

I. Problem of Tara Lata's identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable*

Daughters:

This research entitled "Identity Crisis of Tara Lata in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*" probes into the problem of Tara's failure to attain stable identity. Whether she is in India or in San Francisco, she is always followed by her female consciousness, which hinders her to attain a fixed identity. Thus, the patriarchy is at the center of her identity crisis.

Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Desirable Daughters* (2002), is the first novel in trilogy. The central character of *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee, Tara Lata is presented as submissive woman character in India and vibrant freedom seeking woman in America. Tara, the protagonist ventures for the quest to discover her self.

Desirable Daughters depicts the problem of female identity which is always in crisis be it Indian Hindu patriarchy society or western American society. Mukherjee presents striking portrait of three sisters living in two worlds, the traditional Brahmin society of upper class in Calcutta where they were born, and secular world of modern west they moved to as adults. The two sisters are remarkable women but they lead largely unexamined lives. Tara, the youngest to them is examining her life as she lives it, and she is planning to write book, which is going to be about the making of consciousness. The first chapter of the book written in italics gives description of a five years old Tara's wedding to a 'Tree' after her thirteen years old bridegroom died of snake bite on the wedding day in 1879 A.D. Jaikrishna took his daughter into deep forest and married her to a tree, and thus Tara became known as "Tree-Bride".

Tara Lata grew up among Bengali Brahmin family. She was among Bengali and married to an Indian computer designer, Bishwapriya Chatterjee (Bish). After marriage Bish took her to California and became rich in Silicon Valley in California. In due course after some years she gets divorce and walks away with millions following settlement. She lives independently with her son Rabindra (Rabi) and freely sleeps with Andy, her carpenter as well as with friends of her ex-husband. In short, unlike her ancestress, she enjoys complete social, financial and sexual freedom. But the emergence of Chris Dey claiming to be illegitimate son of her sister Padma begins to disrupt her safe haven. Padma, now a New York based clothing designer knows nothing of the boy. And Ron Day, Chris's father in India admits that the boy is his but not by Padma. The mystery deepens when Tara goes to the police and finds out that the boy is an imposter. Tara at last turns to her family and wants to be reconciled with her ex-husband but an explosion destroys her house and wounds Bish very badly. In the end, Tara neither gets liberated from the patriarchal cultural dogma nor can adjust with the new culture. She cannot get her stable female identity in both cultures.

Critics on *Desirable Daughters*:

A large number of critics have interpreted *Desirable Daughters* from multiple perspectives since its publication in 2002. Many criticisms shed light over the issues like cultural dislocation, diasporic situation, cultural collision, female position, and search for identity.

Ramlal Agrawal in *World Literature Today*, he writes:

In *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee sets herself a dual task: she wants to tell her Indian readers about Indian readers about weird

customs and traditions of Indian society. It is a difficult undertaking and Tara, the novel's narrator admits as such. It is one of those San Francisco things I can't begin to explain in India, "She says "just like I can't begin to explain my Indian life to the women I know in California. I have told my Calcutta stories many times and American seems to find them endlessly amusing and appalling... And obviously it deals with American and its liberties individualism and money power and with India and its goods ghosts and curious social practices. (86)

Here, Agrawal opines that the novel depicts the vivid panorama of life, custom, liberties, individualism and Indian expatriates in America. The novel artfully conveys the complexities of Indian society, philosophy and religion in India and United States. It also presents the cultural differences between eastern way of social and ritual practices in terms of religion and faith.

Similarly, Katherine Miller views diasporic aspect of the novel. In this context she writes:

Tara, one of Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*, fees "lost inside a Salman Rushdie's novel, a one firm identity smashed down and reemerging as something wondrous or grotesque". With varying degrees of success the writers reconfigure many permutations of their characters' identities, rewriting myth and personal history. (166)

Tara is engaged in cross- cultural exploration and assimilation as she attempts to find her place, her role in new society she encounters. The novel explores two cultures, and shows how each woman must find her own method of facing the

challenges and managing the pain of remaking herself as she encounters new worlds.

The search of 'female self' is the major theme of the novel *Desirable Daughters*. Tara Lata, the protagonist wants to find her female identity through rewriting her past, history and ancestry. In this regard J.N. Mothanty remarks:

The identity is not pre-given, but has to be continually re-established. A person has to gather herself up, unify her actions, beliefs, motives, character and style together and search her self disintegrate. Here we find the other sense of identity pertinent. The identity of a person is never closed, fixed once for all. It is rather continually in question, to be re-established and restored by her. A person must be able to comprehend and appreciate and not merely remember her past history as her own example by adding, by decisions already made, by keeping promises and commitments. (84)

Tara Lata's identity is in flux in relationship with men and places she stays. She does not have a stable identity; in family she is Tara, the dutiful daughter who follows traditional Hindu custom and norms. To Bish she is a dutiful and traditional Hindu wife. This great step in her life provides the very American identity. Regarding protagonist's quest for identity for selfhood S.P. Swain claims:

Tara, Padma and Parvati rebel against this hackneyed and constraining socio-cultural set up and chart out their own course of action. Moving different directions and different straining circumstances, each of them tries to carve her unique identity. But it is an identity in flux since all of them are ever on the go towards self-

realization and self-actualisation. Each of them tries to connect her past with the present, memory with desire. Each of them is on the move. Mukherjee portrays through these three moving and identity-shifting characters. (91)

Here, Swain traces the life of the three Brahmin daughters, Tara, Padma and Parvati all eager to forge an identity of their own in very complex socio-cultural situations. They were born into wealthy Brahmin Bengali family presided over by their loving father and tradition-bound orthodox mother. They have suffocated from the conventional society which has little regard for women. Though they want to challenge socio-cultural setup, they move from east to west, mainly Tara and Padma but they are unable to carve their unique female identity, so their identity is always in flux.

