle, now that his nephew has chosen to live in an apartment?

Danger accompanies desire. Mukherjee creates at least three characters who wind up bloody, in part, because they eschew duty for desire. Prakash gets blown to pieces holding the money that would purchase the clothes in which he would follow his American dreams. Darrel, who made a desperate, futile attempt to follow his desires, hangs limp from an electrical cord, chewed on by the hogs who represent his duty. Bud winds up in a wheelchair, partly because the wife he left□his duty□could not apply her relative wisdom to the task of saving him. (Jasmine thinks that Karin, under the same circumstances, would have understood to call the sheriff and thus stop Harlan Kroener's assault).

Darrel, like Jasmine, internally debates the value of acting out his desires at the price of neglecting his duty. "Crazy, Darrel wants an Indian princess and a Radio Shack franchise in Santa Fe. Crazy, he's a recruit in some army of white Christian survivalists. Sane, he wants to baby-sit three hundred pound hogs and reinvent the fertilizer/pesticide wheel."

Mukherjee's careful use of imagery and sensory details in Darrel's suicide scene demonstrates the danger of both desire and duty. The fantastical images of far-off galaxies and the pleasantly strong smell of cumin stand in contrast to the word "rawness."

> The frail man who is still slowly twisting and twisting
> from the rafter with an extension cord wrapped around
> his stiffly angled neck isn't the Darrel, would-be
> lover, would-be adventurer, who only nights ago in a
> cumin-scented kitchen, terrorized me with the rawness
> of wants. This man is an astronaut shamed by the
> failure of his lift-off. He keeps his bitter face turned
> away from the galaxies that he'd longed to explore.

Desire, however, does not necessarily end in blood. The danger is always there, but Mukherjee allows for success. Du, Jasmine's adopted Vietnamese son, represents this opportunity. In following his own desire, he betrays Jasmine's sense of duty. In Du's departure scene, he bends over a rifle to kiss Jasmine. The two are fairly close in age, seven years apart, and given their history it's fair to assume an undercurrent of sexual tension. At least, the tenderness goes beyond that normally exchanged between mother

and son. The kiss seems to symbolize so much desire, just as the rifle symbolizes so much violence. Mukherjee might be suggesting that it's necessary to pass through violence to fulfill desire.

> Suddenly, I'm bawling. 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. His wirings and circuits were as close to Vijh & Vijh as I would ever get. . .This time his face is smiling, confident. He's mastered his demons. For the first time in our life together, he bends down, over the rifle, to kiss me. You gave me new life, I'll never forget you. I hear the crunch of gravel. He undoes the lock, announces it's John, not Darrel, not Bud, and on a hot Iowa night, he steps into the future.

Make no mistake: Mukherjee's novel supports the Western notion of self-determination and individual initiative. Of all the settings in the novel, only Manhattan allows for the possibility of freedom, which seems closely tied to happiness. Hasnpur is mud huts and arranged marriages and a lifetime of servitude. Prakash and Jasmine experience a certain kind of bliss in plotting their escape from Hasnpur. Florida is economic and sexual shame. Jasmine gets raped and wanders penniless, sure to die if not for the saint-like kindness of Lillian Gordon. Flushing is India all over again, in costly replication. Jasmine lacks the power, financial and otherwise, to purchase her escape. Baden, Iowa, is India with white people: an agricultural community bound, in so many ways, to tradition. Jasmine plays the role of dutiful wife. The postcards Prakash received from his old teacher□"CELEBRATE AMERICA. . .TRAVEL. . .THE PERFECT FREEDOM"□ don't ring true.

Manhattan is different. It is where Jasmine claims to become an American. "On Claremont Avenue I came closest to the headiness, dizziness, porousness of my days with Prakash. What I feel for Bud is affection. Duty and prudence count. Bud has kept me out of trouble. I don't want trouble. Taylor's car is gobbling up the highways."

The Hayes, an urban professional couple, represent the antithesis of Dida's stubborn relationship with duty. The Hayes possess confidence, wit: they seem happy. Their inclination, surely, is to act according to desire. Wylie Hayes on the surface lives an idyllic life. She's involved in an equalpartnership relationship with her husband Taylor, who is smart, caring, and sensitive. She loves her darling daughter Duff. The family has sufficient financial means and meaningful work. Yet, when she falls in love with Stuart Eschelman, she sees an opportunity to improve upon all that. Forget the ripples of pain Wylie's divorce from Taylor will cause. It isn't about those other people, it's about Wylie. "It's all so messy," Wylie says. "Taylor's such a sweetheart, and there's Duff and Stuart's three kids, but this is my chance at real happiness. What can I do? I've got to go for it, right?"

It's as natural for Wylie to act out her desires as it is for Jasmine to suppress them. Taylor, though hurt, never seems to begrudge Wylie's decision. Taylor, like Wylie, does not seem to consider it a wife's duty to remain with her loving husband and daughter.

Earlier, Taylor and Jasmine exchange ideas on the subject of free will. Jasmine explains, in Hindu terms, how "a whole life's mission might be to move a flowerpot from one table to another; all the years of education and suffering and laughter, marriage, parenthood, education, serving merely to put a particular person in a particular room with a certain flower. If the universe is one room known only to God, then God alone knows how to populate it." Taylor responds angrily to this, saying that a world in which rearranging a particle of dust ranks with discovering relativity is "a formula for total anarchy. Total futility. Total fatalism."

This argument frames Jasmine's ultimate dilemma: to remain as caregiver to the crippled Bud Ripplemeyer, or run away with the man of her dreams, Taylor Hayes. Jasmine finds safety in her duty to Bud, in being a caregiver. She understands responsibility, such as raising her child there in Iowa, as not only practical but expected. She cannot, however, deny the oppression that comes with the duty. "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and oldworld dutifulness. A caregiver's life is a good life, a worthwhile life. What am I to do?"

Notice the similarities between Wylie's rhetorical question, "What can I do?" and Jasmine's more sincere question, "What am I to do?" Jasmine, of course, chooses to run away with Taylor, to once and for all show that a person can determine their own fate. Jasmine will not end up like Darrel. Earlier, she disagreed with Bud's insistence that Darrel keep up the farm. "What I say is, release Darrel from the land." Jasmine, in the end, releases herself. As Taylor says, "Why not, it's a free country?" In doing so, Jasmine executes all the traditional values held by Dida. She leaves a crippled lover to fend for himself. She takes a baby away from his father. She trades security for the unknown.

Mukherjee in the end circles back to the astrologer. "It isn't guilt I feel, it's relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who .oats cross-legged above my kitchen stove." Here, the astrologer, the teller of fate, seems to symbolize old-world duty. The astrologer's position above the stove recalls Vimla's suicide scene. In the Hindu practice called sati, or suttee, the widow cremates herself on her husband's funeral pyre in order to fulfill her true role as wife. Jasmine intended to follow the same ritual after Prakash's death. She brought his suit to America in order to make a pyre. This practice is predicated on the idea that a wife's duty to her husband is absolute and eternal. Now, Jasmine mentally has the astrologer hover above the stove, as if to commit a kind of sati. The image seems to symbolize a ritual death of duty.

The ending of the novel recalls so many Hollywood endings in which the happy couple ride off into the sunset. "I am out the door and in the potholed and rutted driveway, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope." The tone and

language, along with the .nal word "hope," suggest that Jasmine does not regret her decision to act out her desires. The author draws very little attention to the sorrowful image of an abandoned Bud, and rather focuses on the thrill of Jasmine's liberation.

Source: Donald G. Evans, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, author Amy Levin discusses Bharati Mukherjee's novel Jasmine *in conjunction with two other novels in an exploration of female perspective on domestic and farm ideologies, as well as the quest for self, in the American Midwest.*

During the 1980s, Republican administrations glorified nostalgic visions of family life. These visions coexisted with social and fiscal policies that had negative ramifications for small farms, families, and women. This paper analyzes three contemporary novels *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee (1989), *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley (1991), and *A Map of the World* by Jane Hamilton (1994) in which the heroines' lives on their farms are influenced by contemporary myths. Like some of their predecessors, today's novelists express nostalgia for a harmonious homestead; however, they reveal the .awed nature of such visions and question their public acceptance. Ultimately, the heroines leave their farms for anonymous lives in town, indicating some resignation to the power of dominant ideologies. At the same time, the three novels offer distinct perspectives on region and narrative, as well as more specifically on what it means to be a Midwesterner. These perspectives complicate the connections among farming, families, and ideology, throwing into relief global events such as the surge in undocumented immigrants, as well as questions of identity.

During the 1980s, the American press documented hardships experienced by rural families as a result of shifts in public policy and attitudes. More recently, women novelists have provided another record of these events, focusing on the interrelated effects of government regulations and domestic ideology on the lives of farm women. Specifically, three novels Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), Jane Hamilton's *A Map of the World* (1994), and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) use first person narratives to comment ironically on the farm woman as popular icon. Yet, even as the authors offer a critique of social and political values, their heroines remain enmeshed in powerful ideologies regulating gender, sexuality, and the family. The novels reflect on the nature of literary regionalism as well, illustrating how it may give voice to some of those neglected by the dominant discourse, while it may silence still others.

In *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860,* Annette Kolodny has traced the existence of connections between social ideology and domestic fiction back to novels written prior to the Civil War. She indicates the ways in which some nineteenth-century women's novels about the West perpetuated nostalgic visions of the American home, and she outlines how several authors reinforced contemporary ideals of frontier farms and ranches. Such portraits of farm life, accompanied by pastoral imagery, were opposed to views of corrupt, dirty towns and cities. Kolodny links this theme in fiction to nineteenthcentury conceptions of women's roles, indicating how novels at once supported and subverted popular values. Carol Fairbanks (1986) expands on Kolodny's theory, writing about later authors. Fairbanks suggests that these women, like some of those described by Kolodny, "wanted to undermine or, at a minimum, modify the public's image of the lives of women on the

frontier" (1986). Works about farming in the Midwest during the turbulent 1980s suggest that these points apply to contemporary literature as well.

