

Cultural Hybridity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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Abstract:

Bharati Mukherjee is a post colonial contemporary writer who has presented her themes of cultural conflict in different perspective. She has portrayed the problems faced by Indians and other Third World immigrants. This study tries to explore that Mukherjee is primarily concerned with the problems of women immigrants. The present work deals with special attention on cultural hybridity. It attempts to study the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation, experienced by the immigrant with special reference to Mukherjee's women characters.

Keywords: cultural conflict, Immigrants, Cultural hybridity, Alienation, Women characters

Desirable Daughters is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of negotiating the multiple dislocations in three different dimensions. The three daughters are the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and the great-grand daughters of JaikrishnaGangoogly, belongs to a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. They part ways taking their own course of voyage towards their destiny. They are a blended combination of traditional and modern outlook. Padma and Parvathi have their own trajectories of Choices; the former an immigrant of ethnic origin; New Jersey, and the latter married to her own choice and settled in the posh locality of Bombay with an encourage of servants to cater her.

In *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee focuses on the alternative ways to belongs. Cultural hybridity simultaneity and the 'third space of enunciation' which are markers of the post colonial condition of existence. Diasporas experiences double identification that constitute hybrid forms of identity. Such forms of identity differ from the essential notion of national and ethnic identity. It also explores multiple belongings that enable people to inhabit more than one space at the same time. Tara is a fictional rendering cultural hybridity.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee fuses near and far, traditional and modern which transform and recreate the meaning of cultural space. In the novel Tara attempts to reconfigure her meaning as a trans-national and trans-cultural subject and attempts to centre the narrative upon her individual experiences as a diasporic shuttle. She is a frustrated woman dwindling menacingly in the alternative models of survival between territories, migrations and mediations. Tara, like Mukherjee's diasporic characters struggles hard to occupy the translational space, after multiple dislocations and ruptures. Most of her fictions stems from the same dichotomy of growing up in two cultures as it is woven in Tara's trajectory from one location to another. Precisely, the novel *Desirable Daughters* concentrates on complex ideologies revolving round the life of three sisters and their multiple alienations-Padma, Parvati and Tara.

Mukherjee has written three different texts in the novel that unfold and also entangle the politics of diasporic consciousness of three women. Though the three sisters had different opportunities to assimilate America with their Indianness each sister's reactions to the confrontation are distinct. While Tara undertakes this root searching mission as an attempt to come to terms with her fragmented and at times confused notion of self, Padma takes the world at her stride according to her own cultural poetics.

Tara's positioning is different from Padma in the sense; Padma is a hyphenated immigrant. From her survival strategy in an alien soil, Mukherjee vociferously talks against the status of a hyphenated immigrant because the hyphen marginalizes the Asians as minorities. Parvati the middle sister, with an American education and an America

trained Indian husband, lives the life of a privileged rich wife in India. She symbolizes the traditional life of an Indian woman with western orientation. Each one traverses her own path of immigrant life quite happily.

Tara, through the life of her two sisters Parvati and Padma her husband Bish her illegitimate nephew Mr.ChristopherDey, introspects on her own crisis of identity as an immigrant and she continually expresses her desire to seek a consolation in her native reveals the spaces of tradition and modernity.She indulges in the nostalgic romanticism of the past, the inverted story of mobility, existential suffering, hybrid-subjectivity and plurality in her physical and psychic dividedness.In Mukherjee's poetics of Diaspora, rejection to the nativity and incapacity to deal with the new situation make the theme of identity more powerful and poignant in the mainstream American life.

Parvati's identity crisis is not so much acute as in the case of Tara. Parvati is a static kind of identity with her emphasis on tradition and convention whereas for Tara, identity is dynamic; it is in flux, constantly changing. A divorcee, her life style is totally different from her other sisters. Dislocated as she is, she lives in San Francisco, still cherishing the American Dream of Possibilities and promises but to utter dismay, she finds that life fails to deliver these promises, hence her frustration and loneliness. The milieu dissatisfies and disappoints her. She feels a longing for the past:

It is a happy landscape; I like to think, reaching from the shallow depression of
 Golden Gate Park and climbing to the Communication towers atop Twin Peaks.

The area is given to summer fogs that make conventional gardening impossible, but
 that remind me,not unhappily, of mountain resorts in India.I almost expect the chattering of
 monkeys,corn and peanuts smoking on open braziers, the tinkling of women's bangles and
 Buddhist prayer wheels.(43)

Through Tara, Bharati Mukherjee voices her belief in the individual's liberty and freedom to mould himself, to reconstruct and reshape his identity. She does not believe in a reality that represses and stifles one's self-expression, expectations and one's liberty.

Bharati Mukherjee depicts a problematic and fluid society in her novels.It is of constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of machines, flow of criminals, flow of extraterritorial power structure, even we have the crossing of geographical boundaries when Tara is an essay to search her roots remembers her ancestral ties with Tara Lata, 'Tree-Bride' of Mishtigunj. She was attempting to redefine the importance of her cultures through space and time .Sense of home plays a significant role in Tara's construction of her identity.