Regarding the *Desirable Daughters*, Joanna M. Burkhardt in *Library Journal* sees the importance of the past in everyone's life. She remarks:

The novel shows that the past is not something that stays in a neat frame of album, but one that collides with how the present is one that can colour and illuminate the past. It mediates upon the irretrievability of the past, the differences between cultures and the cyclical nature of history. (141)

Here, Burkhardt takes the past as something that builds her identity.

A renowned critic Debra Mason sees a cultural aspect in *Desirable Daughters*. In *New York Times*, he views:

Tara is able to disguise herself in blue jeans and pasmina shawal as one more divorced woman and single mother, happily bowing to

exalted American ideal of just bending in. But like the cross-cultural challenging in Mukherjee's previous novels, Tara is struggling to shake off the old world constraints of class, female deference and fate. And in her case the past is not easily evaded. (11)

Tara is living in between cultures, in such condition she is trying to belong somewhere walking the fine line between old Indian traditions and the new liberated American lifestyle. She wearing Jeans and living of her own by taking charge of upbringing her son. She is challenging Indian society. She is taking the role of male earning oneself and taking the responsibility to upbringing her son. She is also living a carefree life, so she is on the way of reconfiguration of her own identity.

In this way the novel is analyzed from different perspectives, still the issue of female identity crisis is untouched. The present research will study the novel *Desirable Daughters* on the light of feminist theory regarding the question of identity of female character Tara Lata. The present work has been divided in four chapters. The first chapter highlights the biography of Bharati Mukherjee, a short note on her major works brief outline of *Desirable Daughters*, an introductory outline of the present study and a short review. It gives a bird's eye view of the entire work. The second chapter is entirely devoted to look at identity of female character, Tara Lata from feminism as theoretical tool. This part of work will define some terms related to feminism, i.e. liberal and hardcore feminism. On the basis of second chapter the third chapter will analyze the text at a considerable length. It will sort out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the study the main cause of Tara's failure of attaining her stable identity is her

consciousness that is formed in patriarchal society. This portion of the work should serve as a core of this work. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research. It will conclude the exploration and arguments put forwarded in the preceding chapters and show Tara's unsuccessful attempt to create her female identity either in India or in America. She is always followed by the patriarchal ideology, which hinders to attain her fixed identity. Thus, the whole research has proved the fact that Tara Lata's failure of attaining her stable female identity in India or in America. The main cause of failure to attain her stable female identity is the female consciousness which is shaped in patriarchal society of India.

II. Radical Feminism: Female self and Identity

The term "Feminism" was first used by French dramatist Alexandre Dumas in 1872 in a pamphlet 'L', to designate the emerging movement for women's rights. It gradually emerged to be world wide cultural movement to secure a complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights-moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal, economic and so forth. This Second chapter gives a short overview of feminism, its facets, comparative study of Western feminism and Indian feminism on the female identity and female consciousness on which the textual analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Desirable Daughters* will be based in the next chapter.

Feminism, as described in *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*, is "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim"(466). Feminism came into practice to attack against female marginalization in all social forms of knowledge and practice. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, defines feminism as a, "doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and advocating equal opportunities for men and women" (132).

Feminism is a doctrine that strongly holds a belief in sex equality and severely opposes the sex hierarchy. It presupposes that woman's condition is socially constructed in male-dominated society rather than simply predestined by god or nature. It also posits that women perceive themselves not only as biological sex but a social grouping. Defining feminist consciousness in her own terms, Gerda Learner writes:

I define feminist consciousness as the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally that they must and can provide an alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination (14).

Feminist consciousness progressed over time and challenged the practices that ever lasting notions of superiority of men and inferiority of women. Feminism demands equal rights and opportunities for women in economic, political, psychological, social and individual sense.

Defining feminism, R.Delmer points out the classification of its meaning:

There are those who claim that feminism does have a complex of ideas about women, specific to emanating from feminists...it is by no means absurd to suggest that you don't have rights to equal treatment, and that not all those supportive of women's demands are feminists. In this light, feminism can claim its own history, its own practices, its own ideas, but feminist can make no claim to an exclusive interest in or copyright over problems affecting women. Feminism can thus be established as a field but can not claim women as its domain (13.)

Since class, culture, race and physically also affect how people are treated, gender is understood by considering cultural practices. Because of the history of

male dominance, women especially in western societies have taken notice of and action against the inequality they have historically experienced.

It is a political movement emerged in the late 1960's with an aim to enhance the status of women both in the theory and practice. Though feminism became a dominant force in the literary studies in the 1960's, it had its origin from two centuries earlier with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) which is considered to be the first formal enhancement of feminist writing though many others had tried their hands before her as well. Wollstonecraft is an English writer, devoted feminist and especially advocate of social and educational equality for women. This book concentrates upon poor condition of suffering women caused by male-versed or biased educational system, which instead of enabling girls/women, makes their status degrade. It argues that such educational system of Mary's time deliberately trained women to be frivolous and incapable. Mary proposes for radical reform of national educational system to upgrade women's status in society. She argues that in an educational system that provides same advantages to girls and boys, women/girls would prove themselves to be exceptional wives and mothers as well as capable workers in many professions.

In this book, Mary Wollstonecraft goes beyond her Dissenter friends, because they had their views strictly patriarchal. She creates here some fundamental feminist principles to be accepted and adopted by later feminists. According to her, mind does not distinguish whether someone is male or female. On the other hand, the society can not attain harmony, peace, prosperity and progress, if it keeps on retaining women in the role of convenient domestic slaves

and alluring mistresses, denying their economic independence and encourages them to be passive and attentive only to their looks to the exclusion of all else.

Mary discusses the harmful impact of sentimental novels on the lives of women in eighteenth century. Whatever women see or hear in sentimental novels serves to fix bad impressions. Due to the traditional educational system, women are compelled to study such novels which are not intellectual, but sentimental. Because of the impact these novels have upon the woman, woman cannot exercise intellectually but are trapped in the 'Sentimentality' and become emotional rather than rational being.