In their edited collection of articles, Sherrie Inness and Diana Royer go beyond Kolodny and Fairbanks, arguing that regionalism "offers a forum for social protest"(1987). Yet even protest is complicated because of women's liminal status as community insiders and outsiders: "As regional writers present their communities, real and imagined, they engage in multiple discourses born out of those communities, discourses that embody cultural conflict and reflect social tension even as they seek to resolve those very issues." They emphasize that protest arises out of women's need to construct their own identities. Thus, by definition, such regionalist works address issues of difference and in particular of "how foreignness is constituted," literally and figuratively. By implication, they are "essential to understanding how the United States constitutes itself." The importance of this concept is evident when one considers the historical context of the novels to be discussed. During the 1980s, the Reagan and Bush administrations, spurred on by the Moral Majority and other conservative coalitions, glorified visions of family life, even though□or perhaps because□many Americans were convinced that the family as they knew it was rapidly disintegrating. Magazines such as *Newsweek* devoted special issues to the plight of the family, including articles such as one wondering, "What Happened to the Family," which lamented, "marriage is a fragile institution," and the "irony here is that the traditional family is something of an anomaly" (Footlick 1990).

At the same time, farms were portrayed as a refuge from the forces pulling families apart, as well as from isolating and corrupting aspects of urban survival. For many, the Midwest remained a metonym for rural living, and farms took on metaphorical associations with a prelapsarian America, where families enjoyed prosperity, togetherness, and a certain moral certitude. In this almost mythical realm, women kept impeccable houses and baked bread, and people of color were virtually invisible.

In the first half of the decade, country was, quite literally, the fashion. In 1979, Mademoiselle featured an article entitled "Barn Makeover," offering readers advice on purchasing items necessary to replicate the effect. In 1985, Vogue chronicled socialite Robin Duke's conversion of a barn on Long Island into a "haven for simple pleasures after decades of globe-trotting" and a "dream house, a pleasingly rustic, French-accented country retreat" (Talley 1985). Never mind that the old horse stall separating the dining and living areas was probably as close as the socialite and her guests would get to farming, or that the homes on most Midwestern farms lacked imported French antiques. What such texts recorded was an enduring fantasy of mythic proportions.

Idealized visions coexisted with increasingly conservative social and fiscal policies that had negative ramifications for small farms, families, and women. The same week that *Time* magazine reviewed the .lm *Witness*, noting the "tone of civilized irreconcilability" between the heroine's rural, Amish life and the hero's spiritually starved urban existence as a policeman (Schickel 1985), its cover stories recorded the crisis facing America's farms. Popular magazines throughout the year ran articles about the farm bill, the

administration's attitudes toward price supports and credit, and their negative effects on family operations.

Specialized magazines, such as *Successful Farming*, recorded similar circumstances as the decade progressed. The April and May 1979 issues of *Successful Farming* hinted at trouble with articles entitled "Loan Request Denied" (Kellum 1979) and "He Sold His Cow Herd in the Face of Rising Prices" (Kruse and Baxter 1979). Yet, such troubles seemed scattered and remediable; the farmer who had to relinquish his cow, for instance, turned to raising corn. An article by Carol Tevis, who reported on women and families, was optimistically entitled "Mom is the Key," and noted the importance of women to successful farm transfers and keeping the family together (Tevis 1979).

Thus, in the first part of the decade, farming and general interest magazines revealed that for many the vitality of the Midwestern farm belt was associated with and perceived as a refiection of the condition of the American family. Any threat to the farm represented a potential assault on the family, as well as on the moral values in which the family was grounded. The government crackdown on farm and price supports met bitter anger, having provoked in farmers a sense that their way of life was under attack, with "partisans . . . waging the battle with nearly religious intensity" (Church 1985).

Ironically, these perceptions of a direct relationship between the fate of the family and of the farm, between moral and economic stability, may have facilitated the administration's pursuit of its agricultural policy. In the middle of the decade, public personages such as David Stockman and Agriculture Secretary John Block presented farmers as irresponsible financial managers who failed to provide for their families and thus undercut the stability of the nation. Concomitantly, what had been portrayed as valuable, fertile "real estate" (to use a category proposed by Carol Fairbanks) was increasingly referred to as a kind of "waste land," over cultivated or left fallow in crop plans designed to yield maximum federal subsidies (1986). The 1985 issue of *Time* on farming prominently featured Stockman's reproach: "For the life of me, I cannot figure out why taxpayers of this country have the responsibility to go in and refinance bad debt that was willingly incurred by consenting adults who went out and bought farmland when the price was going up" (Church 1985). Through such rhetoric, politicians were able to weaken popular nostalgia surrounding agricultural life. This strategy made policies hostile to farming interests more palatable to taxpayers in towns and cities, who felt they had something to gain□morally and financially□with the elimination of easy credit and price supports for their neighbors. Farmers themselves blamed the "greed" of their colleagues (Tevis 1992), as well as the government and bankers, but not their own practices.

By the end of the decade, *Successful Farming* testified to the devastating effects of the 1980s on farms and their families. In "Diminished Expectations," Carol Tevis (1992) compared 1974 and 1991 surveys of thousands of families. The results were discouraging. Federal policies were frequently blamed for the desperate plight of farms; the author reported that "A strong sense of disillusionment prevails regarding government." More specifically, said a woman from Kentucky, "I believe the government wants the family farm out." Respondents also linked government policies to the collapse

of the family: "Many farm men and women point to the increase in off-farm employment [necessitated by the economy] as a factor behind the erosion of social relationships, and the decline in neighboring in their communities." Not only did the survey indicate that "[t]he feeling that family life is threatened is more pronounced," (1992) but it cited a farmer who took a stab at earlier rosy pictures of rural life: "I hate the way farm magazines glorify the farm with all the sentimental slop." In light of such disgruntlement, it is not surprising that in the 1991 survey, only 63 percent of the respondents thought the family farm would survive.

Similarly, sociological and anthropological studies of women in rural America have noted increasing anxiety and tension, which they locate historically and contemporaneously. Their methodologies include large samples, as well as interviews and case studies, and some of them take an explicitly feminist perspective. For instance, Deborah Fink traces the history of the myth that "farm people were happier, healthier, and more virtuous than city people" back to Jeffersonian idealism (1992), entrenching perceptions of rural America in the political ideology of the new Republic. Fink further argues that visions of the "frontier West as a place where women could shake free" are feminist reconstructions of the past, whereas many farm women have lived and continue to live in virtual isolation. She indicates that "the organization of labor within the nuclear family undermined its liberating potential" and permitted the elision of women from study, as well as the neglect of farm women's troubles. Her work chronicles "subtle acts of sabotage," or women's modes of resistance, in contrast to the portraits of united families in popular farm publications.

In *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change*, Fink (1986) takes a feminist anthropological perspective in focusing on women since World War II. In this work, Fink emphasizes the importance of economics in farm country, in particular in such changes as increased mechanization and women's difficulties in finding adequately paying off-farm jobs that might reduce their dependence on men. She also identifies land transfers and a lack of social services to help with domestic violence, child care, and other needs as difficulties for farm women. And, unlike the reporters in popular farm publications, she contends that the patriarchy itself is a major source of tension and unhappiness in farm life. To the extent that other social and political structures support the patriarchy, she finds them complicit as well. Thus, while farmers in the public press blamed many of their problems on external forces, and the government accused farmers of fiscal irresponsibility, scholarly researchers noted internal family tensions as well.

These connections between the health of the family and of the farm, between political policy and domestic ideology, which researchers such as Kolodny documented in nineteenth-century novels, are central in *Jasmine*, *A Thousand Acres*, and *A Map of the World*. Smiley's novel is set in 1979, and Hamilton's at the end of the 1980s or beginning of the 1990s. Mukherjee's focuses primarily the middle of the 1980s. The novels thus span the decade and offer a retrospective on its events. At the same time, the three texts provide distinct perspectives on the region and what it means to be a Midwesterner: the heroine of Smiley's work is born and bred in Iowa, the family in Hamilton's book has chosen to farm in Wisconsin, and Mukherjee's protagonist arrives

in Iowa after a long odyssey that began in Punjab. These different temporal and spatial removes complicate the connections among farming, families, and ideology, throwing into relief global events, such as the return of Vietnam war veterans or the surge in undocumented aliens, as well as questions of national and regional identity.

The effects of these various removes are particularly significant, because they exemplify theories developed by contemporary scholars on regionalism in literature. First, these novelists contest the idea of a single, monologic definition of a region, instead "[v]iewing geography as a two- or threetiered field, as a combination or dialectic of what there is and what people believe or imagine there is" (Loriggio 1994). Every one of these texts supports Marjorie Pryse's assertion that the region that is experienced by marginalized individuals, including women, minorities, and ideological "outsiders," is very different from the Midwest experienced by members of the dominant population (1994). This difference generates confiict and plot (Loriggio 1994).

Second, these novels illustrate a distinction made by Marjorie Pryse between regionalist literature, written or narrated by insiders, and regional literature, which is written or narrated by outsiders and captures "local color" (1994). The literature of insiders tends to elicit "empathy" (Fetterley and Pryse, 1992) and to express an "implicit pedagogy" (Pryse 1994), while outsiders maintain an ironic remove. While all three novels include characters whose perspectives exemplify this duality, Mukherjee's text ultimately challenges and collapses the distinction.

Third, the novels enact various, contested views of region by presenting conflict not only among differing factions in the local population, but also between inhabitants and government outsiders, or between long-term residents and newcomers. Thus, just as the article from *Vogue* (Talley 1985) cited above offers a view of farming that differs from the representations in *Successful Farming*, these novels contain myriad perspectives on farms and their owners. At their best, these novels are about the (re)possession of space, and of memories or myths of that space, which inhabit it and affect individual constructions of it.

Specifically, in all three novels, the heroines' lives on their farms are infiuenced by myths of "an idyllic rural life" (Hardigg 1994). Moreover, the ultimate collapse (or near collapse) of their families and modes of living is directly related to economic policy, government farming regulations, and social ideologies that offer oppositional views of their efforts. Because citizens of neighboring towns represent or carry out government threats, the distinctions between farm and town life become critical.

