

## Chapter-V

### *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*

#### SEARCH FOR ROOTS AND THE (RE) LOCATION OF IDENTITY

As literary rendering of Diaspora, Mukherjee's fictions are centric to the question of borderline existence, nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of expatriation, fragmentation of the self, exuberance of immigration, assimilation, cultural translation and negotiation. Mukherjee's sixth novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) marks a new trend in her writings. In an interview with Dave Weich, Mukherjee says: 'The authentic Strategy for this book was also using the width of the field of history, geography, Diaspora gender, ethnicity, language – rather than the old fashioned, long clean throw.'<sup>1</sup> In her earlier novels, diasporic transmigration meant new opening and emancipation from the clutches of convention bound society. In these novels, attachment to one's own native culture and homeland, living abroad was presented as something to be spurned and total assimilation into the host culture was hailed. It is to create a location of the presence that reduces the diasporic individual to delink the past and deconstruct the future. In *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee considers different pattern of belonging in the Global perspectives from in-between temporality to assimilative permanence and further, hyphenated and unmixed nationness.

The general tendency of the people in the diasporic 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. In Mukherjee's fictions the two geographical entities, the home and location thus support, and to an extent reflect each other.

In her narratives she takes in account of the spatial and locational subjectivity related to their homeland. Her characters experience the cultural inanity and the social displacement which are expressed in mixed identity codes. Such concept of diasporic space as theoretical construct, evolving out of the practical journey from alienation to acceptance seeks to project and map out the space of different culture and postcolonial heterogeneity. This space of diasporic experience is potent to become the pulsating contemporary parameter, offering various other new scopes of negotiations on the

programmed location of culture.

*Desirable Daughters* is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of negotiating the multiple dislocations in three different perspectives. The three sisters, who are the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and the great-grand daughters of Jaikrishna Gangooly, belong to a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. They part ways taking their own course of voyage towards their destiny. They are a blend of traditional and modern outlook. Padma and Parvati have their own trajectories of choices; the former an immigrant of ethnic origin, New Jersey, and the latter married to her own choice and settled in the posh locality of Bombay with an entourage of servants to cater her.

Tara, the narrator of the novel, takes the readers deep into the intricacies 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 camouflage the fragile vulnerable self.

Tara as a young wife stays for ten years with Bish Chatterjee, but his almost sinister preoccupation with his profession leaves her yearning for companionship and care, the couple eventually separate. Next, she finds solace in Andy's arms, her live-in partner, but again, when Andy leaves her she feels threatened and comes back to Bish. Her rhapsodized soul takes dip as she is confronted with the realities of terrorism. New revelations unfurl as her son declares that he is a gay, tearing apart her cocoon and, the final blow is her house being bombed and Bish Chatterjee is crippled and dependent on her. Finally, Tara Bhattacharjee returns home to find solace at her father's house. She further probes into her family tree to unveil the life of 'Tree Bride' her ancestor. The retrospective journey is in fact a return to the roots seeking Eastern solution to the weeds developed in the Western World.

The novel begins with the history of Tara Lata describing the dull disquiet of the time. The conflict between the inscrutable traditional corridor and simple quest for location and space constitute the description of the interpersonal world:

Tuberculosis is everywhere. The air, the water, the soil are septic. Thirty-five years is a long life. Smog obscures the moon and dims the man-made light to faintness deeper than the stars'. In such darkness perspective disappears. It is a two-dimensional world impossible to penetrate.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Tree Bride* (2004) her namesake the child bride, Tara Lata is thus, headed towards her destiny. Before she gets married the groom dies on his way due to snake bite. The groom's father is greedy and wants Jaikrishna Gangooly to give the dowry. Jaikrishna Gangooly instead of bulking down to the demands of the groom's father, puts his foot down and refuses to hand over his daughter to her in-laws, dooming her to a life of servility. A Sanskrit scholar and a Brahmin, he decides to solemnize his daughter to a tree as bride so that she can overcome the curse of widowhood. It is presumed that she is united with God, and now she is eternally doomed to be a married woman leading a life of purity, sainthood and lifelong virginity. Tara Lata, the Tree-Bride becomes a family legend:

After the night of her marriage, Tara Lata returned to Mishtigunj and, at least by legend, never left her father's house. Unburdened by a time-consuming, emotion-draining marriage and children, never having to please a soul, she grew up and grew old in a single house in an impoverished village in the poorest place of earth, and in that house, the world came to her. She lived there seventy years and gradually changed her world.<sup>3</sup>

Tara Lata of *The Tree Bride* shall never become a human bridegroom to continue an ancestral line. In marrying her to proxy husband, a tree, he permits her to occupy the respected position of married woman, within the family home. Married to a tree she will at least remain a spouse, 'and not a widow.'<sup>4</sup> What appears to be a strange practice is in fact a highly efficient adaptive strategy.

The author describes Tara Lata, just five years old and is being carried on a palanquin, all decorated in the ceremonial dress to be given away in marriage. The older sisters, seven and nine are already married. In Hindu culture it was authenticated that a father should give away his daughter in marriage before she reaches puberty and if the father is not able to do so he is considered useless and undeserving:

In a palanquin borne by four servants sit a rich man's three daughters, the youngest dressed in her bridal sari, her little hands painted with red lac dye, her hair oiled and set. Her arms are heavy with dowry gold; bangles ring tiny arms from wrist to shoulder. Childish voices chant a song, hands

tap, golden bracelets tinkle. I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her life time imprisonment.<sup>5</sup>

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.

In his haste to save the situation from disgrace, Jaikrishna Gangooly opts for preserving a 'primary' identity asserting the insipid patriarchy of the prevalent time. In the assertion of patriarchal impositions enlightenment is apparently discredited. The inventive traditionalist father secures his daughter's place in the world by a fiction of marriage and goes for a metaphysical settlement. This is the point of conjunction between Tara of *Desirable Daughters* and Tara Lata of *The Tree Bride*. The abjectness of life in a hostile ethnicity of the modern world finds answer in the celebratory romance of the past rooted in native soil.

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 captures 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. To quote Maya Manju Sharma: 'In her fiction Mukherjee handles Western themes and settings as well as characters who are westernized or bicultural. Yet she is forced to admit that the very structure of her imagination is essentially Hindu and essentially moral.'<sup>6</sup>

But in *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee focuses on the alternative ways to belong, cultural hybridity simultaneity and the 'third space of enunciation'<sup>7</sup> which are markers of the post colonial condition of existence. Clifford says 'Diaspora women are caught between Patriarchies ambiguous pasts and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways.'<sup>8</sup> Likewise, 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. According to Avtar Brah: '[T]he identity of diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given[...]. As such, all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even though they are implicated in the construction of a common we.'<sup>9</sup>

In other words, Diasporas experiences double identification that constitute hybrid forms of identity. Such forms of identity differ from the essential notion of national and ethnic identity. It also explores multiple belongings that enable people to inhabit more than one space at the same time. Under such condition in the absence of a dominant code, culture is becoming an individualistic enterprise, in which people create their own super-structure and super-culture, becoming in a way their own 'cultural programmers.'<sup>10</sup> Tara is a fictional rendering of such cultural hybridity. Tara's assertion that she is both, being simultaneously an Indian and an American, helps her gaining the same 'third space of enunciation.'<sup>11</sup> Tara says in *Desirable Daughters*:

The rhetoric of modern San Francisco makes me invisible. I am not "Asian,"[...] I am all things[...]yet I'm still too timid to feed my Ballygunge Park Road identity in to the Kitchen garbage bin. That dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case[...]I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I am convinced, I don't belong here, despite my political leaning; worse, I don't want to belong."<sup>12</sup>

In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee fuses near and far, traditional and modern which transform and recreate the meaning of cultural space. In the novel Tara attempts to reconfigure her meaning as a trans-national and trans-cultural subject and attempts to center the narrative upon her individual experiences as a diasporic shuttle. She is a frustrated woman dwindling menacingly in the alternative models of survival between territories, migrations and mediations. 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 epicenter of the most important demographic dislocations of the modern times. It now represents an important compelling force in world culture. Salman Rushdie points out: 'Our physical alienation from India almost

inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we will in short create fictions, not actual cities villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands Indias of the mind.<sup>13</sup>

Precisely, the novel *Desirable Daughters* concentrates on complex ideologies revolving round the life of three sisters and their multiple alienations – Padma, Parvati and Tara. All of them maintain distinctive individuality in their attitude and approach to life. The novel begins with the description of bridal procession of Tara Lata, an ancestor whose life history becomes a focal point of Tara Chatterjee's, family chronicle. Tara Chatterjee, the narrator had always treated the story with a sense of awe and it is after divorce from her husband Bishwapriya Chatterjee she became curious to know about the trauma of the 'Tree bride.' Seemingly, a thematic parallel with Spivak's phenomenal article, *Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism*<sup>14</sup> Mukherjee has written three different texts in the novel that unfold and also entangle the politics of diasporic consciousness of three women. Though the three sisters had different opportunities to assimilate America with their Indianness, each sister's reactions to the confrontation are distinct. While Tara undertakes this root searching mission as an attempt to come to terms with her fragmented and at times confused notion of self, Padma takes the world at her stride according to her own cultural poetics.

