

# Tara as a Paradigmatic Indian Consort in Desirable Daughters by Bharati Mukherjee

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## ABSTRACT

*Mukherjee illustrates the weird nature of the roles of women in social and ancestral scaffold. She was well aware of limited future panorama for Indian women as they are presiding over by Indian mythological values. She has written a significant novel that is both the picture of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and a contemporary American story of a woman who has in many ways broken with tradition but still remains tied to her own country. Mukherjee follows the swerving trails taken by three astonishing sisters. The present paper scrutinizes Tara as a paradigmatic Indian consort in Desirable daughters. Tara is an affluent Bengali Brahmin who has left India, divorced the husband chosen by her father, and engrossed herself in a non-familial life in San Francisco. Woman has been at the substructure of social stepladder*

*in Indian patriarchal set up for a long time; she has been measured as a defenseless and scrawny mortal. But, now the altering scenario has changed her functions and the emerging class of new-fangled being has inquired her traditional roles and seeks to go beyond the proscribed realm.*

**KEY WORDS:** panorama, swerving, paradigmatic, affluent, scrawny

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee's protagonists are valiant and dynamic; they have the strong potentiality for compliance; they live in the dense ground of actuality and admit the tart precision of their life. In *Desirable Daughters*, the three sisters, Padma Parvati and Tara, break with the tradition and hackneyed roles in one way or the other to live life in their own way. They try to amend

with the changed circumstances. In India, marriages are inflicted on girls. They are not allowed to make love or marry a man of their option particularly of other caste.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Bharati Mukherjee renders her condemn of child marriage and consequent widowhood through intrusion of the yarn of Tree Bride Tara Lata. The tale of Tara Lata who is cursed and mortified for the death of her husband and eventually married to a tree emblematically brings out the rearward-ness of traditional society of India. It is totally callous on the part of society to divest a girl of her inborn right to endure and accomplish her requirements. The utilization of women in the name of religion and social kudos is deprecated by the novelist. Through this narrative the novelist illustrates the curses of patriarchy and different forms of exploitation upon women. She depicts marriage as the medium of exploitation rather than a desirable holy ecstasy.

### 2.1. A PROTEAN CONQUEROR

Mukherjee interlaces together mesmerizing stories of the sister's ancestors, their childhood memories, and dramatic

scenes from India's history. The ram of Tara's arranged marriage with Bish and success of love marriage of Parvati with Auro. The issue of imposed marriage upon girls is also raised in Mukherjee's other novel *Wife* in which the protagonist Dimple gets neurotic on shattering the dreams and illusions of married life with Amit Basu and aborts her baby. Finally she kills her husband in the neurotic state. Here, Tara's unsuccessful marriage is outcome of imposed marriage. She married a man she had never met. She married Bish because her father told her to get married like Dimple made it in the novel *Wife*, and Maya in the novel *Cry, the peacock* respectively. She says;

"I married a man I had never met, whose picture and biography and bloodlines I approved of , because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market."( p.26)

Tara faces the enigma of modern women after her settlement in America. She undergoes transformation from a desirable

daughter to an advanced American lady. She is caught in the struggle between tradition and modernity. As a protean heroine she braves the New World to seek her individual identity. She makes adventure in dress, attitude, food and fashion. She began to address her husband as Bishu while in India; she could not utter his name and it's not possible for Indian wife.

“The groom’s dak name that is his house name, is Bishu. His American friends call him Bish, a not quite appropriate nick name , since it means “poison”. I, of course as a good Hindu wife to be, could not utter any of his names to his face”(p23)

Tara enjoys sexual freedom with Andy. She gives divorce to her husband because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled while she knew that divorce was a stigma for woman in Indian society, after getting divorce, she has to lead a miserable life in future and her identity will also vary. But Tara wanted to drive and to work, to be economically independent. Husband in Indian conservative society is treated as god, sheltering tree, provider, and protector, without him (husband) it is not possible for the woman to lead a happy life. Women feel proud to get beating from their drunkard husbands. But Tara breaks this conservative formula and chooses another man who suits her temperament and who satisfies her sexual desires. She rejects to be an object of sacrifice, a showpiece and a silent and subservient creature to her husband. Tara reports about her early life in Calcutta,

“Our bodies changed, but our behaviour never did. Rebellion sounded like a lot of fun....My life was one long childhood until I was thrown into marriage.”(p27-28)

She has the indomitable courage to transcend the boundaries, to take initiations on an unknown path which may lead her to ruin. While her other sisters Padma and Parvati lead a complacent and passive life, adopt a middle path, remain suspicious about their new identity, do not feel the need to widen their horizons and are less assertive, Tara emerges as a powerful figure to meet every adverse situation; to march ahead with all her limitations to an unknown and unfathomed path of realizing her full potential as an independent human being.

Tara chooses her own way and she knows about what she is doing. The revelation of her son's different sexual orientation leaves her shell shocked for a moment, but the maturity and readiness with which she accepts the above relation speaks of her modern consciousness and sensibility. In spite of moving towards complete freedom from traditional roles, Tara can not be separated from her roots. She nurtures Indian family norms and feels isolated and incomplete after being divorced. Presence of Bish gives her inner solace which she lacks in Andy's company. She feels emptiness after separation from Bish because in her mind he is still her husband, the sheltering

tree, protector, and of course like a god will rescue her from her critical circumstances.

