



---

## Clash of Culture depicted in the Novel, *Desirable Daughters*

*Mary Fatima J.*

II MA English Literature, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

---

### ABSTRACT

Literature is the collection of works of a language, period, or culture which supports to convey one's own emotions in the form of poems, prose, stories, letters, and compositions. This paper strives to understand and realize the cross-culture outlook in the novel, *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee is the greatest novelist of the Indian emigration in the United State. She is considered as American writer of Indian, who focuses the problem faced by Indian women in adjusting the cultural clashes. Mukherjee's life covers India, Canada and the United States and her novels concentrate mainly on separation and adaptation in the alien land. She has written eight novels, two short stories and two non-fictions. In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee confronts with cross culture, quest for identity, self-obsession and reconciliation in the life of Tara Lata the Tree Bride, and her sisters (Padma and Parvati). This is the best and latest novel of Bharati Mukherjee (2002).

---

**Keywords:** Quest for Identity, Self-Obsession, Reconciliation, Culture, Religion.

---

### INTRODUCTION

"A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment". (P4)

*Desirable Daughters* a novel, by Bharati Mukherjee interacts about the backstory; a myth-tinged family legend about a "Tree Bride". Tara Lata is to become a traditional and cultured child bride of an arranged marriage. Unfortunately, the groom is bitten by a snake and dies. Both families have worshipped the snake goddess to avoid tragedy. Sooner the bridegroom's father claims his share of the dowry, even though the marriage did not take place. But the bride's father refuses to give it to him.

Bharati Mukherjee counting to say that, in Hinduism the only way for a woman to reach nirvana is through the worship of her husband. This means that Tara has to remain unmarried. So Tara Lata's father decided to give marriage to her to a tree symbolically. This was considered as better than remarrying.

"I have had the time, the motivation, and even the passion to undertake this history. When my friends, my child, or my sisters ask me why, I say I am exploring the making of a consciousness" (P5). From the above quoted lines, Bharati Mukherjee focuses on the present day. The three sisters named Tara Lata, Padma and Parvati were born in a traditional Brahmin family, and raised in Calcutta in the 1950s. All three have travelled in different paths. In this particular novel the story is narrated in the perspective of Tara Lata, the youngest sister who went beyond the tradition and culture. In early time, Bengal was the seat of British power, Calcutta its capital, its cultural and economic center. "The city is endowed with the instruments of western knowledge" (P5). But still People of Brahmin kept up their rituals, cultures and tradition to be followed.

All three daughters Tara Lata, Padma, and Parvati were expected to obey Parent's wishes and become traditional, cultured good wives. However, the situation has turned their lives and so could not keep up to their tradition and culture. Parvathi the second daughter breaks her society's culture and marries a man who is not of their own community. Yet she learns to adjust and embrace the other culture in her married life. She was happy and content with the family.

"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" (P21). Tara Lata who was named after her "Tree Bride" also happened to divorce her wealthy husband because he did not express any affection towards the family life and understand her love. He was only focusing on his business as well as future life. So then she decided to travel to San Francisco and raised her teenage son, Rabi, on her own. Though divorce is out of ordinary in Tara's Indian immigrant community, hers was an open secret, which no one could speak about. During her stay in San Francisco she is exposed to Western Culture and finds an American white boyfriend named Andy with whom she finds happiness than the real husband.

Bharati Mukherjee throws a challenge through the life of Tara. Though she is exposed to western culture, she refuses to see herself as foreigner. She is able to define herself through what she is not, but struggles to balance the culture and identity of what and who she is. She also expresses herself as feeling invisible but to her, this invisibility is freeing.

“I wasn’t, perhaps I’ll never be, a modern woman”. (P27) Though Tara sees herself as an American, she is constantly aware of India and its richness of the culture and its tradition. So she decides to come back to India with her son where she finds her root in India and experiences a spiritual moment of wonder by embracing her own rituals, tradition and culture. Finally Tara is revealed as a powerful woman and fitting herself in the center of the wheel.

---

### CLASH OF CULTURE IN THE NOVEL

Bharati Mukherjee was born on July 27, 1940, in Calcutta, India. She is Indian-born but American novelist and short-story writer. Mukherjee belongs to a wealthy family, so she had an opportunity to study in the Bengali school from 1944 to 1948 and went abroad for three years and returned to India. She also attended the University of Baroda (M.A 1961).

Mukherjee’s main work centered not only on cultural clashes but of violence and separation. She wrote her first novel, *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1972), which highlights of Indian women astonished by immersion in American culture, then shocked by her return to a violent Calcutta. *Wife* (1975) is about the madness of an Indian woman who was captured in New York City by the fears and her challenges in coming up in life. In the novel, *Jasmine*, the protagonist struggles between various cultural identities; her hardship to the popular presiding culture of two different countries, and at last her response made by her the existing culture.

At the end I would like to emphasize by saying that Tara Latadisputes with the culture in which she is born. She withstands the traditional stereotypical roles from her childhood. However, she does not follow the Western culture blindly; rather she transforms herself into an individual who is not bounded by any ethnic and cultural identities. She is neither a passive person nor does she victimize herself. She agrees with every new identity imposed upon her.

### WORKS CITED

---

Mukherjee, Bharati, (2002). *Desirable Daughters*, Rupa Publications India Private Limited, New Delhi.

Mukherjee, Bharati. *Wife*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1975, Print.

Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1990. Print.

<https://youtu.be/MDMH3qPNajw>