



Research Paper

Bharati Mukherjee's Craftsmanship in Desirable Daughter

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ABSTRACT: The present paper is an attempt to analysis the narrative and linguistic devices used by an Indian born American novelist, Bharati Mukherjee. Her migration from India and her Canadian and US citizenship has helped her to carve a distinct path of her own as she employs both Eastern and Western devices in her novels. Her cultural affiliations with different countries has enriched her skill as a writer and empowered her to employ some culturally hybrid devices too.

Keywords: Craftsmanship, diaspora, hybridity

The narrative of diaspora is essentially the narrative of the self. Diaspora writers often exhibit the dual affiliation by employing the typical characteristics of both the cultures. At the level of cultural production and creativity, the diasporic consciousness plays a crucial role. The diasporic community remains at forefront in creativity, bringing as Bhabha calls it, 'newness enters into the world'. The intermingling and blending of typical narrative strategies often shape the creative writings of the diaspora. These writers have enriched the literary productions by employing hybrid, syncretic and creolized narrative and linguistic devices. Narrative technique for a fiction writer is the tool for modification of language to express the desired nuances. Every writer has his/her unique way to express the thoughts and experiences to the readers. The writer communicates his vision and ideas to the readers by the means of different narrative strategies. Narrative technique is a systematic order of words and phrases; it can not be employed randomly. Certain artistic and emotional effects can be achieved by employing proper narrative strategy.

Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Desirable Daughters* uses first person narrative as the protagonist has to retell the family history. The psychological disturbance that Tara passes through can be convincingly explained when narrated by the victim herself. Her novel *Desirable Daughters* marks a departure from her previous fiction as in her interview with Powell she 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"(Powell npg). In her previous novel *Jasmine* she seems to suggest that migration to America means new opening and freeing the self from the conventional bound society, whereas in *Desirable Daughters* she considers various patterns of belonging in the Global perspective. The tie with homeland and linkage with the past are presented as essential in creating the interstitial place in the host country.

The tale is narrated from the first person point of view. Tara, the central character of the novel narrates the story of the lives of three sisters. She takes the readers deep into the intricacies of her life in America and her past in India. The story of three sisters of a traditional Bengali Brahmin family and their own course of voyage towards their destiny is narrated by one of the sisters, Tara. These sisters; Padma, Parvati and Tara and their ways of life are a mixture of traditional and modern outlook. Padma lives her life as an immigrant of ethnic origin in New Jersey and Parvati is married to a man of her choice and lives a luxurious life in the posh locality of Bombay. Tara, the narrator takes pride in her traditional Brahmin upbringing, but with her desire to move forward in life and to carve an identity for herself, she embraces the liberated ways of American culture.

Tara is narrating the history of her family and in recording this history she is projecting the creation of her identity. The past here plays an important role in constructing the present. In order to understand herself and recreate a new identity for her, she must delve into the past and unfold the intricacies of it. She begins the narration with the story of her ancestral namesake, Tara Lata, the Tree Bride of Mishtigunj. In this introductory chapter of the novel, she retells the story set in India over 85 years ago. This introduction takes the reader into the past and also serves the purpose of exploring some traditional aspects of Indian culture. The second chapter takes the reader into the present life of Tara in California along with her past memories of Calcutta. The story moves with the ease from past to present, from India to America and from Calcutta to California, that it seems that the boundaries between these two different geographical world do not exist. The reader moves with Tara from past to present and it often becomes difficult to distinguish between them. Mukherjee's mastery is in

handling the story of the past and present simultaneously and making what has happened and what is happening equally interesting by infusing the new concept of time and space.

So far as the use of language is concerned, Mukherjee succeeds in retaining the vitality of language by relating it to the everyday speech. She changes words, grammatical structures and syntax to suit the character. Tara, an assimilated immigrant in America is comfortable in expressing herself at both the places; India and America. She can freely use Indian expressions and even communicate in Bengali whenever require. At the same, she uses American slang expressions with her American friends. Whereas her sister Padma, enjoys being an immigrant of ethnic origin in America speaks a mixture of Indian and American English. Padma finds her obsession with her Indianness as a survival strategy in America.

Mukherjee uses the device of parallel and contrast to highlight the multiple identity of the protagonist. By linking her story with the ancestral namesake Tara Lata, Mukherjee draws a parallel between the lives of Tara Chatterjee and Tara Lata. Tara Chatterjee's revolt against the traditional concepts of Indian wife and Tara Lata's surrender to spend her entire life as a Tree bride are juxtaposed. Tara was married to Bish Chatterjee at the age of nineteen and moved to America with him. Her husband was selected by her father and she gives the reason for it: "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" (DD 7).

