

The Enigma of Cultural Displacement for Female Indian Migrants: Translocation and Gender Oppression in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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Abstract :

Immigration and the disputed concepts of culture and identity are indeed serious issue in diasporic postcolonial writing. This article addresses the ١٩٨٩ book "Jasmine" by Bharati Mukherjee, which portrays the pain of the diaspora and gender inequality in the life of Jasmine, an Indian lady. It examines the difficulties faced by migratory Indian women, including gender discrimination, translocation, socio-cultural redemption, and self-transformation. This study relies on the postcolonial critical theories of critics and theorists, including Fanon's theory of the inferiority complex and Bhabha's theory of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry. These serve to illustrate Jasmine's battle with self-transformation and the reshaping of her female identity.

Key Words: Immigrant ; Exile ; Gender Oppression ; Cultural Displacement, Identity

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Introduction

The Indian postcolonial period's most significant diasporic literary works are Bharati Mukherjee's book "Jasmine." It discusses relevant issues relating to the native cultural identity and national history of the adopted culture of the metropolis. Exile, immigration, the issue of cultural displacement, and its effects are also explored in the novel by the author. The main character of novel, Jasmine, recounts the journey of her immigration from India to America while also revealing aspects of her mother's culture and identity and the way they are changing and evolving along the way. Jasmine experiences gender discrimination, exile, alienation, and translocation, similar to many immigrant women, before ultimately experiencing socio-cultural redemption and undergoing self-transformation.

The work delves into the issue that the Indian immigrant lady faces in her quest for independence and the reconstruction of her ideal independent female identity. Mukherjee's heroine in this novel portrays the immigrant lady seeking independence by redefining herself and changing identities, since her journey begins in India as an exiled woman but ends as an immigrant in America. Evacuation from local social practises and qualities, a lack of native language proficiency, being an alien in both worlds, and various wounds of the mind and psyche have all had an impact on Jasmine's identity, causing an identity crisis and raising the diasporic experience of the alienated woman and her battle for social identity and belonging.

This paper depends predominantly on critics' and scholars' convictions like Fanon's theory of Inferiority Complex that deals with the abused individuals' view of persecution and Western prevalence. Furthermore, Homi Bhabha's speculations of hybridity ambivalence, and mimicry are used to show Mukherjee's utilization of these devices by which the migrant lady, Jasmine, may challenge and go against the assorted systems of mistreatment and feature her battle of self-change and the reconstruction of female identity.

Mukherjee's novel, "*Jasmine*", depicts the struggle of every woman in the Indian society; as it sheds light on the social orientations towards women. Jasmine represents women's desire to identify themselves as existing independent souls in their society. Alas, they find themselves restricted to certain social values and stereotypes that determine their social status as submissive creatures dependent on their husbands. As a little female child, Jasmine was treated as an exhausted dependent fellow and thus she developed psychological contentions that urge her sub-conscious to reciprocate and drive her to conceive the journey of self-determination.

Mukherjees' feminist writings ignore the significance of caste and class, as

well as how they interact with gender, ethnicity, and age in India and the modern United States. Mukherjee's major protagonists, however, are Indian women from the middle class. She disregards their social position and makes the erroneous assumption that every woman is given the same opportunity for career advancement.

Indeed, the conventional understanding of diaspora denotes a certain separation from the typical or "natural" place of residence or way of life. A lack of opportunity for social or economic progress is one example of a dislocating factor that may be direct or coercive. It is challenging to accurately and validly characterise the phenomena across time and geography because to the many causes that underlie movements of people and groups in different regions of the world.

١. Social Blunder and Aboriginal Indian Culture

In her novel, *Jasmine*, Mukherjee portrays the struggle of the Indian women against the oppressive Indian social norms as she focuses on females' strive to bridge the gap of social and cultural alienation. Through *Jasmine*, Mukherjee wants to shed light on the strong affinity between the Indian Women and their culture which, in return, reflects their native identity.