Tara's positioning is different from Padma in the sense, Padma is a hyphenated immigrant. From her obsession on assimilation as a critical content of a survival strategy in an alien soil, Mukherjee vociferously talks against the status of a hyphenated immigrant because the hyphen marginalizes the Asians as minorities. Parvati the middle sister, with an American education and an America trained Indian husband, lives the life of a privileged rich wife in India. She symbolizes the traditional life of an Indian woman with Western orientation. Each one traverses her own path of immigrant life quite happily.

Tara, through the life of her other two sisters, Parvati and Padma her husband Bish her illegitimate nephew Mr. Christopher Dey, introspects on her own crisis of identity as an immigrant and she continually expresses her desire to seek a consolation in her native traditions. In Tara's realization the novel reveals the spaces of tradition, personal memories, places, and life styles, tradition and modernity. She indulges in the nostalgic romanticism of the past, the inverted story of mobility, existential suffering, hybrid-subjectivity and plurality in her physical and psychic dividedness. In Mukherjee's poetics of Diaspora, rejection to the nativity and incapacity to deal with the new situation make

the theme of identity more powerful and poignant in the mainstream American life.

Tara at the age of nineteen was married to a software engineer from an outstanding Bengali family. After her marriage, Tara was shifted to American society, in Atherton California where her husband Bish tried to carve out a semblance of Indian traditionalism. Mukherjee describes the reason for such selection of Tara's husband:

He had that eagerness, and a confident smile that promised substantial earnings. It lured my father in to marriage negotiations, and it earned my not unenthusiastic acceptance of him as husband. A very predictable, very successful marriage negotiation.<sup>15</sup>

Her marriage to Bish did not have any immediate traumatic effect as earlier experienced by Tara-Lata the 'Tree-Bride.' While Tara Lata became a widow by the foul mechanization of fate, Tara leaves her husband by choice in a self redemptive and assertive role of a woman of the global era. She falls a prey to her own experiencing of America where the 'Cream-colored houses seem to have tumbled down the hill sides like children's blocks, or-on bright days under a cloudless sky-like cottages in an Etruscan landscape.'<sup>16</sup> Here she feels 'totally at home, unwilling to leave.'<sup>17</sup> But her American summer suffers a jolt with a series of dislocations.

Swerving away from the tradition she ends up becoming a fun loving woman who is 'ethnically ambiguous'<sup>18</sup> and finds comforting charm in the arms of a Buddhist retrofitter. To her love is no longer a matter 'indistinguishable from duty and obedience.'<sup>19</sup> But such Western excesses of untrammelled fun and glitziness of the exotic perturbs her inner self, and she contemplates an alternative way to survive. A transition is on the cards, from imaginary homeland to imagining the homeland:

I wasn't, perhaps I'll never be, a modern woman. These are the objections of modern American woman who know me now, all of whom have passed through at least one unarranged marriage and who are raising at least one child with or without the bottom line of child support. They have no idea of the wealth I came from.<sup>20</sup>

The nostalgia of Tara for her past, her protective existence in India, her

helplessness to assimilate in the glamorous life of the USA has become a voice of all these immigrants who lead a life of 'subaltern' in the highly mechanical, progressive and prosperous society of America. In his review of *Desirable Daughters*, Jopi Nyman Comments: 'Bharati Mukherjee's fictions rewrite the traditional immigrant story, imagining new spaces and favour of identity as a result of travel and dislocations.'<sup>21</sup>Tara's journey to the 'tree bride's India is in fact a quest and a re-search for space beyond the third space of cultural location.

The story of *The Tree Bride* shuttles back and forth between modern San Francisco and her ancestral mansion in pre-Independence East-Bengal. The novel deals with colonialism in India, terrorism in the USA and the British Diaspora in India. The socio-cultural and political history of Bengal is nicely knitted into the fabric of *The Tree Bride*, blending the family saga of generations handed down to the younger generations. The present study is concentrated only on the connectedness between the two narratives where Tara decides to walk down Tara Lata's footsteps in search of roots, denying to stay afloat and partially submerged in the glittering American ethos.

Tara feels a mysterious connection to the 'Tree-Bride' whose story she had heard from her mother. Tara had been married, borne 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.'<sup>22</sup> Mukherjee gives a searing detail of the seamy side of the traditional Bengali society in the following language:

Older aunts shush her. She is paying for the sins of a past life, they explain. God is letting her off lightly. She is being saved from the fate of despised ghar-jalani, a woman-who-brings-misfortune-and-death-to-her-family, by the quick thinking of their wise, god-fearing patriarch.<sup>23</sup>

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 time to sire a son who would carry his name and typically endorses a kind of sexual colonialism.

Sexual colonialism refers to the relationship between the sexes which is a relationship of dominance and subservience. It refers to the relationship between sex and power and through this system a most inspired form of central colonization is achieved. Men are the colonizers, the women colonized. 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 behavior or expectations of intimacy.

Vertie Treadwell tries to analyze Tara Lata's physical anatomy with his sexual overtures and Tara Lata in turn fixes her gaze on his middle portion. Naturally he takes it as a sign of invitation. Tara Lata with her gesture ensnares him and one tends to applaud Tara Ma's empowerment. Jasmine in *Jasmine* has killed her rapist incarnating herself as *Kali*. Tara is another name of *Kali*.

From the bushes her private army rises up and circles him, kicking his head and face as he tries to rise. He curls his body and they descend upon him in a rain of boots and lathis. The pain in his head builds to a series of explosions. In the distance, a woman claps her hands and he hears the slapping of sandals in retreat.<sup>24</sup>

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 Mishtigunj, Bangladesh, at Tara Lata's home. As Tara says- 'I'm like a pilgrim following the course of the Ganges all the way to its source.'<sup>25</sup> 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 polemics 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 prophetic: 'Each generation of women in my family has discovered in her something new. Even in far-flung California, the Tree-Bride speaks again.'<sup>26</sup>

In epigraph of *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee evokes tradition-both as impossible to follow, and as a felt necessity. The epigraph to the novel, a Sanskrit verse adopted by Octavio Paz that provides an insight in an immigrant's quest for identity and authenticity of oneself:

*No one behind, no one ahead  
The path the ancients cleared has closed.  
And the other path, everyone's path,  
Easy and wide, goes nowhere.  
I am alone and find my way.<sup>27</sup>*

It gives hint that neither the old tradition nor the new tradition can really lead to happiness unless one finds one's own way of living which is inevitably a quest for the strategic location of culture. The result of globalization is that it has created a 'Third space'<sup>28</sup> to spread beyond the known 'location' and 'space.' It is now a situation of 'enunciative split'<sup>29</sup> to take from each other's heritage and sew it together into one's own heritage in the location of one's culture. Tara fails to generate the sense of belonging that she so desperately seeks in America. She fails to be absorbed beyond 'base-superstructure division'<sup>30</sup> and remains unrepresented in the 'transnational totality.'<sup>31</sup> Far from the condition of the 'enunciative split' her Americanization remains elusive, despite all her attempts at assimilation. Tara at the end of the novel seems to believe that there is no simplistic answer to her quest. Tara's own stories is that of an entirely untraditional Bengali –American who has rebelled against the life of an Indian wife, and set up home with a lover in a multi-ethnic neighborhood almost synonymous with revolt unlike Tara Lata of *Tree Bride*. Hers is emphatically a modern world, a 'new global unconscious.'<sup>32</sup> As a student her husband Bish discovered a process for allowing computers to create their own time, instantaneously routing information to the least congested lines.<sup>33</sup> Bish, on the

other hand is a part of the process of globalization, the process by which people become increasingly interconnected across natural borders and continents.

Tara's connection to the *Tree Bride* is not therefore a connection back to a secured primordial identity, but to a rebel. She feels a profound connection to the Tree Bride. Both have two sisters. To an external eye, Tara's sisters are very alike. All share a birthday, all have played the same roles in the same operettas at the same convent school; all are docile to parental expectations. But their apparent homogeneity is an illusion. The novel digs out their histories in explicit relation to theories not of descent through the generations-but of birth order, to place the emphasis on insurgence rather than conformity. The novelist describes the sisters as 'Homo bengalensis, subspecies Hindu Calcuttan, subbreed Ballygunge,'<sup>34</sup> a middle class, conservative, Calcutta-bred clan, 'already extinct in our native habitat.'<sup>35</sup>

As the story of the 'subspecies' sisters opens, Padma is living in New Jersey with her Pobjabi husband Harish Mehta, a divorcee with grown-up children. Parvati, the middle daughter, after her studies in Boston has settled down in Bombay with her husband Aurobindo Banerji and her teen aged sons Bhupesh and Dinesh. Tara, the third daughter is the speaking voice in the narrative. She lives in San Francisco with her son Rabi and Andy, her live-in-lover, a Hungarian refugee. Her divorced husband Bishwapriya Chatterjee is a computer geek, and an iconic figure of Silicon Valley.