Within the novels, these issues are embedded in contemporary discourse pertaining to sexuality and sex crimes. Just as the fate of the family farm is directly related to who holds political and financial control, so is the fate of the protagonist's body. The heroine of Smiley's book finds herself deeply affected by her experiences as an incest victim; Hamilton's protagonist is accused of molesting children; Mukherjee's Jasmine is raped (and her husband is crippled by an angry farmer). Ultimately, the novels might be considered maps of a world, charts not only of the limited acreage the heroines possess and are possessed by, but also topographical surveys of an important segment of

American society and reflections on the forces that shape and dominate regions. As Mukherjee's heroine notes repeatedly, the Midwest has much in common with Punjab, a reference to the presence of violence and factionalism, as well as to agrarian life.

The question of whether and how much difference is tolerated by the community is even more pronounced in Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, another novel concerning a woman's attempts at self-definition. Even though the novel was not written by a Midwesterner, *Jasmine* offers significant variations on the themes developed in Hamilton's and Smiley's texts. Beginning in India and ending with a journey to California, Mukherjee's text presents a "map of the world" that is embedded in a regional setting even more explicitly than *A Thousand Acres* or *A Map of the World* itself.

Moreover, *Jasmine* invokes the distinction between regional and regionalist texts or characters only to throw it into question. On one level, *Jasmine* renders the very distinction moot, because the heroine takes different perspectives during various points in her life. On another level, the novel offers both regional and regionalist perspectives simultaneously. *Jasmine* is a regional work in the sense that it is written and narrated by an outsider with critical distance from the milieu. At the same time, it offers a regionalist perspective, giving voice to the increasing numbers of Asian immigrants in the Midwest, individuals who may be marginalized on the basis of linguistic, racial, and cultural differences. Most importantly, the novel draws attention to the fact that distinctions between insiders/outsiders are questionable, because they are based on discriminations made by those empowered and rendered visible by their status as members of the majority.

These distinctions between insiders and outsiders come into play as Jasmine travels around the world, adopting different personas. She is given various names□Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane□to indicate the shifting phases of her existence. Having emigrated to the United States and served as a nanny in New York for several years, Jasmine chooses exile in Elsa County, Iowa, because it is the birthplace of Duff, the adopted little girl she looked after. The money from the adoption covered Duff's mother's college tuition, and the opportunity to be her nanny offers Jasmine an escape from the stifling Indian community in Flushing. Consequently, Jasmine decides, "Iowa was a state where miracles still happened" (Mukherjee 1989). For Jasmine, Duff□and, by extension, the county of her birth□ initially represents openness, acceptance, freedom, and caring.

Once again, the Midwest□with the community of Baden□is presented as an idyllic environment. Jasmine is offered a job as a teller and rapidly enters a relationship with Bud Ripplemayer, the bank's manager and "secular god of Baden." The breakup of Bud's first marriage causes a stir, but as Jasmine and Bud adopt Du, a Vietnamese child, and Jasmine becomes pregnant, they appear to blend back into the community of families.

Like Smiley's Ginny, Jasmine offers advice about understanding the Midwest and farmers' lives. She explains that unfed hogs sound like abused children and that farmers need to get away from their reponsibilities in winter. Additional information is reported,

often originating with Bud or his ex-wife Karin: "Bud always says, of young farmers or the middle-aged ones with shaky operations, Look out for drinking." In this community, too, character and the success of a farm are inextricably linked: "The First Bank of Baden has survived in harsh times because Bud can read people's characters. Out here, it's character that pays the bills or doesn't, because everything else is just about equal." This determination of character exists as part of a network of gossip, which is communicated over the telephone and at events such as quilt sales.

Community gossip reveals danger under the town's bucolic veneer. In contrast to the towns in the other two novels, in Elsa, violence is so frequent as to seem almost banal. "Over by Osage a man beat his wife with a spade, then hanged himself in his machine shed," comments Jasmine flatly. Bud is shot and paralyzed by Harlan Kroener, "a disturbed and violent farmer," and Darrel Lutz, the owner of a neighboring farm, adopts the rhetoric of hate groups and eventually commits suicide.

The violence is driven both by a literal drought and the drying up of credit, which in turn is caused by government policy. Whereas Bud "used to welcome" the state inspectors' visits,

it's become impersonal. Cranky bureaucrats, men
with itchy collars and high-pitched voices, suggesting
that this looks like a bad loan, and this and this, saying
in pained voices that a banker who cosigns his neighbor's
loan . . . is getting that farmer in a tougher spot.

In the communities in Smiley's and Hamilton's books, bankers are associated with the external forces destroying farms; here "[e]ven a banker is still a farmer at heart." The enemies are functionaries enforcing policies that trap farmers in debt and despair, tearing apart their families.

A few farmers are able to leave for winter or to negotiate loans to develop and sell their land. Others are rooted like crops in the soil. As Karin comments bitterly (and somewhat comically), "I won a Purple ribbon in a 4H state fair with my How-to-Pack-a- Suitcase demo . . . but I never got to travel." Yet economics alone do not determine who will go. Karin notes that "She could have [left], but she chose to stay." What really traps local residents is an inability to conceptualize other parts of the world as distinct: "In Baden, the farmers are afraid to suggest I'm different. . . . They want to make me familiar." Bud never questions Jasmine about India because "it scares him"; to the extent that he recognizes her past, he does so in cliched terms that cast Asia as Other, unknown: "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability." "The family's only other encounter with Asia" was when Bud's brother Vern was killed in Korea, adding to the aura of danger and silence surrounding the continent. Torn between ignoring difference and fearing its perils, the inhabitants of Elsa County have no compelling reason to leave home.

Even Jasmine denies difference. Of Florida, she says, "The landscape was not unfamiliar: monsoon season in Punjab." Iowa is .at like Punjab, and the farmers there

remind Jasmine of the ones she "grew up with." The Indians in Flushing "had kept a certain kind of Punjab alive, even if that Punjab no longer existed," so that after a while, Jasmine notices that "I had come to America and lost my English." Unlike the inhabitants of Elsa County, however, Jasmine is repulsed by such similarities, especially since the greatest resemblance is in the area of regional or factional prejudice.

To the extent that Midwestern characters acknowledge the existence of otherness, they do so only to tame or domesticate it. Asia and Africa provide the women of Baden and Elsa County multiple opportunities for charitable events, such as quilt sales. These allow the women to socialize and trade news. At a fair to raise funds for starving Ethiopians, the women seem oblivious to the fact that "[e]very quilt auctioned, every jar of apple butter licked clean had helped somebody like me [Jasmine]." The merchandise consists of little more than cast-offs from local families. Instead of representing genuine compassion for the sufferings of others, the objects seem designed to elide any sign of difference or exoticism:

> There was a model tractor commemorating John Deere's fortieth anniversary. All the dolls had yellow hair. It had been a simpler America. The toys weren't unusual or valuable; they were shabby, an ordinary family's cared-for memorabilia. Bud's generic past crowded in display tables. I felt too exotic, too alien.

The surface of Baden, with its deliberate and continual references to a "simpler America," obscures violence and difference in the same way that the apparent fertility of the farm in *A Thousand Acres* hides subterranean pollution. As in *Map of the World*, the locals blame outsiders for the violence, but like Alice, Jasmine shows repeatedly that it is inherent in the community. Moreover, even though Jasmine remarks, "Every night the frontier creeps a little closer," immigrants remain invisible. At the hospital, Asian doctors treat women, but one has to "poke around" to find them. The stories of people like Jasmine and Du remain undocumented, outside the law and the "official" versions of the television newscasts. The silencing of foreignness exemplifies the "conservative, nostalgic" qualities of regionalism described by Warren Johnson, who notes that "[r]egionalism would seem to be the converse of exoticism. The depiction of the foreign and exotic frequently seeks to evoke what is repressed in the dominant culture for being extreme or excessive" (1994) and is thus perceived as threatening.

Despite its international flavor, then, Mukherjee's novel insists on fragmentation and regional conflict in a way that the other two works do not. From the beginning, for instance, *Jasmine* specifies that Baden is neither Danish or Swedish, but German. The early sections of the novel show the effects of Sikh separatism and of a terrorist attack that kills Jasmine's first husband. Not only does the murderer reappear in Central Park, but when Darrel Lutz begins to lose his sanity, he accuses Bud of being a tool of the Eastern establishment. There is even a pecking order among immigrants; Du, who is from urban Saigon, looks down on the Hmong emigres. Ironically, even though such prejudices constantly invoke difference, they ultimately render it impossible to

distinguish between insiders and outsiders; the policies that create have and have-nots also spawn endless numbers of factions, and factions within factions.

Rather than embracing such fragmentation, Jasmine leaves Bud for the "perfectly American" Taylor, choosing a myth of nationality over the actuality of factionalism, a fiction of self-development over a narrative of entrapment. Jasmine's departure echoes Ginny's abandonment of the farm in Smiley's novel. Jasmine has changed with her names from the timid Indian widow who wanted to immolate herself to the self-sufficient Iowa farm woman tending a handicapped husband. Her ability to transform herself, gained through years of traveling and suffering, distinguishes her from the rooted Iowa women: "The world is divided between those who stay and those who leave."

In much canonical literature, the quest is presented as a male prerogative, while females remain at home. One could therefore argue that much regional literature is gendered as female because "characters in regional fiction are rooted" (Fetterley and Pryse 1992), too. In her discussions of some of the nineteenth-century texts she analyzes, Kolodny (1984) supports these assertions, tracing the historical efforts of pioneer women to cultivate their environment, rendering it homelike and familiar. Yet, even as these three novels about farming in the 1980s question ideological and social traditions, they break with literary convention by presenting female characters who choose, or are forced, to journey. Their itinerancy is instigated by the devastation of the land and the accompanying cruelty of its owners. Women such as Ginny in *A Thousand Acres* and Alice in *A Map of the World* ultimately must forge urban existences, contradicting stereotypes that gender the earth as female and portray it as freer and somehow purer than the city. Similarly, Jasmine is a traveler leaving behind natives and other migrants who have walled themselves in: "the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows" (Mukherjee 1989).

