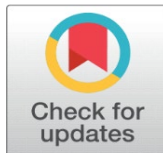
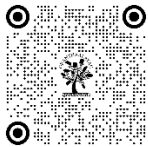


BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS: A NOVEL OF MULTICULTURAL REPRESENTATION

Kiran Yadav ¹, Dr. Vasant Prabhakar Gawai ²

¹ Research Scholar, MATS University, Raipur (C.G.), India

² Assistant Professor, MATS University, Raipur (C.G.), India



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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) as a seminal work of diasporic literature, exploring its nuanced portrayal of multicultural representation through the lens of postcolonial and feminist theories. The novel follows three Calcutta-born Brahmin sisters Tara, Padma, and Parvati as they navigate the tensions between traditional Indian values and modern American identities. Focusing on Tara, the protagonist, the study analyzes how Mukherjee employs narrative strategies to depict the complexities of cultural hybridity, identity crisis, and gender dynamics in a globalized world. Through Tara's journey, Mukherjee challenges essentialist notions of culture, illustrating the fluidity of identity shaped by migration, patriarchy, and assimilation. The paper argues that *Desirable Daughters* transcends simplistic East-West binaries by presenting a multifaceted view of multiculturalism, where characters negotiate their Indian heritage and American realities, embodying both alienation and empowerment. Drawing on Stuart Hall's concept of diasporic identity and third-wave feminism, the analysis highlights how Mukherjee critiques patriarchal constraints while celebrating female agency. The novel's rich tapestry of historical and personal narratives, including the symbolic "Tree Bride" story, underscores the interplay of past and present in shaping transnational identities. By examining Mukherjee's stylistic choices, such as first-person narration and cultural interweaving, this study reveals how the novel bridges cultural divides, offering a critique of both Indian traditionalism and Western individualism. Ultimately, *Desirable Daughters* emerges as a powerful commentary on the immigrant experience, contributing significantly to discussions of multiculturalism, gender, and belonging in contemporary literature. This research underscores Mukherjee's role as a pioneering voice in articulating the diasporic consciousness, making the novel a critical text for understanding the intersections of culture, identity, and globalization in the 21st century.

Keywords: Identity, Culture, Immigrants, Feminism, Hybridity

1. INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) stands as a seminal work in the canon of diasporic literature, offering a nuanced exploration of multicultural representation through the lens of Indian-American identity. The novel intricately weaves the lives of three Brahmin sisters Padma, Parvati, and Tara whose journeys illuminate the complexities of navigating cultural heritage and modern individuality in a globalized world. Mukherjee, an Indian-born American writer, draws on her own experiences as an immigrant to craft a narrative that transcends geographical boundaries, addressing universal themes of identity, belonging, and transformation. This research paper investigates how *Desirable Daughters* employs narrative techniques, thematic depth, and character development to portray the diasporic experience, with a particular focus on the intersections of gender, cultural hybridity, and personal agency. By examining the novel's portrayal of Tara, the youngest sister and protagonist, the study seeks to uncover Mukherjee's critique of traditional and contemporary societal structures, both in India and the United States.

The novel opens in Calcutta, where the sisters are raised in a privileged, patriarchal Brahmin household steeped in tradition, before shifting to the United States, where Tara grapples with her identity as a divorced Indian-American woman. This geographical and cultural transition serves as a microcosm for the broader diasporic experience, highlighting the tensions between rootedness and reinvention. Mukherjee's use of a first-person narrative allows readers to delve deeply into Tara's internal conflicts, as she negotiates her Indian heritage with her Americanized sensibilities. The novel's historical subtext, embodied in the "Tree Bride" story a tale of a young girl married to a tree to preserve her family's honor further enriches its exploration of gendered expectations and cultural memory. Through this layered storytelling, Mukherjee critiques the rigid frameworks that constrain women, whether in the hierarchical traditions of India or the subtler pressures of assimilation in the West.

Desirable Daughters also engages with the concept of cultural hybridity, a hallmark of postcolonial and diasporic literature. Tara's interactions with her sisters, who embody different facets of the immigrant experience Padma's embrace of a performative Indian identity in New York and Parvati's adherence to traditional roles in Bombay—underscore the multiplicity of diasporic identities. Mukherjee challenges the notion of a monolithic cultural narrative, presenting instead a spectrum of experiences shaped by individual choice and circumstance. This multiplicity is further complicated by the novel's exploration of globalization, as characters navigate transnational networks of family, commerce, and technology. The novel's climax, involving a mysterious figure claiming kinship with Tara, raises questions about authenticity and belonging in a world where identities are both constructed and contested.