Parvati lives in a high-rise building overlooking the Arabian Sea. In her Bombay flat each object has its rightful place. Parvati lives well within the mores of Indian culture and her life 'preserves as much of the old ways as sanity permits.'<sup>36</sup> She is very hospitable to the long string of guests who visit her house. In fact, Parvati 'manages a hotel at home.'<sup>37</sup> Usually these guests, who are from Auro's side, are convinced that 'they have earned the right to enjoy the sumptuous hospitality that God's grace, parents' sacrifice, neighbors encouragement and, of course, their 'dear Auro's' diligence at universities in India and America and his masterful job performance in Bombay finally produced.'<sup>38</sup> This is a critical commentary on the social life in India which is opposed to the individualism of the West. The relatives think that they have the right to share the advantages of Bish's successful career. Tara however, always takes strong exception to the way Parvati allows herself to be exploited by her relatives. But Parvati's reply always is:

I am not complaining [. . .] we have this great place that Auro's company pays for, so why not share it with my in-laws? How else are they going to ever see the inside of a Nepean Sea Road high-rise apartment?<sup>39</sup>

Parvati feels that her wedding has proved to be more solid and her lifestyle more 'conspicuously luxurious'<sup>40</sup> than that of Padma and Tara. She stands out; she is in the milieu but not with the milieu. As a radicalized subject, Tara has to encounter the racist and nationalist ideology segregating her, pushing her away from the centre of American experience. She emerges with a new identity:

I felt as though I were lost inside a Salman Rushdie novel, a once firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and re-emerging as something wondrous or grotesque.<sup>41</sup>

Parvati's consciousness of the Indian tradition and an Indian's socio-cultural identity is mirrored in the following lines which describe her Daddy's renunciation and detachment from the mundane world:

Daddy is becoming more and more detached from the world, which I suppose is a good thing, at least it is something we are supposed to aspire to, but in his case I feel Daddy is fleeing this world, rather than seeking the next.<sup>42</sup>

Parvati's identity crisis is not so much acute as in the case of Tara. Parvati is a static kind of identity with her emphasis on tradition and convention whereas for Tara, identity is dynamic; it is in flux, constantly changing. A divorcee, her life-style is totally different from her other sisters. Dislocated as she is, she lives in San Francisco, still cherishing the American Dream of possibilities and promises but to her utter dismay, she finds that life fails to deliver these promises, hence her frustration and loneliness. The milieu dissatisfies and disappoints her. She feels a longing for the past:

It is a happy landscape, I like to think, reaching from the shallow depression of Golden Gate Park and climbing to the communication towers atop Twin Peaks. The area is given to summer fogs that make conventional gardening impossible, but that remind me, not unhappily, of

mountain resorts in India. I almost expect the chattering of monkeys, corn and peanuts smoking on open braziers, the tinkling of women's bangles and Buddhist prayer wheels.<sup>43</sup>

Through Tara, Bharati Mukherjee voices her belief in the individual's liberty and freedom to mould himself, to reconstruct and reshape his identity. She does not believe in a reality that represses and stifles one's self-expression, expectations and one's liberty:

Life was of all a matter of shaping up and hitting one's mark, satisfying expectations, achieving a quota. Repudiations of reality were destined to die a dishonorable death.<sup>44</sup>

Tara was happy that her son Rabi was going to a school with the children of San Francisco's bohemian elite, kids who'd never harbored an illiberal thought, nor suspected the existence or repressive social codes and norms of behavior.

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 extritorial 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' of Mishtigunj. 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. Here Mukherjee is different from her earlier projection of heroines who preferred to melt to be reconstituted in new condition:

We have to stop living in a place that's changed on us while we've been away. I don't want to be a perfectly preserved bug trapped in amber, Didi, I can't deal with modern India, it's changed too much and too fast, and I don't want to live in a half-India kept on life-support.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Parvati's exposure to the West, she always criticizes both Tara and Rabi for their American ways. To Auro and Parvati, Rabi looks like 'a savage, a trust-fund American savage.'<sup>46</sup> Auro and Parvati plead with Tara to return to India with Rabi, before it is too late. They fear that at a later stage, Rabi may not be either Indian or American. Parvati thinks that Tara's American adventure is over with her divorce, whereas to Tara it

is just beginning. Parvati and Tara are closer to each other than they are to Didi, but they do not share a common language. As Tara says:

As sisters we were close, certainly closer than either of us was to Didi, but we didn't have a language for divorce and depression, which meant we couldn't fit in concepts like powerlessness and disappointment. We couldn't talk about why a young woman with everything she could ever want would decide to leave her protector and provider.<sup>47</sup>

Parvati's traditional life-style is more predictable, in the sense, there are no sudden shocks and surprises. So there are times when Tara envies Parvati's clarity and confidence as she thinks that Parvati seems to be in control of things that are happening around her. She does not tolerate anything that questions the tradition of the family or the community. When Tara asks Parvati about the liaison between Padma and Ron Dey, she reacts:

I cannot fathom what is going on in your life to force you to make such a bizarre request. Do you have any idea how mad you sound? Maybe you have lost touch with the way things work here, in which case, I think you need a good long Indian vacation away from all those crazy soap operas that keep putting bad ideas into susceptible minds. [...] Have you become so American that you don't realize how absurd your request is?<sup>48</sup>

Through Parvati, the readers get to see the changing scenario in India. Despite the fast changes taking place, in the name of globalization, the caste system has not changed a whit. For instance, Parvati wants Tara to get a suitable Bengali Brahmin girl settled in California for Aunt Bandana's fourth son. To Parvati being or becoming an American is getting mongrelized. As a traditionalist, Parvati accepts whole-heartedly the pretensions and less candid relationships even between husband and wife as the cultural norm of the Indian society.

Tara's divorce likewise, is not spelt out to her parents. Auro does not know about Tara's relationship with Andy, the 'live-in-lover.' In Parvati's version of India however, there is always a self-protective mechanism at work. Accordingly, Parvati's personality becomes 'less assertive and more pliant.'<sup>49</sup> She has chosen a way of life in which she seeks to please rather than confront. She has fashioned her life around the whims and fancies of

Auro and defends her lifestyle emphatically. She says: 'We Indians don't run to psychiatrists for every problem. Come to think of it, I don't know a single psychiatrist.'<sup>50</sup>

Padma is often referred to as Didi and is markedly different 'in the way of sisters who are socially and psychologically and in every definable Indian way (caste, *desh*, language, shared history) so very much alike.'<sup>51</sup> The gap between Tara, the youngest daughter and Didi, the eldest, the disparity of their marriages and the paths of immigration they have taken have made them strangers. Tara says, 'passion like Didi's is foreign to our family; reckless unknown. She is our true American, our improviser, although I am the one to hold the passport.'<sup>52</sup> In that sense, Padma is a truer American than Tara herself. None knows when the liaison between Ron and Didi began. The birth of Christopher Dey, the consequence of a premarital relationship, is a hushed up family secret. Moreover, marriage between a Hindu and a Christian was unthinkable those days.

Padma's life in London and New York is miserable. She works her 'fingers to the bone.'<sup>53</sup> She struggles hard to survive. Padma lives in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, with her husband Harish Mehta. Padma and Harish socialize exclusively with Indians. In the twenty years that Padma had been in the United States, she has become more Indian than when she left Calcutta. She is a multicultural performance artist for colleges, schools and community centers. She stages Indian mythological evenings with readings, slide shows and musical recitals.

The difference between Didi and Tara is that, Tara loves her family and culture but has refrained from the struggle to preserve them. But Didi tries to lead a traditional life of Bengali culture in New Jersey, though her speech has always been couched in hatred for her family and the city of Calcutta. Didi tells Tara, 'If you fixed yourself up and resurrected your flirting skills, there are dozens of catches out there. There are scads of divorced men just waiting, even for girls like you.'<sup>54</sup>

Didi has thus, become the distinguished representative of her 'homeland.' She is invited to the U.N. functions and concerts and recitals by Indian artistes. Tara has seen Didi among the glitterati on the Indo-American television. Didi enjoys her life as an icon of her ethnic roots. Tara is fascinated to see Didi. Didi clings on to her own version of India. India has changed a lot since she left India. She wears Indian clothes and eats Indian food. She has Indian friends and her ways are Indian. To Tara, it looks like a cowardly way of coping with a new country.

Tara expresses her aversion for the Westernized manners of her elder sister who had uncertain liaisons with a Christian, known as Ronald Dey. Tara is all the time

conscious about the distinction between Indian values and American tradition. Tara, in retrospection evaluates the life of Padma who used to maintain a living that might have been relevant to American society but not conducive to India:

In India, we didn't have outside influences like the media, or lax schooling, or cars and dating and drugs. We didn't know family breakdown. Our families existed inside an impenetrable bubble. Anyone entering or existing was carefully monitored. We honoured the proprieties. There was no rebellion, no seeking after individual identity.<sup>55</sup>

Tara has divorced Bish but she fears if this rumour spreads in India it might bring disgrace to the family. Besides, in spite of her separation from Bish, she never detains Rabi to meet Bish because she is still confident that marriage is certainly an unbreakable tie. Tara fails to assimilate the American society and Calcutta with its distinctive culture, and the nostalgia of Bengali tradition constantly haunts her. Tara thinks in nostalgia how the three sisters were alike: 'It is true that we three sisters were as alike, at least to look at, as blossoms on a tree.' She further reflects:

'To be Calcutta bhadra lok, as we Bhattacharjees were, was to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement, and beauty that was the envy of the world. That is the legacy of the last generation of Calcutta high society, a world into which we three sisters were born, and from which we have made our separate exits.'<sup>56</sup>

At nineteen when Tara graduated from Calcutta University with a first class, her parents had a desire to see her, 'a wife, a wearer of vermilion powder in her hair-part, not a widow, well into the age of white hair.'<sup>57</sup> Tara's seven circles around the fire with Bish, ceremony of '*shubo-dristi*, the rite of auspicious gaze'<sup>58</sup> and her father's '*gauri-daan*', the giving of virgin-bride-as-a 'gift'<sup>59</sup> had initiated her with a *mantra*, 'a woman could attain nirvana only through worship of a husband'<sup>60</sup> - however, remained a metaphor before she could think of the return to the roots.