With its reference to the frontier and "uncaulked windows" of makeshift abodes, the conclusion of Mukherjee's novel reinscribes itself within the lore of America's past, reinforcing a notion that anything is possible for someone with the correct spirit. Indeed, *Jasmine* constitutes a female version of the myth of the self-made American: "We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (1989). If, as she claims, the people of Elsa County are "puritans," then Jasmine is one of the Elect (1989), protected by the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Jasmine's "Rescuer" (1989), the man who encourages her to escape from Iowa, is Taylor. Yet Jasmine's decision to follow Taylor is ambiguous. Jasmine presents the choice as liberatory: "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old world dutifulness." The America she claims for herself is one where "Adventure, risk, [and] transformation" are possible. Taylor is not taking her back to New York but to the Western edge of the country□California□ which is also Du's new home. The novel concludes with the heroine "reckless from hope" (1989) like a male adventurer in a nineteenth-century novel.

But what has Jasmine chosen? She is initially attracted to Taylor because he seems "entirely American": "I fell in love with what he represented to me, a professor who

served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her, and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she didn't understand it" (1989). This statement makes an essentialist equation between being an upper middle class intellectual and being American, as if to be a banker/ farmer in the Midwest were somehow less American (a comment that reverses many stereotypes, even as it colludes with 1980s political rhetoric against farmers). Although Jasmine denies being a "gold digger" (1989), one cannot help wondering about Taylor's increased attraction after Bud is paralyzed and his bank is increasingly controlled by outsiders, given the importance of financial success in the myth of the self-made American. Similarly, Jasmine's astoundingly rapid acquisition of knowledge of literary classics such as Jane Eyre, together with her ready acceptance outside the immigrant world, obscures the realities and prejudice in American society.

The world Jasmine chooses, then, is not free of the ideological illusions surrounding the Midwest of the 1980s. Like the heroines in Smiley's and Hamilton's works, one could argue that Jasmine has chosen a diminished realm and a fractured or weakened family. Taylor offers not wholeness but an "unorthodox family" (1989), appropriately, as he is a physicist specializing in subatomic particles. Moreover, Jasmine's departure leaves traditional family structures and roles intact; although Jasmine claims that she is relinquishing her role as a "caregiver" (1989), she initially met Taylor when she was his child's nurse, and she will continue to tend Duff. It is questionable, therefore, whether the move is truly liberatory, or whether her narrative merely reinscribes conventional gender and power relations: "As exotic caregiver, homemaker, and temptress, Jane is the model immigrant woman who says and does nothing to challenge the authority or ethnocentrism of the white American male" (Grewal 1993). If this is the case, the manual embedded in the text is not so much a guide to the Midwest as a revision of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, another work that equates character and worldly success.

To the extent that Jasmine has learned about America, she has familiarized herself with a 1980s ideology that lays claim to classlessness but looks down on farmers, that values technology and money over the vagaries of crops, livestock, and the weather. Even though Jasmine bears the psychic and physical effects of rape, she seems reborn after killing her attacker and slicing her tongue, effectively silencing herself. The effects of this violence do not seem indelibly written on her body, although Bud is permanently crippled and can only father a child with the assistance of technology. The novel seemingly liberates Jasmine, but fails to challenge a system that traps and oppresses many Midwesterners. Similarly, the novel elides the fates of most immigrants, who continue their undocumented existences on the margins of the American economy. By leaving such social and political structures in place□and suppressing alternative stories□Jasmine bows to their power. The book gestures toward a regionalist perspective that "speaks for us, the new Americans from nontraditional immigrant countries" (Mukherjee 1988), but ultimately settles for a critical distance from the newly reconstituted Midwest.

Taken together with *A Thousand Acres* and *A Map of the World*, *Jasmine* demonstrates that fiction continues to document the complicated effects of social beliefs and economic trends on individuals, as well as the silencing of women, immigrants, and the

otherwise marginalized. Like their predecessors, today's novelists express nostalgia for a more harmonious form of life; however, they reveal the .awed nature of earlier social visions and question the public's acceptance of them. In the end, the heroines leave their farms for lives in town, indicating a certain resignation among the authors to the overwhelming power of dominant ideologies concerning women, farming, and family in 1980s America.

Ultimately, the ambiguous endings of all three novels, including the heroines' mixed success at finding a more liberated existence, have significant implications for our readings of contemporary women's regionalist fiction While this fiction succeeds in giving voice to the unheard and offering a critique of agrarian idealism, the authors are unable to conceive of a world where women can extricate themselves from powerful discourses pertaining to gender, social policy, and politics. The protagonists offer readers advice, but the advice is not what it seems, outdated, or useless. The strength of regionalist fiction□that it comments from inside the region rather than from outside□is also its weakness, for it cannot rise above community structures and social ideology. For women heroines, this means that their narratives must express nostalgia for a past that never was and dream of future unity that may never be.

Source: Amy Levin "Familiar Terrain: Domestic Ideology and Farm Policy in Three Women's Novels About the, 1980s," in *NWSA Journal,* Vol. 11, March 22, 1999, p. 21, Jasmine.

Critical Essay #3

In the following brief review of Mukherjee's novel Jasmine*, author Abha Prakash Leard writes that Mukherjee is offering the reader a unique, female Hindu* bildungroman*. As the novel's protagonist, alternately known as Jyoti, Jasmine, or Jane, travels from one circumstance and geographical location to another, so is her inner self travelling the journey of rebirth toward a higher plane.*

Despite postcolonial readings of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*, Western critics have not placed in context the pivotal play of migrations, forced and voluntary, literal and figurative, found in the plural female subjectivity of the novel. With the connotations of both dislocation and progress within the tangled framework of the narrator's personal history, journey as metaphor in the novel stands for the ever-moving, regenerating process of life itself. In presenting a woman capable of birthing more than one self during the course of her lifetime, Mukherjee invests her novel with the unique form of a Hindu *bildungsroman*, where the body is merely the shell for the inner being's journey toward a more enlightened and empowered subjectivity.

But the material self exists and is the site of oppression and transformation. Cognizant of the formidable interventions of gender, class, religion, and historical circumstance, Mukherjee shapes her heroine as a "fighter and adapter," who is perpetually in the process of remaking her self and her destiny. Set in the seventies and eighties when the violent separatist demands of the militant Sikhs forced many Hindus to migrate from Punjab, *Jasmine* centers around the experiences of Jyoti, a teenage Hindu widow, who travels all the way from Hasnapur, India, her feudalistic village, to America. These experiences are told in first person by a woman who identifies herself as Jane Ripplemeyer, the pregnant, twenty-four-year-old, live-in girlfriend of Bud Ripplemeyer, a Jewish banker in Baden, Iowa. But the "I" in the past and present fragments of this first-person narrative belongs to a woman who sees herself as more than one person. Officially known as Jyoti Vijh in India, the narrator, in America, is a many-named immigrant with a fake passport and forged residency papers. By giving her protagonist more than one name, usually through the character of a husband/lover, Mukherjee subverts the notion of a fixed, uniform subject. Simultaneously, the narrator's plurality of names□Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, Jane (which successively became more Westernized) □helps to mask her ethnic difference and enable her to survive in a hostile, alien land.

Jasmine's decision to leave her homeland coincides with her desire to escape the confines of her cultural identity. This desire, articulated in the dramatic recollection of the opening chapter, is a subtext that continually spurs the narrative's critique of the patriarchal underpinnings of Hindu culture and its social fabric. The little girl's refusal to accept the astrologer's prophecy translates into the adult narrator's unwillingness to imprison herself within traditional, predetermined codes of femininity. As Jyoti matures into a young woman, her resistance against a determinate existence continues in her unconventional marriage to Prakash, a "modern man," who wants them to leave the backwardness of India for a more satisfying life in America. Within a cultural context that privileges arranged marriages, Jyoti's romance, that she has engineered, can indeed be

seen not only as nontraditional but also as a subversive tactic against the established cultural norm. Her marriage is not only liberating but transforming as well. Comparing her husband to Professor Higgins, the benevolent patriarch of Pygmalion, the narrator recollects the early days of her marriage when Prakash, in an attempt to make her a "new kind of city woman," changes her name to Jasmine. Although "shutt[ling] between identities," the narrator is eager to transcend the name/ identity of her child self in the hope of escaping the doomed prophecy lurking in her future. To leave the country of her birth would mean new beginnings, "new fates, new stars." But before the seventeenyear- old bride can embark on a new life with her husband, he is killed in a terrorist bombing.

The motif of the broken pitcher in Jasmine epitomizes not only the temporality of one life journey within the ongoing Hindu cycle of rebirth, but also the fragility of constructed boundaries, whether of the self, the family, or the nation. The author parallels the violence of the Khalistan movement that is responsible for Jasmine's widowhood and her subsequent displacement and exile to the bloody communal riots between the Hindus and Muslims at the time of India's independence in 1947. Despite her distance from this historical event, which rendered millions of people homeless and destitute overnight, the narrator can still empathize with her parents' anguished memories of the Partition that forced them to leave their ancestral home in Lahore and flee to Punjab. The fragmentation of the nation and the family as well as the haunting journey from terror to refuge have seeped into Jasmine's subconscious□"the loss survives in the instant replay of family story: forever Lahore smokes, forever my parents flee."

Directly or indirectly, historical confiicts (sparked by religous intolerance) within India determine the problematic constitution of Jasmine's shifting individuality. Her "illegal" migrant life in America is an extension of an existence that began in the shadow of political refuge and later, with her husband's death, almost ended in her widowed status. Within the enclosures of the Hindu culture, a widow must atone the death of her husband for the rest of her life. Jasmine's widowhood cancels her right to material fulfillment. It entails a life of isolation in the "widow's dark hut," on the margins of Hasnapur society. For Jasmine, to live the life of a widow is to live a fate worse than death.