Parvati's traditional life-style is more-predictable in the sense; there are no sudden shocks and surprises.So there are times when Tara envies Parvati's clarity and confidence as she thinks that Parvati seems to be in control of thinks that are happening around her.She does not tolerate anything that questions the tradition of the family or the community.

Through Parvati, the readers get to see the changing scenario in India. Despite the fast changes taking place, in the name of globalization, the caste system has not changed a whit. For instance, Parvati wants Tara to get a suitable Bengali Brahmin girl settled in California for Aunt Bandana's fourth son. To Parvati being or becoming an American is getting mongrelized.

Desirable Daughters is the exploration of the first generation Indian-American cultural-clash and identity crises.Mukherjee describes the essential dilemma of Bengali culture.The novel shows that the past is not something that stays neat in a frame but is a force that influences the present and future.Mukherjee's writing show the influence of Hindu mythology in which animals can transform into people.She applies this tradition of changing forms to the mythology of America in which people are allowed to think of themselves as American, undergoing their own transformation.The novel pushes the story deeply in the direction of the past.Moving from generation to generation, past and present, Mukherjee weaves a portrait of a modern yet traditional Indo-American family with a secret at its core and a loyalty to preserve its pride.

In this novel Mukherjee puts forward a cross- cultural understanding of problems lie caste, exile, and identity by persistently shuttling her setting between Calcutta and Jackson Heights. In Jackson Heights the Asian migrants are forced to consider themselves as a monolithic ethnic group. In this perspective, caste is only a part of one's

memory. Tara moves between these two cultural locations and her mobility ultimately proves that caste and nationality have to be contested on the basis of personal experiences of living in and moving through different cultural spaces.

Desirable Daughters reveals survival strategies at multiple levels ranging from cultural, physical, social and psychological to spiritual levels. Mukherjee's protagonist in *Desirable Daughters* stands at the rim of history and with a peculiar conviction surges ahead for a root search. Here one can see the survival strategy to retain her identity in a pluralistic society by not assimilating but by devising her own ways to articulate her immigrant conditions. This novel makes us to understand the dynamics of shifting personal and ethnic implications in adherence to the authors own ethnic transformation.

It is evident that Mukherjee writes out of her lived experience and that characters Padma, Parati and Tara are modeled on Mira, Bharati and Ranu respectively. All the three are desirable in their own ways. With all her experience and exposure to the west, Parvati reconciles for a conventional, disciplined and domesticated role of an Indian woman. Tara in *Desirable Daughters* breaks all shackles of tradition and walks out of the wedlock with her son Rabi choosing a live-in relationship with a Hungarian Buddhist retrofitter, and doing volunteer work in a pre-school in San Francisco, all for her self-fulfillment. In *Desirable Daughters*, assimilation is suspended as a strategy of survival. Mukherjee in this novel interrogates cultural essential and celebrates cultural hybridity with a tilt towards ethnic essence. Tara is a cultural hybrid who is at home in both cultures.

Tara's reconstruction of identity thus, is rooted on the same nostalgic and romantic recollection of her past. It is based on the flux of her thoughts about the past that is coming to her mind in the present but in fragments, and not whole. It is a spatio-temporal reconstruction of her identity. Tara is in search of relocating herself in the trans-national realities. In spite of her liberated attitudes, her desire to construct hybridity, her acceptance of her son's gay sexuality and live in relationships, she fails to outdo the traditional life of Indian women. Rashmi Gaur aptly observes:

Tara represents the dilemma of an average migrant. The demands of tradition and their hold on one's psyche are never ultimately rejected ... She tries to create a personal space for herself through compromise. Rejection of her husband and associated security is a bold step for an Indian girl of Tara's background ... Despite an obvious difference, she questions, at least for some time, traditional notions and shuns the clichéd answers provided by conventions. She wants to redefine herself and create fresh gender relations. (98)

In *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee has struck a balance between the past and present through a deft blending of tradition and modernity. This she achieves through the character of Tara who has outwardly severed her links with tradition but still remains tied to her native country. She is influenced by ancient customs and traditions, but is also very much in to the glitziness and modernism of the multicultural America. She is caringly conscious of her existential predicament. Tara's tentative steps towards seeking her true self requires her to carefully navigate between prescriptive Hindu traditions and American notions of individuality and freedom.

Bharati Mukherjee in her making out of cultural mutation captures the rigid and inflexible binaries between orient and occident, man and woman. Her way of life stands for new cultural fusionism. Tara is an American and an Indian at same time. In the trans-Cultural global situation she experiences both the native and alien problematic. There is fusion and translational polemics of culture. In her Americanized status Tara has a philosophical quest in the web of dualism. This disentangles her completely in an indifferent city where she neither is able to surrender her personality nor is able to accept a new giant identity in the crisis of her life. She lives physically a nomadic life in the cultural desert of America in her psychological invalidity.

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