١.١ Socio-centric Women's Orientation: Bulwark or Servility?

In her novel, *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee explores the journey of the immigrant woman highlighting multiculturalism and displacement. She examines the dilemma of being caught between the two cultures; the Indian culture and the host American culture. She focuses on the American lifestyle but she delineates some aspects that are basic elements in the Indian culture.

The opening pages of the novel are devoted to shed light on the patriarchal Indian society and how it perceives women. Through *Jasmine's* character and journey, Mukherjee exhibits women's social life and their sufferance as being submissive despite their achievements. Yet, those Indian women consider themselves inferior and worthless. They think that intelligence and success are men's right. They assume that even the successful woman should look at herself as men's property. This perception is highly depicted as a social norm when the time of their marriage come because it is the woman's family that award the man and his family money and gifts; on behalf of the oppressed Indian women; *Jasmine* narrates her own experience as she states that her mother lamented that it was cruel of God to give brains to girls; and it is much crueller for God to make a fifth girl pretty instead of the first.

By the time of her wedding, *Jasmine* states that there were no wedding funds left by the time, although it was the appropriate time to start a family. So, she wouldn't get the husband she merited. She was seven years old at the time, and she was a student, a scorer, and a sketch artist to whom Masterji, our school's senior and sourest instructor (B. A. Patiala, failed), donated his personal books. She was fluent in Punjabi and Urdu and the first female leader Masterji may have had for English lessons. *Jasmine* confirms that the school's senior was carrying a stack of English Textbooks, some from the British Council Library and others with USIS

markings on them. Yet, she recalled a thin one about an American community that reminded him of Punjab, as well as Alice in Wonderland, which gave her insomnia and sometimes nightmares. The books in the United Kingdom were thicker, with more words and therefore she recalled being compelled to abandon both *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre* because they were too difficult (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٣١).

Mukherjee refers to some beliefs in the Indian society focusing on the social and cultural stereotypical perceptions towards women. On behalf of every marginalized alienated Indian woman, Jasmine talks about her birthday and how it was perceived as a curse although she was born in the year of harvest after a long period of drought. Yet, she is still considered as a cursed child in contrast to the baby boys who are considered as a blessing. This social difference between the two genders creates a sort of gender discrimination and males' myth of superiority and dominance. Accordingly, the social and cultural norms of the Indian society regard women's existence as a property that is identified and determined by marriage; as Jasmine argues:

In a make shift birthing hut in Hasnapur, Jullundhar District, Punjab, India, I was born the year the harvest was so good that even my father, the reluctant tiller of thirty acres, had grain to hoard for drought. 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. Gods with infinite memories visited girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations. (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٣١)

Marriage is given a fundamental role in the Indian culture as it is considered as a spiritual blessing that takes women to heaven. Thus, it has special ceremonies that are performed by the married couples and their families. Both, the husband and the wife are obliged to wear special traditional clothes that make them look different and special. For the wife, she has to wear what is called "Sari", a red and gold wedding dress, with a lot of jewelries in her hands and on the top of her head along with a special ring in her nose and white flowers decorating her hair. As for the relationship between the couple; it is marked by the nucleus in the wife's neck. Jasmine has talked about her wedding day with her husband Prakash saying; "two weeks later we were married. I wore Matajis red and gold wedding sari, which was only slightly, damaged by mold, and in my hair the sweetest-smelling jasmynes" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٥٢). The wedding dress and accessories are part of the Indian culture and therefore their presence in Jasmine's wedding look reflects her attachment to her aboriginal Indian culture.

