7. Silent Agonise of Black 'Celie' and Brown 'Jasmine' in America

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Abstract: *Both the characters Jasmine and Celie as a girl child were brutalized right from their childhood. Celie's sufferings and agonies starts when she was raped by her stepfather Alfanso whereas Jyoti's tragic life starts when she leaves her native India and journey's to America. Celie shared her traumatic experiences by writing letter to god and later to her sister Nettie. On the other hand Jyoti undergoes series of transformation from Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jassy-Jase-Jane. Her each incarnation thus symbolizes new life and new self with its new changed identity. Both the novelist represented violence in sarcastic manner. Celie not only undergoes with physical violence but also spiritual violence. In Jasmine violence is portrayed through communal riots and when Jasmine murdered Half–Face. Celie was portrayed as sacrificing figure whereas Jasmine on the other hand throughout the novel searches her better prospects in life and her thirst for self-identity. Both the characters adopted America as new existence with dilemma of acculturation and assimilations. The silent sufferings of Celie and Jasmine in alien world conceptualizes the different perception of life, 'The Colour Purple' finally had blissful ending as Celie's reunion with her family takes place in the end whereas Jasmine compared herself as an unsatisfied soul behaving like tornado.*

Bharati Mukherjee born in Calcutta in 1940 and was educated in India and the USA (Iowa). She has lived for ten years in Canada with her husband and has Canadian citizenship, but now she lives in the USA. Her works often relate the difficulties of forging a new American identity and the problems faced by Asian Americans *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife,* both published in the early 1970s, are novels about the isolation of Indian expatriates. She has written more than a dozen books of fiction and nonfiction, including the acclaimed collection Leave It to Me (1997) among her collections of short stories. Her most influential work has been *"The Middleman and Other Stories"* (1988), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and contains the short stories that was the bud of her novel *Jasmine* (1989) and her recent novels, *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and its sequel, The Tree Bride (2004). Mukherjee's eloquent novels treat the subjects of assimilation, family, and the struggles of Indian women. *Jasmine* was published in 1983.

Alice Walker (b-1944) in Georgia is an African American novelist, short-story writer, poet, essayist, and activist. Her first two novels, The *Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) and *Meridian* (1976) articulated Walkers Womanist concerns. In the *Third Life of Grange Copeland,* she deals with the theme of female genital mutilation as practiced in Africa. In Meridian, Walker projects the character of protagonist as a revolutionary and a Civil Right activist. Her third

novel was *The Colour Purple* (1982) which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award in 1983. Walker's creative vision is rooted in the economic hardship, racial terror, and folk wisdom of African American life and culture, particularly in the rural South. Her writing explores multidimensional kinships among women and embraces the redemptive power of social and political revolution.

Unity in diversity is a marked characteristic of both American literature and American social life. Numerous writers exploit diversities as well as the racial and ethical peculiarities of the various people that constitute the American nation. Alice Walker's The Colour Purple (1982) and Bharti Mukherjee's Jasmine (1983) are brilliantly complex novels depicting the general living conditions of black and brown women in America. Bharti Mukherjee and Alice Walker explore woman's psychology, her social relationships and her emotional sensitivity in the new found world. The colonial rule exploited the woman but even for the post colonial woman exploitation and oppression of the patriarchy was not less. Indian and African women occupied a secondary place in the man's world, not because of their incapabilities but because of imposed cultural and societal forces. Alice Walker and Bharti Mukherjee have created an authentic world of women where they grow and live, suffer and endure and then emerge as more dignified and more humane as individuals fighting for their own battle in life. An anonymous author's description about women holds very true when we read the story of Celie and Jasmine. "Women's work is never done and is underpaid or unpaid or boring or repetitious and we're the first to get fired and what we look like is more important than what we do and if we get raped it's our fault and if we get beaten we must have provoked and if we raise our voices we're nagging bitches and if we enjoy sex we're nymphos and if don't we are frigid and if we love woman it's because we can't get a real man." (Anonymous, quoted in 'The Torch',14 September 1987)

These two woman writers created two powerful characters which portray the real picture of struggle of a Black and Brown woman setting ground for parallel comparison. This paper is focused on common suffering faced by these protagonists belonging to different culture, education and nationality. Both are tolerating with the same noble cause to create their own identity and fight against sexism and violence. The Black population of America was victim of societal forces such as racism, redundancy, slavery and sexisms. The Blacks were suffering under dominating white racist patriarchy. This oppressing concept made a room for black men to brutalize their women. Thus, black women have to bear double jeopardy. Gerda Lerner comments on this and writes: "Belonging as they do to two groups which have traditionally been treated as inferiors by American society-Blacks and women. They have been doubly invisible. Their records lie buried, unread, infrequently noticed and even more seldom interpreted." (MS,1972:xvii-xxiii)

