



Multiple Hybridity In Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee, a well known women writer famous for immigrant writings. Her works deal with the immigrant and cross-cultural experiences of her women protagonists. Themes related to migration or dislocation, assimilation and hybridity come from the novelists' personal experiences. Her novels depict her own experiences which she has experienced both in Canada and America. Her fiction powerfully and sensitively evokes the cultural tensions and identities that her South Asian protagonists suffer. This makes the master pieces of the novelist more powerful. From all the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, one can understand the evolution of women characters from expatriates to cultural hybrids. Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters focuses on the central character Tara, an epitome of cultural hybridity and fluidity. Her life in India and America transforms her psyche in terms of identity, culture, sexuality and creates a new hybrid identity in her.

Key words: assimilation, hybrid identity, transformed psyche

Major Themes in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels

Bharati Mukherjee, a prominent contemporary diasporic writer in Indian Literature well known for short story writings, a novelist and a critic. The protagonists of her novels not only redefine themselves to suit their new cultural milieus and also redefine their identities. After a long struggle in the alien land, they become more maturity and able to face their problems in an optimistic manner. They become masters of adaptation and understand the demands of the new land and change quickly according to the new milieu. This inner tumult constitutes the state of the Bharati Mukherjee's immigrant women psyche.

Mukherjee's fiction represents not just the psyche of individual immigrants.

They mainly depict the collective immigrant population which comprises especially women immigrants from India. Their chase for liberty leads to their migration from India to America. Most of her novels trace the translation of the individual primarily from a psychological point of view. The protagonists suffer alienation and loss of identity even when they come back to India. They belong nowhere and stay nowhere. They have lost their identity wherever they go. They perennially travel the globe in search of new experiences. The portrayal of Indian social reality and American social reality and the way her women perceive is handled by the novelist with utmost care and detail.

Multiple Identity in Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters



The novel depicts the story of three daughters Padma, Parvathi and Tara, the great-grand daughters of Mothilal Jai Krishna Gangooli. They come from the traditional Bengali Brahmin family. They are "like blossoms on a tree". Padma, the eldest of the three daughters lives in New Jersey with her divorcee husband who already has children. Parvathi lives with her husband Aurobindo Banerji in Bombay with her grown-up sons. Tara, the third and the youngest of the daughters had obtained a divorce from her first husband, Bishwapriya Chatterjee. She got married at the age of nineteen with Bish, a computer geek. She lived a wealthy life with her husband and has a son Rabin.

Bish forgets to take care of the emotional needs of Tara. After her marriage Tara has got an opportunity to experience American life and culture. Tara easily adapted to the American culture and way of life. American culture totally changed her and soon she realizes that she cannot continue to live as a traditional Indian woman that she is supposed to be. When Tara relates her story to her American friends, they find it both amusing and appalling. Tara finally decided to get divorce from Bish because she does not like to be a shadow of the rich Bish. This sudden change frustrated her own plight which is unthinkable for a traditional Indian woman. There is no one to support her and she was starving for love and companionship. She meets Andy, a Hungarian refugee and carpenter who gives love and make her feel free and happy. She feels more happy and freedom with Andy which she failed to get with rich Bish.

When Tara leaves Bish, she is approached by many Indian men who live in America openly approach women in

the matters of sexuality. This embarrassing proposal compels Tara to leave the place and forces to settle in somewhere far away. Her decision to come out from Bish is mainly to get mental freedom. Tara now understood the difference between an American woman and an Indian woman living in America. The approach of the vulgar mind of American men for sexuality only forces to begin to date with carpenter Andy. Even when Tara lives in America, she realizes that living as a divorced woman does not provide security to her life. She feels she needs a man as a protector to avoid from such vulgar man. Tara now realizes that she is free to live a life that she wishes. She says,

"Yesterday, practiced daughter of Calcutta that I was, comfortable within a filtered gaze... one door had closed, another opened". (Desirable Daughters, p.167)

Tara still finds difficult to make out or explain her psychic change to others. "It's one of those San Francisco things I can't begin to explain in India, just like I can't explain my Indian life to the women I know in California". (Desirable Daughters, p.25-6) India and America become two peacefully coinciding worlds for her.

Tara progressively changes her attitude from Bengali Brahmin woman into an American seeking a distinct identity of her own. In this process, her Indian sexuality also undergoes some transformation which allows her to accept Andy, a Hungarian carpenter for her support. She feels she cannot totally change herself as an American and mingle with the American culture and its modern feminine values. Even now she continues to view America through her



Indian cultural and traditional perspective.

One fine day, Tara was troubled because of her sister Padma's past brings trouble in her life. A young man named Christopher Dey visits Tara in her San Francisco house. He says to Tara that he was born to Padma and Ron Dey through a premarital relationship when her sister was in Calcutta. In order to prove him, Dey even shown a letter to Tara which is allegedly written by Ron Dey. Tara is shocked but at the same time she did not ask her elder sister Padma about this. She takes the help of Parvathi and finally discovers that the young man Christopher Dey is an imposter.

Tara is now very conscious and with the assistance of Jasbir Jain, an ethnic police officer, she finds out that the real name of Chris is Abbas Sattar Hai, a notorious Don of the Bombay underworld. Then Tara calls to Padma to know about Ron Dey. But Padma says she does not know such a person. Jain warns Tara to be alert so that she can save her family in San Francisco. To save her family members, Tara allures Bishwapriya and her son Rabin to come back to her house. But the same day her house is bombed by unknown men. Bish, the famous business man in Silicon Valley was the target of the attack. Bish is wounded in the bomb whereas Tara and her son Rabin are safe.

Tara feels insecure because of this incident. Tara decides to return to India to stay for some time in her elder sister's home. Tara finds that her sister Parvathi lives peacefully with her husband and sons in Bombay. When compared with Tara, Parvathi's life was very smooth and predictable because of her confidence and clarity mind. Parvathi leads a very happy

and traditional life style in Bombay. Unlike Parvathi and Tara, their elder sister Padma is strangely Americanized. She is not in any way like her sisters. Padma lived a self-indulgent life style even though she was born in a very orthodox Bengali family.

Tara is still an Indian woman with Indian identity and memories of her past life in India. Sometimes her Indianness overpowers her psyche. She says, "As far as I've drifted from the path of piety, or even of family, their names suddenly swell by dozens, the hundreds, filling my heart, brain, memory, soul...." (*Desirable Daughters*, p.246)

Tara had spent many years to try to adapt to suit her psyche to American culture. She was tired of being an exotic or strange woman in the new world. She feels instead of struggling preserve her own past; she can make her present and future in America. Her positive approach in each step in her life motivates to move further rather than stagnate. She attempts to build a new identity for herself in which she can comfortably forget her past and live in her present, as she wishes for.

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee traces the various problems associated with the lives of her immigrant women such as loss of identity, alienation, loneliness, and cross-cultural conflicts from her direct personal experiences. Across the novels of Mukherjee, one could find a steady growth of women from assimilation to hybridist. In the novel **Desirable Daughter**, we can find that Tara's psyche is constantly changing and evolving. She retains her identity wherever she moves but does not want to be controlled by them like her sisters. She develops a



hybrid psyche which has the power to accommodate many different things all at once. Tara symbolizes a typical woman immigrant's reaction to multicultural America. Her psyche exists between the Indian and American worlds. This attitude helps her to control her world with an ease and live multiple lives at once.

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