



PICTURIZATION OF UNCANNY NAIVETY IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

N.Kaushireddy

*Ph.D Scholar (Full-Time), Department of English & Comparative Literature,
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.*

Abstract

*This paper is an attempt to focus on Bharati Mukherjee's **Desirable Daughters** is a satirical portrait of Indian society, which is got picturized with certain kinds of superstitious beliefs based on Bengali Brahmin traditional family. Bharati Mukherjee has adopted Hindu myths with religious custom and spiritual power through her writings with some superstitious belief of society. The attempt is made to give a picture of women who suffer from man-made cultural and traditional prescriptions as well as retribution which do not allow them live a life free from such constraints.*

Key Words: *Supernatural Powers, Superstitious Belief, Customs and Tradition, Uncanny Effects.*

“Literature is the art of discovering something extraordinary about ordinary people, and saying with ordinary words something extraordinary”. - Boris Pasternak

Literature is the expression of awe-inspiring thoughts, impressing the reader's mind with a sense of greatness and elevates human life. The tradition of transmitting literature and gave way to written the formal literature. Literature acquired a colossal growth in diverse literary forms about experiences of human life. It was used as a medium to communicate the message to construct a better society.

In the context of Indian writing in English, the contemporary towards developing a primordial sensibility has assuredly been a large and complex historical process, which has evolved through a variety of phases. According to M. K. Naik, Indian writing as start as a heed of concomitant experience in the late eighteenth century between a scintillating and enterprising Britain and a decaying and chaotic India.

Women writers established their identity through literature and emerged with buoyant originality and outstanding transparency on women's experiences in the patriarchal society which was boldly exposed in their novels. Indian women writers outshine in the exploration of the inner mind of women through their feminine discernment.

Bharati Mukherjee has gained critical literary recognition as a prominent writer in Asian American literature and Canadian multicultural literature and expatriate Indian Women Writers in English. She vividly describes the predicament of Indian women immigrants in the new world where cultures confluence in to a modern way of life filled with chaos and violence. For immigrant women, life in the new world means endless rebirths and redefinitions in thoughts, identities, personalities, cultures, attitudes and world view.

Bharati Mukherjee's novels portray the trauma of immigrant women psyche in the process of cultural transformation or transfiguration. Mukherjee's sensational works originate from her own intense autobiographical experiences. Bharati Mukherjee's primarily deals with the feministic concerns, cross cultural conflicts, acculturation, assimilation and other related issues of the new woman immigrants like nostalgia, isolation and rootlessness. Her women protagonists are exiles, immigrants who come from India to live in America for various reasons. Their endless psycho-sociological struggles are captured by Bharati Mukherjee with feminine empathy and objectivity using a refined language and style. She has explored many facets of diasporic consciousness and immigrant experiences of dislocations, ruptures and relocation of the migrant women in her novels. She has dealt with psychic and spatial identity and the trauma of dislocations at multiple levels.

India is a large south Asian country with billions of people belonging to different caste, views, beliefs, perception, knowledge about different situations, cultural background and socioeconomic class. A superstition is a belief in something to believe blindly without verification, which is not justified by any reason or evidence. Indian beliefs



and superstitions are passed down from generation to generation. From the ancient times, there are various traditions and beliefs that have been followed by Hindu Indians.

In everyday life, the supernatural became a part of it and the time has come to acknowledge that such beliefs and experiences are not doomed to annihilation. Supernatural beliefs and practices linger because they serve important social functions. They provide explanations for frightening or unexplained events, help people endure with trauma, impregnate the platitudinous with mystery, establish social bonds between like-minded people and even provide a platform for developing self identities. Now days, most of these beliefs are to be argued, that the superstitious beliefs were people follow blindly for the fear of being cursed or harmed by supernatural powers or God.

According to Freud, the uncanny which means he attempt to derive that the uneasiness (uncanny) is not from something externally, alien or unknown but from something got palsy-walsy among the group which defeats the efforts and to separate ourselves from it. Freud discusses how an author can encapsulate an uncanny response on the part of the reader by bestride the line between reality and unreality within the fiction itself. Through this description, this paper is an attempted to telltale that, everything like supernatural or superstitious belief of human is bound form the human constrained society. Everything is the creation of human, which made popular or spread by human society.

