

**DIASPORA: A HOME AWAY FROM HOME IN BHARATHI MUKHARJEE'S
DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS**

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Abstract

A diaspora is a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale. The people of a diaspora scatter from their homeland to place across the globe spreading their culture as they go. A diaspora is the movement, migration or scattering of people away from an established homeland or people dispersed by whatever cause to more than one location or people settled from their ancestral homelands. Hence diaspora is defined as a mixed culture, specially separated from their place of origin and living between places in their identity and cultural life. It refers to the migration of people from their original or native land to far off lands. Etymologically, the term 'Diaspora' originates from Greek word diaspeire in "to scatter about, disperse", from Dia means 'about, across, speieren means 'to scatter' said by Merriam Webster. This research paper explains diasporic aspects in Bharathi Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters.

Key words: diaspora, group, heritage, homeland, migration, mixed culture, separated,

INTRODUCTION

Diaspora or expatriate writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures and search writers and their writings in the relation with the culture of their homeland and of the wasteland. The diasporic writers are writing mostly about their Homeland and the changes in the socio cultural value systems immigrant experiences disappointments and even disillusionment. Bharati Mukherjee the prominent women writer mainly focuses on the issues of Indian women and their struggle. Migration the status of new

immigrants and the feeling of expatriates in the writings she herself was away from India. Bharati Mukherjee has occupied a central place in the Indian fictional world for more than three decades. She is a multi-faced personality and first and foremost Indian novelist dealt with immigrant experience and issues. She is one of the versatile personalities in the age. She is an established voice of Indian diaspora in North America and a significant feminist novelist. In a critical and creative career that spans over 30 years she has been engaged in redefining the idea of diaspora as a process of gain contrary to the conventional perspectives that construe imagination and displacement is a condition of loss and dispersion.

DIASPORIC ELEMENTS IN THE NOVEL

Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Desirable Daughters* commences with the marriage ceremony of tree bride Tara Lata in the year 1879. It is the time of British colonization and Bengal as the seat of British power and Kolkata is capital that is stout both culturally and economically the city is equipped with Britishers loving luxurious facilities. About Bengalis the novel exposes that:

The Hindu Bengalis were first Indians to master the English language and to learn their Master's ways, the first to flatter him by emulation and the first to earn his distrust by unbidden demonstration of wit and industry. (DD 16)

Desirable Daughters is multi-layered novel which attempts to bridge countries cultures and generations. It works at multiple levels as it trace to leverage between the past, present and the world of suspense and the underworld. It is a tale told through the eyes of Tara Battacharjee who lives in California with the teenaged- son Rabi and is divorced from her rich husband Bishwapriya Chatterjee, a brilliant computer engineer, who lives in the Silicon Valley. The youngest of the three Batterjee sisters, Tara grew up in a privileged bhadrluk Bengali family in Calcutta, with exposure to both Bengali and western culture. Mukherjee also hails from similar background and is also one of the three sisters. A nostalgia for the

Calcutta of Mukherjee's childhood pervades the novel as she weaves this richly tale of family and the contrasting values and sensitivities of the three Bhattocharjee sisters- adma, Parvati and Tara. Tara's sister Padma has been an immigrant to America for many years and lives in New Jersey with her husband, while Parvati lives with her husband and children in a fancy Bombay apartment. Tara comes to California expecting to fulfil the role of traditional Indian wife, but instead realises that she does not desire to play the typical part of Indian drama.

Mukherjee's most recent novel, *Desirable Daughters* opens with the story of Tara Lata the tree wife 13 age Penis is killed by a snake on wedding night 5 year old Tara Lata is spared the description of life as not white widow.....but a woman who brings her family Misfortune and death by her father's immediate action. He gets married to a tree. Tara Lata, the tree Bride, lives the residue of her life in her father's home, emerging only when she is dragged off by the colonial police for her support of India's freedom fighters. The life of Tara Lata becomes Criterion for the narrator, also called Tara. The modern Tara is a wealthy Bengali Brahmin who has left India, divorced the husband chosen for her by her father, and engrossed herself in a non-familial life in San Francisco. Tara challenges some of the social and ideological markers that determine distinctiveness; however, as Mukharjee demonstrates in this novel, identity determinants cannot be get rid of as easily as a snake's skin.

By juxtaposing the stories of modern rootless Tara with the rooted Tara Lata, Mukherjee opens up the contradictions between feminist idioms and “the stubborn potency of myth in the face of overwhelming change” (19). Recounting the night of Tara Lata's marriage to the tree, Tara writes that:

A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing life from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness. (4)

This quotation introduces quite a few issues that are significant in the novel. The first is the association between gendered identities and home. After her marriage to a tree, Tara Lata spends the rest of her life “imprisoned” within her father's residence. In disparity, the modern Tara is rootless. The subsequent issue is the impact of history, community, and religion upon a woman's identity. Mukharjee Makes and a number of references to Tara’s distinctive and inescapable circumstances as a wealthy Bengali Brahmin, divorced from an influential and prominent member of the Indian community. As a Police officer tells Tara, if you’re trying to hide your identity, let me tell you it won't work” (143). The third is the idea of identity construction itself; the modern Tara constructs the narrative of Tra Lata’s life from “scraps of family memory,” but she also attempts to reconstruct her own life within the nexus of gender, religion, caste, and class. In *Desirable daughters*, Mukharjee explores:

a complicated working out of the relationship between home, identity, and community that calls into question the notion of a coherent, historically continuous stable identity and works to expose the political stakes conceded in such equations. (Martin and Mohanty 195)