Wollstonecraft opines that from the very beginning girls' learning has been being mere repetition of the conventional ideas promote by the representatives of patriarchal societies. In sentimental novels, she writes, a boy is depicted as an active person whereas girl is presented as passive beauty. Such novels create ideal pictures of man and woman. According to her, man holds public and private space, but woman holds only private space, being deprived of public one.

Giving emphasis upon women's reasoning in order to see them free from all discriminations in patriarchal society, Mary remarks, "it is the right use of reason along which makes us independent of everything-excepting the unclouded Reason 'whose service is perfect freedom'.(398)

Feminism is a political discourse aimed at equal rights and legal protection for women. It involves various movements, political and sociological theories, and philosophies, all concerned with issues of gender difference; that advocate equality for women; and that campaign for women's rights and interests. Feminism voices the new women's objection to be treated as doormat or piece of furniture meant for

convenience of man. Feminism intends to rebel against the hostile environment in which a woman lives. It is a struggle against the hardship, neglect and dual moral standards to which women are subjected. It seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression inequalities and injustices of women that suffer because of their sex, defends equal rights for women in a political, economic, social psychological, personal and aesthetic sense. So, feminism defines women as the people who are either oppressed or suppressed by patriarchy of freedom of self-expression. The growing feminist movement sought to change society prevailing stereotypes of women as relatively weak, passive, docile and dependent individual who are less rational and more emotional than men.

Moreover, all feminist activity including feminist theory and literary criticism has as its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting gender equality. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of activism. This activism campaigns on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, discrimination and sexual violence. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, oppression and patriarchy.

Radical Feminism:

Radical feminist is a term still current but perhaps more in use in the 1960s and 1970s. Radical feminism tends to be universalizing rather than to focus upon the socially, culturally and historically specific characteristics of patriarchy, although to this it needs to be added that radical feminists have led important campaigns against specific forms of oppression. This group views the oppression

of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture and economic class. This is a movement intend on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions. This, Radical feminism, also questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it question when men adopt certain other roles based on theirs. It attempt to draw line between biologically determined behavior and culturally determined behaviors in order to be free both men and women as much as possible their previous narrow gender roles. It is in insistence upon the fundamental and all embracing significance of gender differentiation that radical feminism's radicalness is normally taken to consist along with a rejection of most or all form of collaboration with men or with organizations containing men. Radical feminism is often associated with a commitment to lesbianism. Radical feminist celebrate woman's biological attributes as source of superiority rather than inferiority.

Kate Millet used the term 'Patriarchy' to describe the cause of women's oppression. She says that 'patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male'. Radical feminism recognizes the oppression of woman as a fundamental political oppression wherein woman are categorized as an inferior class based upon their sex. It is the aim of radical feminism to organize politically to destroy this sex class system.

In patriarchy, women are projected as the 'other' subordinate being. Men perceive themselves as self and women as other. Men assume that they (male) are the defining and dominating 'subject' who represent humanity in general. This othering according to Beauvior mystifies woman's qualities and pushes her in to isolation. The categories with which men think of the world are established from

their point of view as absolute. In her celebrated book *The Second Sex* Beauvoir states, "thus, humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (XVIII). Men defer women as relative being. They treat women like their object or property. It is taken for granted everywhere women as men can have no right and privilege.

One of the most recurring and highly thought of statement of those women and men, who are barging their heads against patriarchal wall, is "ONE is not born but rather becomes, a woman" (295). Beauvoir describes female according to this patriarchal mentality as "intermediate between male and eunuch, which described as feminine" (295). Beauvoir, on the other hand, insists the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object or 'other', to man as the defining and dominating 'Subject' who is assumed to present humanity in general (Abrams 234). Beauvoir argues that one is not born, but rather becomes women. It is civilization as whole that produces the creature which is described as feminine. She also attacks the patriarchal myths of women presuming the female essence prior to individual in the work of many male writers.

Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their own: British Women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is a prominent master piece of the theoretical work on feminism. It describes the female tradition in the English novels from Bronte onwards as development of subculture by arguing that since women in general constitute a kind of subculture within the framework of a larger society, their work would demonstrate a unity of values, conventions experiences, and behaviors encroaching on each individual. Showalter divides feminist criticism into two distinct modes. The first mode is ideological which she terms 'feminist critique'. It

is concerned with the feminist as reader and it offers feminist reading of text which considers the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the exclusion and misconceptions about women in criticism, according to Showalter, is the study of women as writers. She calls it 'gynocritics' and provides the subjects, "the history, styles, theme, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psycho-dynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individuals or collective female career; and the devolution and laws of a female literary tradition"(248). Showalter, likewise in her analysis of historical development of feminisms present three important stages of women writing: feminine feminist and female. First it the female imitation of mainstream (male) literature tradition dated from 1840 to 1880 and it includes the writers like George Eliot and Bronte Sister. The second is the protest against the standards of this dominant tradition concerning social values and rights. It is dated from 1880 to 1920 and it includes the writers like Elizabeth Gaskell and Oliver Schveiner. The third state is self-discovery which aims at search for independent identity. It is dated from 1920 onward and it includes the writers like Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf.

Patriarchy is an embodiment of the masculinist ideal. The masculinist society has perceived men to be the only fully and primarily human creatures where they regard women as secondary creatures. Masculinity manhood is symbolized by the astrological symbol which represents Mars, the ancient god of war. In this regard, Mark Feigen Fastean, a lawyer and feminist says,

Men are brought up the idea that there ought to be some part of them, under control until released by necessity that thrives on violence. This capacity, even affinity, for violence, lurking beneath

the surface of every real man, is supposed to represent the primal, untamed because of masculinity (47).