Celie was a young black girl living in rural Georgia, a Southern Black town of Africa. Her father was a farmer later turned into businessman and owned a mega store. He was lynched to death by whites on the outbreak of racial violence of The Civil Right Movement "One night, the man's store was burned down, his smithy destroyed, and the man and his two brothers dragged out of their homes in the

middle of the night and hanged.(TCP-167)" Celie's mother remarried to Alphonso, a White Man as she desired not to face life ahead singly. He was a lecherous man having priority only for carnal passion in life. He was neither physically, mentally, nor emotionally attached to Celie's mother. She became weak after delivery. She visited the doctor for medical checkup. Alphonso molested little Celie, his own step-daughter. His tortures never discontinued, the cycle of rapes continued. Celie says:

> He [Pa] never had a kind word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and get used to it. But I don't never get used to it. And now I feel sick every time I be the one to cook. (TCP-3)

Celie became pregnant but could not confess anything to anyone. His father threatened her not to reveal anything else he would kill his own wife Celie's mother. Celie faced double torture, physical torture by her father and mental torture due to her mother's anger. As she could not seek help from anyone she decided to pour down her sufferings by writing letters to God. These letters helped her to rupture the silence imposed on her and also helped to heal her mind. Writing was the key element that made her to survive and prevented her mental state from going insane. Celie feels that writing letter to God certainly lightened the burden of shameful secrets that she carried around her. Can mute Celie achieve a wholesome satisfied personality in the end? Can Jyoti, protagonist of Bharti Mukherjee's Jasmine, "a silent woman" becomes a "speaking woman" after straddling two cultures? The paper focuses about these two women, Celie and Jasmine struggling to reach somewhere in their respective lives. Radical and Socialist feminist theories seem to be appropriate to approach these novels to identify reason behind these female characters evolution and development. Celie was told by her Pa that he had taken her children into the woods and God has taken them, but she thought that he might have sold them. Pa says: "Say I'm evil an always up to no good. He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don't think he kill it. I think he sold it to a man and his wife over Monticello. I got breast full of milk running down myself. He says why don't you look decent? I don't have anything."(TCP-5)

Celie's plight was pathetic putting humanity at shame. She had only one dress which used to get wet as she could not nurse her child. In spite of being aware of this fact her Pa would say to look decent. Pa's atrocities knew no bounds; his next target was Nettie, Celie's beautiful sister. Pa tried to seduce her several times but Celie offered herself to her stepfather unwillingly to prevent her sister Nettie from being ruined. The next phase of her life's painful journey begins with her step-father's remarriage to another woman after her mother's death and Celie's marriage to a man named Albert (Mr._) who was an incarnation of Satan. Mr._ was not ready to marry Celie but Pa convinced Mr._ that though she is ugly but she can work like a beast and prove to be a good care-taker of his already existing children. "She spoiled twice. She ain't fresh tho, but you don't need a fresh woman

no how. I got a fresh one in there myself and she sick all the time. He spit, over the railing. The children git on her nerve, she not much of a cook. And she big already."(TCP-9) After marriage severe violence was seen in Celie and Mr. _'s married life. Celie's self was wounded by the callous behavior of her husband. Celie faced domestic violence and assault by her husband. Her wounded self bleed more and more.

> Harpo ask his daddy. Why he beat me. Mr_ say, cause he my wife. Plus she stubborn. All women good. he don't finish. He just tuck his chin over the paper he do it remind me of Pa. (TCP-23)

In 'The Colour Purple' the colour is a symbol of bruises which appeared in Celie's body due to beatings inflicted upon, first by her father Alphanso and then by her husband. Due to all these tribulations in her life Celie became stiff like wood, and her inner feelings were completely dead. She also compares herself to a tree, giving selfless love and serving everyone without expecting anything from others "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know tree fears man."(TCP-23)