Jasmine's difficult "odyssey" to America and her initial experiences in an alien society parallel the emergence of a new selfhood despite the vulnerability of her youth and material circumstances. Her brutal rape at the hands of Half-face, a man who represents the worst of America in his racist and inhuman treatment of the Asian and black refugees aboard his trawler, is a climactic moment in the text which signals the sudden awakening of Jasmine's "sense of mission." Refusing to "balance [her] defilement with [her] death," a traditional ending for most rape victims in orthodox Indian society, Jasmine, infused with the destructive energy of the goddess Kali, murders the man who symbolizes the "underworld of evil" and begins a new "journey, traveling light."

Given a world where violence and bloodshed, exploitation and persecution are constants, Jasmine's plurality of selves is her only strategy for survival. Knowing only too well that there are "no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself," Jasmine

views her multiple selves with a detachment that has been forged in pain. But beneath this carefully maintained distance is the terrible agony of a woman who cannot free herself from the collective memory of her haunting past:

> Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy
> and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that
> Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer. . . . And which
> of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced
> monster, which of us has held a dying husband, and
> which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats
> and cars and motel rooms?

Having lived through "hideous times," Jasmine, in her arduous journey of survival, has accomplished the rare mission of transcending the boundaries of a unitary self and identifying with all the nameless victims of gender, culture, class, and imperialism. The narrative ends on a note of optimism where Jasmine, "cocooning a cosmos" in her pregnant belly, and about to "re-position her stars" again, is ready to plunge into another life and another journey of transformation.

Source: Abha Prakash Leard, "Mukherjee's 'Jasmine,'" in *The Explicator,* Vol. 55, No. 2, Winter, 1997, pp. 114-118, Jasmine.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay on Mukherjee's novel Jasmine*, F. Timothy Ruppel suggests that* Jasmine *disrupts the traditional narrative process, thematizing narration and identity by illustrating, through the circumstances of Jasmine's character, how identity can be ascribed by outside infiuences that desire to define her character as known, or as conforming to, their own social, economic or hierarchicalized mythos.*

> We are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped-off corners of waiting rooms where surly, barely wakened customs guards await their bribes. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of intercontinental vagabondage. We only ask one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue. (Mukherjee)

Who are these "strange pilgrims"? Certainly, we see them infrequently on the evening news en their "vagabondage" becomes intolerable, when their passage can no longer be ignored, when they put spectacular pressure on our borders. Then, these "outcasts and deportees" emerge into a brief visibility beneath Western eyes. Watching TV the other night, I saw Haitian "boat people" crammed on their small, overcrowded crafts off the Florida shore. Through its spokesman, the United States administration reasonably explained its policy of denying these refugees entry, citing a benevolent and humanitarian concern with the possible loss of life. In other words, their "vagabondage" was being treated as an issue of water safety, of laudable nautical rigor, rather than as an issue of political and material conditions. In addition, and due to the interests of electronic brevity, the Haitians had been resolutely fixed into the already known, and therefore available, category of "boat people," a distinction that defined them as a collective identity. As Chandra Mohanty writes, "the idea of abstracting particular places, peoples, and events into generalized categories, laws, and politics is fundamental to any form of ruling."

We are thus insulated from the historical trajectories that set this population in motion, the contra- dictions and ruptures that have propelled them out of their native culture. This insulation involves a substitution, a metalepsis, where a sociopolitical effect is identified as a cause. As a result, these "strange pilgrims" become the originary cause of scrutiny, interest, or benevolence of a discourse that seeks to situate them in teleological narratives of Western civilization and progress, rather than as the effects of these same narrative gestures. In this paper, I want to suggest that texts such as Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* attempt to disrupt this even flow of narrative historiography with a counterdiscourse that thematizes prior narratives of enforced identity□narratives that through accumulation and repetition seek to define and circumscribe identity as a fixed and available resource, constituted wholly by another's desire. At the same time,

Jasmine illustrates the inherent difficulty of such an attempt, since Mukherjee's overt critique of debasing stereotypes based on gender and exoticism tends to impede a sustained critique of problematical representations of India.

Although *Jasmine* is a narrative of emergence, I do not wish to assert, in any sense, that this novel relates an immigrant's success story, charting a steady and inevitable progress that culminates in the achievement of an autonomous, unified self. Nor is it a completely realized postcolonial text, since Mukherjee's portrayal of India relies on the trope of the manichean allegory and the demonization of the Sikh community. Rather, *Jasmine* is a novel that resists closure and suggests a strategy of continual transformation as a necessary and historically contingent ethic of survival. This continual remaking of the self invokes "two temporalities: that of oppression, memory, and enforced identity, and that of emergence after the 'break,' the counter memory, and heterogeneous difference" (Radhakrishnan, "Ethnic Identity"). On the one hand, *Jasmine* thematizes narration and identity by bringing into focus how differences are social products of interested desire. At the same time, it offers the symbolic possibility of the emergence of a reinvented, paralogical, heterogeneous "family," based on affinity and multiplicity rather than fixed identity. Thus, I will be reading *Jasmine* as a counternarrative where "re-inventing ourselves a million times" becomes a reflexive, historically situated strategy for negotiating power.

Discussing narrative history, Frantz Fanon writes that when the colonizer comes to write the history of the colonial encounter "the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders ' but the history of his own nation . . . ." Such interested productions become, for Lila Abu-Lughod, "the great self-congratulatory literature of the rise of the West, which for so long has shaped our view of the past . . . ." Suggesting that this literature should be "revaluated" and "remade," Abu-Lughod recommends an analysis based on triangulation, or multiple, contradictory points of view. It is just this voice of the excluded and marginalized respondent that feminist, Afro-American, and multicultural studies try to recover. But, at the same time, this voice is seen as a threat to the accomplishments and values of Western culture simply because it has been historically marginalized and may have a different story to tell. In other words, the silent, demarcated subject who is the product of Western and patriarchal historiography built upon theories of synchronous development is again resituated just at the very moment of emergence, at the very moment s/he speaks.

Moreover, as Edward Said suggests, when the postcolonial subjects speak, they are considered by many Western intellectuals to be merely "wailers and whiners," denouncing the evils of colonialism. They are thus implicated in the politics of blame. As Said explains, such a politics proceeds from a willingness to assert that colonialism has ended. Therefore, "any claims about or reparations for its damages and consequences into the present are dismissed as both irrelevant and preposterously arrogant" ("Intellectuals"). The phrase "into the present" is crucial. As I mentioned earlier, the former colonial subject becomes an originary cause, a source of discourse. Instead of being grateful for what "we" have historically done for them, "they" are constituted in the present as a pack of unappreciative whiners. They have declined the invitation, refused

the call to step up into a world that is not of their own making. They are then implicated in a failure of recognition that only confirms their essential and underdeveloped nature.

This rhetorical and strategic resituating of the resisting respondent tends to maintain boundaries of exclusion. What is at risk here is the erasure of those traces of resistance that might disrupt the inevitability of the Western narrative of progress and benevolence. These exclusions occlude the complete record of colonialism, even as they resolutely try to define the excesses of colonialism as the product of aberrant individuals, a succession of Kurtzes, rather than as effects of the system that produced them. Such an experience of colonialism does continue into the present, producing an endless ripple of effects. For specific reasons, different in each case, the historical discourse produced by the colonizer created a system of representations (mostly centered around, and justified by, supposed traits of the native) that effaced the possibility of resistance. Resistance to domination was portrayed as an essential misrecognition on the part of the native.

This is the complex of concerns articulated by *Jasmine:* resistance, hierarchical distinctions, and boundaries that exclude and include. In what follows I will be examining these in light of what Chandra Mohanty calls (following Dorothy Smith) "relations of ruling"□a model for cultural analysis that "posits multiple intersections of structures of power and emphasizes the process or form of ruling, not the frozen embodiment of it." In *Jasmine* these concerns, embedded in relations of ruling, reveal themselves through the actions of the religious fundamentalist, Sukhwinder, the rapist, Half- Face, and the seemingly benevolent banker, Bud Ripplemeyer, individuals who continually attempt to place *Jasmine* into prior narratives of desire that would define her as a known, visible, and essential self conforming to one or another of the myths that their narrativized knowledge of her authorizes and legitimizes.

Confronted by the repeated pleas from Bud Ripplemeyer, the father of her unborn child, the narrator of *Jasmine* reflects upon how much he doesn't know about her. In fact, he has studiously avoided such knowledge, since her "genuine foreignness frightens him." Instead, his desire and interest are spurred by his image of "Eastern" women. For her prospective husband, she is "darkness, mystery, inscrutabllity. The East plunges me into visibility and wisdom." This visibility then involves an identity as an already-known subject. But she knows differently: she has been "many selves" and has "survived hideous times." In contrast to her, Bud lives innocently within "the straight lines and smooth planes of his history."

Two versions of history and narration emerge in the narrator's comments. For Jasmine, history is the discontinuity and rupture produced by material and political events and, as a result, the self becomes plural and contradictory. Her survival depends upon a flexible strategy of appropriation and transformation. For Bud, history is a straight line, a teleological and progressive ordering of existence where the phenomenological world is transparent and the self is unified and autonomous. It is "a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies an end of time, a completed development" (Foucault). The narrator's displacement of fixed identity and these two views of history provide a point of entry into Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. In the course of the novel, the narrator is Jyoti,

Jasmine, Jane, and Jase. Each of her names represents a transitional self as she travels from Hasnapur, India to Baden, Iowa. Rather than a recapitulation of the stereotype of the deceitful, mendacious Asian, these name changes can be seen as a response to the still ongoing effects of colonialism. She must change to survive and to continue her journey. In fact, the narrative structure is that of a journey and passage, a liminal state, which places the third world inside the first world. In the process, the narrator must continually remake herself to avoid the threat posed by enforced identity. She must avoid the limiting boundaries that seek to confine her in traditional and specific gendered roles, both in India and America.