In the patriarchal society women have two identities, if she accepts the traditional gender role and obey the patriarchal norms, she is 'good' woman, if she doesn't, she is 'bad' women. These two attributes identified women as 'Angle' and 'Bitch'. According to patriarchal ideology, 'bad' women violate patriarchal sexual norms in some ways; sexually boisterous in appearance or they commit promiscuity.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their essay, *The Madwomen In The Attic*, argued that women writers have achieved a distinctive voice by subverting the patriarchal literary norms and values. The female stereotypes of 'angle' and 'monster' (madwoman) are simultaneously accepted and deconstructed. They tend to limit women writers freedom by constructing them as exceptionally articulate victims of patriarchal engendered plot.

Patriarchal ideology has always shamelessly dared to define women as the naturally inferior sex, and to prove this point they are trying to naturalize the socialization from the very moment any baby girl came into existence.

'Tradition', one of such weapons, forwarded by the patriarchal norms and values, is often used to define the resistance of women towards any injustice against them as sinful act and to make women themselves believe that it is happening the way it has to be. Tradition is nothing but the way of creating the hegemonic domination over women and to justify it arrogantly. Traditions such as "dowry, polygamy, that in fact control the uses of the female body are mystified as social custom with the

weight of ancient, at times, scriptural authority" (390). We've also got the present of killing or persecuting women in the name of witch and the past of "sati (widow immolation)" (381). This system of physically burning alive (with husband's pyre) is, of course, no more alive, but that single woman is burnt alive emotionally and psychologically every moment, her entire life. She is not allowed to remarry and has to live her entire life in white mourning dress or if more, then other kind of dull colored clothing. We still have the sati system alive, though in different manner, but with the same degree of suffering.

Some writers and critics have shown their interest in gender issues and have partially contributed to degenderization process philosophers from Plato. Plato labeled women as grade three citizens quite matters in that needed deep contemplation. Aristotle declared that female was female by virtue of certain lack of qualities. So, he considered women to be an unfinished man. This stands as a dehumanizing and demoralizing tendency of a philosopher like him. He said that the rational soul is not present at all in a slave, in female it is imperative, and in a child underdeveloped. This statement has demonstrated that prominent philosopher like him blundered in reasoning owing to his prejudices towards male centrism. St. Thomas Aquinas thought women to be an imperfect man. He said that form was masculine and matter feminine. Rousseau considered that women should be educated to please and complement men. Bible is one of the most discriminating holy books that woman is described as to have been created from rib of man. This description has pushed women into a degenerate and subordinate position.

Similarly, in the non-western cultures and myths, women have been marginalized and given a lower status. Laxmi, the wife of lord Vishnu, Parvati, the

wife of lord Shiva are seen sitting at the feet of their husbands always dedicated to carryout their orders and serve them without their own interest. They are appended to their husband's existence. Sita is stereotypically portrayed as a faithful and devoted wife of lord Rama. She moves into wilderness with her husband and continues to suffer a lot and becomes victimized by another male Ravana. The sacrifice of her personal existence and identity is what is decoded as an embodiment of Hindu women.

Issue of Identity: Search for Female Identity

Identity has been the central question for human beings in their effort to make sense of the world. Only after knowing oneself can one think of knowing others. Central to providing a meaningful answer to the question of identity is a reference to one's social system. Among the various types of identities, the gender identity is the most crucial one.

It is believed that the emancipation of women and searching of their identity have started from the nineteenth century onwards, which is vividly stated in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, when Helmer says, "Before all else you're a wife and mother." Nora says, "I don't believe in that anymore. I believe that, before all else I'm a human being, no less than you - or anyway, I ought to try to become one. I know the majority thinks you're right...But I can't go on believing what majority says" (472). So, the voice of Nora is the voice that has been raised by the women of the nineteenth century for liberation and salvation from the patriarchal norms and values, and search for their own self and identity.

As the time changes from nineteenth to the twentieth century, women were faced with two very different images, called 'True Woman' and 'New Woman', to which they were expected to conform. The 'True Woman' represented the ideal woman, a domestic wife and mother who found her identity and voice through her husband. The 'New Woman' symbolized an independent woman and self-supporting woman, uninterested in domestic life or family, reflecting her belief in the importance of a woman developing her own identity and voice.

In this postcolonial scenario, when the world is highly ruled by the concept and practice of globalization, women (especially from one directly or indirectly colonized land) who are migrated abroad after marriage, face double alienation. On the one hand, she has to be a traditionally 'good wife' and 'good daughter-in-law' to satisfy in laws' needs and expectations. And in contrast, she has to adopt westernization to fit in the outside world. Both places are the ones she is not used to adjusting with, and that's not all, but also she has to impress these both to create some space for her living. But this place could only be a 'fake space'. The place, where one has to act, one has to be somebody else, can never be a real space. Both of them are her "alien homes" (388). Everythin she does that contrast with the western values will be viewed as barbaric ones. She is confused between the meaning of the modernizatin and westernization.

It's often supposed that woman's ability of adjusting and converting according to any new atmosphere is higher than man, and she is trained to take this flexibility as matter of pride. She is expected to have fine-turning wih any environment, because she has no exact place to claim as her own; has to adopt with any identity because her only identity is expected to be her fluid personality with

no autonomous self, no agency. Beauvoir says "...women are always trying to converse, to adapt, to arrange, rather than to destroy and build a new; they prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution" (613). Her 'self' or 'ego' should not revolt and has to adjust, because that's the only option, she is recommended, left for her to keep living. That's why, though usually unexpressed explicitly, female body has been in exile at all times, far and wide.

Indian feminist scholars and activists have to struggle to carve a separate identity for feminism in India. They define feminism in time and space in order to avoid the uncritically following Western ideas. Indian women negotiate survival through an array of oppressive patriarchal family structures: age, ordinal status, relationship to men through family of origin, marriage and procreation as well as patriarchal attributes dowry, siring sons, kinship, caste, community, village, market and the state. It should however be noted that several communities in India, such as the Nairs of Kerala, certain Maratha clans, and Bengali families exhibit matriarchal tendencies, with the head of the family being the oldest women rather than the oldest man. Sikh culture is also regarded as relatively gender-neutral. The heterogeneity of Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies and so also are there multiple feminisms. Hence feminism in India is not a singular theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women and women as a group.