This research paper argues that *Desirable Daughters* serves as a powerful commentary on the fluidity of identity in the context of multiculturalism. By analyzing Mukherjee's narrative strategies, including her use of intertextuality, nonlinear storytelling, and vivid characterization, the study illuminates how the novel redefines the immigrant narrative. It also situates the text within broader literary discourses on postcolonialism, feminism, and diaspora studies, drawing comparisons with works by authors like Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie. Through its focus on Tara's evolution, the novel underscores the agency of women in reshaping cultural narratives, offering a vision of identity that is dynamic and self-determined. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed examination of how *Desirable Daughters* not only reflects the challenges of multiculturalism but also celebrates the resilience and creativity of those who straddle multiple worlds.

Bharati Mukherjee explored the positive aspects and negative aspects of multiculturalism for foreigners in her writings. She situates her protagonists in diverse cultural contexts where they deal with characters of various racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. She said,

"Multiculturalism emphasises the differences between racial heritages. This emphasis on the differences has too often led to the dehumanization of the different. And dehumanization leads to discrimination. And discrimination can ultimately lead to genocide." ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 33).

In this multiculturalism and multiethnic environment, she depicts the path for the quest for identity, as well as protagonist's difficulties and hardships. She sketches her characters as transnationals with equal ties to their own country and host country.

The miserable effect of the post-modern situation is acculturation, which Mukherjee had understood at an early stage in life. The life of South Asian expatriates and the complexities of "acculturation" and "assimilation" have thus been her primary concerns as a postmodern writer. She depicts in her novels the modern woman's struggle to define herself and achieve an autonomous selfhood, particularly in cross-cultural crises, through her female characters, who are autobiographical projections of her experience as an immigrants. This issue has taken on significant importance in the current globalized world.

Mukherjee makes an effort to delve deeply into the warped thoughts of immigrant women who have been surviving in the face of traditional Indian beliefs; these women's personalities and attraction with western lifestyles are a result of this. Her journey from estrangement to adoption and assimilation is explored in her novels and short stories.

The protagonists of Mukherjee's work are all sensitive and have received varying training in the new ethnic imagination. They are thrust into a world of social oppression, racism, gender bias and ambivalence about their identities are. In the process of cultural divergence and assimilation, they confront multicultural reality and manage displacement.

"Indian people shop collectively, but they don't live together in tight little communities...they travel from distant suburbs...or from neighbouring states. We're a billion people, but divided into so many thousands or millions of classifications that we have trouble behaving as monolith." (DD, 199)

They strive for a new life and a break with the past as a result of the multiculturalism perspective they confront. They try to quantify the disjunction and persecutory paranoia based on their dual and bicultural perceptions when they are depicted at an emotional transition point.

While Jasmine and Desirable Daughters (2002) reflect the “cultural diaspora-ization” Stuart Hall refers to as the beginning of the desire for the survival in the community of adoption. The Tiger’s Daughters (1972) relate the dilemma of belongingness as a matter of flux and agony and explore the problems of nationality, location and identity. She chooses an affirmation of belonging and the idea of the triumphant “conquest” of the New World over the nostalgia of her early works and the myth of the nomad “adrift”.

Three high class sisters Padma, Parvati and Tara, who were born in India and now reside in the United State as Indian immigrants are the subject of the masterfully written and profound novel Desirable Daughters. The protagonist Tara, who is more alienated from her original Indian culture than her two sisters, is the focus of the book, which essentially examines her diasporic experiences. It captures her sense of isolation, absence of belonging, memory and disjointed identity, but it does not explain her longing or desire to go back her native country.

When I speak of this birthplace. Desh and homel to my American friends-the iron-clad identifiers of region, language, caste, and subcaste- they call me 'over determined and of course they are right. Then I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crises and feelings of alienation. (Mukherjee, Desirable Daughters 33).

It promotes immigration as a process of gain rather than a case of loss and the breakdown of national culture, in contrast to earlier works like The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife.

Desirable Daughters tells the story of immigrants, three sisters attitudes and how they dealt with the several relocations from three distinct points of view. The three sisters come from a typical Bengali Brahmine family; they are the great-granddaughters of Jaikrishna Gangooly and the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee. They separate, each embarking on their own journey to achieve their goals. They combine a classic and contemporary perspective. The paths of Padma and Parvati are different; the former is an immigrant of ethnic heritage from New Jersey, while the latter is married to a boy of her choosing and lives in the affluent neighbourhood of Bombay with a staff of servants to take care of her.