Tara's marriage to Bishwapriya Chatterjee is an arranged marriage. The tradition continued through ages and the great-grand-daughter of Tara Lata follows the same footsteps and her father fixes her marriage. The daughter, who cannot raise voice against

her patriarch, a graduate with M.A. degree in hand, is handed over to her groom, a suitable match in the form of Bish Chatterjee or Biswapriya Chatterjee. She has to get married because she cannot adhere to her own liking and marry a person whom she might like. They have a son named Rabi. They have a large house in Atherton. With the assistance of Chester, Bish invents the system of communication called Chatty. Chester gets the patent and Bish forms the company. Soon Bish becomes the richest man in Silicon Valley.

He establishes an Indian school so that Rabi could get the advantage of his inherited past and adopted present. There is free flow of money from Bish's successful enterprise in the field of computer. Yet Tara finds that her married life is not fulfilling. She walks out of her traditional life. Had she wanted only to be provided for well within the 'gated community,'<sup>61</sup> she could have stayed on in Atherton. A very common American divorce settlement follows. Now Tara lives with her ten-year-old son in Upper Height, San Francisco. She says:

I am one with the neighborhood, a young woman like so many other on the street: ethnically ambiguous, hanging out in the coffee shop, walking dogs, strolling with boyfriends, none of us with apparent sources of income.<sup>62</sup>

Tara works as volunteer in a pre-school. Rabi grows up in American culture with all its complexities. As a second generation kid he struggles to find his own way in the host culture hybridized and hyphenated.

Bharati Mukherjee asserts that in the process of splitting and cultural dislocation man seems to lose his meaning and purpose in life. In the process of migration, the immigrants can neither adopt alien culture nor can leave their culture of 'home' and finally a new hybrid culture comes to flourish. To quote Bill Ashcroft:

Post colonial culture is inevitably a hybrid phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European culture systems and an indigenous ontology with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity. Such construction or reconstruction occurs as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic and 'peripheral' subversion of them.<sup>63</sup>

In America Tara could imagine any number of Atherton families, Bish's friends coming here for weekend, flooding the courts and riding paths but Tara could never imagine Bish enjoying these situations. Tara always feels herself guilty of lavish spending and conspicuous luxury, "I'm feeling just a little alien and uncomfortable, a tinge of not belonging, in the midst of such welcoming comfort and I think it must be the way Bish feels."<sup>64</sup> Love, to Bish, 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. Love is indistinguishable from status and honors. 'I can't imagine my carpenter, Andy, bringing anything more complicated to it than, say, 'fun.' Love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than anyone else, over a longer haul.'<sup>65</sup>

Tara however enjoys her love-life with Andy because she feels that there is something exotic, something that defies the set norms and structures. Old rules of the game are gone. It is exciting to formulate new rules. Tara swerves away from Indian traditionalism and allows herself to be physically involved with Andy. Her dislocation from cultural codes fragments her once again. Tara defines her relationship with Andy:

We were exotics to each other, no familiar moves or rituals to fall back on. He interpreted my fear as shyness. He was not my first American lover, but he was twice the mass of any man I'd ever known, a bear-man.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, loneliness brings a greater isolation in the life of Tara, and she feels alienated in American society. She seeks solace outside the traditional world of austerity and self preservation. In India the details of religion, caste, sub-caste, mother tongue, place of birth are all integral part of man's personality and one cannot dare to go beyond them. Tara further confesses:

Nobody pays attention to me other than to ask for spare change or press a handbill into my closed fist. I am not the only blue-jeaned woman with a Pashmina shawl around my shoulders and broken-down running shoes on my feet. I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I'm convinced. I don't belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don't want to belong.<sup>67</sup>

She terribly suffers for her separation from Bish because the concept of divorce is not acceptable according to Indian code of matrimony. She left Bish because the promise of life as an American wife had not been fulfilled. When the relationship between Bish and Tara becomes intolerable, she comes to a bitter realization. 'In America, it seemed to us, every woman was expected to create her own scandal, be the centre of her own tangled love nest.'<sup>68</sup> She feels displaced and out of joints. She cannot apprehend herself properly. She feels splitted, splintered and dislocated. A negative transparency is constructed on the mental fringe that creates a confusing doldrums between the structure and super structure. Bhabha explores such diasporic condition in his own critical terms: 'The displacement from symbol to sign creates a crisis for any concept of authority based on a system of recognition: colonial specularly, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid.'<sup>69</sup>

Though Tara does not belong to India or to America or to the Silicon Valley Wives Group, yet she is comfortable in all these cultures. From the 'split screen of her self' she is a claimant of all legacies. She breaks out of the over-determined notions of identity, culture and homeland. There are many instances in the novel in which she deliberately flaunts her Brahmin heritage. 'We are Bengali Brahmins from Calcutta and nothing can touch us,'<sup>70</sup> are Tara's resounding words in honor of her Brahmin heredity. But these facets of her personality do not hinder her strategies of survival in the adopted land. For six long years, she defies the Indian tradition of arranged marriage and lives with a Hungarian refugee. The reconciliation of the broken family also symbolizes the reconciliation of cultures.

Padma on the other hand, in spite of her immigration and dynamic attitude to life, devotes herself to the popularity of Bengali life and culture. Padma, after excavating her past, concludes that a true Bengali family cannot even be fully Westernized- 'our family westernization was superficial, confined to convent school, metro cinema and movie magazines, which overlaid a profound and orthodox Hinduism.'<sup>71</sup> Mukherjee here resolutely deals with the margins of national culture and also reflects on dislocations due to cultural cohesion between longing and disgust for Indian cultural tradition. Bhabha attempts to explain this ambivalence in the following language: 'Cultural globality is figured in the in-between spaces of double frames: its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentered 'subject' signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the 'present.'<sup>72</sup>

Mukherjee, in her endeavor to explain the diasporic condition in the unstable temporality, is conscious of the mechanics of splits and doubles in the making of the third location of culture. She is particularly emphatic on the question of cultural inheritance and the total assimilation in the culture of adoption. Bharati Mukherjee thus not only highlights the longing of immigrants for Indian cultural heritage but also expresses her disgust at the changing scenario within India itself and the shifting dynamics of American culture. In both the situation the sense of loss is intense. Tara during her conversation with Padma expresses her sense of loss as Westernized Indian and all pervasive cultural pollution. If she is disgusted with materialism of the West, equally disgusting is the scene in India.

Padma reinvents herself as a performance artist, interpreting Indian culture and mythology to suburban American audience. She also anchors a Bengali language news show for a Sindhi tycoon's television station. Padma reacts to the collision of cultures in a way radically different from the trail taken by Tara, who comments on Padma: 'She and Harish socialize almost exclusively with Indians. In the nearly twenty-five years that she has been in the United States, she has become more Indian than when she left Calcutta.'<sup>73</sup> Padma's diasporic self-fashioning has encouraged her to salvage her Indianness with retribution, adopting the discourse of authenticity to defend her space. Her career as an Indian American performer also dictates that she foregrounds her ethnicity, so as to appear more 'authentic' to her audience. Despite the outwardly stable identity, Padma projects the ambivalences and ploy that govern her life and that becomes visible:

Didi was sitting just inches away, a firm identity resisting all change [...] But under scrutiny, fractured, like cracks under old glaze. Up close, I didn't recognize her. I didn't know who she was. I was following the cracks, fascinated by their complexity, not the simple shining face. "Puffles and Piffles", Andy once called them, but I never thought that previously unidentified fault lines could refer to my sister or to me.<sup>74</sup>

Tara's diasporic torment however, is relational; she is unable to affirm an authentic Indian self or assimilate totally in to American culture and fails to perform as a diasporic signifier. The emergent non-metaphysical reality discloses itself just underneath the 'split truth' or the 'double frame'<sup>75</sup> of her polished front. In an ironic turnaround of their actions during their youth, Tara had become more bohemian living in the Upper

Height area of San Francisco, the epicenter of the hippie movement of the 1970s. She had divorced her wealthy, handsome husband as she felt stifled in her marriage. Tara, in direct contrast to Padma had embraced the American notions of freedom and self-fulfillment as being of primary significance in her life, seeking refuge in this discourse as a reprieve from the orthodoxies of the Bengali Brahmin culture:

The gap between the youngest and oldest, the disparity of our marriages and the paths our immigration have made us strangers. Her reaction to my divorce (that I had brought shame to the Bhattacharjee family had been her refrain) had hurt.<sup>76</sup>

The middle sister Parvati had also rebelled in her youth. Her rebelliousness however, was not subversive, as she had chosen for her husband a Bengali Brahmin, Aurobino Banerji. Parvati and her husband had relocated to India and had established a typical upper class milieu to raise their two sons. In many ways Parvati was the most conventional of the sisters plying the role of the Bengali wife to completeness:

Parvati makes her routine stops to her favorite Goan meat and poultry seller, Parsi baker, two or three fresh water fish vendors in the fish market, and half a dozen vegetable hawkers in the produce bazaar [...] Parvati's in-laws expect her to meet them when they arrive and to see them off when they leave.<sup>77</sup>

Bharati Mukherjee seems to establish that India is a land of spiritual values, stability, variety of languages and tradition that American society would never be able to appreciate. She says: 'I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien.'<sup>78</sup> Mukherjee, through the nostalgia of Tara, significantly exposes the loss of spiritual values in the materialistic glamour of the West. Tara is anxious regarding the proper education of her son Rabi that may be close to typical Bengali tradition. The concept of American education was all illusion to her. She has a firm conviction: 'Existence was too easy in Atherton, they agreed, America made children soft in the brain as well as the body; it weakened the moral fiber. They grew up without respect for family and tradition.'<sup>79</sup>

Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* testifies a kind of perturbed coexistence of double consciousness and a leaning to ethicize and problematize other aspects of their lives, and all other relationships among the Indian community. In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara expresses the same contradiction: 'It's one of those San Francisco things I can't begin to explain in India, just like I can't explain my Indian life to the women I know in California.'<sup>80</sup> Thus it is their ethnicity which gives the Asian American a *locational* status among the Americans.

