

Quest for Identity and Difficulties of Cultural Assimilation in Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters

Dr. Sanghamitra Dash

Freelance Writer in English Literature

Abstract

The emergence of diasporic literature has led to various interpretations by scholars and critics. All of the criticism of the diaspora and its vast literature revolve around issues of alienation and assimilation. The diaspora expelled from their country of origin suffers from a loss of identity as a result of the loss of culture in the past. They are forced to face the dilemma of choosing between living in permanent exile or accepting the culture of the new country through assimilation. Bharati Mukherjee's novel "Desirable Daughters" explores the struggles of Indian diaspora women in navigating their identities and cultural integration, highlighting the challenges of family loyalty and societal expectations. The novel depicts the transformation and reinvention of immigrants and exiles in American society, shedding light on the patriarchal norms and restrictions faced by women in both Indian and Western cultures. Mukherjee's portrayal of characters like Tara, Padma, and Parvati reflects the complexities of gender roles and the quest for individual freedom within traditional and modern societies.

Keywords: Diaspora, Assimilation, Alienation, Immigrants

Introduction

The quest for identity and cultural assimilation is a central theme in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Desirable Daughters*. Mukherjee's exploration of this theme highlights the complexities and challenges faced by immigrants as they navigate between their cultural heritage and the dominant culture of their adopted homeland. The novel follows the lives of three sisters, Tara, Padma, and Parvati, who have all made different choices in their pursuit of identity and assimilation. Mukherjee's nuanced portrayal of these characters sheds light on how cultural identity is shaped by personal choices, family dynamics, and societal expectations. As immigrants themselves, Mukherjee's characters grapple with questions of belonging, tradition, and modernity, offering a compelling and multi-layered exploration of the intersection between individual identity and cultural heritage. S. P. Swain (1996) in his article "Problems of Identity: A Study of Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*" explains Mukherjee's liquid and dislocated society, wondrous, roaming, adventurous, constantly changing identity, transit way of life, and frustrated characters. Similarly, Bhagat Nayak (2005) in his article "Quest for Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*" opines that Mukherjee in her novels explains the women's conditions, their mental situations and focuses on the quest for identity and constant immigration from India to the USA. In Bharati Mukherjee's "Desirable Daughters," the concept of identity is intricately explored through the characters of Tara, Padma, and Parvati. Mukherjee delves into the complexities of identity formation in

the diasporic context, highlighting the struggle to reconcile cultural heritage with modernity. Tara, as the wife of a successful Silicon Valley professional, embodies the tension between her Indian roots and American aspirations, leading to a fragmented sense of self. Padma, who lives in New Jersey on the other hand, embraces her Indian heritage more overtly, but still grapples with the expectations placed upon her as a woman in both cultures. Parvati, staying in India serves as a symbol of tradition and a catalyst for the sisters' reflections on their own identities. Through the experiences of these characters, Mukherjee challenges the notion of a singular, fixed identity and instead presents a dynamic and evolving construction shaped by cultural, societal, and personal influences.

Cultural assimilation plays a significant role in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, "Desirable Daughters," as the characters navigate the complexities of merging their Indian heritage with American culture. Throughout the narrative, Mukherjee skilfully portrays the tension between preserving one's roots and embracing a new way of life. The protagonist, Tara, struggles to find her identity as she grapples with the expectations of her traditional Indian family and the allure of Western influences. This dichotomy leads to inner conflict and a quest for self-discovery as Tara attempts to strike a balance between her cultural heritage and the opportunities presented by her adopted country. Mukherjee's exploration of cultural assimilation reflects the broader immigrant experience and raises important questions about belonging and identity in a globalized world. The novel highlights the complexities and challenges faced by individuals attempting to navigate multiple cultural influences simultaneously, illustrating the nuanced nature of assimilation in contemporary society.

Characters in Bharati Mukherjee's novel 'Desirable Daughters' face significant challenges in navigating their identities and assimilating into different cultural contexts. The protagonist, Tara, struggles with embracing her Indian roots while adapting to American society, illustrating the complexities of dual identity. As she grapples with her past and present, Tara embodies the tension between maintaining tradition and embracing modernity. This internal conflict mirrors the external challenges faced by many immigrants who must reconcile their heritage with the new culture in which they find themselves. The characters in Mukherjee's work serve as poignant examples of the difficulties individuals encounter in forging a cohesive sense of self while navigating the complexities of assimilation and cultural identity. By delving into the nuances of these struggles, Mukherjee sheds light on the multifaceted nature of the immigrant experience and the quest for belonging in a world characterized by shifting identities.

Globalization has profoundly impacted the formation and negotiation of individual identities, particularly in the context of cultural assimilation. The increasing interconnectedness of societies has led to a shifting landscape where traditional notions of identity are challenged and assimilation into dominant cultures becomes a pressing issue. In the novel "Desirable Daughters" by Bharati Mukherjee, the characters face the complexities of maintaining their cultural identities while navigating the expectations of the globalized world. Mukherjee explores how globalization can blur the boundaries between cultures, creating a sense of dislocation and fragmentation in the characters' identities. This struggle between preserving one's heritage and assimilating into a new cultural context underscores the profound impact of globalization on individual identity construction and underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural assimilation in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bharati Mukherjee's novel 'Desirable Daughters' delves into the complexities of identity and cultural assimilation faced by Indian immigrants in America. The protagonist, Tara, embodies the

struggle of balancing her traditional Indian roots with the allure of Western modernity, highlighting the tensions and challenges that arise in the process of adaptation and assimilation. Through Tara's journey, Mukherjee exposes the intricacies of identity formation in the diasporic context, where individuals navigate between multiple cultural influences to carve out a sense of self. The novel ultimately suggests that finding a balance between one's heritage and the demands of a new cultural environment is a continuous and evolving process, one that requires introspection, negotiation, and resilience. Mukherjee's exploration of these themes offers valuable insights into the complexities of immigrant experiences and the quest for a cohesive and authentic identity in a globalized world.

References

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