Gender has been a central 'issue' in India since the colonial encounter. An overwhelming preoccupation with the "woman's question" arose from the 19th century social reform movement, crucially informed anti-colonial nationalism, and

remains a point of crisis in India's cultural, social, and political space. The recognition of gender as an issue forms the basis for India's women's movement.

For Uma Shankar Jha, most educational system play the role in the production of disparities which exist within the society. She also poses the question of the position of women in the patriarchal society. Man's role in the occupational structure is the major one in the maintenance of the household. Man provides economic support to the house, whereas woman has to maintain household works.

She writes:

This pattern of moral construction continues throughout the book. Desirable moral traits for boys include being content with life, generosity, not being prone to anger and cruelty, knowing one's limits, being God fearing and charitable, honesty, and pursuit of sciences and education. For girls, they include tidiness, being obedient to one's mother, not hiding anything from one's parents, lack of arrogance, hard work, and learning womanly crafts.(98)

The way women are treated and psychological complexities inherent in them are basically concerned with the cultural system existing in the society. Women's condition and development are determined by the cultural forces, as the cultural theory includes not only race, class, history and nationality but also gender as significant literary determinant.

The above discussed issues raised in the theoretical books of noted feminist critics and writers have propagated enough arguments and ideas to clarify the causes behind women's suffering, women's consciousness shaped both in eastern and western society and justify the women's united revolt against patriarchal

society in Bharati Mukerjee's novel *Desirable Daughters*. They have also created certain perspectives to observe, scrutinize and analyze the novel meticulously and scrupulously and to understand the writer's feministic intention in her book.

III. Tara Lata's Search for Her Identity:

In *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee has described the individual self which is trapped in between the American as well as the Indian society. The narrator, Tara moves back and forth between America and India both at the psychological and physical level. The novel traces the life of the three Brahmin daughters, Tara, Padma and Pravati all eager to make an identity of their own in very tiresome and complex socio-cultural situations. Tara, the youngest of them rebels against socio-cultural setup and moves to carve out a unique identity of her own.

In order to assert her femininity and reconstruct and redefine her identity, Tara leaves her husband, Bish for an independent life of her own. She gets divorced from a millionaire husband, Bish. She lives independently with her son, Rabindra, and freely sleeps with Andy, her carpenter as well as with friend of her ex-husband. In short, unlike her ancestress, she enjoys complete social, financial, and sexual freedom.

As a whole the novel presents the female identity on the repressive society of America and India. In an interview with Suzanne Ruta, Bharati Mukherjee says:

Quite a lot of arranged weddings are really for green cards or the bridal dowry money which the husband needs to go abroad [...] The wife takes a long time to be sent because of the visa regulations.

The traditional arranged marriages are still going strong, not through a matchmaker in the old way anymore, but over the Internet. The photos are down loaded, and little histories, and you e-mail, talk by e-mail, and both parties feel modern, but you don't get

together too often before you're having to make up your mind. The women brought up here, Hindu American women--Muslims are a slightly different story, because they're not allowed quite as much freedom--are the ones worst off for arranged marriage, because the parents of the boys and the boys themselves want to go back to India and get a certified virgin. (1)

The narrative begins with the mythic marriage ceremony of Tara Lata Gangooly, a child bride, whose bridegroom dies of a snakebite even though the proper worship and rituals for the snake goddess have been made; the bridegroom's greedy family demand the dowry anyway, because they claim that the boy died due to a curse and that the bride was a "home-destroying, misfortune showing daughter" (10). The father, Jai Krishana Gangooly, who is a Hindu and who believes that an unmarried daughter will not attain Nirvana and might be reborn as a woman, saves her from that fate by marrying her to a tree. She is now a married woman just like her two older sisters. She goes on to live for seventy years and gradually changes the world by becoming a freedom fighter. Tara is recently divorced from Bishwapriya Chatterjee, a millionaire software tycoon, and is living with her white American lover, Andy, who is an ex-hippie, and follows Buddhism. She is raising her fifteen years old gay son, Tara is still friends with Bish, and the cause of the divorce seems to be fairly simple; Bish is a typical Hindu man, a householder who performs his *dharma* well. The *dharma* of the householder involves paying off the debts to one's ancestors which are discharged by marrying and having children. A debt to the gods to that is discharged by the household rituals and sacrifices; and a debt to the teacher that is discharged by appropriately

teaching one's wife or children. Tara needs someone who is less serious and dutiful; she needs "Andy, good old 'boys-just -want-to-have-fun' Andras Karolyi," her "balding, red-bearded, former biker, former bad-boy, Hungarian Buddhist contractor/yoga instructor [...] [her] carpenter"(25), who got her with a "backrub," and who, even though a committed Buddhist, has "never taken a deep interest in [Tara's] Indian life" (46-47). She explains,

"Love" is slippery word when both partners bring their own definition. Love, to Bish, is the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities, earning professional respect, and being recognized for hard work and honesty. Love is indistinguishable from status and honors. I can't imagine my carpenter, Andy, bringing anything more complicated to it than, say, "fun." Love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than with anyone else, over a longer haul.

(27)

Here, too, Mukherjee falls into reductive and easy binaries regarding love vs. arranged marriage, duty vs. *dharma*, liberated fun sexuality vs. sexual oppression and couches them in the inherited rhetoric of emancipation constructed by the elite in India during the nationalist era.