Tara is sternly shielding about her own territory, Calcutta, which gives her ethnic identity among American friends. In an intolerant tone she critiques the way in which they reduce Calcutta to a few tempting images. Her trodden ways in Calcutta challenges these stereotypes:

The city was Calcutta in late fifties and early sixties. My American friends in California say God, Tara, Calcutta! as though to suggest I have returned to earth after a journey to one of the outer planets. It's one of those cities in the world with negative cachet, a city to escape, one of those hellholes made famous by Mother Teresa and mindless comparisons in the American press; dirtier than Calcutta. Crueler than Calcutta. Poorer than Calcutta. I grew up in city that never pitied itself, a city that deflected all these abuse. Insults were the badge of our superiority, proof of others' ignorance.<sup>81</sup>

In this novel Mukherjee puts forward a cross-cultural understanding of problems like caste, exile and identity by persistently shuttling her setting between Calcutta and Jackson Heights. In Jackson Heights the Asian migrants are forced to consider themselves as a monolithic ethnic group. In this perspective, caste is only a part of one's memory. More than the caste, nationality becomes the marker of one's ethnicity. In Calcutta, in contrast, caste is still an issue. Tara moves between these two cultural locations and her mobility ultimately proves that caste and nationality have to be contested on the basis of personal experiences of living in and moving through different cultural spaces.

*Desirable Daughters* reveals survival strategies at multiple levels ranging from cultural, physical, social, and psychological to spiritual levels. Mukherjee's protagonist in *Desirable Daughters* stands at the transgressive rim of history and with a peculiar conviction surges ahead for a root search. Here one can see the survival strategy to retain

her identity in a pluralistic society by not assimilating but by devising her own ways to articulate her immigrant conditions. In this new cultural and diasporic endeavor one feels tempted to locate autobiographical hue and to question, whether the novel is an ethnographic project. In *Desirable Daughters* one also gets to understand the dynamics of shifting personal and ethnic implications in adherence to the author's own ethnic transformation. Pramila Venkateshwaran in her article, "Bharati Mukherjee as Autobiographer", amplifies this issue:

Mukherjee combines autobiography with ethnography; her personal story is relevant only insofar as it relates to the outer set of events and the collective identity of Calcutta women. The world outside the self takes on an importance as it would to a novelist or a journalist, such that it provides an area for the narrator to either participate in or observe from the fringes. Her alienation or involvement is contextual; therefore, the centre of the narrative constantly shifts according to the context, from the collective to the individual, from the socio-historical reconstruction of women to individual and personal revelation.<sup>82</sup>

*Desirable Daughters* is a fictionalized version of Mukherjee's article entitled "Two Ways to Belong" published in *New York Times* 22 September 1996. In this article Mukherjee talks about how she and her sister Mira interact with the country of their choice. Mira arrives in Detroit to study child psychology and American pre-school education. Bharati Mukherjee follows her a year later to study Creative Writing in the University of Iowa. Mira marries a Bombay-born graduate student and the couple acquires Labour Certification, which is necessary to get a green card. Mira now lives in Detroit and works in South Field Michigan School System. She has gained national recognition for her contribution to pre-school education. Even after thirty-six years, Mira clings on to her Indian citizenship tenaciously and hopes to return to India after she retires.

Bharati Mukherjee on the other hand marries an American of Canadian descent. By marrying outside her ethnic community, Bharati Mukherjee has opted for fluidity, self-invention, renouncing three thousand years of caste-conscious, pure culture. She celebrates the cultural fusionism and *mongrelization* beyond the 'base and superstructure division.'<sup>83</sup> In short, Mira wants to maintain her identity in the host culture whereas

Bharati wants to transform it. Mira pinpoints 'the lack of structure, the erasure of Indianness, the absence of an unvarying daily care'<sup>84</sup> in Bharati Mukherjee's life. But Mukherjee points her finger at Mira's 'narrowness of perspective, uninvolvement with the mythic depths or the superficial pop-culture'<sup>85</sup> of the host society. As Mukherjee says:

America spoke to me-I married it-I embraced the demotion from expatriate aristocrat to immigrant nobody, surrendering those thousands of years of 'pure culture' the saris, the delightfully accented English. Mira retained them all. <sup>86</sup>

Mira and Bharati Mukherjee, like Padma and Tara differ in the way they negotiate with the host culture. 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 modeled 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 for example feels solace at Jackson Heights that is the commercial centre of Indian life in America. She appreciates life at Jackson Heights because, 'side walks full of Indian Jewelry, Indian clothing, Indian travel, Indian food and spices, Indian sweets and restaurants. The smells and the noises are familiar.'<sup>87</sup> And she finds everything exhilarating. The anguish is conspicuous that in immigration one has to make a choice between one's own culture and the temptation of material gain. She admits that most of the immigrant community comes with a keenness for making money. She admits 'Jackson Height is a landscape of potentialities that had been denied in India.'<sup>88</sup> Against the filth of acquisitive worldly infatuation, Bharati Mukherjee exalts Indian moral values, dress codes, jewelry, religious books and stable human relations.

Tara quotes the words of brother Antony, a goon, 'Bengalis understand the soul.'<sup>89</sup> She considers high-tech mania of Indians a profane activity that encourages migration along with the passion for drug smuggling and cyber crimes. In search of money, people are leading life of insecurity and dissatisfaction. 'I know that money makes an enormous difference. But right now, all the money in the world isn't buying me even simple security.'<sup>90</sup> Tara finds that Bish's complete identification with American style is better alternative than her stubborn yearning for her cultural ancestry.

Being played out with abundant superfluity in her life of the New World magnificence, Tara in *Desirable Daughters* breaks all shackles of tradition and walks out of the wedlock with her son Rabi choosing a live-in relationship with a Hungarian Buddhist retrofitter, and doing volunteer work in a pre-school in San Francisco, all for her self-fulfillment. Her divorce is not known to her parents in India who like every parents desire their three daughters desirable for all time to them. She has an entrenched ethnicity implanted in her cultural heritage. She has the native cultural classiness, contrapuntal to American cosmopolitan glitziness and paranoid fantasy. As a diasporic subject she is caught in the cross cultural complication and treads on a thin line between isolation and oneness.

This cosmopolitan consciousness has deeper impact in her daily affairs. She cannot be her own, as she is unable to get rid of her 'foreignness.' At the same time she cannot quite negotiate her cultural nativity and rootedness. In California's High Street she has already a refined rearing. Her early affairs with Ronald Dey, a Christian boy, the brilliant brother of her friend Poppy was not liked by her parents as they advised her 'if you sow the wrong kind of soil, you are bound to end up with an unhealthy sapling. That means no inter-caste alliance.'<sup>91</sup> Tara neither is able to accept Bish as a sanctuary nor is she completely ready to become a traditional breast giver and a pure Indian house wife. In her subaltern and Third World marginality she comes into sight like Mukherjee's alterable and mutable heroine in just braving the New World.

Tara Bishwapriya is different from Tara Cartwright, the uprooted exile of Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*. Tara Bishwapriya's return to India is not the same as that of Tara Cartwright's nostalgic revisit to India. To Tara Bishwapriya, home is where one feels at home. In Tara Bishwapriya's case it is not homelessness but a multiple array of home. In *Desirable Daughters* while moving in different directions and different straining circumstances, each of them is on the move. Mukherjee portrays through these three moving and identity-shifting characters, disinterested identities and tactical

belongings, diverse ways to feel the 'self' in a diasporic condition. Their sense of belonging is constantly reinvented and relocated, like the name of Tara 'Our Tara Lata' and 'Tara Lata, the Tree-Bride' of Mishtigunj and anew Tara Banerjee Cartwright of Mukherjee's other novel *The Tiger's Daughter*.