As a village girl from Hasnapur, she is "born to that kind of submission, that expectation of ignorance." Her transformation from Jyoti to Jasmine represents her ability to escape from "a social order that had gone on untouched for thousands of years." This social order can be seen as symptomatic of the relations of ruling I discussed earlier. For Jyoti and the other women of Hasnapur, these relations of ruling involve a submission to the patriarchal order, which demands limited education, arranged marriages, and constant reproduction. These gendered restrictions are also configured along the lines of class and religion in *Jasmine*. Jyoti's expectations as a bride are limited by the fact that she is undowered. Her husband dies in sectarian religious violence. As the fifth daughter of nine children, Jyoti is born into a culture where daughters are a curse, since they must have dowries□which her family is unable to provide. Jyoti's mother, in an effort to spare Jyoti from a history similar to hers, a history of incessant childbearing and beatings, tries to kill her at birth. This is a culture that brings up daughters "to be caring and have no minds of our own." Nevertheless, her mother fights to keep Jyoti in school for six years and to prevent her from being married at the age of eleven to a widowed landlord.

When Jyoti does marry, it is to Prakash Vijh, a city man whose values are those of Gandhi and Nehru. In contrast to the other men of the traditional culture, Prakash does not see marriage as the cultural sanctioning of patriarchal control and enforced obedience. He renames Jyoti as Jasmine, a symbolic break with her feudal past. Yet this break causes Jyoti/Jasmine deep conflict. As a traditional woman she wants to get pregnant immediately to prove her worth and to validate her identity. Indeed, in this society, pregnancy is the only available identity. Jyoti still feels "eclipsed by the Mazbi maid's daughter, who had been married off at eleven, just after me, and already had had a miscarriage."

The point to note here, as Jasmine later realizes, is that Prakash does exert a Pygmalion effect on her, since he wanted "to make me a new kind of city woman"□a new woman for his new India. Thus, Prakash is entirely determining Jyoti's new identity. He tells her that it "was up to women to resist." Despite his modern views, Prakash 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. As such, Prakash exerts a more subtle form of patriarchal control, disguised as benevolence and demanding her active complicity. Jyoti fully recognizes her husband's limitations. She instinctively hides her detergent sales' commissions from Prakash. "For all his talk of us being equal, was he possessive about my working?" she wonders. Indeed, his talk of equality contradicts his belief that a "husband must protect the wife whenever he can." At the same time, Jyoti begins to

read, even reading Prakash's repair manuals. Her ability to read and understand technical manuals leads to the turning point in their marriage: the night when they work together, repairing a VCR with an equal division of labor. They dream of opening their own business, Vijh & Vijh. This vision is important in the narrative economy of Jasmine, since it provides the first model of the reconstituted family in the novel.

This possibility is decisively put to an end by the religious fundamentalist, Sukhwinder, who has "unforgiving eyes" and a ".at, authoritative voice." Conveniently forgetting the history of violence that followed Partition, Sukhwinder wants to create the new, separatist state of "Khalistan, the Land of the Pure" for believers who renounce "filth and idolatry." Within this codified economy of sameness, "whorish women" would be kept off the streets. Indeed, "all women are whores," and "'the sari is the sign of the prostitute.'" Sukhwinder thus wishes to uphold the traditional rigid segregation of the sexes and the exclusion of women as a corollary of his religious beliefs. For Sukhwinder, the nationstate is an exclusionary border, an enclave that celebrates the will to sameness in its univocal narrative of historical and human destiny. In her desire for stark narrative contrast, Mukherjee, however, demonizes the entire Sikh community, portraying them solely as violence-crazed fundamentalists. Here, as in her portrayal of the asymmetrical relationship between India and the West, Mukherjee succumbs to those relations of ruling that, at other points, she struggles to dismantle.

Jasmine and Prakash cannot escape the sectarian violence that has spread from the provinces to the city. Prakash is killed by a bomb wired into a radio as his assassin yells "'Prostitutes! Whores!'" The bomb is meant for Jasmine, who becomes a political target because her aspirations pose a threat to the social order built on women's subjection. Like Jasmine's father, and later Professor Devinder Vadhera, Sukhwinder and his cohorts desire to return to an imagined, timeless, and seamless moment that, to them, reflects the natural order. For Jasmine, this political killing means an abrupt end to the dreams of Vijh & Vijh. Instead, she must join her mother in enforced widowhood. As she laments, "I am a widow in the war of feudalisms." In spite of this temporary recognition, however, she is still balanced precariously between Jyoti and Jasmine. Her place, her "mission," is to travel to the United States and commit ritual suicide, suttee, where Prakash intended to go to school. As such, she is still ensnared in the same imaginary relations as her contemporary from the village of Hasnapur, Vimla. When Vimla's husband dies of typhoid, Vimla, although just twenty-two, douses herself with kerosene and flings herself on the stove. "In Hasnapur, Vimla's isn't a sad story."

At this point in the novel, India merely serves as a regressive and repressive background to further Mukherjee's thematic aims. It is a timeless India that is forever feudal, undeveloped, and barbaric, and, hence, still in need of Western guidance. On strictly literary grounds, Mukherjee argues that "I had to give her [Jasmine] a society that was so regressive, traditional, so caste-bound, genderist, that she could discard it" much easier than "a fluid American society" could be discarded ("Interview"). Here, India's stalled backwardness is unfavorably contrasted to the more attractive fluidity of Western society. Following Abdul JanMohamed, we can see that Mukherjee deploys the trope of the manichean allegory in her representation of India, since "the putative superiority of the European" depends upon "the supposed inferiority of the native." As

JanMohamed explains, the manichean allegory exerts such a powerful influence, consciously or subconsciously, that "even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex." Mukherjee's interests in Jasmine do not include such a critical attitude towards "imperialist exploitation" or the practice of suttee. Instead, her focus remains on the gendered subject in transit from the third world to the first world. For Mukherjee, then, a critique of stereotypes based of gender and exoticism supersedes a critique of imperialist influence in India. In many ways, this omission points to the inherent difficulties involved in avoiding the powerful attraction of the manichean allegory and, again, indicates the pervasive effects of colonialism continuing into the present.

These effects become more apparent in Mukherjee's novel when Jasmine leaves Hasnapur. She joins the dangerous, unstable category of "refugees and mercenaries and guest workers," slipping into "a shadow world" of interchangeable bodies. This floating population only asks to be allowed "to continue," while it journeys, simultaneously and side-by-side, with the tourists and businessmen who travel through legal channels of access and availability. These pilgrims are thus seen and unseen. They are ignored because of their obscene message that colonialism is not over yet. Colonialism has merely shifted into a different register. As Donna Haraway writes, the international economy of electronics and capital has redefined the notion of work. This new worker is "female and feminized," conforming to the twin imperatives of constant vulnerability and availability, as she is thoroughly "exploited as a reserve labor force."

For the refugees, the goal is simply to survive. However, this survival is threatened at the moment of their emergence into visibility. They then become the locus of suspicion and discourse. As a "'visible minority,'" these refugees are enveloped in an "atmosphere of hostility" based upon a whole series of "'crippling assumptions'" ("Interview") that are the product of prior colonialisms, textualities, and cultural myths. These myths then represent and influence behavior towards the native. For Jasmine, these myths of the available and passive Eastern woman create the climate that legitimizes her rape.

Jasmine's journey has taken her from Hasnapur to the United States aboard unregistered aircraft and ships. As an illegal immigrant traveling on a forged passport, she must complete her pilgrimage to Tampa aboard The Gulf Shuttle, a shrimper engaged in "the nigger-shipping bizness." She ends up in a motel room at the run-down Florida Court with the captain of the trawler, Half-Face, whose name derives from the loss of an eye, an ear, and half his face in Vietnam, where he served as a demolitions expert. Half-Face, a character "from the underworld of evil," is thus marked by his neocolonialist experience in Southeast Asia, and in this sense is like the young man at the bar later in the novel who reacts to Jasmine's entrance with the remark that "'I know whore power when I see it.'" Recognition and association are immediate: "His next words were in something foreign, but probably Japanese or Thai or Filipino, something bar girls responded to in places where he'd spent his rifle-toting youth." The young man and Half Face, both veterans of the East, respond similarly because Jasmine represents an already known and gendered subject.

With banal conviction, Half-Face 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. Hell, you'll probably like it. I don't get many complaints." For Half-Face, Jyoti's vulnerability is a "'sort of turn-on,'" and his boast implies a prior knowledge/narrative of known Eastern women and an entire history of others who have not complained. In other words, for Half-Face and his cohorts, women have not complained because ultimately they accepted the inevitability of the hierarchical situation and their presumed sexual nature, thus discovering that they "really" liked it after all. In this interested configuration of desire, cause and effect are conflated, and the threat of violence occluded. The myth of the available and passive Eastern woman eliminates any possibility of resistance, any possibility that these women did not "really" like it. For Half-Face, Jyoti is merely "'one prime piece,'" a gendered marking of the body that "cancels out" any other considerations. With mechanical and perfunctory obliviousness, Half-Face drinks, rapes, and then falls asleep. As a consequence of her "personal dishonor," Jasmine considers killing herself as Half-Face snores in the next room.

Occurring at the exact center of the novel, Jasmine's rape signals a crucial moment in her successive transformations and in the formation of her ethics of survival. Instead of killing herself and passively conforming to an identity politics that would define her solely as a victim, she decides instead to kill her attacker. With ritualistic attentiveness, she first thoroughly cleanses her body, and then she purifies her soul through prayer. She has a small knife, given to her by Kingsland, a savvy fellow nomad traveling aboard The Gulf Shuttle. She first uses it on herself, cutting a strip across her tongue. As Mukherjee explains, Jasmine becomes Kali, the goddess of destruction, since "Kali has her red tongue hanging out" ("Interview"). In addition, 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.

