

**Tara – A Microcasm of Predicament in Bharati Mukherjee's 'Tree Bride' And 'Desirable Daughters'**

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**Abstract:**

Indian-born writer Bharati Mukherjee's novels feature largely Indian women protagonists. Mukherjee's novels address issues of importance for many immigrant women today, in particular for women who immigrate in search of a better standard of living and quality of life in terms of gender recognition, equality, and integration. Bharati's protagonist, Tara - as most famous fictional characters like Sherlock Homes, Harry Potter and James Bond most renowned character of Bharati Mukherjee's most familiar works. The pursuit of this research paper is why Tara has become a predicament charm in Bharati Mukherjee's novel and what Bharati Mukherjee tries to expose through that Indian name in her novels to the readers. Why Tara is for? And is Tara fulfilled the desires of Bharati Mukherjee? Though Tara is a microcosm character but she has become predicamental one by Bharati by presenting her in most of her works and Tara is nothing but the spirit of Indian Bharati Mukherjee. It is attempted to depict in this paper.

**Keywords:** Predicament, Microcasm, fictional, hardwork.

It is visible evident that literature in which every writer is attempting to document their human fascination with metamorphosis (due style). And probably in all literature, innovative themes and causes are down to change – about characters growing, developing, learning, changes of heart, changes of mind but these seem to be somewhat more emphatic because, the events represented by the author may be Biographical or Auto biographical and even the changes appeared in the work is to maintain the interest and greater confidence of the readers or to move accordingly with the author's perceptiveness or to make the audience to travel with his conscience of the characters' surviving environment.

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the strongest voices of recent times. She declares clearly and distinctly the tales of the immigrants of the Indian sub-continent with the quality of arousing deep emotions like sadness, regret, misery and bitterness. Her all characters pass through the situation of

displacement and rootlessness. Her female characters continuously find within themselves the strength of adjustment and assimilation. The general tendency of the people in the emigrant space is to be centric to primary identities -religious, ethnic, territorial and national. Most of Mukherjee's novels deal with the question of such primary identities and the crisis of such identities along with transmission of ethnic traits. She takes in account the borderline condition of cultural translation in the postcolonial location of past, present and future.

When the protagonist Tara visits the unknown land in both the novels, she is an outsider in a no-man's land and there she has to struggle a lot for her survival. Conquering the new feeling of nostalgia, she carves out a new territory and wraps herself totally with the lure of the west. She recreates herself into a new personality and forms emotional ties with the place she lives in. This encounter of a new personality slowly makes her forget her own native culture. On her return to her native land she finds that her native taste and touch have turned alien to her. Her mind is again torn apart between the cultural clash of two environments and she is forced to fight with her split personality. All the above factors and details of Tara well suits for Bharati Mukherjee as an immigrant.

*Desirable Daughters* is Bharati's most factual novel. Tara Lata Banerjee is the female protagonist and she incessantly renews her sense of self and her memory with her family in India and

the United States. Tara leaves the Mukherjee's narrative of cultural hybridity. Tara is enforced to locate her roots in hard times. The narrator of the story is Tara Chatterjee and she narrates the story of Tara Lata, bears her nickname. Tara Lata's life history becomes the central point for Tara Chatterjee's family annals. Tara becomes intrusive to unfold the agony of the 'tree-bride' after taking divorce from her husband, Bishwapriya Chatterjee. Tara expresses her intense sense of loss in both situations: Indian and American.

*Desirable Daughters* is a novelized version of Mukherjee's article entitled "Two Ways to Belong" published in New York Times 22 September 1996. In this article Mukherjee spoke about how she and her sister Mira interacted with the country of their own choice. Mira moved Detroit to study child psychology and American pre-school education. Bharati Mukherjee tailed her a year later to study Creative Writing in the University of Iowa. Mira wedded a Bombay-born graduate student and the couple and acquired a green card. Mira, living in Detroit and works in South Field Michigan School System. She grown into a national recognition for her involvement to pre-school education. Even after thirty-six years, Mira clings on to her Indian citizenship stubbornly and hopes to return to India after she retires.

Bharati Mukherjee on the other hand married an American of Canadian descent. By marrying outside her ethnic community, Bharati Mukherjee has

chosen for flexibility, self-invention, relinquishing three thousand years of caste-conscious, pure culture. In short, Mira wants to maintain her identity in the host culture whereas Bharati wants to transform it. Mira identifies the lack of structure, the erasure of Indianness, the absence of an unchanging daily care in Bharati Mukherjee's life. But Mukherjee points her finger at Mira's narrowness of perspective, involvement with the mythic depths or the superficial pop-culture of the host society.

