

**Tara's Self-Explorations and Psychological Transitions in Bharati
Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters**

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ABSTRACT

The feminist or women-centered approach is a significant development that deals with the experience and situation of the feminist consciousness in Indian English Literature. Contemporary writers have moved away from the traditional role of enduring self-sacrificing women toward women searching for identity. It reflects the feminist idea that exists in the patriarchal Indian society. The present study focuses on the psychological frame of women's minds in the novel, *Desirable Daughters*. It has thus attempted to understand the psychological aspects of women's moral development, focusing on the psychological approach to women's mindscape with the application of psycho-feminist theory. Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) is set in America and India. It is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and a contemporary story of an American woman who has in many ways broken with tradition but remains tied to her native country. Mukherjee's protagonist, Tara, faces a multicultural society and exhibits a deep awareness of the social reality surrounding her. The present study elaborates on Tara's self-exploration and psychological transitions, which brings her to understand her self-identity.

Keywords: women mindscape, self-explorations, psychological transitions and self-identity

"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."

- Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002)

Opened with the Sanskrit mentioned above poem at the beginning of the novel, Bharati Mukherjee exemplifies the lay out the mission of the protagonist Tara in *Desirable Daughters*. These lines reveal the inner psyche of the unconventional woman, Tara. It also describes women's longing to find their identity in the world.

The novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) asset in America and India. It is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and a contemporary story of an American woman who has in many ways broken with tradition but remains tied to her native country. Mukherjee's protagonist, Tara, faces a multicultural society and exhibits a deep awareness of the social reality surrounding her. The assimilation of alien identity has changed not only Tara but also her elder sisters, Padma and Parvati.

The study of the female psyche attempts to interpret women's status in India and the world. A famous Canadian novelist and poet, Margaret Atwood, creates heroines that can be considered case studies of the concerns of all Canadian females. Toni Morrison is an American feminist who talks about society's view on women through sexism. She portrays the role, the dilemmas, the rebellion, and the ambitions of women in her novels.

Hence, Simone de Beauvoir very precisely exposed the condition of women in her most famous book, *The Second Sex*.

Man can think of himself without women. She cannot think of herself without a man. And she is simply what man decrees-. (Beauvoir 534)

At this juncture, Simone de Beauvoir depicts how socio-cultural factors influence the identity of human behavior. Thus, man explored their characters openly, whereas women could not. Women were differentiated by their sex. And they are opposed by men as an inessential being.

She is firmly established in San Francisco with an ex-husband, a teenage son, Rabindranath, and a Hungarian Buddhist lover. Tara also preserves close relationships with her two older sisters, Padma (referred to as "Didi") and Parvati (the former married and living in Montclair, New Jersey, and the latter living in Bombay with her husband and two children). Despite the distance between them, the sisters (all born on the same date but separated by three years) communicate often, and Didi and Parvati remain Tara's links to a past that she has begun to forget. Tara is forced to face her family, history, and culture from which she has distanced herself, resulting in a conflict between old modes of thinking and new forms of consciousness. Tam soon realizes the misconception of a "real singular identity," Finally, Tara returns to her father's house for consolation.

The present study analyses the inner mindscape of a woman with the theory of Carol Gilligan. Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) deals with the psychoanalytical theory about women's moral development. Gilligan has identified women as 'different' from men and has sketched through the different notions of femininity. She has divided women's moral development into three stages. The first is a selfish stage considered pre-conventional morality; the second is a belief in the conventional morality of self-sacrifice; the third is the post-conventional stage which includes responsibilities of consequences of choice. This is progress from selfish, to social, to moral morality. Gilligan shows the individual as self-centered and unable to distinguish between necessity and desire in the orientation to individual survival. In this stage, the individual attempts to protect herself by not pursuing intimate relationships with others. Thus, the character of Parvati in the novel *Desirable Daughters* is

projected as a self-centered woman choosing her life partner before her elder sister, Padma. Parvati gives importance to her desire rather than anything else.

In addition, the first transition is from selfishness to responsibility, in which a new connection exists with others and differentiation between needs and wants. Parvati feels that her life is more "conspicuously luxurious" than that of Padma's and Tara's. Goodness as self-sacrifice is the second level of development. In this stage, the individual relies more on others and yearns for social acceptance. Almost all the female characters in the present study have sacrificed many things like their desire, identity, dreams, and even life. In the second transition, i.e., from goodness to truth, the particular questions why she places others' needs above one's own and realizes that their sacrifice needs self-acceptance in society.

The third and last level, the morality of nonviolence, shows an individual with a transformed understanding of self. There is much respect for the self and individual needs, but the individual also recognizes the responsibility and care for others and selects among competing choices. When she leaves her husband, Tara says (DD 82).

Similarly, Gilligan asked women, "How would you describe yourself?" she found that women define who they are by describing relationships. Men defined themselves by separation or the use of "I" statements. She also found that men think in more violent terms than women. Women learn to "include self and other in the compass of care. And, at the same time, to accept responsibility for decisions" (IDV 90)

In female post-conventional morality, Gilligan says, "responsibility and caring about yourself and others" (IDV 99) but realizes that the principle put into practice here will still leave you with conflict. So everyone must accept responsibility for their decisions. Someone can still be hurt. But it doesn't always have to be women who get hurt for the decision to be moral.