Besides, Indian wives are not allowed to call their husbands by their first names; they consider this as disrespect to the husband and as a sin because they believe that Lord has given men distinctive spiritual property. However, Prakash's way of thinking differs from other Hasnapur people's beliefs and customs. He believes in human beings equality and thus he asked Jasmine to call him by his first name. He is a modern Indian man with a modern beliefs and ideologies. Jasmine says;

My husband, Prakash Vijn, was a modern man, a city man. He did trash some traditions, right from the beginning ... There's no room in modern India for feudalism," he declared...He wanted me to call him by his first name. "Only in feudal societies is the woman still a vassal," he explained. "Hasnapur is feudal." In Hasnapur wives used only pronouns to address their husbands. (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٥٢)

In addition to the good noble way, Prakash creates a new identity for his wife. He changed her name from Jyoti, which has been given to her by her grandmother, to Jasmine. She says: "he laughed again and told me to stop regressing into the feudal Jyoti. "You are Jasmine now"" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٦٢). This new name allows jasmine to have a new self-identification, a more feminine prestigious status. She believe that the previous name, Jyoti, creates a strong woman who has been fighting and struggling to be educated and independent as she makes referenced to the British novel "Jane Eyer". Accordingly, jasmine argues: "my grandmother may have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٣١).

٢,٢ Marriage Catechism: A Spiritual Affiliation or Coercion?

Believing in men's superiority creates kind of spiritual relationship between the husband and his wife, to the point that one may think that Indian women should worship their husbands and praise them to have God's mercy and satisfaction. Dida considers Jasmine a sinner as she called her husband by his proper name because this is forbidden in the Indian culture. She criticized her and blames her for doing so and being at the Sari shop at the same time. At the same time she argues that God was angry at jasmine because she has broken the pillars of the Indian culture by this marriage since it was like the Christians marriage and thus God depraved her husband and punishes her by the death of her husband Prakash. Mukherjee mentions this custom saying;

If you had married the widower in Ludhiana that was all arranged ... If you had checked the boy's horoscope and not married like a Christian in some government office ... If you had waited for a man I picked ... none of this would have happened. I am told you called him by his proper name. It is very clear. You were in the sari shop to buy something you could not afford, to celebrate a separation from your husband and his desertion of India to make money abroad. God was displeased. God sent that Sardarji boy to do that terrible thing. Dida, I said, if God sent Sukkhi to kill my husband, then I renounce God. I spit on God. I blame the Muslims, she cried. If we had all stayed in Lahore, you would have married a prince! (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٦٥)

Nevertheless, Jasmine remained faithful to her husband after his death. As any Indian widow, Jasmine wears a white Sari that every Indian widow has to wear. Meanwhile, she starts planning for immigration to burn the clothes of her husband in America, where they have been planning to live. Jasmine comments; "it is my mission to bring my husband's suit to America. I am taking it to his school and burning it where we were going to live" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, pp. ٧٣-٧٤). Jasmine takes

all the clothes of her husband with her to America to burn them in the place where they were supposed to live together; this act represents to what extent Jyoti is loyal to her husband and to the Indian culture that urges the living people to burn the dead people and their staff and put them where they loved to be in order to be free, relieved and happy. She argues: "I had planned it all so perfectly. To lay out the suit, to fill it with twigs and papers. To light it, then to lie upon it in the white cotton sari I had brought from home" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٧٦).

Mukherjee confirms women's strong affiliation to their husbands when she describes Jasmine's situation after Prakash's death. She portrays "when Jyoti's future was blocked after the death of Prakash, Lord Yama should have taken her" (p.٨١). Henceforth, in the Indian culture, women are nothing without their husbands; their lives are related to the lives of their husbands. Thus women live a terrible life after the death of the husband as they have no right for happiness and another marriage. They live waiting for their death as a lord mercy.

Jasmine's sadness and melancholy after the death of her husband lead her to think of purifying herself to be prepared for the meeting with her Prakash's soul. I determined to clean my body as it had never been cleaned, with the small wrapped bar of soap, and to purify my soul with all the prayers I could remember from my fathers and my husband's cremations. This would be a fitting place to die. I had left my earthly body and would soon be joining their souls. (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٧٥)

Jasmine prays and repeats all the spiritual ceremonies she has learnt from her family and from her husband to purify her soul and prepare her for the unification with Prakash soul in the other life. She adds "I said my prayers for the dead, clutching my Ganpati. I thought, the pitcher is broken. Lord Yama, who had wanted me, who had courted me, and whom I'd flirted with on the long trip over, had now deserted me" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٧٧). She believes that the ceremonial prayers she has performed are like a divined soap that cleans all her sins and pain after being raped by the man who helped her to immigrate illegally. She is shocked and traumatized and feeling shameful of being raped. Mukherjee uses the scene of rape to show that third world women are always exposed to violence. Jasmine's displacement from India to America is a change of fate and transformation from oppression to freedom (Ayaicha, ٢٠١٩, p. ٣٢).

