



## **SELF-IDENTITY IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS: AN OVERVIEW**

**M. Marichamy**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, G. Venkataswamy Naidu College (Autonomous),  
Kovilpatti

### **ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Desirable Daughters*, exploring themes of cultural identity, migration, and diasporic struggles. Focused on the three sisters—Tara, Parvati, and Padma—the narrative unravels their diverse responses to transnational migration, highlighting the clash between tradition and modernity. Mukherjee skillfully portrays the protagonists' attempts to navigate dual identities in the multicultural landscape of America. Tara, the central character, grapples with a profound identity crisis, torn between her Indian heritage and the allure of American individualism. The narrative delves into the complexities of cultural hybridity, revealing the challenges faced by diasporic individuals in reconciling Eastern and Western values. The article underscores Mukherjee's exploration of the intricacies of diasporic cultural identity, offering insights into the characters' quests for self-discovery amid the multifaceted layers of migration and cultural adaptation.

**Keywords:** cultural identity, migration, diaspora, multiculturalism, and transnational.

Bharati Mukherjee immigrated to the United States to avoid imperialism in the UK and Canada because the United States is known as the homeland of opportunities and bestows freedom for immigrants, such freedom is portrayed in Mukherjee's novels as well as diasporic women characters who travel towards the freedom. The protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* has a vision that returning to her home country where she was raised and to back her tradition and true identity. Tara collects some details about her ancestors and makes consistent her

Indian identity and heritage and her present life adaptation to U.S. women.

The idea of a quest for diasporic cultural identity is the main concept and a root search according to Mukherjee's narrative. This article focuses on the exploration of such concepts in which the present analysis becomes the root cause for discussion on transnational women's diasporic identities represented by the protagonist of this novel, in which turning incidents may lead the character's self-discovery and realization of their true tradition and culture of the home country.

Mukherjee's protagonists are portrayed as the composition of cultural identities of the diaspora, which is the central idea of this article.

South Asian women writers have documented their experiences boldly by making the diasporic characters because they are willing to fight for their rights. This kind of writing will help others to overcome their obstacles in a different nature. They are ready and prepared to reveal the facts and condemn the Eastern practices towards women. The South Asian women writer's works are very popular among English-speaking countries.

In their works, such women writers present the oppressive nature of patriarchal systems in which women are urged to follow severe cultural patterns. In general, women are treated as slaves hard laborers to pursue the family code, and no space is given to them to make decisions regarding cultural aspects. The process of seeking self-identity of Asian Indian and U.S. individuals in the late twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century has been interpreted in Bharati Mukherjee's novels.

In *Diasporic Daughters*, the three sisters' life is portrayed as chaos due to immigration in their attitude negotiating the different dislocations in different proportions. These three sisters belong to a traditional Bengali Brahmin family and they

are daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and the granddaughters of Jaikrishna Ganguly. These three sisters, Tara, Parvati, and Padma born and raised in Calcutta by culture and they travel in different directions. Tara lives in San Francisco and sees her as an American but she is always aware of her origin. In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee blends traditional and modern which leads to changes in the meaning of cultural space. In this novel, Tara endeavours to reform her identity as a trans-cultural subject and seek to be the center, of the narrative of her own experiences as a diasporic figure. She is irritated due to her menacing attitude because of her survival between territories and trans-cultural exposure. The protagonist Tara like Mukherjee's characters struggles hard for survival in the translocation and multi-cultural environment. The novel *Desirable Daughters* explores manifold ideologies' existence in the lives of three sisters and their alienations. Mukherjee's various approaches in the novel explore the fact of politics of three women. Though the three sisters make efforts to perceive American culture with their Indian mindset, each sister's reactions are different and deficient when they confront their obstacles.