One further observation here has implications for Jasmine's later desertion of her crippled husband. Mukherjee has remarked that Kali is "the goddess of destruction, but not in a haphazard, random way. She is the destroyer of evil so that that world can be renewed" ("Interview"). As such, this restructuring and renewing function of Jasmine as Kali provides a key to the possibility of a postcolonial politics where resistance to the myths, histories, and narratives of the metropolitan center involves an active thematizing of the structures of enforced identity, and an affirmative transformation that involves appropriating the weapons and technologies that have served to maintain the center. Jasmine's killing of Half-Face involves a reappropriation□a violent sundering and subsequent adapting of the controlling strategies of violence and desire□and the reinscription of active resistance into the patriarchal narrative of vulnerability and availability. She appropriates the knife/ phallus, and she penetrates his body. Then, instead of committing suttee□burning the suit of her dead husband and then lying on the .re, the "mission" that controlled her journey to the United States□ Jasmine burns Prakash's suit and her Indian clothes in a trash can next to the motel. She breaks the chain of causality, the metalepsis that continually tries to substitute cause for effect in the relations of ruling, the terrible causality that led to her being "raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms" on her journey to America. 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.

As R. Radhakrishnan writes, "[t]he task for radical ethnicity is to thematize and subsequently problematize its entrapment within these binary elaborations with the intent of stepping beyond to find its own adequate language" ("Ethnic Identity"). For Jasmine, this "adequate language" involves the ability "to adjust, to participate," without succumbing to the desire to hold on to the past and certainty. To do so would be to become like Professor Vadhera and his family, who recreate an artificially maintained Indianness. In contrast, Jasmine must seek to negotiate and resituate, continually, the horizon of her fears and desires. This process of constant adjustment propels her to New York, where she acquires an illegal green card and comes to work as a domestic in the Hayes household. In the process, she is again renamed. Like Prakash, Taylor Hayes acknowledges her liminal state: "Taylor didn't want to change me. He didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness. My being different. . . didn't scare him." In contrast to her earlier transformations, she asserts that "I changed because I wanted to." She thus becomes "Jase, the prowling adventurer."

But Sukhwinder reappears in New York. To protect her new family, Jase escapes to Baden, Iowa. Here again, she changes, exchanging Jase for Jane. The point to note here is that she is actively changing her name, rather than passively accepting a name as she had with Prakash. But this new role requires a "regression, like going back to village life, a life of duty and devotion" ("Interview"). Settling in Baden as the wife of Bud Ripplemeyer, the head of the local bank, would be the same as remaining in Hasnapur, since becoming Bud's wife would be merely another form of enforced identity. As Jane, she only feels affection for Bud. Crippled by a distraught farmer whom his bank has foreclosed on, Bud appeals to her feelings of responsibility to be a caregiver as she had been in the Hayes family. To become Mrs. Jane Ripplemeyer, therefore, would require renouncing her desire to gain control of her body and destiny.

I began my reading of Jasmine with Jane and Bud by noting their two different conceptions of narrative and history, and I want to return to the connection between these conceptions and the production of enforced identity through another's de- sire. These two contrasting views become apparent when Bud and Jane are driving through Baden and pass "half-built, half-deserted cinder-block structures at the edge of town." The "empty swimming pools and plywood panels in the window frames" remind her of the Florida Coast motel where she was raped because as constructed by prior narratives of female identity she could be imagined as provocatively vulnerable and available.

Bud reacts differently to the cinder-block structures. Contemplating these undeveloped resources, Bud "frowns because unproductive projects give him a pain." In fact, Bud sees these unproductive resources and can only wonder "who handled themr financing." For Bud then, individuals, resources, and land are only understandable within an economy of productivity and efficiency. Thus, "Asia he'd thought of only as a

soy-bean market," presumably tended by productive and silent natives. And, indeed, Bud imagines the natives of his own region in terms of similar evaluative categories. A "good man" is one who displays "discipline, strength, patience, character. Husbandry." To Bud, individuals like Darryl who do not want to be tied down by the family farm, who want to make "something more of his life than fate intended," are irreducibly ".awed."

Bud Ripplemeyer is like a series of characters in this novel□Sukhwinder, Professor Vadhera, and Jyoti's father□who want to preserve a vision of the past as a pure, uncontested, and originary terrain. This nostalgia precludes change while it authorizes relations of ruling that seek to deny the interested subordination of oppositional voices and knowledges. Thus, the narrator can easily "wonder if Bud ever sees the America I do." The answer is no. Bud's desire manifests itself in the will to possess and to define. Jasmine has learned a different lesson from history.

Rather than preservation, stasis, and attachments, Mukherjee's novel proposes a counter-narrative that suggests that "transformation" must be embraced. Such a strategy questions the drive to essentialize that characterizes Sukhwinder, Half- Face, and Bud Ripplemeyer. It also suggests a different relationship between former colonial partners, a resituating of history that involves a thematizing of prior myths of enforced identity and a breaking into a new space, provisional and based on affinity, not identity. This postcolonial space is portrayed symbolically as the reconstituted family that emerges at the end of the novel: Jase is carrying Bud's child, Duff is an adopted child, and Taylor is emerging from a failed marriage. In addition they are going to California to be reunited with Du and his sister, victims of Vietnam's colonial past.

In the reconstituted family, they do not have the certainty of Bud's straight line of history, but neither do they have those benevolent assumptions that authorize exclusions based on fear of immigrants. Here, individuals survive through a flexible strategy of "scavenging, adaption, and appropriat[ing] technology," not exactly because they want to, but because they must in order to survive. It is not coincidental that the skills of Prakash and Du involve the rewiring of the circuitry of electronic machinery. Yet, this skill can also be turned to destructive ends, since Sukhwinder and his cohorts, the Khalsa Lions, wire bombs into radios. In this sense, an affinity that recognizes difference and contradiction, rather than an affiliation solely based on identity politics, becomes a necessity.

But survival also depends on a recognition of the historical and material forces that set this floating population in motion. As I indicated earlier, such a recognition might have informed Mukherjee's portrayal of India and her understanding of the ideological complexity of suttee. With its title character scarred by history, Mukherjee's *Jasmine* concludes with an image of affiliation through affinity □a hopeful imaging of a postcolonial world where difference is acknowledged and history is reconfigured. Yet, at the same time, this achieved state or topos of the reconstituted family cannot be seen as fixed and realized. Instead, Jasmine wonders how many "more selves" are in her. There are no answers to these questions in *Jasmine*, since any answer would involve a refutation of the novel's ethic of survival, adaptation, and transformation.

"Re-inventing ourselves" may be seen as an active strategy that implies the possibility of resistance and reappropriation through a reconfiguring of the received knowledges that constitute colonial hmstory. As JanMohamed and Lloyd note, such a critical reinterpretation "assert[s] that even the very differences which have always been read as symptoms of inadequacy are capable of being re-read transformatively as indications and figurations of values opposed to the dominant discourse." Thus, this archival work involves a strategy of re-reading the received history of the past, with particular attention to its silences, ruptures, and contradictions. It strives to avoid mistaking effects for causes, and to maintain a critical activity that sees differences as a product of competing discursive fields. Identity is never reducible to one stable and essential position, but is an effect of these discourses and contestations. To think only in terms of the implacable opposition of center to margin is to revalidate the essentializing binary grid of identity. To think in terms of shifting the center, de-centering, is to imagine an ascendancy of the margins, a simple reversal, where "interested" versions of heterogeneity vie for prominence. A third option is to illuminate the borders where centers and margins rub against each other in often contradictory ways. It is to bring the border into visibility, while resisting the urge to speak for it.

Jasmine examines this play of borders. As such, the novel avoids becoming a simple attack upon identity-based discursive formulas. Instead, it addresses the multiplicity of material forces and discursive regimes that seek to position the gendered subject. Put another way, *Jasmine* examines the doubleness involved in being "always moving and always still," a shifting and multiple identity that is in a state of perpetual transition. This novel presents the possibility of the acceptance of a plural self, one that resists the impulse towards certainty and totalization. In addition, resistance and transgression become viable alternatives, since, as the narrator remarks, "[t]here are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself." Remaking oneself becomes the only possible response to enforced identity and subjugated knowledge.

It is a mistake, I think, to seek agency at the conscious level of enactment. Even when there is a face on the machine□for instance, Half-Face or Bud Ripplemeyer□it is only one of many replaceable faces. The task for the intellectual is to delineate the workings of the machine, the relations of ruling, at its tentacle extension, at the extended point where it is most vulnerable, disputed, and diffused. Such a strategy involves a reappropriation, but also a negotiation, since negotiation recognizes difference as a site of both affinity and contestation. Negotiation is a desire to open up larger spaces in a common field of dialogical interaction. Yet, at the same time, there is the persistent danger noted by R. Radhakrishnan, related to the "profound contradictions that underlie the attempt to theorize change," that "our attempts to change the subject" may be "potentially wrong and repressive, even barbaric" ("Changing Subject"). In other words, there is the real danger of reproducing the very same relations of ruling that we have identified. To some extent, these processes occur in Jasmine.

Rather than locating agency in a unified subject position capable of correctly reading the real, a subject who has somehow "successfully" resisted its interpellation, Mukherjee's Jasmine struggles to articulate another form of knowledge. This negotiated knowledge is a modality of action predicated on a series of shifting subject positions. These

temporary roles then become vectors of intersection and intervention, and, because they are temporary and mobile, possibly prevent succumbing to the desire for certainty and completeness. A "role" is not originary, unique, or substantial. In fact, it points to the fictiveness of the gesture towards complete, realized development and continuity. It reveals discontinuity beneath the "role," the mask. Rather than a frozen category, Identity, then, becomes an historically specific strategy: not a "free" subject acting, but an available site for negotiation. Mukherjee has argued that an ability to adapt and appropriate is transformative, establishing the "sense of two-way traffic" ("Interview"). This "two-way traffic" captures the sense of Said's call for "a tremendously energetic attempt to engage with the metropolitan world in a common effort at re-inscribing, re-interpreting and expanding the sites of intensity and the terrain contested with Europe" ("Intellectuals").

