

# Tara's Struggle and Standing in Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters

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## Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee can be rightly called a renowned diasporic writer whose novels continuously deal with the theme of dislocation, alienation, multiculturalism, feminism, and identity crises. She is a keen observer of immigrants; especially women immigrants who migrate to another country after their marriage to seek their future. They feel the new world in another country, sometimes they feel freedom but sometimes they feel that they are bound with their tradition and social values.

Bharati Mukherjee portrays the struggle of the immigrant women who want to achieve their identity in the alien land. They feel cultural dissimilarities, linguistic and religious problems in the alien land. They suffer complexities; racial biases and political issues, but they face these challenges very boldly. Sometimes, they even revolt against the traditional framework of society and break all the social taboos of their society like; Jasmine does in *Jasmine*, Dimple Das Gupta does in *Wife* and Tara does in *Desirable Daughters*. They make their own ways according to the circumstances and become more conscious of their roots and identity in society. They reconcile with this new culture, but never forget their own culture values.

Ms. Mukherjee depicts different aspects of cultural, political, psychological, gender, and racial discrimination problems, and the sufferings of Asian immigrant women. Her present novel *Desirable Daughters* shows all the aspects of Tara's lives' struggle and her adjustments, assimilation, and the quest for identity in another country.

**Keywords:** Assimilation, Identity, Tradition, Migration.

### Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee is of Indian origin, an American writer of recent times. She presents different dimensions in her fictions from other writers of contemporary society like Anita Desai, Vikram Seth, VS Naipaul. Being the writer of modern times; she displays the message of global acceptance.

That acceptance of the foreign country is very well shown through her female characters in her works. She has dealt with these issues of migrated people, bringing their journey into light through a diversity of cultures in new lands.

In an interview Bharati Mukherjee has clearly stated her aim in her writing

*"We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries.....When we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American society.....I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and stories. My aim is to explore Americans to the energetic voice of new settlers in this country." (The Times of India, 1 Oct. 1989)*

In her fiction, she advocates many phases of feminism, including violence for equal opportunity, sexual freedom, and self-discovery. She raises her voice for the liberation of women from the rotten traditional norms. Though she portrays them boldly and courageously, also they are shown gripped with the fear of alienation and assimilation in an unfriendly environment. Her heroines are typical representatives of young women of third world countries, who flourish their dreams of emigrating to America to touch the skies of reinventing themselves and later on settle there permanently. They feel delighted to be a part of a more advanced nation such as the USA. They have their reasons, their perceptions, and views to see the new world. They also create their world, set up ideal conditions for survival, where there is no intervention of men.

Tara, the protagonist of *Desirable Daughters*, belongs to a very orthodox and cultured family. She is shown as extremely bold and an enthusiastic lady. She breaks the all rules and regulations of the old customs and accepts the challenges of the foreign country. She set up a new identity in this new nation. Chasing the quest for identity leads her again to her ancestral house Misthiganj which brings her to several revelations from history; the history of her great grandmother Tara Maa, who has been a real admonisher of her family roots.

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## Objectives of the Study

This paper explores the theme of the struggle and standing of a woman, named Tara who explores her new dimensions through her daring journey of life. She Possesses Different perceptions towards life and transforms herself from a traditional lady to an advanced American woman. She takes high risks to go against the conservative rules of society and set up new benchmarks to live a liberated life. She recreates herself into a new personality and wraps her with the lure of the west. Her struggle of assimilation into the new culture, brings forth many difficulties, problems, and troubles, but her strong desire reconstructs her path to get self-assertion and identity. She creates her own identity apart from her husband and seeks an adventurous life as a protean heroine.

## Review of Literature

To comprehend this topic appropriately; the following review of the literature has been a milestone for my research work. I read research papers, interviews of the author, various articles, and textbooks. Mentioning some reviews of the critical writers and interviewers to establish the foundation of the research work.

Anne Brewster, Professor, School of English, University of New South Wales, Australia. She writes in her articles:

*"Bharati Mukherjee discourse on immigrants in the U.S. positions them not on the margin of contemporary American culture but, rather, as exemplars of a hegemonic nationalism. She characterizes her writing about migrants not as oppositional to mainstream America but as representing the voice of "the new America and thus enunciates a neo- nationalism."*

Mitali R. Pati: Love and the Indian Immigrant in Bharati Mukherjee's Short Fiction, edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson.