Tara Lata, the tree bride was destined to get marry at the age of five and as the groom dies before the marriage, she marries a Tree at the suggestion of her father. Tara's marriage with Bish wasn't a traumatic experience for her as in the case of Tara Lata. Bish, a software engineer from a prominent Bengali family has a name and fame in America. He tries to lead a traditional Indian life in America and expects the same from Tara. Tara as a self assertive woman of global time leaves him by her choice, whereas Tara Lata is forced to live an alienated life by fate. Tara Lata turns out to be a freedom fighter and a martyr during the period of colonialism and succeeds in achieving a unique identity for herself in spite of her victimization in the name of tradition. Tara, the globalised modern woman makes herself free from the traditional role of Indian wife to explore the new possibilities of life. Tara seems to find out the analogy of rebellious spirit in her life with that of Tara Lata.

Mukherjee has presented a tale of two hybrid cultures and focused on the issues where these two divergent cultures intersect. Her observations on the issues of culture and traditions show her sense of history and her mature vision. She succeeds in interweaving the themes of class, quest for identity, history and changing consciousness. Mukherjee presents the picture of the lives of culturally different Indians in India and America and thus, portrays the different cultural practices of Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and Sikh and their ancient prejudices. Family norms and spiritual rituals play a key role in knitting the multicultural society of India. Indian traditions and myth are depicted with remarkable expertise. Mukherjee's use of the ordinary language as spoken by the characters in their real life reveals the multidimensional way of her writing.

Diasporic people have to pass through the process of transformation in the host nation i.e. to say they have to kill the inner self to some extent in order to accept the new persona. Mukherjee uses 'violence' as a device and link it with the process of transformation. In *Jasmine* the killing of Half-face gives Jasmine a new force to change the typical Indian woman inside her and start a new life. In *Desirable Daughters*, the turmoil of terrorism by terrorists like Abbas Sattar Hai and bombarding in Tara's house depicts the violence. At the same this violent attack on Tara's house in which her husband Bish gets injured gives Tara a chance to reunite with him. Thus, Mukherjee depicts the stark reality of the contemporary world as a device to highlight the process of transformation.

Mukherjee juxtaposes the story of Tara and Padma to present the essential crisis of assimilation. Padma has recreated India in America by clinging to Indian culture and rejecting all that is American. She associates herself with the people of only Indian origin, she works in an Indian television channel and she lives in the area which is populated by South Asians, whereas Tara moves forward to embrace American culture. She is ready to face the challenges of assimilation and to recreate herself. She views her Didi's attempts to preserve Indian culture as her inability to cope with the challenges of assimilation as Tara says;

Her clinging to a version of India and to Indian ways and to Indian friends, Indian clothes and food and a 'charming' accent seemed to me a cowardly way of coping with a new country. Change is corruption; she seemed to be saying. Take what America can give, but don't let it tarnish you in any way (DD 134)

Tara on the other hand changes throughout her life in America. She views the multiplicity of her identity. She views herself, her sexuality and her race through the ever shifting lens of culture and consciousness. At the age of nineteen she comes to America with her husband expecting to fit in the role of traditional Indian wife, to support him and raise his children. She realizes that she doesn't want to play the typical role of Indian wife. She takes the step which is considered the most drastic one in Indian culture-'divorce', when she realizes that "the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled"(DD 82). She continues to develop in the course of her life in America and chooses to accept or retain certain aspects of both the cultures. She realizes that she can never be totally Indian or America, but rather recreate a new self

comprised of the both. Mukherjee by juxtaposing the story of two sisters' assimilation in American society seems to raise the issue of position of immigrants in America and that of hyphenated immigrants. Padma, a hyphenated immigrant and Tara, an assimilated immigrant provide Mukherjee's reader to brood over the status of immigrants in America, as the hyphenated immigrants are treated as minorities in America.

By adopting the Sanskrit verse adapted by Octavio Paz and translated by Eliot Weinberger as the epigraph of the novel, Mukherjee reveals the ambiguity of diasporic experience.

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 (Epigraph)

The verse indicates the in-between space and liminality of diaspora, it also focuses on the space of diaspora, where 'no one behind, no one ahead' concept of space is indicated. It is beyond the geographical boundaries as the verse reads the path as 'goes nowhere'. It is also applicable to the process of identity construction as it is a continuous process. The ambiguity of diaspora is expressed in the notion of going 'nowhere' on the path of 'everyone'. Thus, the epigraph clearly indicates the scope of diaspora that on such a wide path the immigrant has to find out his way.

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