The novel’s protagonist, Tara, immerses readers in the complexities of the New World while appearing to wander aimlessly through time. Her identity’s flexibility attests to both her own and the immigrant flexibility. Tara said.

"All the neighbourhood services, except the laundries and the Japanese restaurant, are owned and staffed by crack-of-dawn rising, late-night closing Palestinians, whose shifting roster of uncles and cousins seems uniformly gifted in providing our needs and anticipating our desires." (DD,160).

Although she takes satisfaction in her progress in life, she cherishes her conventional upbringing. Her perception of her family’s ideals surrounds her like a wall of protection, hiding her weak and vulnerable side.

Tara’s cultural dislocation and fragmentation are causing her a great deal of distress. Despite her agreement to embrace and assimilate into the new culture, she finds it difficult to fit into the stereotypical image of an Indian woman. But the main character of the book, Tara, finds it difficult to fit into the traditional gender roles of wife and mother. Tara is forced to face the fact that “she isn’t, perhaps never will be, modern woman” because of her conventional surroundings. Tara feels torn between the culture and the parallel place, which only gives her a fragmented identity. She understands her cultural differences very well. Her San Francisco home appears to be a depressing place. According to the Indian code of matrimony, divorce is not permissible, thus she suffers greatly as a result of her separation from Bish. The promise of life as an American wife had materialized, so she left Bish. When Bish and Tara’s relationship becomes unbearable.

Tara’s other sister, Parvati, is entirely Indian in her cultural customs, as seen by the weeks she spends hosting her husband’s family in her opulent apartment with its breathtaking city view. Although Tara presents herself as much more modern in her attitude and adopts the American way of life, all of her treatment of the family members, maids, and drivers looks extremely absurd and inconvenient to her. “Is the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities, earning professional respect and being recognized for hard work and honesty” (DD, 27). She feels that her sisters lead extremely hectic lives and cause her discomfort by doing things that she does not want to. Therefore, Parvati’s actions are a result of her Indian mentality and her distaste for American customs, but Tara presents herself as the most contemporary of her sisters, disregarding these means of exhibiting an Indian lifestyle and intending to embrace American culture. Her other sister’s Indian devotion makes her dislike everything they do.

The identity issue of *Desirable Daughters* who must deal with both the traditional and modern worlds and their shifting values is thus highlighted by Bharati Mukherjee in her novel. Indian immigrants quest for identity in the multicultural nation of America is brilliantly shown through the spaces of custom, recollections, various locations and new lifestyles under the modified sociocultural constraints. In addition to wanting a forge her own identity, Tara works to reshape it in opposition to the customs she is a part of. She is proud of her Indian identity, which she upholds while doing this. Her attempts to preserve her dual identities –partly Indian and partly American- make her a cultural mix that raises the question of who she really is. Bharati Mukherjee thus portrays the protagonist's identity dilemma and her yearning for her new self throughout the entire novel. The primary focus of Bharati Mukherjee's writings is always multiculturalism and cultural complexity, although there is frequently a young feminist undertone.

2. CONCLUSION

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* stands as a compelling exploration of multicultural identity, diaspora, and gender dynamics, offering profound insights into the immigrant experience. Through the lives of Tara, Pad Komisji, and Parvati, Mukherjee masterfully illustrates the complexities of navigating bicultural identities in a globalized world. The novel's nuanced portrayal of the sisters' struggles balancing traditional Indian values with the individualism of American life underscores the fluidity of identity and the transformative power of migration. By employing postcolonial and feminist lenses, this study has highlighted how Mukherjee challenges patriarchal norms and static cultural constructs, presenting hybridity as both a challenge and an opportunity for empowerment. The recurring motif of the "Tree Bride" encapsulates the tension between rootedness and adaptation, serving as a powerful metaphor for the diasporic experience. Mukherjee's narrative transcends simplistic immigrant tropes, weaving personal and historical threads to critique the intersections of race, gender, and class in transnational contexts. The novel's relevance lies in its ability to articulate the ambiguities of belonging, making it a significant contribution to postcolonial literature. As globalization continues to reshape cultural landscapes, *Desirable Daughters* remains a vital text for understanding the evolving nature of identity and the agency of diasporic women. This analysis affirms that Mukherjee's work not only enriches the discourse on multiculturalism but also invites readers to embrace the complexities of hybrid identities. Future research could explore comparative studies with other diasporic narratives or examine the novel's cinematic adaptations to further unpack its cultural resonance. Ultimately, *Desirable Daughters* affirms the resilience of those who straddle multiple worlds, offering a timeless reflection on the beauty and challenges of multicultural representation in an interconnected world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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