*She writes, "she exposes the dilemmas of Indian immigrant men and women who are often neither able to abandon their Old-World scripts of romance and sexuality nor thoroughly master the American modes of romantic and sexual self-expression. Mukherjee's expert use of irony, satire, and parody reveals with gentle humour how her immigrant characters' "Indian paradigms of love, desire and romance are deconstructed by their American experience."*

R.K.Dhawan: The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee, A Critical Symposium.

*He writes, "Her novels express the nomadic impulses of Indians who, in their deliberate search for a material life, migrate to the west and consequently face the tensions of adaptation and assimilation."*

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, "Routes of Identity": In conversation with Bharati Mukherjee.

*Mukherjee states, "I am romantic, and my passion just gets more intense. But mine is a clear-eyed live of immigration and reformation of personality that the United States has offered me. And, so, in the last forty years, just as the society of the United States has become more nuanced in political terms, especially in its attitude to its non-European naturalized citizens, I too have become more nuanced in the ways in which I know what I*

*want and how I want to fit in American Society."*

Desirable Daughters is a tale of immigrants' different perspectives of life and their way of negotiating the multiple dislocations in the alien land. The three sisters Padma, Parvati, and Tara who are the desirable daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and great-granddaughters of Ja ikrishna Ganguly, belong to the upper-class Bengali Brahmin family of Calcutta. These three sisters have various qualities in their characters such as being obedient, beautiful, well-educated, and extremely desirous to fulfil dreams of their life, and a strong will to come out from the traditional roles which are assigned to women in the orthodox Hindu society. Through this novel, Mukherjee presents their happiness, crisis, expectations, achievements, and the final realization of life. Tara, the protagonist, migrates to America after marrying Bish Chatterjee, a software tycoon of Silicon Valley, and is deeply rooted in Indian culture showing the actions of an exemplary Indian wife. She feels herself lost between the pull of traditions and the haul of freedom in the foreign land. Her story moves from the past to the present with such fluidity that all the changes in her personality are shown as if they are from a dutiful wife to a modern lady of the contemporary society. It is within this chaotic world that Tara writes about both; her history and her present. She uncovers the multiple consciousnesses as she keeps on unearthing the secret of her past.

In her fiction, Mukherjee clearly shows the transformation in her heroines who are always caught between the reminiscences of past life and the promising culture of the present life. Sometimes they feel connect with their racial values and sometimes disconnect.

Clifford says, *"Diaspora women are caught between patriarchies ambiguous past and future, they connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways."*

Tara, Jasmine, Anjali are the protagonists of Mukherjee's fiction, they are shown transforming from simple, innocent, and traditional kingston confident, sensible, grown-up ladies and understanding wives, ready to complete their mission for a better future.

When Tara first arrives in America, she plays the role of the pragmatic Indian wife. She is subservient to her husband and an expert in household works, such as serving pakoras and freshening drinks, while Bish takes the enjoys watching the Sunday football match with his friends. She wanted to go to community college for further studies but she has to devote her life to support Bish and raising her son Rabi. Believing in this commitment of marriage she stays at home to take care of her son just like to do other young Indian women in Atherton, California. She has been subjected to a sheltered life submerged in the culture and ethnic values despite being educated by the Catholic nuns. She stifled her innermost feelings and play the role to be a dutiful wife in the Indian family drama. She was highly influenced by those American magazines that encouraged women to talk over their problems, disappointments, experiment with hair colour, sexual positions, and

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had gone through the advice given in those columns of magazines applying them in her life, but she has no tenacity to shatter the image of a good lady. She gradually feels tired of discharging all the domestic duties and therefore seeks for freedom. She realizes that her husband has no interest in her personal needs and desires. So, she no longer tried to imprison herself into the conservative environment where a woman's life is considered an altar of scarification for others like Sita Maa in Ramayana. Bish's ignorance awakes her inner consciousness for her repressed desire, and she takes a drastic decision, that is called a stigma in Hindu society: Divorce.