Further, Gilligan talks about the morality of an individual. She says that a male's character has a 'justice orientation' and a female morality has a 'responsibility orientation'. Using this aspect of female morality (which is based on responsibility) to study the women characters presented in the novel *Desirable Daughters* portrays women's psychological predicaments.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara raised her son, Rabi, as any responsible mother would. She works as a teacher in a school for her son's welfare. And also, she is responsible for the reputation of an orthodox family. Tara gets shocked by the encounter with Christopher Dey. Christopher Dey introduces himself to Tara as an illegitimate son of Padma and Ronald Dey. Tara gazes into the past life of Padma by getting information about her sister the Padma from Parvati. It shows Tara's responsibility over her family.

Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* talks about women's rights and women's judgments. Here, Gilligan mentions how women are caught between selfishness and responsibilities. Morality, which arises from their inner world, drives women to make decisions on their own. This aspect matches with the life of Tara, who is responsible for her family's reputation. Thus she enquires the Padma about Padma's illegitimate son Christopher Dey.

Gilligan focuses on an individual's conflict between a native and foreign culture which disconnects oneself from ordinary circumstances and makes to feel lonely. The sudden changes which Tara ought to adopt in a foreign country make her "sick of feeling an alien" (DD 87). She could not embrace the culture and people. She felt hard to explain her cultural values to them. She describes herself as a "self-appointed Joan of Arc" (DD 221). Devi expresses her identity crisis and feelings of alienation by saying, "When everyone knows your business and every name declares your identity, where no landscape fails to contain a plethora of human figures, even a damaged consciousness, even loneliness, become privileged commodities." (DD 33-34). Tara's longing for identity and monotonous unadventurous life frustrated her. Thus, she expresses, "There was no rebellion, no seeking after individual identity" (DD 44).

Tara's search for identity leads her to literature. Tara uses Tennyson's and Yeats's poems at two different points in the novel. Through these poems, she tries to make sense of her situation. However, these English poems do not help her find the voice she is seeking. Tennyson's poem "The Kraken" expresses the suddenness of change when a person's sleeping past cracks the surface and rises out of it in the form of the monstrous Kraken. In the Kraken who lies "Below the thunders of the upper deep/ Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea" (DD 132), Tara recognizes the smugness with which she had let her past lie dead. She realizes this in the lines, "until the latter fire shall heat the deep . . . In roaring he shall rise" (DD 133). Although Tara relates to the poem at some level, it does not become a mode of revelation to cope with the change she faces, for to her, it depicts only the problem, not a solution.

Similarly, Tara is reminded of Yeats's Byzantium poems, which create a dream-like timeless world where "Golden birds on golden boughs and hammered gold and gold enamelling" (DD 205) represent the immutability of art, which is favored over human mutability. Again, Yeats's poem helps Tara recognize the tension between fixity and fluidity, preservation and transformation, which she has struggled with throughout the narrative. However, the lyrics, lacking the ability to help her strike a balance between acceptance and rejection of the past, do not allow her to give voice to her ambivalent experiences. It reflects Tara's perception of life, created through her imagination. "The promise of an American wife was not being fulfilled" (DD 82) shows Tara's longing for self-identity.

The consequences of investigating the past take place in Tara's life in the novel *Desirable Daughters*. Tara's boyfriend Andy warns her about her past life as it has the power to dominate one's entire presentation. Tara proceeds with her quest for identity. She is forced to face her family, her past, and a culture that she has distanced herself from, resulting in a conflict between old modes of thinking and new forms of consciousness that have been created. When her house is firebombed, Tara is entirely exhausted. That makes her yearning for a homeland and traditional life more acute. Tara is trying to discover herself and fit into her place in the universe.

Tara tries to trace her ancestral past. While she says, "Tara Lata Gangooly had turned the tragedy of her husband's death and lifetime virginity into a model of selfless saintliness.

My story was different, perhaps even an inversion."(DD 280) It shows Tara's rebellious nature, and creating such a westernized idea generates new processes of self-discovery in her psyche.

Not only Tara but also Tara's sisters (Padma and Parvati) have longed for their self-recognition. Thus the actions of the character exemplify their courage and determination, which have helped them to overcome the suppression imposed on them. And they march towards self-discovery proudly and happily.

The study of the interior mindscape of women in the select novel reveals the pathetic condition of women in Indian society. Their inner self needs an identity that leads them to move toward their self-recognition. Consequently, Simone De Beauvoir defines: "The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether frustrated, disgusted at, or indifferent to this institution." (Beauvoir 451)

The orthodox society has constructed the conventional image of women. Throughout the world, women have been deprived of their fundamental socio-legal rights by a patriarchal order. The process of social conditioning influences women with its power and authority. It only moulds her psyche to desire and pursue traditionally accepted and encouraged feminine roles.

Bharati Mukherjee has used her creative work as a medium to register her protest against the forces against women and has sincerely tried to seek solutions and consolations by delving deep into the interior mindscape of women characters in her writings.

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