No doubt, this "common effort" does not in any way help the Haitian "boat people" that I began this paper with. Nor will it probably help the next floating population of refugees and deportees. The failure lies in the too-easy conflation of cause and effect and the ready availability of abstract categories, so that these people are not seen as the effects of colonialisms "into the present." We can, however, continue to create the conditions where these silent people might speak of a different history. I think Mukherjee's strategy of "re-inventing ourselves" does open up the transformative possibility of not only interrogating these structures of power and knowledge, but also suggesting a historically- situated strategy where borders serve as multiple sites of contestation, transformative rereadings, and affinity. As such, the visible border becomes the site for critical interruption and discontinuity, for rewiring the circuitry.

Source: F. Timothy Ruppel, "'Re-inventing ourselves a million times': narrative, desire, identity, and Bharati Mukherjee's 'Jasmine,'" in *College Literature,* Vol. 22, No. 1, February, 1995, pp. 181-92, Jasmine.

Critical Essay #5

In the following review of Mukherjee's novel Jasmine*, Eleanor Wachtel describes the life journey of a Punjabi woman, Jyoti, as circumstance moves her through varying geographical locations and personalities, and calls Mukherjee's depiction of clashing cultures and philosophies as narrated by Jyoti, or Jasmine, as "powerful", "ambitious" and "impressively compact."*

In Bharati Mukherjee's new novel, the inhabitants of Hasnapur, a fictional village in India's Punjab state, dream of better lives in richer lands. As a girl, the title character of *Jasmine* listens with fascination as the men around her debate over which countries would be best for making a new start. Her brothers talk of well-paid jobs in the United Arab Emirates. But Prakash, their friend□and Jasmine's future husband□says that guest workers there are mere slaves, even if they are rich ones. He insists that the place to go is the United States. "When I go to work in another country," he declares, "it'll be because I want to be part of it." In the end, the brothers stay at home when their father is gored by a bull in a freak accident, and Prakash is killed in Hasnapur by a bomb planted by Sikh extremists. It is only Jasmine who becomes part of America.

The novel grew out of a story that appeared in Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories*, a collection that won last year's prestigious U.S. National Book Critics Circle Award. And it elaborates on a theme that Mukherjee, 49□who was born in Calcutta but moved to the United States in 1961 (she later lived in Canada for 14 years)□has carved out as her own: the assimilation of Third World immigrants into the American melting pot, which is itself enriched by those she describes as "new pioneers." Jasmine is one of those pioneers, a survivor with courage, wryness and a hopeful streak at odds with her fatalism. At the end of the short story, even though Jasmine was a domestic worker without a visa, papers or a birth certificate□and had been seduced on the Turkish carpet by her boss, an academic□she was still happy, "a girl rushing wildly into the future." By the time the novel's complex, textured and violent story comes to a close, Jasmine is still "greedy with wants and reckless from hope."

Using flashbacks and crosscuts, the novel weaves the story of the heroine's life from her early days in Hasnapur to her extraordinary adventures in the United States. The narrative begins when Jasmine is 7 and an astrologer in her home town foretells a future of exile and widowhood. As Jasmine evolves, she is given different names. Born Jyoti, she is renamed Jasmine at 14 when she weds the modernthinking Prakash. When his murder leaves her widowed three years later, Jasmine emigrates to the United States. There, she undergoes a series of metamorphoses as she struggles to leave her old self behind and find a new, American identity.

She lands in Florida, where a kind Quaker woman nicknames her "Jazzy" in response to her quick take on American-style walking and dressing. She goes to work for a New York City academic□a variation of the one depicted in the short story□and he names her Jase. Then, she leaves him and travels to rural Iowa, where she meets her second, common- law husband, Ben, an invalid banker with whom she adopts a refugee

teenage boy from Vietnam. Ben calls her Jane. The naming underlines her mutability□it is part of the melting process.

While Jasmine remains curiously passive and adaptable to her new country, ready to reinvent herself, she is also tough and resilient. She has to be to endure all of the violence that she encounters. Violence has always characterized Mukherjee's work, but in Jasmine the body count is so staggeringly high that it reinforces one of the novel's many aphorisms: "Dullness is a kind of luxury."

Jasmine's devoted schoolteacher, Masterji, who recognizes her intelligence and saves her from an arranged marriage at 14 to an old widower, is murdered by Sikh punks on scooters□"emptying over 30 bullets in him." Her girlfriend douses herself with kerosene and flings herself on a stove after her husband's death. During her migration to Florida, Jasmine is raped by a Vietnam veteran who lost half his face in a paddy field. She murders him with a small, sharp knife.

Even one of her Midwest American neighbors chokes to death on a piece of Mexican food while vacationing in California. Another hangs himself from the rafters of his unfinished hog barn. Still another maims Ben and then kills himself. Mukherjee suggests that people everywhere□whether they are Indian victims of Sikh extremism or Iowa farmers distraught by bankruptcy□are ripped apart by terrorism, passion and despair.

In her powerful depiction of clashing cultures and philosophies, Mukherjee has created an ambitious and impressively compact work. The writing is vivid and economical as the author moves easily between the Punjab and Iowa, Florida and New York City. In one of the novel's more poignant sequences, Jasmine discovers that her husband's old teacher, Professorji, now living in an immigrant enclave in Flushing, N.Y., is not a professor in his adopted country but an importer and sorter of human hair.

Working in the basement of the Khyber Bar BQ, he measures and labels the length and thickness of each separate hair, which is then sold for wigs and scientific instruments□which use human hair as a gauge for humidity. "A hair from some peasant's head in Hasnapur could travel across oceans and save an American meteorologist's reputation," Mukherjee writes. "Nothing was rooted anymore. Everything was in motion."

But the author seems unafraid of change. Her heroine surveys the havoc of American farm country and observes: "I see a way of life coming to an end. Baseball loyalties, farming, small-town innocence." It is clear that Jasmine feels no regret. Her fatalistic Eastern perspective□the long view□assumes that everything has a purpose and change is as it should be. At the same time, Jasmine is willing to push fate to elude its hold. That is how American she becomes.

Source: Eleanor Wachtel, "Jasmine," (book review) in *Maclean's,* Vol. 102, No. 43, October 23, 1989, p. 72.

Topics for Further Study

In studying Bharati Mukherjee's work, you'll often encounter the term "post colonialism." What does the term mean, and how does it relate to Jasmine's India?

Jasmine's childhood friend Vimla burns herself after her husband's death. This act is called "sati" or "suttee." Define "sati" and discuss its cultural, historical, and religious origins.

Prakash and Jasmine, in plotting their move to the United States, confront problems getting their "green cards." Later, in Flushing, Jasmine again worries about procuring her green card, even equates it with freedom. Pretend you are a modern-day citizen of India. Explain the requirements you would have to meet in order to legally make a permanent move to the United States. What obstacles might you encounter?

In literature and .lm, farmers are often stereotyped as being rather simple, sometimes crude, people. In Darrel Lutz we see a more complicated portrait of the farmer: a young, hard-working person who must understand sophisticated technology and high financing. Do some research into the state of the American farm. How big is the average farm, and how much does it cost to run?

What Do I Read Next?

In *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), a novel of magic and everyday life by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the heroine, Tilo, forgoes a life of special powers to live and love as an ordinary woman.

What's Happening to India? Punjab, Ethnic Conflict, Mrs. Gandhi's Death, and the Test for Federalism, by Robin Jeffrey (1986), is a survey of events leading to the Golden Temple incident and Indira Gandhi's assassination, with a focus on the roles of media and modernization.

Days and Nights in Calcutta (1977), by Mukherjee and Clark Blaise, is a journal of the couple's 1973 visit to India.

In *The Holder of the World* (1997), a novel by Mukherjee, a diamond called Tear Drop connects a contemporary woman, Beigh Masters, to a 19th-century Puritan woman, Hannah Easton.

In *Leave It To Me* (1997), a novel by Mukherjee, the heroine, Debbie DiMartino, searches to find her origins and identity.

The short stories in *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), by Mukherjee, trace the lives of Third World immigrants and their adjustments to becoming Americans.

The Tiger's Daughter (1972), a novel by Mukherjee, provides a satiric look at Indian society from the point of view of expatriate Tara Banerjee Cartwright.

In *Wife* (1975), a novel of morals by Mukherjee, Dimple moves to the United States with her husband and becomes torn between Indian and American cultures.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), a deeply comic novel by V.S. Naipaul, the title character yearns to be something greater than a henpecked sign writer.

In *How I Became A Holy Mother and Other Stories* (1981), a collection of short stories by Jhabvala Ruth Prawer, the characters are divided into two essential categories, Seekers and Sufferers.

The Great Indian Novel (1989), an irreverent novel by Salman Rushdie, chronicles modern Indian political history.

Further Study

Chua, C. L., "Passages from India: Migrating to America in the Fiction of V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee," *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson, Greenwood Press, 1992, pp. 51-61.

Discusses Mukherjee and V. S. Naipaul's portrayal of Indian immigrants in North American, and their struggle to realize the American Dream.

Hofstede, Geert, *Cultures and Organizations*, McGraw- Hill, 1997.

Provides a method for understanding cultural differences.

Kriefer, Joel, ed., *The Oxford Companion To Politics of the World*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Provides comprehensive coverage of international affairs and domestic politics throughout the world.

Lesser, Wendy, "United States," in *The Oxford Guide To Contemporary Writing*, edited by John Sturrock, Oxford University Press, 1996, 406-431.

Explores the recent writing of various cultures, including the literary and cultural contexts for authorship in each area.

Mukherjee, Bharati, "American Dreamer," in *Mother Jones*, Jan/Feb 1997.

In this essay, Mukherjee clearly identifies herself as an American and rejects other, more limiting labels.

Nelson, Emmanuel S., ed., *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*, Garland Press.

Provides an assortment of critical essays on Mukherjee's work.

Vignission, Runar, "Bharati Mukherjee: an interview," in *Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, edited by Vijay Mishra, Number 34-35, 1993.

Vignission's 1993 interview with Mukherjee where she explains her initial attraction to literature.

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Product Design
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Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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Editor, Literature of Developing Nations for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535