Celie kept on facing blows in her life. Her relations with Mr. were mechanical rather than physical. Mr. tortures knew no proportions. He brought sick Shug Avery' a bar singer his true love to his house. Poor Celie was entrusted the work of nursing her husband's mistress. Celie accepted it stoically but it turned into a blessing in disguise in Celie's life. Celie nursed her; cared for her physically. Shug in return healed her emotionally by the magic wand of her true love for Celie. Celie unlocked the burden of sexual abuse by her step-father to Shug. She enveloped Celie in her arms: "I start to cry too. I cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, lying there in Shug's arm. How it hurt and how much I was surprised. How it stung while I finish trimming his (private part) hair. How the blood drips down my leg and mess up my stocking. How he don't never look at me straight after that."(TCP-103). Celie has no desire to know her body because of repeated rapes and beatings. She knew that she was black and ugly. But it was Shug who initiates Celie to the pleasure of sex and after this lesbian relationship with Shug, Celie became aware of her body and her sexuality. As Celie had never been loved by any man, this homosexual relation is ultimate gift of love from Shug. There were profound changes in Celie. Celie's spiritual journey of love making and being loved lead her towards selfhood. She leaves her husband.

Celie's transformation begins with her new business of sewing pants. Shug's lesbian relationship empowers Celie's and puts her on the road to prosperity. Celie felt very comfortable to share her feelings with Shug and considers her as the best healer of her life's sufferings. She learned how to love oneself. Even when Shug leaves Celie for a nineteen year old boy named Germaine, Celie does not stop loving herself and Shug. Celie represents herself as the forerunner of other African – American heroine who epitomizes the survival spirit of black women. Celie's evolution is achieved through a lot of sufferings and in every phase of her development, she sheds a little bit of her old self and gradually emerges as a new woman. The sisterhood binding with Nettie, Shug and Sofia exert a critical effect on Celie's awakening. When Nettie moved to Africa, she kept in contact with Celie through letters. Nettie brings Celie's lost children back which give a new lease of

life to Celie. Sofia, Celie's step-son's wife encourages her to develop her new self image and provokes her to fight against the injustices imposed on her. Celie in the end accepts that the most important thing in life is love, admiration, enjoyment of the beauty that adds to happiness in life. Finally, Celie herself attest that she is happy because she has love, money as well as her family by her side. Celie marks her out as a survivor who is willing to testify against the sinicism and racism.

Bharti Mukherjee's "Jasmine" who was earlier Jyoti is the story of a simple Punjabi peasant girl who lived in Lahore. Jyoti was the fifth daughter and seventh of nine children of her parents. Her story unfolds with the burden associated with daughters in their community. "If I had been a boy, my birth in a bountiful year would have marked me as lucky, a child with a special destiny to fulfill. But daughters were curses. A daughter had to be married off before she could enter heaven, and dowries beggared families for generations".(J-39)

Jasmine being the daughter was subject to complain by her mother that God is "cruel…to waste brain on a girl but Jasmine's intellectual potential earns admiration from the village teacher, who lobbies for her to be allowed to continue her education and pursue a career. Her father commented that masterji thought that she was a lotus that bloomed in cow-dung. Jasmine silently bears such humiliation right from her childhood from her own parent. Her mental suffering begins with the forecast of astrologer about her future widowhood and exile. She tried to deny that one is helpless against fate. Jasmine's journey of physical suffering begins during the post partition when the family was forced out violently to leave their comfortable, upper-middle class lifestyle in Lahore and was forced into "a village of flaky mud huts" (J- 41). Jasmine narrates how this loss of home, homeland, and status plagued her family: "Mataji, my mother, couldn't forget the Partition Riots. Muslims sacked our house. Neighbors' servants tugged off earrings and bangles, defiled grottoes, sobered my grandfather's house. Life shouldn't have turned out that way! I've never been to Lahore, but the loss survives in the instant replay of my family story: forever Lahore smokes, forever my parents flee. (J-41)

She loses her father when a bull strikes him to death. She takes the responsibility of the whole family. A ray of hope 'Prakash' comes in her life who is a progressive and modern man. He wanted to move to America for higher studies. He believed America to be land of golden opportunities. He makes her a new woman, changes her name to 'Jasmine' lovingly he said: "You are small and sweet and heady, my 'Jasmine'. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume (J-77)." Her husband Prakash is killed by explosion of bomb planted by Sikh terrorists. Her grief was so profound at the loss of her husband that life became meaningless for her without him. She wants to immolate herself in the funeral pyre of her husband in America. She migrates to America with an illegal visa to become sati. Thus Jasmine abandons India and joins with the collective pool of immigrants. She was travelling with feeling of minority status in her mind. Her trauma of newness and hedonism is described as: "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 surely, barely wakened customs guards await their bribe." (J-101) She was raped by the ugly captain of the ship Half-Face

by which she was voyaging to America. She was already lifeless and the incident made her cold as corpse. After her rape her condition turns very pitiable. "For the first time in my life I understood what evil was about. It was about not being human. Half-face was from an underworld of evil. It was a very simple, very clear perception, a moment of death. I had faced death twice before, and cheated it."(J-116) Jasmine felt hatred towards her own body. She cleaned her body by bathing and she kept on applying soap as if it had never been cleaned before. She started believing that she had left her earthy body. Jasmine took on the form of Goddess Kali. She changed from plaint girl to ruthless woman and killed Half-Face.