As Kaplan writes of Indian culture, *"Marriages are considered permanent and should not be altered by either partners, free choice.....Divorce was taboo and considered a sure sign of Americanization."* (Kaplan Caren. 119-132)

Through this novel, the novelist brings out marriage as the medium of exploitation of women rather than a desirable heavenly bliss. In a conservative society, marriage is imposed on girls. They are not allowed to choose their life partners of their choices, particularly in another caste. The issue is raised in the case of Padma, who loved a Christian boy Ronald Dey, but could not marry him.

*"Any violation of the codes, any breath of scandal, was unthinkable."* (Desirable Daughters P.32)

Tara's unsuccessful marriage was also the consequence of this forced marriage. She contends for the freedom to select one's life partner and exposes the success of Parvati's love marriage, but her arranged marriage crushed all her dreams and desires which she had seen before. At the age of 19, she got married to a man whom she had never met because her father told her it is the best time to get married, and he was the best husband in the market. That problem caused by obligatory marriage on girls has been reflected in the novelist's previous novel 'Wife'.

Tara's decision to take divorce presents a firm step toward a new consciousness in which the customs and traditions have no meanings. She breaks an iceberg of the typical Indian woman and gets the height of a new outlook. Tara becomes more familiar with American society and transforms herself from a good daughter-in-law to a determined, progressive, and successful Californian lady. She discovers more space in liberal America to get her individual freedom and expression than her archetypal conventions.

The novelist declares that her women character is so furious to get her own identity in the new society for that she is ready to leave her own primitive rules and regulations. They cross the all barriers and limitations of the patriarchal community to create their self-conception to make themselves more advance and liberate.

Bish did not like Tara's Assimilation of herself into the modern culture. He had no interest in American style and never regarded the endeavours of Tara towards it. For Tara, to live with Bish was impossible, so she leaves her husband's house with her son Rabi and works as a teacher in

a pre-school to get her self-identification apart from her husband's identity. For an Indian woman after marriage, the husband's identity is all in all and his home is considered a place of protection and reputation in the Indian community.

In this context Rosemary George's comment about 'home' is worth quoting, *"private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter comfort, nurture and protection"* (Marangoly 1).

Tara generates her sexual relationship with Andy Karolyi, a Hungarian Buddhist. She feels more pleasure and peace with her lover Andy. She never realized guilty to her sexual relationship with him. She forgets her Indian virtues, her native principles, family reputation, establishes her personality as a modern lady who scatters all taboos of traditional society. She Adjusts herself in the new-fashioned and moveable society which is around her. For Tara, her relationship with her lover Andy becomes a symbol of freedom of this flux community. Tara becomes a manifest of New Women who believes in free thinking and in battling against the odds of life.

In an article from Burning Down the House, K. Srilata's asserts the figure of the New Woman. *"The New Woman who expresses her agency in terms of her public visibility, the clothes she wears, and her participation in the discourse of 'free choice' and its corollary, romantic love"* (Srilata 308).

In Mukherjee's fiction, the sexual freedom of the lady often acts as a measure of her increasing cut off from traditional sexual characteristics of customs and continually assimilation in the new world through her rapid Americanisation.

Soon, Tara recognized that American social surroundings as something different from her personal experience. In this society, women's sexuality is mainly based on selfishness and self-involvement. Her realization evoked her soul that she can never cut off her Indian Traditions Identity. She feels ashamed of her erotic relationship with Andy and she is seemed like to float between two identities partly Indian and partly American.

Tara, comes under the category of the controversial heroines of Mukherjee, for she appears to distance herself from all that is Indian, including her past. Reinventing herself with self-confidence and self-assurance to create her way. Each protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee reinvents herself within different circumstances but Tara Bhattacharjee is amenable and admirable who accepts the reality of her son Rabi's sexuality, who is gay, and her unconditional love with Andy.

In this way, the novelist has always concentrated on how the migrated women have transformed themselves according to western morals and celebrating their freedom and rootlessness in American culture. Her heroines are bold, assertive, and has the strong potentiality to face the ground reality and a bitter truth of their life.