Mukherjee delineates gender oppression in the Indian society making jasmine's life as a focal point that she refers to at each time. This oppression is part of the Indian culture and thus a way of life that existed and it is still exist in some regions such as Punjab. Meanwhile, Mukherjee uses some historical references such as names of places "Hasnapur" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٥٢), "Lahore" (p.٦٥), and "Delhi" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٦٥), and names of characters like "Vimla" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٥٢), "Prakash Vijn" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٥٢), "Jyoti Vijn" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٦٥), "Lord Yama" (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٧٧), Mukherjee's aim behind the use of these exospheric references is to give authenticity and originality to her novel and to create an Indian cultural background to this building roman. The story took place between the two

worlds; hence, she amalgamates the two cultures to illustrate change and Indian women's desire for freedom and independence from the feudal Indian society.

٢. Displacement, Exile and the Need to Belong: Quest for the Self

Home is a stable place of living that feels safe, cozy, and familiar, whereas homeland is a place of origin to which one feels emotionally tied. Home and homeland are not necessarily the same location, even though it is frequently the case that people feel at home in their country. After being oppressed and annihilated in the motherland, writers such as Bharati find their relief in migration. Yet, the utopian dream of relief in the occidental world collapses and becomes a chaotic dilemma of search for the self, for home, for culture and belonging.

In general, individuals avoid going into exile and remaining there. Exile is a status imposed on people, communities, or nations; they are passive reactors. Exile is seldom desired. Individuals, entire communities, and peoples may intentionally flee into exile to seek sanctuary and avoid persecution at times. Once in exile and politically secure, these people and groups may actively seek to assist other refugees and bring about a change in political tyranny (Baumann; ٢٠١٠. P.١٩).

According to Ashcroft et al; exile is defined as a separation and alienation from one's actual country or one's ethnic and cultural origins. Some critics argue that there should be a distinction made between the concepts of exile, which denotes coercive restraint, and emigration, which suggests a choice act or condition. Only the first generation of free settlers (from all the many colonial civilizations) may be considered expatriates rather than exiles. For individuals born in the colonies, the concept of exiled expatriation (defined as voluntarily entering a state) must be redefined. Exile becomes a trait of many colonial situations, albeit, if the concept is limited, as Gurr proposes, to refer to persons who cannot return to their "place of origin," even if they so choose. For instance, it explains the tension felt when native-born offspring of the colonists choose a faraway region their "home." (٨٥-٨٦).

Exile would be adopted as an imaginary place removed from colonialism's principles and frameworks in both a psychic and ideological context; as a result, it would be positioned as the preliminary step for the anti-colonial discourse that would produce the majority of resistance literary texts (Gikandi; ١٩٩٢, p.٣٤).

٢.١ Skepticism and Self Transformation

Departing India and settling abroad gave Bharati Mukherjee the experience to focus the scope of her fictional novel 'Jasmine' on the Indian young woman Jasmine's identity inside the patriarchal society of India and within the totally different setting of the western society (Kamlesh, ٢٠١٥, p. ٢٦), p.٢٦). The protagonist Jasmine tries to assimilate herself into foreign culture where she gains new independent individual identity. Jasmine was born as Jyoti, a rebel Indian girl who is married to a modern Indian man Prakash. Unlike Indian men, Prakash encourages Jyoti to be a different girl to fulfill her dreams in becoming a modern woman. He gives her a new modern name "Jasmine" and promises her to fly to the United States in order to flee the traditions of their society. Jasmine's quest for a new

identity begins after the death of her husband when she decides to accomplish his dream to travel to the US (Sankar.G, ٢٠١٧, p. ١٠)