Tara introspects her own identity as an immigrant through the life of her two sisters Parvati and Padma, her husband Bish, illegitimate nephew Mr. Christopher



Dey and she has a desire to seek comfort from her native place which discloses the spaces of tradition and modernity. Tara has involvement and emotional association with her past, existential suffering, and a multitude of her physical and emotional dividedness. In Mukherjee's writing of diaspora, the need for nativity and the inability to deal with the new problem in a new situation becomes root causing the theme of identity more severe and affection in mainstream American life.

Parvati has no urgent and acute identity crisis like Tara. Parvati has an unchanging identity compared to Tara, she has an identity of a dynamic kind, and it changes her lifestyle, and is different in comparison with her other sisters. Tara is dislocated and lives in San Francisco with the dream of American life but she realizes that this American life fails and has space for doubts and emptiness and her frustration and loneliness are the root cause to get her feelings of longing for her past. By making characterization of Tara, Mukherjee shows her belief in the individual's freedom to build oneself, to reconstruct and rejuvenate his identity. In reality, one's self-expression liberty would be suppressed.

Bharti Mukherjee represents the fact of the reality of society in which the existence of problematic factors and its constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of criminals. In crossing of boundaries and

experience of translocation make influence at hr to assess and seek her roots, and ancestral ties with Tara Lata. She was endeavouring to realize the elixir of her culture through space and time because the sense of home is the hub of her diasporic identity.

Parvati's traditional life has no uncertainties; there are no sudden changes because of its static nature. The readers can see the changing scenario in India through Parvati's character, in the name of globalization but not a bit of change in the caste system. Through the study of Tara Parvati and Padma characters; we can explore the first generation of Indian American culture- class and identity crisis. The Bengali culture is the essential dilemma for the immigrant, explored in *Desirable Daughters*. In this novel, the past is the important base to play a pivotal role in the present and future. Mukherjee's words interpret the fact in Hindu mythology, that animals can be transformed into people. In this novel, the story moves from the direction of the past, from generation with the force and influence of the past to realize the present scenario. Mukherjee's portrayal shows the contemporary Indo-American family with its center and struggles to preserve its value and pride.

In this novel, Mukherjee reveals the problems of a cross-cultural understanding: caste, exile, and identity by translocation of

sitting between Calcutta and Jackson Heights. The Asian migrants' caste is treated as a part of one's memory and not considered as an identity because of forced to consider themselves as a monolithic group in Jackson Heights. Tara's translocation of culture proves that caste and nationality or origin have to be considered by personal experiences through various cultural places. Survival strategies are presented at complex levels from socio-cultural to spiritual levels. The protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* looks at the edge of historical scenarios and with a peculiar urge of inner to search for her origin and roots. Here the survival strategy is to retain her identity in a multicultural society, defining her immigrant conditions. It is clear from the characterization of Padma, that Parvati and Tara are on their track in life. Parvati reunites for an Indian tradition and domestic role in her life, but Tara exposes her experience to the West.

Tara overcomes her barriers and comes out from the wedlock bond accompanied by a Hungarian Buddhist as a life partner, her son Rabi, and working in a pre-school in San Francisco for her self-satisfaction. In this novel, Mukherjee proves the importance of culture and recognizes cultural concoction, towards the center of origin. Tara is a cross-cultural girl and follows both cultures at home. Thus, Tara's reminiscent and emotional reunion of her

past. Though is a temporary identity, she would like to replace herself in the reality of cultural hybridity. She has a liberated attitude and, a desire to construct a cross-cultural identity but fails to perform the traditional life of an Indian woman because of her dilemma with the reality of cultural hybridity.

Tara's experimental move to search for her roots of origin drives her carefully between Hindu traditions and American ideas of individualism because she realizes her crisis, through her life in a multicultural environment. In the event of cultural blending and translocation, Mukherjee finds out the concrete binaries between the Orient and West like man and woman. Tara is an Indian as well as an American simultaneously. In American modern culture, Tara is on the quest for dualism. Immigration is a root cause of her identity crisis because of her living in an indifferent city and its new giant modernism, where she neither accepts her tradition nor rejects non-native culture. So she lives and accepts the cultural hybridity physically in the modern, multicultural soil of America.

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