Mira and Bharati Mukherjee, like Padma and Tara differ in the way they negotiate with the host cultures. Mira is happy to live in America as an expatriate rather than as an immigrant-Indian. But Bharati Mukherjee has the need to feel like a part of the community she has adopted. She, like Tara wants to put her roots down, and make a difference. It is quite evident that Mukherjee writes out of her lived experience and that the characters Padma, Parvati and Tara are modelled on Mira, Bharati and Ranu respectively.

All the three are desirable in their own ways. With all her experience and exposure to the West, Parvati reconciles for a conventional, disciplined and domesticated role of an Indian woman. On the other hand, Didi represents the way of life of hundreds of immigrants in the United States. To feed the nostalgia of Indian settlers in the U.S. is her cultural mission and also her survival strategy. In contrast, Tara's way to belong is a complex one. In the United States, she

internalizes the progressive views of the host country, culture, and homeland.

Tara feels a mysterious connection to the 'Tree-Bride' whose story she had heard from her mother. Tara had been married, born a son, and had travelled all over the world, yet as she asserts, she had never changed the world. In locating empowerment within Tara-Lata's narrative of extreme circumscription, Mukherjee offers a feminist projection of such uninspiring and vapid ethnicity. Tara Lata as revealed earlier plays a redeeming role to save her father from disgrace by accepting her fictional wed-lock to a lifeless tree. She in a way, helps preserving the triumph of patriarchy where her father plays a lead role in a macabre exercise of the forest marriage.

Her house became the place of refuge for the sick and the poor. While she was confined to her father's place, Mist Mahal, she took on tree like characteristics. She was rooted to her father's house and was silent as a tree. She spent her entire life in Mist Mahal reading and talking to the trees. She communed with tree planted in the mansion for the next sixty years. People believed that Tara Ma belonged to higher spiritual plane. When word spread out to the common masses that she had donated her gold jewellery to Gandhi's Salt March, reverence turned to veneration.

Years later, she became a goddess, prayed to by unmarried girls needing husbands and by women seeking sons. Marriage of a child at the age of

five is an atrocious tradition, widely practiced in those days. Getting a child married to a tree to prevent a lifelong widowhood was another prevalent shortcoming of the patriarchal society. The father, after getting his daughter married to a tree, proceeds to get married nine times to sire a son who would carry his name and typically endorses a kind of sexual colonialism.

Thus, Tara Ma is not a passive victim. She is a virgin, an individual who balances the old beliefs and is exposed to the new beliefs to attain the new height of empowerment. She has her own choices to make and no man can lure her to give up those beliefs. She doesn't need to reconcile to the old patterns of marital relationships with newer codes of sexual behaviour or expectations of intimacy.

Tara Lata is a lifelong virgin; she had opened the house to beggars, the sick, and then to the young soldiers fighting the Raj. She had transformed herself from the unfortunate Tree Bride to 'Tara Ma', saint and freedom fighter. Mukherjee's depiction of Tara's quest culminates in Bangladesh, at Tara Lata's home. She realizes that the Tree-Bride is central to every story of female assertiveness in the family. Through Tara Lata's subversion of patriarchal norms from within, Tara understands a significant facet of her identity. Bharati Mukherjee, through Tara, contends that female self-affirmation does not fall for the extreme feminist arguments she had seen in

California. Mukherjee's representation of a nuanced, diasporic Indian American identity seems to advocate connectedness as a practice in the politics of representation. Tara sounds predictive: Each generation of women in my family has discovered in her something new.

Tara takes the readers deep into the particulars of the New World and seems to float rootless with time. The fluidity of her identity testifies not only her own but also the fluidity of the immigrants. She values her traditional upbringing but takes pride in moving forward in life. Her image of her family values forms a wall of security around her that camouflages the fragile vulnerable self. Bharati Mukherjee has struck a balance between the past and the present through a deft blending of tradition and modernity. This she achieves through the character of Tara who has outwardly severed her links with tradition but still remains tied to her native country. She is influenced by ancient customs and traditions, but is also very much in to the glitziness and modernism of the multicultural America. She is caringly conscious of her existential predicament.