“Our father could not let either of my sisters out on the street; our car was equipped with window shades.”(p.29)

When a stranger, Christopher Dey, arrives at her house claiming to be the illegitimate son of one of her older sisters, she is shocked and forced to contend with the issues he raises, while facing possible dangers, as she tries to check out his story, where did he come from? And why he approached Tara? Why did he betray her sister? She is shocked when the appearance of Chris Dey, supposedly her oldest sister's illegitimate child, challenges her perceptions of the past. Tara's son, Rabi, brings Chris into the sanctuary of the house. Chris, who claims to be the son of Padma and a Christian doctor, betrays himself in several culturally specific ways like smoking a cigarette in front of an older woman, speaking a streetwise form of Bengali as other than he seems. For the most part she toes the line in a way which has diminished her soul. She writes to Tara:

“I hope you aren’t doing bad things to yourself like taking Prozac and having cosmetic surgery. Please, please don’t become that Americanized.”(p39)

Tara, who had embraced the freedom of American life, begins to feel a lack of independence due to her Hindu husband’s notions that a woman should not work. Tara has moved to San Francisco with her fully acculturated teenaged son and the two live in a funky house in the heart of the city. She is living a complacent life until one day a sinister boy appears in her home as a guest of her son. He says he is Chris Dey and he is looking for Tara’s eldest sister, Padma, who he claims is his mother.

## 2.1. SELF VERSUS SOCIETY

Padma condemns and considers Tara’s divorce as shame to the Bhattacharjee family. Though Tara and Padma reside in USA, they are strangers to each other. Tara has become American, self-engrossed, for whom the past is now darkest cave. Tara’s American life is shattered with the sudden

arrival of her so called nephew Chris Dey who calls Padma as his mother. She could not believe in Dey and calls her both sisters to discuss the matter. Parvati, who lives in Bombay, warns her to do not believe anybody as the gangsters are activated in the country.

Padma also rejects Chris Dey as her son. But Tara is not satisfied with all that comes to her and decides to go back into the past to find out the secrets of her family. Her investigation leads her to the life of her great-great grandfather, Jaikrishna Gangooly and his three daughters, especially his youngest daughter Tara Lata, the tree bride and lifetime virgin.

“Our father could not let either of my sisters out on the street, our car was equipped with window shades.”(p.29)

Tara is a good example of a woman who creates her own distinctiveness by following all caucuses of the traditional Indian society. After realizing the truth of her family, Tara complains to the police regarding fake Chris Dey. The police investigation ends at the fact that Chris Dey

is already killed and, in the guise of Chris Dey, Abbas Sattar Hai, wants to kill the techno-guru Bish and his family. An Indian origin Americanized policeman Jasbir Singh warns Tara about the dangers of her family life.

“Bhattacharjee’s oldest daughter which unless properly managed, controlled the prospects of his second and third daughters as well- that any violation of the codes, any breath of scandal, was unthinkable.”(p.32)

Meanwhile, an unknown person bombed Tara’s house, aiming to kill Bish, Tara and Rabi. Bish rescues Tara from the explosion but, in his attempt, he is badly

injured. Her communication in Bengali and English, the food she cooks is Indian and American, the clothes she wears are Indian and American, even her sexual life indicates that she sustains both the Indian and American identities. In the novel *Desirable Daughters*, the main character in the form of Tara Lata struggles with the major themes of Self versus Society, Self Destruction and Self Discovery. But, as schools of thoughts go, these two concepts are incompatible.

The conventional role assigned to women in India is the very antithesis of what American feminists espouse. Tara Lata was first married to a tree in a ceremonious ritual, as a measure to mitigate the malefic aspects of her horoscope. It was earlier predicted by a Hindu astrologer that Tara’s married life would be short lived as a result of this malefic aspect. Such conceptions of marriage are mere superstitions from the point of view of feminism.

### 3. OUTCOME

Mukherjee accomplishes this tapestry through the protagonist, trustworthy voice of Tara. The result is an intimate portrait of a woman in transition. The novel unfolds the story of three sisters, who are settled in different countries, and are

suffering to find out their own identities as they come to realize their marginal position as well as substitute role in family and society. The stalk of its protagonist Tara for a separate uniqueness in the traditional bound society leads her place to place, but wherever she moves, she finds the spaces of tradition and a fixed sense of identity as an Indian. This novel examines with startling honesty the prejudices, ambitions, familial ties, and the culture of India primarily as they manifest themselves in contemporary America.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Mukherjee throws out exoticism for candidness, relying not on lyrical prose but on insight. It suggests that daughters are the object of family prestige, so their behavior should be desirable, that is to say, in tune with the norms laid by the society and not deviant. The primary issues discussed in the novel are marriage, love and woman subjugation. Tara is desirable in her girlhood in the sense that she fulfill her requirements of daughterhood beauty, intelligence, politeness, obedience and she remains confined within four walls for the sake of family status and respect. The novel is all about the psychological journey of the protagonist Tara from America to her

cultural roots in India. The three Bengali sisters represent the three different aspects of female experiences.

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