The novel starts with Jasmine retelling a memory in which the whole journey had been foretold by an astrologer. Exile and alienation bring about Jasmine's identity change and transformation within the frame of the prophecy and in Jasmine's plan to be Americanized. Throughout the novel Jasmine's name changes several times "from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazzy to Jassy to Jase to Jane", indicating identity metamorphosis in relation to the different events she goes through (Sankar.G, ٢٠١٧, p. ١١). Jasmine found herself caught between the borders of the two cultures, the Indian culture and the American one. She is unable to fully belong to a given place; this lead to the creation of what Bhabha refers to as "Third Space".

Bhabha has presented the concept of the "third space," which he defines as a space for acculturation, subversion, incursion, and other forms of blasphemy. But hybridity is indeed the place in which all binary divides and antagonisms, such as the ancient dichotomy between theory and politics, that are representative of contemporary political notions, dissolve. Instead of the old dialectical notion of denial, Bhabha proposes discussion or cultural translation as the sole method to modify the world and bring forth something politically innovative, which he considers to be politically provocative in and of itself. Following the logic of cultural interpretation, he believes that an colonial expansion of politics is only conceivable in the area of mass culture (Ayaicha, ٢٠١٩, p. ٣٢).

Cultural displacement is exposed throughout the novel, as the protagonist, Jasmine, provides Indian food on the American dinner table or performs traditional rituals away from her aboriginal society. She pretends to be an American but she feels nostalgic to her mother country India and to her culture and rituals. Jasmine practices her Indianness in Nirmala apartment; she watches Indian movies and wears the Sari of the Indian widow. As it is portrayed in the novel:

Nirmala brought plain saris and salwar-kameez outfits for me from the shop so I wouldn't have to embarrass myself or offend the old people in cast-off American T-shirts. The sari patterns were for much older women, widows. I could not admit that I had accustomed myself to American clothes. American clothes disguised my widowhood. In a T-shirt and cords, I was taken for a student. In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like. To them, I was a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude. If not, it appeared I was competing with Nirmala. (Bharati, ١٩٨٩, p. ٩٢)

٢.٢ Trauma and Socio-cultural Redemption

Jasmine's practices of her culture secretly reflects her psychological state; she feels nostalgic to her aboriginal culture along with feeling ashamed of it when she compares it with the mainstream American culture. Frantz Fanon believes that the oppressed people develop a special sense of dismissal of the homeland culture, self-

loathing along with the feeling of embracement of their culture, which they believe to be inferior to their authoritative master (Antony, ٢٠١٣, p. ٢).

Accordingly, Fanon says that "he is talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair and abasement" (Fanon. F, ١٩٦٣, p. ١) when he analyzes the aftermaths of colonial deeds and the socio-political and psychological sufferance. Henceforth, Jasmine starts mimicking the American lifestyle seeking acceptance in the mainstream American society. Bhabha states that mimicry emerges as a representative image of the colonial ambivalence. It reflects double consciousness, double voicing and colonial power domination (Bhabha, ١٩٤٨, p. ١٢٦).

On the other hand Memmi states that the traumatic third world people mimic the white men to feel their value in the colonial society. He states that; "this psychological trauma was so intense that they tend to run away from their own individuality by imbibing the traits of their own masters, in order to be equal or to be accepted by the white community". He assumes that mimicry a reflection of the traumatized self that suffers from psychological and social disorder (Memmi. A, ١٩٧٤, p. ١٦٦). Jasmine rebels and revolts against the traditions of the Indian society since her childhood, she rejects oppression of the patriarchal society and celebrates and adopts the American liberal values (Sobarna, ٢٠٢٠, p. ٧٤٤)

As an exiled immigrant woman, Jasmine finds herself caught between the borders of the two worlds. She realizes that she is living between two cultures; her native Indian culture and the American host culture and thus having what Bhabha refer to as "hybrid identity". Jasmine lives in the dilemma of conflict between her past and the current present life; this results from the geographical displacement from India to America. Mukherjee represents the difference between the Indian people's past and present life through portraying their culture, as she describes Jyoti's new life; such as having new names from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jase and Jane.