Tara, like Mukherjee's diasporic characters struggles hard to occupy the translational space, after multiple dislocations and ruptures. Most of her fictions stems from the same dichotomy of growing up in two cultures as it is woven in Tara's trajectory from one location to another. Tara experiences the recurrence of this dichotomy and constitutes the epicentre of the most

important demographic dislocations of the modern times. It now represents an important compelling force in world culture. Tara in the novel finds herself caught between Patriarchal histories of her past home and legends created by her husband in the acquired home. She rekindles the legend by walking out and, in turn, gets stagnant in a relationship of retrofitting with a man who leaves her alone in her time of need.

Tara is thus an alienated self, languishing in the anxiety and uncertainties of the diasporic experience, Tara's predicament as a diasporic subject is problematic as it is difficult to frame her character in Mukherjee's celebratory Americanism. Tara, after multiple fragmentations and displacements seems to decline Mukherjee's fascinating Americanism; instead her character takes the route to the root, in the shrine of Indianness and Tara Lata's mystical world. Through her critical reconstruction of the Tree-Bride's history, Tara is able to arrive at an awareness of her identity as a construct that is largely shaped by her consciousness. Tara arrives at the realizations that if Tara Lata, aged virgin and a 'Tree-Bride', could attain the status of a saint and freedom fighter in a society where it was unthinkable for a woman to be without a man, it was essential that as Tara-Lata's descendent she too, must forge her own path towards self-assertion.

Mukherjee has the affinity with the native soil, but discourages the vapidness and pollutants of the soil yet

declining to pay short shrift to its vitality. While writing about the two invariables of the transnational conditions- exile and homeland, Mukherjee in her novels capture the temporal and spatial dynamics of immigrant sensibility lost in the space between home and location. The estranging consciousness of relocation is haunted by some sense of loss, an urge to reclaim or to look back at the transgressive precinct of the past. Mukherjee in her novels discourse Western themes and settings as well as characters who are westernized or bicultural and her characters are evident to admit that the very structure of her imagination is essentially Hindu and essentially moral.

Her return to tradition is also a revolt against modernity. Tara Lata becomes famous for acts of rebellion and she becomes freedom fighter and martyr. Paradoxically, therefore, in pursuing a vapid Indian tradition and confining his daughter to a life without the distractions of husband, children and mother-in-law, the father transforms her into a symbol of essential womanhood under the patronage of traditional male symbolic order. Tara crushes all cultural values of her home and goes beyond all the margins of culture and gender imposed upon Indian family. In the process of searching a new life for herself, she first gets divorce from her husband. In doing this, she brings disrespect for the Bhattacharjee family because during sixties in an Indian family the word divorce did not exist in the Indian family system.

Bharati Mukherjee depicts a problematic and fluid society in her novels. It is of constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of machines, flow of criminals, flow of exterritorial power structure, even we have the crossing of geographical boundaries when Tara in an essay to search her roots remembers her ancestral ties with Tara Lata, the Tree-Bride. She was attempting to redefine the importance of her cultures through space and time. Sense of home plays a significant role in Tara's construction of her identity.

In Mukherjee's fictions the two geographical entities, the home and location thus support, and to an extent reflect each other. She takes up the life of the Indian immigrants in the USA as the subject-matter of most of her novels. There she tries to vivify the image of those women who have tried to assimilate the alien culture and have tried to accept the changed identity, over throwing the Indian cultural heritage in which they took their first breath. What is most important in them is their spirit with which they overthrow their old culture and adjust themselves with the new surroundings. The psyche of an immigrant is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia.

Tara is a representation of contemporary woman who declines to be a beneficial object in the society and prefers instead to declare her

individuality by challenging the defined social and family norms and structure, be it marriage, wifehood, motherhood, or the larger question related to her liberty, freedom and recognition of her social and intellectual searches. Mukherjee shows that she is full of dynamism and vigour and is in frequent quest for new prospects in the modern twenty first century India.

Women have experienced through marriage and/or travel abroad, tremendous physical and mental changes in their personal lives which was well branded as Tara by Bharati Mukherjee. Though they seem to be well suited for adaptability in an alien culture, the shock they go through made them a predicament. The reason is Tara born Indian and brought up very much immersed in Indian traditions to feel and behave as custom demands, but at the same time she wants to break out of it and live like western woman, looking forward to it with a dreamy and tinted glass outlook. Tara speaks of feminism and liberation easily, but stumble in living the same. This is what is found to be the main struggle in the lives of all of Mukherjee's ladies through which Tara becomes a microcosm of predicament.

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