Mukherjee portrays through these three moving and identity-shifting characters who have "partial affiliation disinterested identities, tactical belongings". (.....) The novel is not just an idyllic tale of the three desirable daughters but it is a complex transnational narrative commenting on the intricate and enigmatic process of growing up and of the feminist struggle of these three

sisters. Their fascinating childhood reminiscences are fit together easily with dramatic scenes from Indian history:

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 lace dye, her hair oiled and set. Childish voices chant a song, hands clap, gold bracelets tinkle[...]. A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness.(4)

It gives the actual glimpse of traditional marriage system, where there bride is in her own marriage custom. The writer presents her female awareness and comments over the marriage system as "life time imprisonment where a Bengali girl is going to sacrifice her all freedom. Further, Mukherjee comments over the patriarchal society which is unjust, cruel and religion.

The title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* has taken in a rather ironical sense. In Hindu societies specially in the over protected patriarchal families daughters are not at all desirable for they forbid only trouble. In fact a mother who brings forth only daughters is looked down upon and considered an unlucky woman. Daughters are taken as burden to family where as in traditional Hindu family son is taken as the means to the heaven. So the title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* is ironical. In patriarchal society Daughters are always undesirable. So, Mukherjee by giving the title *Desirable Daughters*, wants to make irony to the patriarchy, where only sons are desirable not the daughters.

Each of the three Bhattacharjee daughters is named after goddess. Tara shares her name with the revered Tara Lata, a women of an earlier era whose arranged marriage as a five-years old child was nullified by the cobra goddess, Manasha, who fatally bit the child bride's intended bridegroom on the eve of the wedding ceremony. Tara Lata instead married to a 'Tree'. Mukherjee comments on the fate of Tara Lata, "it seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her"(4).

The novel *Desirable Daughters*, opens with the story of Tara Lata, the "Tree wife" who is the narrator of the novel. The first chapter of the book written in italics gives the description of five years old Tara's wedding to a 'Tree' after her thirteen years old bridegroom dies of snake bite.

Mukherjee presents the role and position of the Indian women in Hindu patriarchal society;

His two older daughters, seven and nine, were successfully married and would soon be moving to their husbands' houses and living as wives, then as mothers. They were placid and obedient daughters who would make loving and obedient wives. Tara Lata, his favourite, would be no exception.10)

Here, Mukherjee comments over the women's miserable social and family position. In Hindu Patriarchal society daughter or daughter-in-laws are expected to be "obedient daughters" and "loving and obedient wives".

In patriarchal Hindu society, a woman whose husband dies before her, is taken as the ill-fated woman. In ancient time in India and Nepal women were burn

alive on the husband's pyre which is called the "Sati" system. But now too there is the remaining of it but in other form. "Your happiness-wrecking daughter", Surendranath affected the dazed calm of a man beyond grief and outrage. "May she die as horrible a death." "Better a barren womb that produces such a luckless female!" someone shouted behind Jai Krishna (11).

The above lines give the very glimpse of Indian society. When the bridegroom dies of snake bite on wedding day. Surendranath, father of bridegrooms says that the cause of the death of bridegroom is the innocent Tara and curses her with bad words. Surendranath is the one of the representative of patriarchal Bengali society who blames Tara without mistake of her.

Surendranath Lahiri holding the body of his son in his arm says, "You will arrange posthaste for the dowry cash and the dowry gifts to be brought on board, Jai Krishna babu. What you do with wretched girl, the killer of my son, I make your business" (13).

The above statement shows the picture of the dowry system which is prevalent in India in a large scale. In India still in some society bride is burn alive on fire in the name of dowry. In some races the bride's father has to pay the whole expenditure of the bridegroom's study expenses. Here, too Surendranath, father of bridegroom though his son has died still he is asking the dowry from bride's father. It shows the prevalent practice of dowry in India which is deep rooted system of Indian culture.

The bride's father, Jaikrishna says:

"The marriage didn't take place," he said, his voice lawyerly, loud, authoritative. "Therefore, there is no question of dowry giving."

[...] I will see my daughter married to a crocodile, to a tree, before you get a single pice! I give dowry only to one who does not demand it. There will be a wedding tonight, the auspicious hour will be honored.(14)

Jaikrishna's voice is the revolt against the patriarchy. He is determined not to give dowry because the marriage couldn't take place. And to get rid of the patriarchal society calling his daughter ill-fated women, he arranges the marriage with a 'Tree' in the forest. This is the radical step Jaikrishana has taken against patriarchal society.

Tara grew up among Bengali family. She was married to an Indian computer designer, Bishwapriya Chatterje (Bish). After marriage Bish took her to California. In due course, she gets a divorce and walks away from Bish. She lives independently with her son, Rabindra. From a traditional perspective, Tara, herself, has done the unthinkable i.e. divorced her husband and there is no language to express "Why a young woman with everything she could ever want would decide to leave her protector and provider"(66). Tara remembers her early marriage days with Bish. As traditional women she thinks her parents of choosing an absolute person for her who carried her to Sanfrancisco. She says:

When Bish and I first arrived at Stanford as a young married couple, he wanted me to work in the library, then join him (though, like most Bengali women, I didn't drink liquor, beer, or wine) at the student pub. This is the life I've been waiting for , I thought, the liberating promise of marriage and travel and the wider world. Bless Daddy and Mummy, they found me the only man in the world who

could transport me from the enchanted garden of Ballygunge of Stanford University in the early 1980's, which has to count as one of the intellectual wonders of the modern world.(81)

But some time later Tara who had embraced the freedom of American life begins to feel a lack of independence due to her Hindu husband's notion that woman should not work. Tara says:

It was because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. I wanted to drive, but where would I go? I wanted to work, but would people think Bish Chatterjee couldn't support his wife? In his Atherton years, as he became better known on the American scene a player, an adviser, a pundit-he also became, at home more to a traditional Indian. He was spending fifteen hours a day in the office sometimes longer (82).