Tara's quest for a happy home image is again disturbed by the unexpected appearance of Christopher Dey, declaring himself her nephew and

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the illegitimate son of elder sister Padma and her lover Ronald Dey. It leads to a questioning of her family's reputation and culture mores. Although she knew that her sister Padma had an affair with Ronald Dey, Chris' purported father, but she could not believe in this scandal because of the strict structure of her Brahmin Bengali background. She has always felt in her life that nothing can touch a Bengali Brahmin from Calcutta, but the presence of Chris Dey interrupted her mental symmetry and tear down her confidential assumption. It creates violence in Tara's life that transforms her completely.

Violence is the main keyword in Mukherjee's fiction. She thinks that it is necessary for the transformation of character. She is forced to face her past and discern that the past is an integral part of her present identity.

She decides to unfold the mystery of Chris Dey's identity as she was warned by her boyfriend Andy that the upcoming outcome of digging the past has the power to rule on one's entire presentation. But her adamant and stern nature proceeds with her mission. When she confronts her both sisters with these suspicions, Parvati warned her against this intruder while Padma raises her quest for the truth about the past by denying the reality in Chris Dey's story and refusing to discuss the situation. Then, it takes Tara's investigation seriously into the matter of this mysterious person, who claims himself her nephew. She hired a Sikh police officer, Jack Sidhu, an Indian-origin Americanised policeman, who reveals the truth that real Chris Dey had already been killed, he is an imposter and a member of a cyber-terrorist gang headed by Dawood. He is a conman named Abbas Sattar Hai whose intention is to kill Bish, his family, and to destroy his worldwide communication network. Before Tara could understand this warning, her home is bombed by this fake nephew with the pact of killing Bish. Fortunately, Tara was rescued by her ex-husband and Rabi miraculously survive in this bomb blast. After the destruction of the San-Francisco house, she decided to return to India to find her family's roots. She again reconciles with her husband Bish, home, and community as she realizes that one cannot cut oneself off one's traditions. Her realization of their cultural bond again ignites Tara's love for Bish.

Mukherjee's depiction of Tara's quest to know her roots leads her to Mishtiganj Bangladesh, at Tara-Lata's home for searching the hidden truths. She gets the courage to reconstruct her life from her great-grandmother and namesake Tara Lata Gangooly, whose story frames the modern narratives. Tara Lata was the "Tree Bride" and an unfortunate girl, was married to a tree because her bridegroom had died of snakebite on the wedding day. This life-long virgin lady presents an act of tremendous courage by educating herself and fighting for freedom against the British system. She always kept her door open for the beggars and the injured person for providing medical care. In Tara Lata's life, she reads a message for her own that the courage persists against repressive traditions, creating her path towards self-assertion and self-assurance. As Tara Says:

*"I'm like a pilgrim following the course of the Ganges all the way to its source". (Desirable*

*Daughters p.289)*

She feels that the Tree Bride' is the central character to every story of female assertiveness in the family. She also realizes that each generation of my family has discovered in her something new whether they live in America or our native land.

Also, she visits her parents' home on the bank of the sacred river Ganga at Rishikesh. Here, she came to know that her mother is affected with Parkinson's disease, but her mother refuses to be treated in the USA. She cannot live far without her husband and her home. Then, Tara understood the significant role of roots and identity. Through her critical reconstruction of Tree Bride's history, Tara came to know her real identification that is largely shaped by her Indian affiliations albeit mediated through her acquired American consciousness.

## Conclusion

Tara establishes her reasons and her morals towards life. She has a feminist approach to phallocentrism. She rejects all those old myths that make a woman an object of sacrifices, puppets in the hands of man, and salient subservient to her husband. She gives the divorce to her husband because the promise of life as an American wife could not be fulfilled while she knew that it is a blot for a woman in Indian culture. She searches out a new expansion in food, dress, and fashion. She changes herself from a desirable daughter to an advanced American woman. She fights with her circumstances on her terms and finds her way to build an identity. In the process of searching for the truth of her family, especially her eldest sister Padma, who is completely mysterious, Tara knows the reality about her family as well as the reality of life. Tara gets success to rediscover herself and finally comes to a resolution that she cannot evolve herself in a single identity and accept the integration of both culture Indian as well as American. So, Tara is different from the other protagonists of the novelist who dares to firm her place and recognition in an alien land, crossing all old-world boundaries to form a new life for herself.

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