Dissimilar to Tara of *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara of *Desirable Daughters* develops deep association and connection with her ancestry, her culture. She wants to connect her own life with the mythic Tara Lata, the 'Tree Bride.' This myth provides the foundation for Tara's interest to establish her identity through interrogations of cultural negotiation and conflictual cultural ties. The novel is not just a pleasant account of the three desirable daughters and their differing existential conditions, but it is a problematic transnational narrative reflecting on the intricate and inscrutable course of growing up and of the feminist struggle of these three sisters to attach to their own mutable self, their cultural moorings in times of cultural, spatial and ethnic dislocations.

In the peculiar global dynamics Tara has hyphenated herself with her native land though she undergoes anxiety in the inertia of being incapable to return home and also finding a new home in the adopted land. She imbibes the best of Indian and Western cultures through her struggle as a practitioner of feminist principles in which the social and legal aspects of formal procedural marriage are not essential and central to one's survival. She however, finds family to be an indispensable social institution to feel attached and get nostalgic to. In India a wife's identity is part and parcel of her husband's identity but in San Francisco she finds 'maintaining a healthy home life and respect for culture and tradition'<sup>92</sup> is the identity of a wife.

Tara thinks herself as a typical immigrant and locates compulsively in a strange obsession of anxiety between her feelings and response, deep in her insulated and cocooned Indian self with an American garb. In her authorial voice and narrative method Mukherjee has presented splendidly, realised moments of native culture and childhood memories in the texture of *Desirable Daughters* with an enthralled nostalgia. In her oriental glitziness, socialite text, hybrid dialogue and multicultural literary mechanics she has created a new discourse on immigrant identity.

As a postcolonial subject, Tara has a cosmopolitan outlook. She has a decentered way of looking at nation, her immigrant identity and culture. She belongs to the group of 'hybrid hyphenations'<sup>93</sup> and cultural mimic with 'Oriental essence.'<sup>94</sup> In the process of cultural transformation and negotiation Tara faces a series of dislocations. She becomes the marginalized sub-structure of the dominant structure, declares affiliation to the

adoptive culture and again re-inscribes the chronicle of the family and the nation. Mukherjee captures the moment in Diaspora when America has ceased to exist as the melting pot that her character Jasmine symbolizes in the novel of the late Eighties in her almost reckless assertion to assimilation as a survival strategy. Jasmine advocates that removal of one's ethnic essence or suppressing one's past and then structuring or reinventing oneself in the host culture, is no longer possible.

In *Desirable Daughters* thus the melting pot theory or total assimilation is suspended as a strategy of survival. What we find in this novel, is a search for a new equilibrium between home and location, as a strategy to balance an immigrant's life. Tara, in her attempt to achieve this balance, is able to surmount the old notions of binary structures like 'East' and 'West,' text and sub-text or species and sub-species. She stands between collision and synthesis and finally breaks free from stereotypical hyphenation seeking refuge in Tara Lata's world.

At a profounder level, *Desirable Daughters* throws new perspective on the collision and synthesis of multicultural strings, New World sensitivity and tradition, mythology and Old World values. Mukherjee in this novel interrogates cultural essentialism and celebrates cultural hybridity with a tilt towards ethnic essence. She also challenges the stereotypical notions of national identity, utterly unblemished by alien ethos. Tara is a cultural hybrid who is at home in both cultures. Padma is an Indo-American who believes in hyphenation. She is an Indian cultural ambassador in the United States. Parvati is a western-educated Indian woman of the conventional mould. She is content with her role as the woman of the household.

Thus ethnic essentialism and non-Oriental locations are intercutting and intersecting centers. The novel shows how these two overlap and overleap, intervening each other's space. In this diasporic process new subjectivities are born, and the predominant borders are 'crossed' imaginatively. Thus the migrant native aliens from the 'in-between' marginal status, go beyond the binaries and fixities of native/migrants. They gleefully carve new directions instead of being plaintive of the lost 'roots'. Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel *The Namesake* (2003), like her Pulitzer Prize winning collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), explores the theme of Immigrant experience and the clash of cultures in the U.S. Being an Indian by ancestry, British by birth, American by immigration and like her parents having the experience of the perplexing bicultural universe of Calcutta in India and the United States, Lahiri mixes the immigrant experience like Mukherjee.

*The Namesake* is a narrative about annihilation of an Indian Bengali from Calcutta, the Ganguly, into America, over thirty years (from 1968-2000). It is about the cultural dilemmas experienced by them and their American born children in different ways. The novel also highlights the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocations suffered by them in their efforts to settle 'home' in the new land, what is acquired and lost by immigrants and their children in pursuit of the 'American dream.' In the experience of an exodus there is an unspoken ambiguity; the sufferings of displacement are tinged with the hope of arrival and the opening of new vistas in the future. The culture that is transplanted is often different from that is in the homeland, for it has been structured within a particular immutable form.

Mukherjee's novel too, is not only a nostalgic romanticizing the past but also a reconstruction and revalidation of Tara's identity. It is 'her inverted story of mobility.'<sup>95</sup> Tara's reconstruction of identity thus, is rooted on the same nostalgic and romantic recollection of her past. It is based on the flux of her thoughts about the past that is coming to her mind in the present but in fragments, and not whole. It is a spatio-temporal reconstruction of her identity. Nyman Jopi has made a fine and penetrating analysis of Tara's character:

In discussing the significance of the past and in showing how much of Tara's identity, however Americanized it is, is based on her memories of India, and her grandmother's stories of the past, the novel reconstructs Tara as hybrid subject. Like her namesake Tara Lata of *Mishtigunj*, the *Tree-Bride*, she learns to resist colonization and the fixing of identities.<sup>96</sup>

She vacillates between two lives: 'may be I really was between two lives'<sup>97</sup> yet to strike roots, yet to belong to any of these lives, she exemplifies the 'existential dilemma' of diaspora and the problems of an immigrant who has a fluid identity associated with mobility and plurality rather than stasis and singularity. Tara is in search of relocating herself in the trans-national realities. In spite of her liberated and emergent attitudes, her desire to construct hybridity, her acceptance of her son's gay sexuality and live in-relationships, she fails to outdo the traditional life of an Indian woman. Rashmi Gaur aptly observes:

Tara represents the dilemma of an average migrant. The demands of tradition and their hold on one's psyche are never ultimately rejected

[...]She tries to create a personal space for herself through compromise. Rejection of her husband and associated security is a bold step for an Indian girl of Tara's background [...] Despite an obvious diffidence, she questions, at least for sometime, traditional notions and shuns the clichéd answers provided by conventions. She wants to redefine herself and create fresh gender relations.<sup>98</sup>

In *Desirable Daughters*, 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's tentative steps towards seeking her true self requires her to carefully navigate between prescriptive Hindu traditions and American notions of individuality and freedom.

After reconciling with her sister and her life and her own destiny of being hounded by a terrorist and a bomber, feigning an identity which is false, she returns to India at the end of the novel to search for the roots or familial ties. Finally, Tara decides to come back to India to reinvestigate the story of Tara Lata (*Tree Bride*). She visits her sister Parvati, enquires about friends and relatives and expresses her longing to support her parents in their old age. Bharati Mukherjee in her making out of cultural mutation captures the rigid and inflexible binaries between Orient and Occident, man and woman. Her way of life stands for new cultural fusionism. Tara is an American and an Indian at the same time. In the trans-cultural global situation she experiences both the native and alien problematic. There is fusion and translational polemics of culture. Tara's subjectivity is therefore, composed of variable sources, different materials and many locations. She is beyond all ethnic stringencies in her quest for identity.

Such quest for identity has the postcolonial struggle dimension in the existential angst of immigrants in American milieu. Tara and Bish share the same values, the same language and they share the two halves of one-consciousness. The success story of Bish is not without the tale of ignominious sacrifice of Tara in her feeling of neglect and nausea of maladjustment with her husband in an alien land, with no familiar environment around. After divorce her feminine consciousness is rekindled with a flurry of questions for Bish who perhaps forgets that 'marriage is man's manifest dharma; his test, his duty, the outer

sign of his inner strength and harmony.’<sup>99</sup> An American Brahmin and bohemian immigrant, Tara finds like her counterpart in *Jasmine* (1989) how one suffers from the nausea of disconnectedness, estrangement and oppression of kinship.

Tara is thus an estranged self, languishing in the anxiety and uncertainties of the diasporic experience, which to Susheila Nasta is ‘not only an unrequited desire for a lost homeland but also a homing desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it.’<sup>100</sup> 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.

The death of Tara Lata’s husband had imposed virginity throughout her life which got converted into selfless sainthood. But her namesake, Tara Bhattacharjee leaves her life on her own terms. Bish’s preoccupation with his software leaves her bereft in the New World. After living up to the instilled values of patriarchal Bengali society, she divorces her multimillionaire, Silicon Valley entrepreneur husband to drift along rootless, having many affairs and finally finding solace in the arms of her live-in partner, Andy, a Hungarian immigrant.

Striking at the root of the traditional phallic past Tara Bhattacharjee’s move to divorce her husband and her defiance look like a revolt against a patriarchal mindset, which is a part of immigrant life style in the New World of America. Tara Bhattacharjee, unlike Dimple in *Wife* believes in staying afloat like Jasmine. She frees herself from the shackles of marriage and the symbolic phallic power.