In order to assert her femininity and reconstruct and redefine her identity, Tara leaves her husband for a life of her own, chooses a school for her son which is "slanted to the arts"(153). And even takes the bold step of sharing her house with her lover Andy. Tara Chatterjee, the protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* currently living in America, divorces Biswapriya Chatterjee- "who was, and probably still is, wealthy beyond counting or caring" (32) -and was educated, like Mukherjee herself at Loreto House, a prestigious convent school run by Irish nuns. From Tara Banerjee (*The Tiger's Daughter*) to Dimple (*Wife*) to Jasmine (*Jasmine*) to Tara Chaterjee (*Desirable Daughters*), we see a slow transformation of the female characters who negotiate their identities in the New World, and although this

transformation is not without violence or loss in which one self seems to annihilate another, it is still seen as liberator.

After Tara left Bish unlike her ancestress she lives independent and enjoys complete social, financial and sexual freedom. She lives independently with her son, Rabindra and freely sleeps with Andy, her carpenter, as well as with friends of her ex-husband. Tara says:

Andy carried me to bed ("While I still can," he laughed, as weak and rubbery as Andy ever gets), and there we made love worthy of the setting [...] When intimacy first stuck me as inevitable between Andy and me (long before it occurred to him, he said), I was intrigued and just a little anxious about his size [...] We were exotics interpreted my fear as shyness. He was not my first American lover, red-bearded, woolly armed, hairy-chested, gently spoken but, I was sure, given to violence.(76-77)

The catalyst for the narrator's action is the arrival of a young man named Christopher Dey in San Francisco who destroys Tara's safe and comfortable life. However, Tara discovers that Padma might have had a secret love affair in India with Ronald Dey, a Christian Bengali. She is suddenly confronted with the reality of her "nephew," Chris Dey, when he appears from India, ostensibly looking for his mother, Padma. She visualizes her sister's affair in India as liberating, for she exclaims, "Passion like Didi's is foreign in our family; recklessness unknown. She is our *true American*, our improviser [...]" She continues, "Something marked Didi as different" (31), and, of course, the difference is "genetic," Because she had always been marked as different, and therefore American, Padma now lives the

Diva lifestyle in New Jersey as a "fag hag" and is famous in the Indian enclave as a television star. However, she commodifies Indianness and is more Indian than the Indians in India. Tara states, "In San Francisco, I barely knew any Indians" (181). Both the sisters use the idea of Indianness for different purposes, one to "sell" it and one to reject it.

"Love" in my childhood and adolescence was indistinguishable from duty and obedience. Our bodies changed, but our behavior never did. Rebellion sounded like a lot of fun, but in Calcutta there was nothing to rebel against. Where would it get you ? My life was a long childhood until I was thrown into marriage men lay within a narrow, caste-bound zone of contention. In the third-largest population in the world, even a narrow ranted is not a constricted choice.(29)

The narrator compares the lifestyles of her two sisters, who seem to be living ordinary lives as opposed to Tara's American life. Of her two sisters, Parvati lives in India in a very traditional household even though she had a love marriage; she had fallen in love with an Indian student while studying in America. The eldest sister, Padma, who lives in New Jersey, is married to a Harish Mehata, an "American". According to the narrator, as like Padma, "he'd bolted out all that was inconvenient or didn't fit"(183). Padma, according to the narrator, "had been the 'new girl' [in India] and our father had destroyed the opportunity" (179), the opportunity to be liberated and Westernized.

However, this community can apparently remake itself in the west. She states that she belongs to an elite minority group and accepts that she is blessed. In

her earlier novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* Mukherjee shows the same community as being tradition bound, fixed and oppressive, so how is *Desirable Daughters* different from her earlier texts? How is she redefining the passive and fixed India? She seems to be gesturing towards the essentialized core of Indianness that one is inextricably tied to.

What about the Indian communities of the New World that she had demonized as living in ethnic ghettos in *Jasmine and Wife*? In *Desirable Daughters*, we see the author making an attempt to resurrect the age, particularly of the Bengali community, as well as the feminized Indian manhood of her earlier texts.

Lets examine her most recent novel a little more closely. The protagonist of *Desirable Daughters*, too is named Tara, and we see many more specific autobiographical elements in her novel. Tara's ancestors are from the upper class Brahmin community, the "Bhadra lok" and she is a descendant of a, "Bhadra mahila", an educated and genteel Bengali woman; this community was one of the first communities in India to be "civilized"(7). Mukherjee suddenly seems to become aware of the debate and discussion that has been rising in academia regarding the position of the "Bhadra lok" and especially the "Bhadra mahilla" during colonial rule in India.

In her earlier novels, the protagonists long for sexual liberation and freedom; indeed, Tara Chatterjee of *Desirable Daughters*, too desires and celebrates the sexual exuberance of the Americans, yet at the same time, for the first time, Mukherjee seems to valorize the Indian arranged marriage system, in her own conflicted way. The narrator of *Desirable Daughters* continues,

Bish is generous and protective [even as a divorced man]; he has more than enough to provide. Indian men, whatever their faults, are programmed to provided for, stupendously provided for inside the gated community, endlessly on display at dinners and openings, I would have stayed in Altherto.(27)

But, of course, she chooses liberation, represented by love and sexual freedom.

Mukherjee simply rejects the past for autonomy and liberation in her earlier novels, by reaching out to the West and Western ideals. However, in *Desirable Daughters*, she seems to return full circle to her India of the old Bengal with its superstitions and caste-bound traditions. Tara states:

I realized the futility of questioning fate, or blind random chance, or character. If Didi [Padma] had married, would she have stayed in Calcutta? If she had acted, would she have risen to diva status? Something else, equally calamitous would have happened on the same date, at the same minute. Perhaps an earthquake, a plane crash, an automobile accident. Who are we to question God?(303)

Tara Lata says, "The Atherton wives treated me as a 'pariah'. I didn't belong in India or in the Silicon Valley Smug Indian Wives' group anymore" (109). In a passionate attempt to find her position and female identity in American culture she gets divorce from her traditional husband and starts to live with Andy, a live in lover. She starts to teach in kindergarten school. She becomes independent and capable of making her own decisions and openly flaunts her sexuality under the guise of liberation. She becomes a new woman and leads a very free, exiting life. Tara seems trapped between two cultures "drifting between two lives"(146). Her

position is questioned. Her social and at the same time psychological isolation from the both so-called "host" society and other Indian immigrants.