Desirable Daughters opens with the story of bride, Tara Lata, the Tree Wife. She is five years old and headed deep into the forest to marry which is to reaffirms the importance of region, language, and caste. Tara Lata's father marries his daughter to a tree because he believes that this is the only way in which she can escape, "His daughter's true fate, the fate behind the horoscope, had now been revealed: a lifetime's virginity, a life without a husband to worship as god's proxy on earth, and thus, the despairing life of a woman doomed to be reincarnated" (14). This statement is the reflection of superstitious belief in horoscope. Tara Lata is headed towards her destiny. A Sanskrit scholar and a Brahmin, he decides to duly perform the ceremony, to a tree as bridegroom so that she can overcome the curse of widowhood. It is surmised 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. Marriage of a child at the age of five is an infernal 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 marriage system of Hindu community has a uniqueness of its own. Hindu marriage is not merely a union between a female and a male which is social sanction, sacred bond, and its religious, spiritual development and divine sacrament. The author describes Tara Lata, just five years old and is being carried on a palanquin, the four servants carried a rich man's three daughters, the youngest daughter dressed in a bridal saree, all decorated for the occasion of marriage. 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, undeserving and recounting the night of Tara Lata's marriage to the tree:

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, and 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. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. (4)

After her marriage to a tree, Tara Lata spends the rest of her life 'imprisoned' within her father's home. 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. The ingenious traditionalist father secures his daughter's place in the world by a fiction of marriage and goes for a settlement beyond the actual wealth. During the ceremony of marriage, the bride wants to mumble the "Tush Tusli Brata" which is a hymn to the sacredness of marriage. It's an entreat for a kind and generous husband:



What do I hope for in worshipping you?
That my father's wisdom be endless,
My mother's kindness bottomless.
May my husband be as powerful as a king of gods.....
Let my hair-part glow red with vermilion powder, as a wife's should... (4)

As per the deliberation of the Astrologers, the horoscopes have been compared and they clinched marriage to Tara and Satindranath Lahiri, a thirteen-year old groom. On Wedding Night, a snake bites the bridegroom, so Tara made to protect the husband from poisonous snakebite for that she prescribed offerings to Goddess Manasha, is a Hindu folk goddess of snakes or the cobra deity of East Bengal, who causes or prevents snakebites. All rites had been faithfully observed by Tara. From the groom's party, an elder man came to oppose the rites which were performed by Tara: that is, "When the stree-achar rites were performed, some woman must have been unclean. You can deceive judges, but you cannot fool goddesses" (13). He offends; some of the women are being here as menstruating devotee. So that is the reason for the death of bridegroom. Tara's fiance is killed by a snake on her wedding night, five-year old Tara Lata is spared the disrepute of life as "She was now not quite a widow, which for a Bengali Hindu woman, would be the most cursed state, but a woman who brings her family misfortune and death" (12). This is the impact of history, community, and religion upon a woman's identity.

She then describes her own childhood in Calcutta with her two older sisters, Padma and Parvati. Named after goddesses, the **Desirable Daughters** of the title are, in Tara's words, "We are sisters three / as like as three blossoms on one flowering tree" (16). Using the family tree, as a metaphor to the unexpression of identity is essential to defined by one's home, community, and culture. She calls attention to this belief, noting that "Bengali culture trains one to claim the father's birthplace, sight unseen, as his or her desh, her home When I speak of this to my American friends — the iron-clad identifiers of region, language, caste, and subcaste — they call me 'over determined' and of course they are right. When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crises and feelings of alienation, I of course am right. (33)

During their childhood, Tara's maternal grandmother used to tell the story of the village deity, Shitala, the goddess of smallpox and malaria. In a dream of the king named Virata, the brave, just, rich, honest, and benevolent ruler of a prosperous kingdom also named Virata. Shitala, a goddess demanded that make offerings of goats and rams to her. In return, she would grant him a long life free of diseases but, the king refused to do offering to the goddess. So Shitala was unable to control her rampage and destroyed the kingdom, turning it into one big cremation ground. "Our grandmother had been a great believer in gods and goddesses talking to mortals through dreams, cautioning them not to get too uppity. She grew up before vaccination against smallpox became routine. That's why she could comfort herself with myth". (57)

Indian family is constrained by certain regulation in the brought-up of children. By these regulations, there was certain gender based discrimination to follow in the particular set-up. In **Desirable Daughters**, Tara and his son Rabi, age of fifteen, both had involved in a serious conversation about the misbehavior of Rabi, leads him to left their home. "We're not that kind of a family! Boys from good Indian families don't run away!" (92). Here, Tara denotes their own Bengal tradition of conservative families which is more orthodox in their traditional beliefs.

In this novel, 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. It is to create a location of the presence that reduces the diasporic individual to break the connection of 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 epigraph of the novel, a Sanskrit verse adapted by Octavio Paz and translated by Eliot Weinberger that provides an insight into 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”. (Quoted in **Desirable Daughters**).

It makes it clear that, the old tradition or 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. In the social structure of World, Women were expected to focus on practical domestic pursuits and activities that encouraged the betterment of their families. In most cases education for women was not advocated, it was thought to be malignant to the traditional female virtues of innocence and morality. Women who spoke out against the patriarchal system of gender roles or any injustice ran the risk of being exiled from their communities, or worse; unmarried women in particular were the targets of the society. Women have equal participation in human development but she lack in society and women are not treated with respect. Let the society should ready to accept the changes that are happened in society which are regarded to women. Constitutional provisions are not sufficient to get the respectable position in society. In Modern technology, globalization come in to existence but the status and position of women is rather deteriorated.

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