



Identity And Diasporic Consciousness: The Adaptability Of Belonging In Desirable Daughters

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores how Bharati Mukherjee uses her protagonist Tara Bhattacharjee to subtly depict diasporic identity and cultural negotiation. The study looks at how, within a transnational context, Mukherjee investigates the changing ideas of selfhood, displacement, and belonging. The paper makes the case that *Desirable Daughters* redefines identity as a flexible, adaptive process shaped by migration, cultural hybridity, and individual agency by following Tara's transition from traditional Indian domesticity to an independent living in America. In order to examine how Mukherjee reconstructs the diasporic consciousness of South Asian women negotiating between inherited traditions and contemporary individualism, the analysis draws on postcolonial and feminist theoretical viewpoints. The story's intersections of memory, history, and cultural displacement show that belonging is a dynamic negotiation that permits self-redefinition and empowerment rather than a set category. In the end, the article claims that Mukherjee sees the diasporic situation as a transformative place that promotes resilience, self-discovery, and identity renewal in an increasingly globalized world rather than as fragmentation.

Keywords: Identity, Diaspora, Hybridity, Belonging, Transnationalism, Feminist Discourse, Cultural Negotiation, Postcolonialism.

Introduction:

Migration, diaspora, and identity have emerged as essential themes in postcolonial and transnational literatures, especially among authors who traverse cultural and national boundaries. In her novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Bharati Mukherjee examines these themes through the experiences of three Bengali Brahmin sisters—Padma, Parvati, and Tara, who were born in Calcutta but became dispersed due to international travels and cultural shifts. At first look, the novel may seem to be about the experiences of Indian-American immigrants, but it is really more of a reflection on how gender, culture, memory, and geography affect how people feel like they belong.

In this work, the researcher contends that Mukherjee portrays belonging not as a static condition anchored in heritage or nationality, but as a dynamic, fluid process of identity formation within the diasporic context. Gendered roles, the hybrid self, tradition/modernity, and homeland/host-land all play a role in mediating this process. This paper organises the discussion under three broad headings: (1) homeland, host-land and the diasporic self; (2) gender, daughters and diasporic agency; and (3) hybrid identity and the performance of belonging. Each section offers a close reading of key passages, situates them within identity and diaspora theoretical frameworks (e.g., Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha), and demonstrates how the book challenges essentialist ideas of culture and belonging.

Homeland, Host-Land and the Diasporic Self:

Mukherjee begins her story by reflecting on the cultural heritage that Tara Bhattacharjee, the main character, carries: "Our father could not let either of my sisters out on the street, our car was equipped with window shades." (Mukherjee 29). This first section demonstrates how the sisters' lives in Calcutta are governed by

culture, class, and gender. The allusion to incarceration and precautions which highlights the caste, community, and family honour constraints that shape their upbringing in their homeland. Tara's admission that her cultural baggage has "over-determined" her signifies the conflicting nature of diasporic identity, and she inks: "How could we have allowed the instinct bred within us... to draw lines and never cross them, an infinity of lines, ever-smaller lines, ever-sharper distinctions?" (Mukherjee)

Here, she bemoans the emergence of "girls of good family" (ibid.) who put duty, caste, and reputation ahead of self-interest. By doing this, Mukherjee represents Stuart Hall's thesis that cultural identity is not a permanent essence but rather a "positioning" formed within history, society, and power.

Tara becomes intensely conscious of her situation as the story moves to the United States: she is neither entirely assimilated in America (still recognised as Indian) nor fully at home in India (because she has gone). In this way, belonging is no longer a destination but rather a process. As one critic observes, Mukherjee "redefines the idea of diaspora as a process of gain, contrary to the conventional perspectives that construe immigration and displacement as a condition of loss and dispossession." (Kaushik) Tara lives in a space of negotiation rather than yearning to return to a pure origin. The novel's tree-bride metaphor further complicates ideas of home and belonging by discussing the ancient tale of Tara Lata's marriage to a tree.

In the excerpt from Book Reporter, Mukherjee writes: "A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrows of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her" (Mukherjee). This metaphor of entrapment contrasts with Tara's own journey of uprooting and reinvention. Thus, homeland is not only a site of refuge but also of constraint; the host-land not only of opportunity but also of ambiguity.