Jasmine is considered as the protagonist who attempts to find her own identity from the moment of birth onwards. She was exiled in her mother land, India, and then exiled as an immigrant in Europe and America. Yet, she never gives up and she turns to be victorious in her endeavor against the patriarchal society as well as the western world. Her marriage was a new chapter in her journey to find her real self and identity. Although she has been told by a fortune teller that she will become a widow, Jasmine has never hesitated to give up on her relationship with her husband, the educated man, even after his death she kept glorifying her marriage, which in her belief has given her a new identity that opened the doors to the new identity in America.

Jasmine was able to change her situation; she could transform herself from a village submissive girl to an American independent woman. She was consciously able to take the decisions that are of her benefit without being tortured by morals and values. Every single path in her journey proves that she succeeded in transforming herself and she was able to assert herself in the American society although she was sexually oppressed and raped there. She shared a sense of belonging with Taylor.

٣. The Conclusion

In her book *Jasmine*, Mukherjee examined the lives of a semi-educated Punjabi immigrant to America. She investigates the gender-oppressive patriarchal Indian society. She sheds light on Jasmine, who battles with gender discrimination and rebels against it both before and after immigration. Jasmine, like many of Mukherjee's heroes, becomes sidetracked anytime she battles with her Indian ideals and treads the line between tradition and modernity. But she has never allowed this hazy internal struggle to stand in the way of her quest for independence. She aspires and fights to transcend Indian societal conventions and the Western world's estrangement. Her ongoing name changes symbolize how she has evolved from the feudal Indian Jyoti to the contemporary Jane. "Jasmine becomes truly Americanized, not just in peripheral social or cultural mores but in a primal 'intensity of spirit,' and finds peace neither in India, nor America, but in the 'American dream'" (A and V, ٢٠١٦, p. ١٣).

As a result, Mukherjee's narration highlights gender inequality and critiques Indian traditionalism as a cause of women's subjugation. To put it another way, Jasmine is aware of the tale of a lady who set herself ablaze on her husband's grave after his passing, thus what her mother did was not the worst scenario. She has thus worked to establish a new, equitable, and unoppressive relationship between men and women. Jasmine recalls hearing an astrologer predict that she will become a widow when she is ١٧ years old. Jasmine makes an effort to escape her situation. In other words, Jasmine was a warrior from birth and had a small amount of trust in Asian Hindu tradition. Jasmine thinks the rite demonstrates a very harsh patriarchy. Jasmine is, above all, a victim in both the First and Third Worlds. Each "India" and "America" has its own distinct symbolic Order, and each leaves its marks within the fictitious unity that the narrator seeks..., but rather that it is aware of the difficulties and contradictions that still exist within that dichotomy. Mukherjee uses examples of immigrants who are fighters. For her own survival, Jasmine fights. In both nations, she is a warrior.

Her transition is fraught with danger, violence, and dread. Each phase of her existence comes to an end in horror and fear. Jasmine also gains the ability to manage her life's challenges.

Therefore, immigration is a result of Britain's ascent to colonial power; the colonizer's authority wants to drive the local people into exile and replace Europeans in other areas of the world. sometimes Jasmine feels foreign in her own nation. Indian countries are so ignorant of their history's context and the reasons behind their current location. As they migrate to other places, diaspora authors therefore grow estranged from their ancestral home.

The author uses the narrative of *Tree Bride TaraLata* to convey her opposition to child marriage and the ensuing widowhood. The backwardness of Indian orthodox culture is shown by the tale of *TaraLata*, who is cursed and humiliated for the death of her intended spouse and finally marries a tree. Denying a girl her natural right to survive and meet her needs is utterly inhumane on society's side. The author of the

book condemns the exploitation of women for the sake of religion and social status. The girl was described by Mukherjee as having no notion that she had already been demoted from being an envied bride to becoming the second-worst member of her community and the most cursed place.

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