The modern Tara begins her story with “that most American of impulses or compulsions, a ‘roots search” (17). She then describes her own childhood In Kolkata in the late fifties and early sixties with her two older sisters, Padma and Parvati .Named after Goddesses, the desirable daughters of the title are in Tara’s words, “sisters three... as like as blossoms on a tree (21). Using the symbol of the family tree, Tara seems to entire that identity is indispensable, defined by one’s home community and culture:

When I speak of this to my American friends- the ironclad identifiers of region, Language, caste, and sub-caste- they call me ‘over determined’ and of course they are right. When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crisis and feelings of alienation, I of course right. (33)

The opening story of the Tree wife reaffirms the film's significance of province, language, and caste, specifically for a gender identity. Tara Lata's father marries his daughter to a tree because he believes that this is the only way in which she can flee "her true fate...a lifetime's virginity, a life without a husband to worship as god's proxy on earth, and thus, the despairing life of a woman doomed to be reincarnated" (14). As a child, the modern Tara also feels bound by a world in which "every name declares your identity." (30-34)

Tara however, appears to have run away from the constraints of an encoded identity, an identity limited by constraints of community and culture. In her retrofitted American home, contained within the "rhetoric of modern San Francisco" (78). Tara "feels not just invisible but heroically invisible, a border-crossing claimant of all people's legacies" (79). Her indomitable identity seemingly can be discarded in the modern rhetoric of her new home. Yet, just a few pages later, Tara claims that she is "sick of feeling and alien" (87). These contradictions held in tension within her life are challenged when a modern version of a snake appears.

Despite longing to break away from the margins of her community, Tara remains constrained within it by the gender markers of wife and mother. She cannot escape her identity as the ex-wife of a well-known and extraordinary wealthy member of the Indian community, and therefore an objective for the Indian Underworld. Although Tara may look for invisibility within the rhetoric of a modern Nomadic life in San Francisco, she remains firmly embedded within the social and cultural identity assigned by her gender, caste, and economic status. Ideological determinants those "iron-clad identifiers of region, language, and caste" (33), cannot be easily forsaken.

Drifting between two lives and two identities leaves Tara susceptible to threads, both as a modern woman who no longer lives behind the fortification of fortress walls and as the former wife of a billionaire. In New York, she is chastised for "drifting between two lives and

told that she “must not let it go on any longer” (246). Shortly after Chris invades her home, Tara phones Parvati and hears of another form of home incursion, the story of neighbour who was murdered by within the Bombay Apartment Complex. One of the thieves was Parvati’s housekeeper. Tara’s own house is eventually destroyed by a powerful bomb. After the demolition of her San Francisco house, Tara returns to India, Reunited with her parents, she also returns to more culturally traditional concepts of home and community. Her father has sold the Calcutta house and moved to Rishikesh, entering the prescribed third phase of Hindu life as a Sannyasin. Tara's mother immediately offers a contrasting belief, climbing that “Home is where you belong, Rabindra”(297).

Homemade community are ideological determinants of Identity; however individuals take action to these determinants in different ways. Although Tara and Patma remain defined within the social networks of community, but atoms to restructure and authentic Bengali life in New York while Tara refuses to live as “a perfectly preserved bug trapped in amber”(184). Instead, Tara moves from home to home, persistently attempting to redefine the boundaries of home identity and community. At the end of the novel, returning to the story of Tara Lata, she calls the Tree- Bride “the quite centre of every story” (289). Her construction of her ancestor’s life seemingly validates Tara’s own quest to reconstruct her own identity. Yet this story suggests that one’s birthplace does not form one's identity, that identity performance can only be enacted within the limitations of on assigned space. In the final paragraph of the novel, Tara walks the same road traversed by the Tree-Bride in 1879.

It marks her transition into a new identity and liberated self. So soon recognises that her sexuality is also a characteristic of her identity, which she can possess and embrace, after being accosted by the same men who had been respectful towards her during her marriage. She creates a new sexual identity that does not come in disagreement with the preceding self-perceptions.

Initially she tries to seek Solace by clinging on to the past through people, memories, visits or calls and by bonding with her to elder sisters, Parvati and Padma who serve as links to past that Tara has begun to forget. But the appearance of the mysterious Chris Dey exposes the shallow intercontinental relationship of the three Sisters. He acts as both Tara's purgation and retribution. Finally Tara is stunned out of her smugness, emotional paralysis traumatized, as her family is stalked by menace.

When her house is firebombed she is completely exhausted making her longing for native soil and conventional life more acute. A trip back to India rekindles a craving to find her family's familial roots and their place in the history of Pre-independent India. Hence we find Tara Chatterjee trying to realise her and how she fits into her place in this universe. While she is stressed with the thought of getting back to her ex-husband and being pregnant with his child, she tries to comprehend inheritance and the actions of her ancestors which may and may not have contributed to the sum total of the person she has involved into. After Tara time travelling finds that she is comprised of multiple selves accepting or rejecting certain aspects of both Indian and American culture. She come to stipulate with the idea that she never will have a sole identity but rather be discrete between being Indian and American. She does not struggle with her diversity but rather accepts it as part of progressive capacity.

SUMMING UP

The characters in Mukherjee's novel develop multiple consciousness, ensuring in neither self that is neither unified nor hybrid but rather fragmented. As the protagonists distinguish both their race and sexuality through new and different lenses throughout the course of the text, they come to realise that the notion of a singular identity is an erroneous belief and the reality of the diasporic experience is the determinacy of multiplicity. This multiplicity at times becomes a significant plight for the characters, for as their different consciousness disagree with each other the characters are left vague as to the nature of their

identities, not knowing where they fit in the American Society. Finally they become competent of living in a world where individuals survive not as a unified one, but as many, bound by no limits and never-ending in the option of inventing new identities.

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