

# Jasmine by bharati mukherjee: duty and desire



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People could not live without desires for their life. To have a happy life, first of all it has to be desired. There is another aspect of life that opposite desire, duty.

Both of them create life. Jasmine is the main character of the same name novel of Bharati Mukherjee who struggle about what she should act to, desire or duty. She was born in a very traditional culture that supports duty while she really want to live a life that she can choose. The story begins with the appearance of an astrologer. The symbol of astrologer gives readers the idea that future is settled.

The old astrologer who can guess the future, or can tell what is the duty, or fate, of the young girl, Jasmine. Although this is the words of the astrologer, Jasmine does not accept the future that he tells her. “ No! You’re a crazy old man. You don’t know what my future holds (Mukherjee 3)! ” In the deep of her heart, Jasmine knows the man said the truth. The young Jasmine, due to her religious and cultural mindset, has been taught to believe in predestination.

She knows, “ Bad times were on their way. I was helpless, doomed (Mukherjee 4). ’ Outwardly, however, she whispers to the astrologer, “ I don’t believe you (Mukherjee 4). ” 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. Jasmine has been raised by Dida, her grandmother, firmly believes in duty.

She is the one who affects Jasmine's mindset. 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. Her pronouncement that, "Some women think they own the world because their husbands are too lazy to beat them (Mukherjee 47)" demonstrates her belief that woman cannot be the performers of this society.

This is the same as what Jasmine think "Village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go (Mukherjee 46)." 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 (Mukherjee 57),' she says. Later, Dida explains Prakash's death according to religious beliefs. "God was displeased (Mukherjee 98)" 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, "the Lord lends us a body, gives us an assignment, and sends us down. When we get the job done, the Lord calls us home again for the next assignment (Mukherjee 59). But Jasmine is a strong girl. She does not want to be a part of the fate that she has to be. 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, Prakash.

She went against what Dida said for the sake of her desire. And it is Prakash who affect her in another way, living with your desires.

Prakash is not the only one who gives Jasmine the idea of free will, but there also is Taylor. Both Jasmine and Taylor have a talk about fate and 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 (Mukherjee 60). ’ 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. ” The attitude of Taylor makes no mistake that he does not want to live the life follow to old traditions that people have to suffer on. This attitude has a big affect toward Jasmine that change her life in America. To live, people need desires; and to live happily, people need to fulfill the desires.

Mukherjee was very successful in building the way her characters fulfill their desires. Du, Jasmine’s adopted Vietnamese son, represents this idea. In following his own desire, he betrays Jasmine’s sense of duty. ” For the first time in our life together, he bends down, over the rifle, to kiss me (Mukherjee 223). ” The kiss is the symbol of desire.

They are living under a same proof as mom and son. In reality, their age is not too far. Therefore, the sense of love may be beyond the love of mom and  
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son. The picture of rifle represent for violence. In this scene, Mukherjee suggests that people need to go over their obstacles to fulfill their desires. Opposite to desire hich can bring happy life, duty can only bring suffering life.

Whenever people can put down their burdens, they can start to live. To prove that idea, Mukherjee built a duty for Jasmies. After the death of Prakash, Jasmine intended to follow the same ritual. 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.

The image seems to symbolize a ritual death of duty. In fact, after she killed Half-face who raped her, Jasmine burned her past, her burden, her duty with the fire. And this is the new start of her life: " With the first streaks of dawn, my first full American day, I walked out the front drive of the motel to the highway and began my journey, traveling light. " The story ends with the thought of Jasmine about her duty and free will. She gradually builds a new life for her.

The life that she can do what she desires. Jasmine is happy, and never regrets that she acted as her desires. This is the message that Mukherjee want to send. People could not live happy without fulfilling their desires.

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