Gender, Daughters and Diasporic Agency:

The title *Desirable Daughters* itself is charged with irony: the notion of being "desirable" in patriarchal Indian society implies obedience, beauty, marriageability. A study remarks: "The title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) is significant and ironical. It suggests that daughters are the object of family prestige, so their behaviour should be desirable ... Only such daughters who do not cross the "Laxman Rekha" of etiquettes would be liked and appreciated." (Gupta) The three sisters conform to this role in childhood—but later diverge.

Padma stays in the US while upholding Indian customs; While Tara drastically changes—divorcing, living with a partner, and discovering her own identity—Parvati remains in India and embraces local customs. Tara reflects: "The divorced Indian lady combines every fantasy about the liberated, wicked Western woman with the safety net of basic submissive familiarity." (Mukherjee). This self-aware assessment captures the hybrid condition of a diasporic lady caught between Indian aspirations and Western prospects.

In the gendered dimension of diaspora, Mukherjee highlights "double colonisation" (by patriarchy and by expatriation) faced by immigrant women. (Mukherjee is described as a "Third World Feminist writer ... concerned with the problems of cross-cultural conflicts faced by Indian immigrants particularly women.") (Gupta) Tara's refusal to model herself after the good women of Hindu myth, Sita, Savitri, and Behula, is captured when Padma scolds her: "'Things are never perfect in marriage; a woman must be prepared to accept less than perfection in this lifetime – and to model herself on Sita, Savitri and Behula...'" (Mukherjee 134). Tara's rejection of this concept is a prime example of her proactive approach to negotiating identity and belonging.

As such, gender and transnational identity are intricately connected: the sense of belonging is shaped by both culture and gender in terms of the possibilities and constraints it presents. Tara's self-construction across different geographical contexts both contests Western liberal notions of assimilation and confronts patriarchal traditions.

Hybrid Identity and the Performance of Belonging:

A fundamental thought of diaspora hypothesis is the idea of hybridity or a "third space" (Bhabha). In this space, characters are not set in stone and don't come as it were from where somebody is initially from. In *Alluring Girls*, Mukherjee appears this through Tara's life in California/San Francisco, her Indian foundation, and her blended current life. Tara's statement that she feels "heroically invisible" in America, claiming "all people's legacies," signals her adoption of a self-outside fixed category. (Gupta) Having a place here gets to be performative: she sanctions diverse selves depending on space and setting.

Mukherjee too compares mythic and modern: the tree-bride myth in Bengal, the three sisters in Calcutta and America, the moving time frames from past and present. This layering demonstrates that character cannot be followed to a single beginning. As one analysis notes: "*Desirable Daughters* ... focuses on the alternative ways of belonging, cultural hybridity-synchronisation and the "third space of enunciation" which are markers of the post-colonial condition of existence." (JLLS)

In addition, the novel locks in with innovation: within the utilize of innovation, versatility, worldwide careers, but continuously established in Bengali Brahmin culture and memory. The result may be a liquid sense of being, not one or the other entirely Indian nor entirely American, but something in movement. Having a place hence gets to be a transaction of numerous selves, numerous homes, numerous temporalities.

Conclusion:

In “Desirable Daughters,” Bharati Mukherjee explores themes of being a part of different cultures, identity, and belonging in today’s world. She breaks down the idea that having a home can just mean owning something that you got from your family or where you come from. Having a place becomes a fluid, changing process that relates to gender. Through Tara and her sisters, the story shows how their homeland and new country, traditions and new ideas, and gender and movement are connected.

For people living far from their home countries, especially women, identity isn’t just about going back to their roots or fitting in completely. It’s about living in a middle ground, creating different versions of ourselves, and willingly accepting a mix of identities. Mukherjee’s story encourages us to think of belonging as something that is ongoing, active, and flexible instead of something that is set in stone or unchanging.

In simple terms, *Desirable Daughters* shows that in a world where people move across countries, identities are complex, changeable, and can be adjusted. For people studying culture and literature in diaspora communities, this warns against thinking in simple categories like home V away, fitting in V standing out, or Indian V American. Instead, it suggests that we should think about belonging and how people shape their own identities in more complex ways.

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