After moving to several places, Jasmine gets a job of an au-pair girl in Taylor's family. He showed the warmth of friendliness and did not consider her as maid servant for his son Duff. Jasmine blossoms from a diffident, migrant into adventurous "Jase", the new name given to her by Taylor. Taylor accepts her as she is and has no objection even on knowing the fact that she is an illegal immigrant from India. But this romance with Taylor comes to a halt when she confronts Prakash's assassinator Sukhwinder. She leaves Taylor and Duff for their safety and meets another guardian angel mother Ripplemeyer. She serves her son Bud Ripplemeyer patiently after he was crippled. Jasmine walks out of Bud Ripplemeyer's life, going to Taylor when she understands that her attraction for him was not love but affection and sympathy.

In *"Colour Purple"* and *"Jasmine"* there is a marked similarity in the central episode they present. Celie in Alice Walker's novel and Jasmine in Bharti Mukherjee's novel are victims of rapes. While there are obvious points of similarities there are significant differences also. Life is an uphill struggle for both of them. Both the protagonists were suffering with two heterogeneous sensibilities which were conditioned by the intrinsic value system of their cultures. Alice Walker depicted the curse of slavery of protagonist Celie while Bharti Mukherjee described about the Jasmine's wounded self. The rapist of Celie and Jasmine not only take away their innocence but also the sense of happiness in still being naïve and innocent. Their peace and harmony of life is lost after their rape. Rape may be considered as an inverted Caliban Merinda syndrome in a sense that Celie (Black) girl is raped by white Caliban (Alphanso). Jasmine Indian (Brown) girl is raped by white Caliban (Half–face). Both of them are broken physically, mentally and emotionally after their rapes.

But the picking up of 'knife' by Celie and Jasmine represents how to kill and how to be defensive. Celie picks up the knife against her husband Albert (Mr.) and Jasmine kills Half-face by piercing him by knife to death. Here the knife does not represent the path of unworthy but the way to end terrorizing of immigrant women. It paves the way for their escape from tortures. Female ties in both the novels play a dominant role to lessen the pain of suffering of Celie and Jasmine. The sisterhood bonding of Celie with Nettie, Shug and Sofia provides immense moral support and leads her towards an awakening. Similarly Jasmine is rescued by Lillian Gordon who assumes the role of a fairy god mother in her life. She brought a doctor to sew Jasmine's bleeding tongue. She comforted Jasmine by her words that past may make one vary but it should not allow to deform the person. She came as a facilitator who gave Jasmine the life of absolutely ordinariness

which Jasmine ached for. She gave Jasmine shelter, clothes, tea, shoes and food the basic ordinary things she needed. She taught her to walk American, talk American and made her fit for survival in America.

But Celie emerges out as a silent character "a cool breeze" who becomes contented in the end. Celie's lesbian relationship to Shug brings about her gradual redemption and her reunion with her lost children and sister helps her in attainment of her sense of self. Jasmine is focused as a violent character or tornado where her life is fluctuating between certainty and uncertainty. She readily accepts change of name, clothes and life partners. She runs off with one man when she is pregnant with another man's child. She thinks of her happiness, her love and herself. She was rather fluid. She lives a floating life. She takes a superficial view of American life and does not delve deep into the layers of values there. She does not search for special identity but wants to identify herself with American way of life. At the end, we can conclude that Celie became a fully contented soul whereas Jasmine became a hollow adjusting soul. Celie emerges as a selfless woman to attain salvation but Jasmine is a selfish woman who is lying between East and West. Celie and Jasmine learned the concept how to keep going in life.

My struggle was always against
an inner darkness, I carry
within myself the only knows keys
to my death to unlock life, or close if shut
forever. A woman who loves food grains,
the colour yellow
and the sun I am happy to fight
all outside murderers,
as I see I must
(Quoted from Alice Walker's poem 'Stripping Bark From Myself ')

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