Like Jasmine, Tara doesn’t get any fantastic renaming or exfoliation of the self. Mukherjee’s rejection of hyphenation and emphatic embrace of assimilation with the alien ethos do not find fulfillment in the portrayal of Tara in *Desirable Daughters*. In this novel Mukherjee breaks free from the fantasy of exuberance to emerge with a newness of thought in immigrant reality which consists of a root search:

*Have thou no home, what home, can hold thee,  
friend? The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed, and food  
what chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.  
No food or drink can taint that noble Self which  
Knows itself. Like rolling river free, Thou ever be,  
\Sannyasin bold! Say OM TAT SAT OM.<sup>101</sup>*

Like Eliot's search for the East, Mukherjee projects Tara as a frayed traveler to India. Her empathy for the native soil develops at the instant of a void created out of the complete annihilation of the foreign nest, housed by the interpolated native components. Tara watches as the wreckage fall apart:

My life did not flash in front of me. I had stepped outside my life; I had no life. The house appeared in that instant as a living entity struggling for breath; it expanded upward and outward, ejecting its roof, blowing off its shingles.<sup>102</sup>

It is Tara Lata's story that brings her to the conclusion that her identity would be achieved by securing her Indian filiations and affiliations. As in the Tree-Bride's redemptive history, a diasporic Indian American identity requires a careful negotiation between Indian traditions and American notions of individualism. Standing at the transgressive edge of history Tara negotiates the inviolable differences of a confusing cultural space. In such critical moment of disjuncture- 'The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space-a third space-where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences.'<sup>103</sup>

To explain the trauma of the borderline existence Bharati Mukherjee uses Tara's narration of the re-constructed history as the framing narrative for Tara's more contemporary re-negotiation of her identity. In locating the legendry tale of Tara Lata in to the fabric of the current narrative, Mukherjee envisages a feminist perspective of such stultifying customs. As is evident from history, Tara Lata had fashioned a redemptive role of herself in accepting her marriage to a tree. In doing so she relieved her father from social and familial responsibility and thus helping him to escape from disgrace. In the whole narrative of events Tara Lata ultimately had to bear the drudgery of widowhood with no practical reason.

As usual, being an Indian woman she had to play a reconciliatory role to serve the interest of a male society. Tara Lata's drudgery may not be similar to Tara's grinding suffocation but in modern times anything like the 'forest marriage'<sup>104</sup> will be just ridiculous. On the other hand, Tara's revolt against the subjugation is not in line with Tara Lata's submissive docility. Both have been dislocated from their essential womanhood. While one reconciles with her fate, the other revolts and then turns to the root, in 'Tara Lata's footsteps.'<sup>105</sup> Tara reveals the necessity of her root search which is more than simply revisiting her home country as nostalgic explorer: 'I've come back to India this time for something more than rest and shopping and these gin-and-lime filled evenings with my mirror-self.'<sup>106</sup>

In *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee has juxtaposed the Indian culture with American culture and describes the ambivalence of this 'mirror self.' Tara Lata the tree bride is juxtaposed to her great granddaughter Tara Bhattacharjee. While, the former in essence is the symbol of Indian feminism, a virtuous lady with inculcated qualities of tolerance, a freedom fighter of yesteryears, a widow and a virgin she is a goddess who has not brought defame to herself whereas the latter, Tara Bhattacharjee a divorcee, going strong with a Hungarian live-in partner, an immigrant, a believer in Buddhist ideology, mother to a son who is a gay also tagged as a slut. In such diasporic complications and strange nature of immigrant existence, she feels out of place. This happens strongly especially, when she visits her sister and finds the same attitude in people around.

Bharati Mukherjee's construction of a diasporic female subjectivity in *Desirable Daughters* appears to be in consonance with Rahakrishnan's views regarding the critical and dialectic negotiation between the politics of proximity and the politics of distance required of the diasporic individual, seeking to redefine his or her identity.<sup>107</sup> Tara's tentative steps towards seeking her true self require her to carefully navigate between prescriptive Hindu traditions and American notions of individuality and freedom.

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 Indian affiliations mediated through her acquired American consciousness. Tara's suggestion for a passage to America echoes the novelist's own mutated immigrant norm: 'Take what America can give, but don't let it tarnish you in any way.'<sup>108</sup>

Bharati Mukherjee situates the Tree-Bride's narrative at the beginning of the novel and envisions the age old Indian cultural norm of marrying an unmarried by some means. Such portrayal of male Indian customs indicates the stereotypes of Indian

women being in perpetual servitude. In contrast, Tara, the diasporic Indian, is shown to be exploring her freedoms after her traditional arranged marriage ended in divorce. In *Desirable Daughters*, the story of Tara Lata, the Tree-Bride serves to highlight the extreme orthodoxy of the Gangooly family and their descendents. She stands at the transit point of Hindu patriarchal customs and the problematic Indian-American identity. In the process of mutative restructuring, Tara discovers that the path of the bohemian, with multiple love affairs, does not necessarily lead to empowerment or autonomy.

This goes with Avtar Brah's argument that: 'The strong association of notions in diaspora with displacement and dislocation means that the expectance of location can easily dissolve out of focus.'<sup>109</sup> In such subaltern situation Gender and ethnicity play vital function in the text and structure of Diaspora, particularly in the configuration of woman identity. In the process of dislocations and rupturing diasporic Women undergo 'progressive negation--or sublation—in dialectical thinking.'<sup>110</sup> Her experiences regarding displacements are much more revealing. Tara as a displaced Calcutta girl in San Francisco exposes the 'crucial splitting of the ego'<sup>111</sup> and diasporic ambivalences more clearly than her husband does. Bish is a myth of success in Western world of communication technology and yet he expects his wife to reciprocate his cultural preoccupations regarding marriage and marital responsibilities. In the process he fails to communicate with his wife in a displaced home even though they speak the same language and share the same religious and social culture.

Tara's strategies for survival in a displaced world involve subordination, resistance and dislocation, followed by a fear of obliteration and a longing for resurgence through a re-written history. She has to create the terrain for diasporic strategy to construct the selfhood through negotiation and contestation. Thus, Diaspora women are trapped in the complex web of patriarchies, pasts and futures. They experience multiple shifts and restructuring which are transgressive and decentering.

Tara likewise, finds herself caught between patriarchal histories of her past home and legends created by her husband in the acquired home. Initially she ignores the legend by easy exilic departure and in turn, gets inert in a relationship of retrofitting with a man who leaves her alone in her time of need. Tara stands in a translational moment, but hers is a passage in to the tradition. Her fragmented identity seeks retrieval; she is not a void from within nor has retrieved herself totally from the strange paradox of diasporic condition stranded between home and location. She is a postcolonial subject, negotiating 'between' and 'boundaries': 'The subaltern or metonymic are neither empty nor full,

neither part nor whole. Their compensatory and vicarious processes of signification are a spur to social translation, the production of something else besides which is not only the cut or gap of the subject but also the intercut across social sites and disciplines.’<sup>112</sup>

*The Tree Bride* is a sequel to *Desirable Daughters*. The root search links the past incidents with present actions in Tara’s life. Tara Lata and her namesake, the great granddaughter Tara Bhattacharjee’s destinies seem to merge, giving birth to the tale of Tree-Bride. In the crosscurrent of timeline Tara responds to Tara-Ma’s pervading whisper to release her from the worldly boundaries and this is coterminous with her own innate desire to unleash herself from the shackles of the New World.

Thus physical dislocation is emphasized in its historical and existential conjecture which is dealt with in the profane, immoral and impure multi-religious and multicultural context. Finally, Tara takes refuge in her ancestral world that is rooted in tradition and away from Western adventure mechanisms. She has to seek shelter under the pristine halo of Hindu religion, be truthful honest and kind.

Mukherjee’s immigrant characters are steeped in Americanized mechanics and rooted in the Dynamics of adventure, risk and transformation, and suffer from the ‘self’-‘other’ syndrome in the individual’s strategic location of estrangement, immigration, expatriation, exile, dislocations, rupture and quest. Nirad.C.Chaudhury reflects on the solar-stellar difference of Identity among the Bengali Indians in his note sent to Toynbee, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1936:

Even educated Indians of today are curiously indifferent-to their immediate past, the past that is to say which forms the warp to the weft of Western influences. This is certainly due to the discovery of the classical Hindu civilization in the nineteenth century, which has fired their imagination and made the conscious of a heritage of their very own to pit against Western civilization. In their anxiety to feel at one with this heritage from motives of self-respect, they have forgotten the intervening phase of their existence and are now no more able to tear away their immediate past from the classical Hindu background than, looking at the sky at night, we are able to perceive any spatial separation between the solar system and the stellar world.<sup>113</sup>

Chaudhury could sense the strength of the classical Indian heritage, even though the Western mechanics were at work to influence Indian sensibilities with the glitziness

of Americanism. Tara's quest for identity is due to the consciousness of the same 'spatial separation' that she has been undergoing continuously with a series of dislocations. Quest for identity is thus, an existential struggle for space amidst dislocation in its centrality and obsession. Conservative family background, convent education and superficial westernization have provoked her quest for identity in expatriate sensibility.

Tara's quest for tradition in the form of her namesake Tara (Lata) the 'Tree - Bride' is thus symptomatic to this phenomenon of root- search despite Mukherjee's strong assertion to her own Americanization and self provoked assimilation in to the host culture. Here the immigrant suffers postcolonial displacement but desires to return to the lost origin refusing to remain as wandering nomad. Thus, From Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) to *Desirable Daughters* (2002) one can observe a steady metamorphosis from acculturation to self-actualization as a counter- narrative against the atrocities of dominant and central ethos.

