

Cultural Dichotomy and Rootlessness in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee, one of the most well-known writer in the Indo-American literature and of India's best modern novelists in English. She is an Indian novelist, short story writer and non-fiction writer who has enriched Indian fictional world with her significant literary outputs. Her educational backgrounds from different places and own life experience helped her to prove be a celebrity writer in diaspora literature. Her novels focus on the problems of diasporic Indian women who caught between two opposing worlds and experiences cross-cultural boundaries and identity crisis in the new land. Her writings create awareness to the new immigrants to think ahead and instils in them the confidence and strength to face the consequences. Through her novels, she projects the complexities of immigrant in various angles. In connection with immigrant issues, she takes up relevant themes like alienation, cultural dichotomy and detachment which are universal issues, as it attracts worldwide readers to her novels. This paper discusses on the protagonist Tara who understands two diverse cultures in India and America. The modernity in America changes her outlook which troubles her mind mentally and trans-cultural conflict crops up in her leaving her in a sticky situation.

Keywords: Detachment, cultural differences, assimilation, adaptation, survivors

Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian American writer who is well known for her immigrant writings. She was born in Kolkatta and later travelled to different parts of India with her family members which helped her to be celebrated writer in English.

She has written a number of novels and short story collections, as well as works of nonfiction. After marrying a Canadian writer Clark Blaise, she happened to stay with him in Canada for fourteen years. Unable to bear and settle in Canada, she moved to US with her family members and become an American citizen. She considers herself as an American writer, and not an Indian expatriate writer.

Mukherjee has portrayed different facets of women psyche in all her novels. Her novels discuss the immigrant women's struggle for identity and their adaptation in the new soil in the realistic manner. All her novels deal with the trans-cultural conflicts which the Indian women encounter during their migration. Most of her women protagonists are new settlers in the alien land, and it is a new experience for them to start a life in America, and so they find it extremely difficult to adapt and adjust to the American way of life, American culture, conjugal life, and personal morals. At the initial stage, they have undergone cultural shock but slowly they come to understand the realities which exist in the alien culture which becomes a question of survival for them.

Most of the women protagonist develops a positive attitude to life. They change their attitude and adjust according to the new culture. Women protagonist move to different places for their survival or to do their higher studies or to settle with their partners. Some of them are not able to adjust and adapt to the new traditions, culture and language. In earlier days, women are under the control of men and they are too dependent. It is considered that the main duties of women are to do household activities and to take care of their family members. But now in 19th century, women are independent and they prove themselves in different fields with their new identity. Though they become modernised, they are the custodians of traditions, culture, morals, religion, and family life. They take care of their family members and educate their children. They take part in all areas

such as education, sports, media, service sectors, science and technology etc.

Women who migrate to different places for various reasons encounters problems like language, culture, tradition, food, life style, socio-economic problems etc. When they move to a new place they have undergone cultural shock, rootlessness, alienation, loss of self-identity, inadaptability, mental stress, and miscommunication. At the initial stage, they face language barriers which fail them to adapt and communicate emotionally with their neighbourhood. This also leads them to mental disturbances. They are not able to come out from their house and feel difficult to mingle with the society. A cultural difference is also a major problem for the immigrant women where they face lot of differences in their native culture and the alien culture. Free society, liberty, sexual freedom, no restriction by parents is those aspects which is unheard in India whereas such factors are not a sin in American culture.

The novel *Desirable Daughter* glimpses on the tradition and modernity which exists in India and America. It deals with the trans-cultural conflicts which the Indian women suffer in America. This novel focuses on the attitude of three sisters Tara, Padma and Parvathi. They belong to a traditional Bengali Brahmin community. Being born and brought in a traditional background, they are being restricted and stick on to their customs and traditions. All the three daughters of Bhattacharjee were too traditional bound to the customs and values. They were all high breed in richness, education and class. They wore British dresses, trained and schooled in Loral by Irish Nuns and learnt to speak English with poise and proper native slang. When they grew up eventually they got more open minded and got a taste of their class with their parents' richness and often thrown mock tail parties. The novelist clearly pictures the various aspects of tradition and modern outlook of the society in an optimistic

manner. This novel vividly portrays entirely different time and place with a woman of modern personality.

The narrator of the novel Tara marries the rich business man Bishwapriya and led a materialistic life. He bothers about only to earn money and not to take care of emotional needs of Tara. After her marriage, Tara moved to US and experienced cultural shock in the alien society. Tara experiences American culture for the first time in her life and gradually assimilates into the culture. She is totally exhausted to lead a materialistic life with her husband and her vision is to get a new identity for herself. She becomes immensely dissatisfied of her lifestyle. So in a bold gesture she signs a peaceful divorce from her husband and lives in Houston in an apartment with her son Rabi. In the meantime, she met Andy, a Hungarian ex-hippie whom she got admired and decided to live with him.

Tara got mentally upset when her husband's friend freely approaches after she got divorce from him. She realises the problem of being a divorced woman and living lonely in America become a trouble for her and it gives a lesson to her. She has totally given up the Indian culture and her background and assimilates into the American culture. Getting divorce is not a sinful act in America but an Indian Woman Tara didn't think of the consequences as suddenly taken an unwise decision is unacceptable in Brahmin community. Living as a divorced woman in India or in America will not have a status, but at the same time, life in America is a dangerous land, has its hazards for her, for she has to live alone. She finds that she becomes rootless and felt being alienated in the society. This is one of the reasons to get a company with Andy.

Bomb blasting at her home had given an insight to Tara to reunite with her husband again. This reunite gives a lot of peace and happiness to Tara. When compared her life with her sisters, Parvathi follows the traditional lifestyle and enjoys luxurious and peaceful lifestyle. Her elder sister Padma forgets the Indian

ethnic trends and blend into the American culture and life style. Tara wants to lead a life of liberated women in American society. Further she believes that all the traditional customs and restrictions are essential only to live in India and not in America. And moreover she is in between tradition and modernity which confuses her psyche. She made an attempt to build a new identity for herself in which she can forget the past and totally delve into the American culture. She forecast the trans-cultural conflict, and mentally, she prepares herself for it.

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