

Cultural Diversity: Bharti Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* explores very vividly the cultural diversity of explores two cultures east and west. The novel beautifully presents the age and culture of diaspora, beginning with the history of both east and the west. The novel is also a melting pot of styles, which has tried to depict the chaotic facets of cultural clashes on different label. It can be considered as a middle-brow women's novel, even a postcolonial depiction of elite lifestyle in the 60's and 70's.

Key Words: Culture, Clash, Diaspora, Identity, Dislocation

Bharati Mukherjee evaluates the trajectory of her identity and in the course of crossing and recrossing multiple borders of language, history, nationalist boundaries. Her poetics of diaspora reveals her as a writer who was born and raised in India, and presently is a citizen of Canada and the United States. Mukherjee herself elucidates her aesthetic stand on the identity reformulations, which only became possible due to the cultures of India and North America. She explain this reformulation in terms of unhousement to rehousement, a process that entails breaking away from the culture into which one was born, and in which ones place in society is assured and re-rooting oneself in a new culture becomes possible.(Geoffrey 39) In this age of diasporas, she argues, ones biological identity may not be ones only identity. Erosions and accretions come with the act of emigration. (Mukharjee)

Women in the diaspora are subjected to conflicts. Jasbir Jain opines: "The diasporic situation in itself presents a metaphor of dislocation and uprootedness which evokes images of loneliness and cultural conflicts." (Jain 139)

In this dislocation feminist discourse have consistently draw attention to several question on cultural diversity.

The protagonists of her novels are Indian women who take the bold decision to emigrate and they all have the willingness to adventure by trying to create their own happiness, unbothered by conventionality. Woman in the fictional world of Bharati Mukherjee not only comes out of the house but also shows enough courage to cross national and racial barriers.

The women characters of Bharati Mukherjee are not stereo types struggling for homes and failing to find one, but they are fighters, adventurers, confident people who all occupy the central status in her novels. They are, no doubt, emotional but not like Anita Desai's women characters who indulge in insulating themselves from the rest of the world.

Bharati Mukherjee shifts her attention not on "backwardness as an area of darkness, but o her characters growing awareness of the dark spots in their lives and their courage's efforts to discover areas of light.... A struggle for self-actualization". (Padma 78)

The women in the novels come to the U.S. with their aspirations, face a huge number

of challenges, find an emerging identity and also transform the look of America. (Myles 108)

Bharati Mukherjee highlights the plight of South Asian immigrants in America, more specifically, Indian Americans, filling a gap. A lot has been said about African American, Chinese, Hispanic and other immigrants but South Asian immigrants do not have an emphatic voice in literature. Bharati Mukherjee adds several dimensions to her stories by depicting the struggles of her female characters in Indian and America and how they emerge stronger from it. She takes Diaspora, feminism and other elements into account.

She depicts from the clash of cultures and the ensuing dilemmas and successes with unique understanding and startling sensitivity. Her writings have held a mirror up to the south Asian community in North America, and are truly represent the work of a cross-cultural writer.

Desirable Daughters expresses shifting cultures, in an unconventional romantic way.⁷She imbues the typical diasporic yearning for her homeland, constantly focusing on Bengali culture, on which reams of publication culminated into a vital component of literary consciousness. In this novel she is looking beyond given roles and positions and questions in accepted traditions. She deletes the frozen layer of culture, and presents a finely orchestrated contrast between the western and Asian approaches. In an interview she says:

“I also have two sisters,” she explains. “I’m playing with author-protagonist relationship in ways that I haven’t before. I think it’s because I want to write an autobiography, but I just can’t bring myself to. You create masks. It’s a story about three

sisters following different paths, each somehow important to me.” (Homi 292)

The novel very brilliantly expresses the age and culture of diaspora, beginning with the history of both east and the west. The story begins with Tara Lata, the Tree Bride, who has an identifiable enemy, the British. The story interestingly dates back to “English Year of 1879”, but it has its invisible grip on the narrator of the twenty-first century. Bengal was the seat of British power, and the instruments of Western knowledge had influenced the elite. Tara Lata’s father Jai Krishna Gandopadhyaya, pleader at High court was a typical educated Hindu minority who was “dependent on mastering on manipulating British power.”(DD 5)

He spoke polished English and even had been recommended to Oxford for a scholarship, but just because he was from a small town not Calcutta, he never reached the right places. Colonialism had set in and it had to be fought, though the story does not focus more on this aspect, but changes to issues like freedom of Tara Lata from tradition and be free to live life on her terms.

The narrative continuous in modern day San Francisco where Tara Lata, the namesake to the Tree-bride, is divorced from her billionaire husband, Bish, and is raising her fifteen year old son, Rabi. She has a white American lover, Andy, who is a typical former hippie-type who always spouts pseudo-enlightened Buddhist maxims. The divorce was amicable, but the East Indian community has “no language or ceremonies for divorce so the divorce is kind of an open secret, understood but not really acknowledged.”(DD 115)

Tara has two sisters. The middle sister Parvati lives in India and has had a love-marriage. Among three of them she seems to be the only one to have stayed within her traditional cultural norms. The oldest sister Padma lives in New Jersey and is well-known in East Indian arty circles. She is a kind of Americanized Indian princess. It is Padma's past that fuels Tara's realization that she knows very little about life, its dangers Christopher Dey, Padma's long-lost son, questions arise about family secrets, the implications of community and being and Indian in a foreign country. The search for information about Christopher follows the novel's very heart: parental love, the love of siblings and family. The last part of the novel attempts to tie the strands of fate with a kind of spirituality which is rather questionable. But still it is a well-written novel which gives insight into the Indian culture. Mukherjee has energetically been engaged in redefining American national identity from the perspective of immigration, which she construes as a cultural process that keeps the meaning of America alive to continual re-invention. She has expressed in many ways that her Indian heritage has shaped

the ways she views the world. She firmly believes that changing citizenship is easy, swapping culture is not. Focusing on the feminine psyche, in the Indian novel, Dasan observes:

“One needs to cherish a sense of heroism to survive the brutalities of immigrant experiences. Not minding to be called an American writer of South Asian, rather than Indian origin, she believes that there could be more than one way of being in the Indian heritage of early upbringing has done to her social and literary sensibilities.” (Dasan 109)

Desirable Daughters is also a melting pot of styles, which has tried to depict the chaotic facets of cultural clashes on multiple levels. Her element is also found in this novel magic realism. This novel establishes Mukherjee as a formidable writer, who combines her pride in her heritage and gratitude to be called and American. She has repositioned cultural space in term of global dynamics. The conventional narratives of identity, roots, origins, citizenship', Mukherjee offers through her diasporic writing.

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