'Migrants' says Salman Rushdie, 'straddle two cultures[...] Fall between two stools'<sup>114</sup> and they suffer 'triple dislocation'<sup>115</sup> comprising the loss of roots, the linguistic and also the social dislocation. Like many Indian immigrant women in their American status Tara has her frantic effort to seek, organize and affirm her identity after displacement from the originary and thinks how-

In India, we didn't have outside influences [...] we didn't know family breakdown. Our families inside an impenetrable bubble. Anyone entering or existing was carefully monitored. We honoured the proprieties. There was no rebellion, no seeking after individual identity [...] we three sisters were treated with absolute equality, and we responded in total unanimity.<sup>116</sup>

In her Americanized status Tara has a philosophical quest in the web of dualism. This disentangles her completely in an indifferent city where she neither is able to surrender her personality nor is able to accept a new giant identity in the crisis of her life. She lives physically a nomadic life in the cultural desert of America in her psychological invalidity.

The nomadic discourse of the migrant could be described, borrowing Spivak's phrase as a *fantasmatic hegemonic nativist counternarrative*.<sup>117</sup> Although she uses the term in a little different context, it can be deployed with slightly different emphasis to describe Mukherjee's neo-nationalist discourse, a discourse constituted by both her

fiction and her comments on and readings of that fiction, and the ways her writing has been mobilized by critics and reviewers within the wider discourse of literary criticism. Anne Brewster has positioned Mukherjee in a new location of diasporic subjectivity:

Mukherjee identifies the UK and Canada with imperialism and describes her choice to emigrate to the US as a choice for freedom from imperialism. Her mythologizing of herself as a writer is aimed at constructing herself as an American and at re-reading her own experience as national or, more precisely, neo-national. Mukherjee's neo nationalism, figured in the fantasy of the land of opportunity and the romance of the immigrant is, therefore, the counternarrative to her own diasporic condition and the dilemma of postcoloniality.<sup>118</sup>

In *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee emphasizes on a counter discourse against the projected fears of expatriation and subjugation and the ambivalence of cultural differences. If there is any one pattern in Indian culture in the broadest sense it is simply this that the culture seems to be constructed around the proliferation of difference. To be different in the world of difference is irrevocably to belong. The mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut them off. Another interesting feature of the cultural representation of space in India has always been constituted as much by the notion of the periphery as it is by Diaspora. In postmodern climate of the West among the diasporic population and immigrants, there is a relentless pursuit for identity negotiating displacement, dislocation and diverse experiences of the 'beyond.' Homi Bhabha says:

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past[....]we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond.'<sup>119</sup>

This simultaneous dwelling in different locations contributes to the formation of double consciousness. In such non-stereotypical progression of mutative and multiple transitions diasporic identity is in flux, always changing like a nostalgic refrain. The protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* constructs a new narrative of

fragmented identities of a woman who, through the moods of disruptions and dislocations, dismantling, and assimilation yearns for the truth about the unattainable identity of a diasporic woman. In the process of writing her namesake's story, Tara redefines her identity in terms of dislocation while trying to establish a connection with the imagined community of woman of her culture and heritage by historically looking back through the story of her sisters, mother, and grandmothers.

As Mandal has noted in her reading of *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee does not practice what she preaches.<sup>120</sup> Mukherjee's focus on the rituals and customs of the Bengali gentlefolk in *Desirable Daughters* belies her assertion that she has extended the American mainstream. She underscores the heroism of the Tree-Bride and uses it as a yardstick for her protagonist Tara, to measure her own evolving identity against it. Tara reaches the conclusion that a critical renegotiation of her Indian 'roots' and the host culture is required for her to forge an autonomous subjectivity. Bharati Mukherjee employs the exotic narrative of the Tree-Bride as a counter-hegemonic strategy to assert that a hybrid diasporic Indian-American identity can only be constructed through a violent contestation and re-fashioning of self in order to dismantle the imperial delirium and the dominant myths of homogeneity, generally associated with the discourse of home and identity in a diasporic space.

## REFERENCES:

- 
- <sup>1</sup>Dave Weich. "Bharati Mukherjee Runs the West Coast Offense" Powells.com 29 Jan. 2004< <http://www.powells.com/authors/mukherjee.html>>
- <sup>2</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters*. New Delhi: Rupa &Co.2006.p.3.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.17.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p.15.
- <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*,pp.3-4.
- <sup>6</sup>Maya Manju Sharma. "The Inner World of Bharati Mukherjee: From Expatriate to Immigrant." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Garland, 1993.p.18.
- <sup>7</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, NY: Routledge, 1994.p.54.
- <sup>8</sup>James Clifford. *Diasporas*. 1994. "Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism." eds. Vertovec and Cohen. Cheltenham: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999.p.227.
- <sup>9</sup>Avtar Brah. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.pp.182-183.
- <sup>10</sup>James Lull. "Superculture for the Communication Age." *Culture in the Communication Age*. Ed. James Lull. New York and London: Rutledge, 2001.pp.132-63.
- <sup>11</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.54.
- <sup>12</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters*. New Delhi: Rupa &Co.2006. pp. 78-79.
- <sup>13</sup>Salman Rushdie. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Vintage, 2010.p.10.
- <sup>14</sup>G.C. Spivak. (1985) "Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism". *Critical Inquiry*, no.12, 1(Autumn).
- <sup>15</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*, p.7.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Nayman Jopi. "Transitional Travel in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*". *The Atlantic Literary Review*, vol-3 no. 4 Oct-Dec., 2004.(53-56)
- <sup>22</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*, p. 307.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p.15.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 221.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid. Epigraph.*

<sup>28</sup> Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, *op.cit.*, p.53.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.316.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters op.cit.*, p.24.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53-54.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195-96.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96-97.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43-44.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 16.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 15.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 19.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>63</sup>Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*, London: Rutledge, 1989.p.195.

<sup>64</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*,p.75.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 27.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 77.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 79.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 83.

<sup>69</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.162.

<sup>70</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*, p.44.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*,p.178.

<sup>72</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.309.

<sup>73</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*, p.94.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>75</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.305.

<sup>76</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*, p.94.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, p.87.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*,p.154.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*,pp.25-26.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*,p.21.

<sup>82</sup>Pramila Venkateshwaran. "Bharati Mukherjee as Autobiographer." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Garland, 1993.p.24.

<sup>83</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.316.

<sup>84</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. "Two Ways to Belong in America." *New York Times* 22 Sep. 1996. 1-2 . Sawnet 15 Aug. 2000 <[http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/user/sawweb/sawnet/bharati\\_m.htm](http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/user/sawweb/sawnet/bharati_m.htm)>.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 2.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

- <sup>87</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*,p.199.
- <sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p.200.
- <sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*,p.216.
- <sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*,p.233.
- <sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*,p.107.
- <sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*,p.175.
- <sup>93</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.313.
- <sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 103.
- <sup>95</sup>Nyman Jopi. "Transnational Travel in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*" *op.cit.*, p.64.
- <sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 65.
- <sup>97</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*,p. 251.
- <sup>98</sup>Rashmi Gour. "Gender Relations and Cross Cultural Transaction in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters.*" *Indian Journal of English Studies: Vol. X21, 2003-04.*
- <sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*,p. 266.
- <sup>100</sup>Susheila Nasta. *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian diaspora in Britain*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.p.7.
- <sup>101</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*,p.299.
- <sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, p.271.
- <sup>103</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*,p.312.
- <sup>104</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*,p.307.
- <sup>105</sup>Anita Balakrishnan. "Tracing Tara-Lata's Footsteps: Negotiating Authenticity and Alienation in *Desirable Daughters.*" *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives.* Ed. Somdatta Mandal .New Delhi: Pencraft, 2010.p.254.
- <sup>106</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*,p.289.
- <sup>107</sup>R. Radhakrishnan. "Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora" in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur eds. *Theorizing Diaspora.* Malden N.A: Blackwell, 2003.p.124.
- <sup>108</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters. op.cit.*, p.134.
- <sup>109</sup>Avtar Brah. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities.* New York and London: Routledge, 1996.p.180.
- <sup>110</sup>Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture. op.cit.*, p.92.
- <sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*,p.115.
- <sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*,p.92.
- <sup>113</sup>Nirad.C.Chaudhury. *Atmaghati Bangalee.*Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh, 2003.p.29.

<sup>114</sup>Salman Rushdie. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Vintage, 1991.p. 5.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, p.279.

<sup>116</sup>Bharati Mukherjee. *Desirable Daughters*. *op.cit.*, 43-44.

<sup>117</sup>G. C.Spivak. "Who Claims Alterity?" in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani eds. *Remaking History*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1989.pp.281-2.

<sup>118</sup>Anne Brewster. A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee's Neo-nationalism, SPAN, no.34-35(1993).p.5.<http://wwwtds.murdoch.edu.au:80/~continuum/litserv/SPAN/34/Brewster.html>.

<sup>119</sup>Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. *op.cit.*, pp.1-2.

<sup>120</sup>Somdatta Mandal. Ed. *Bharati Mukherjee Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Pencraft.2010.p.268.