Tara's Exploration of Self

Tara's self is not stable from the very beginning to the end of the novel. She says her family "were not effete and artistic- we were traditional Hindus, very orthodox Bengali Brahmins despite Daddy's occasional peg of scotch"(180). There was no rebellion, no seeking after her individual self; it was all confined inseparably to her family.

At nineteen she dutifully entered an arranged marriage. Tara submits, "I married a man I had never met whose picture and biography and bloodlines I approved because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on market"(79). Tara quietly accepts the person who is unknown to her. She accepts what her father says and agrees to marry. It depicts the miserable condition of women in the patriarchal Bengali society where women's voice and desires are not listened. There was lack of romance and freedom in her marriage though she hopes that her marriage and her journey to the United States gives her liberation. She says:

This is the life I've been waiting for, I thought, the liberating promise of marriage and the travel and the wider world. Bless Daddy and Mummy, they found me the only man in the world who could transport me from the enchanted garden of Ballygunge to Stanford University in the early 1980's, which has to count as one of the intellectual wonders of the modern world.(81)

After the arrival to the United States with her husband, she starts the process of acculturation that leads to partial adaptation and adjustment. As Bish becomes rich and she bears her only son, Rabi, she starts to feel confined to house only. She starts to feel jealous to the freedom and independence of other young Indian wife like Meena Melwani with "children in playschool"(82). Meena had "a car and no domestic resistance to using it"(82). Like Meena, she is fascinated to American magazines that encourage her. She narrates:

Those magazines encourages women to talk over their problem, to share their disappointments, to experiment with hair color, sexual positions, pointlessly meaningless one-night stands [...] . In America, it seemed to us, every woman was expected to create her own scandal, be center of her own tangled love nest. (83)

Tara reading newspapers and magazines understands the American way of freedom. She also realizes that she is confined within household activities only. So, reading makes her self aware and seeks her rights and freedom.

Tara, a good wife living in a gated community has a successful husband and personal happiness. She starts to ask herself "what do I want out of life?" Tara ruminates on the path she has taken:

By twenty-two I had satisfied all my ancestral duties. I was married; I had a son, material comfort, and an admired husband-what else is there? Eight years later, feeling myself a privileged prisoner inside the gated community, I listened to all the voices yammering around me and all the stories on television and in the magazines and did the right California thing and struck out on my own. (77)

She finds her self totally mingled in the self of her patriarchal Hindu husband. In discovering and fully experiencing the pleasure of art, sensuality, sexuality and solitude, she discovers a sense of self separate from patriarchal demands. Her awareness of self is kindled in her heart and she starts searching for her position in the world. She questions herself, "You looking for a life outside of the gated community? You are looking for respect, for a life apart from your husband's identity?" (200). She finds that her expectation of fulfilling her longing for a free self in the company of Bish is impossible. So, she gets divorce and migrates to San Francisco with her son. By doing so, she tries to create her new self with certain power and space of her own. She expects to be guided and ruled by herself in her new constructed identity.

Debora Mason in *New York Times* says, "Tara stepped in a world in which the traditional wellsprings of family and ethnic origin become so diluted that they make no claim on her at all and leave nothing to rebel against" (Mason 1). She starts teaching in kindergarten and living with a lover unthinkable in her Indian culture. She, "a divorced Indian lady combines every fantasy about liberated, wicked Western women with safety net of basic submissive familiarity" (188). Her Padma Didi condemns her going through with her divorce. According to Padma, she "had become American and self engrossed" (134).

When she lives with her totally American self, complications arise. She narrates, "just when I thought I had lost all my old self-protectiveness and was looking out on the world with trust, just when I thought I was adjusting so well to being a California Girl" (63). Her comfortable life ends with the arrival of a young man claiming to be her nephew. The quest of information about the man leads her

to the journey of self-discovery. Though Rabi seems to be aware of colonial absurdities, she finds herself "clueless about colonial absurdities" (61). She later finds herself wrong. She directly addressing to the reader, comments on herself:

I have done something here for which I should apologize. I have structured a surprise event in such way that it will seem to you obvious and inevitable. You will wonder how we missed it and I might not be able to communicate the shock, the bolt of lightning that sent me to Bangladesh last year, that set me to writing this book, and started everything else in motion.(31)

This is not only the price she has to pay for her free self assertion, her live-in lover leaves her and her house is bombed. In the bombing, her ex-husband becomes so badly wounded that he cannot walk. She feels herself totally responsible for all these misfortunes and says, "My complications are mine, and my messes are of my making" (184). She confesses, "Out of structure, Bish created greater order, out of order I created chaos" (155).

Her attempt to be assimilated in new western metropolitan culture never becomes possible because her upbringing was in Brahmin family and Hindu patriarchal society, so her psychological mind set up cannot accept the freedom seeking society i.e. Western society. She realizes that without Bish, there is no meaning in her life. Otherwise she should find herself in the category of divorced wife, deserted, beloved and single mother who have nowhere to go.

Thus, in Tara's life she confronts with many ups and downs while searching her self. She cannot totally assimilate with any culture. The more she tries to assimilate the more she feels rootless and homeless. For her all ups and

downs of her life seems miracle. She says to Rabi, "Remember this, it's a miracle" (310).

Tara's New Self

The protagonist of the novel, is from traditional Brahmin family. She gets English education from convent school. In the process of acculturation¹ and assimilation², she becomes aware of her self which she finds totally confined in the self of patriarchal Hindu husband. Her self awareness makes her to search her position in the world. In a passionate attempt to find her position and identity in American culture, she gets divorced from her traditional husband and starts to live with Andy, her lover. She feels comfortable like a California Girl with her American self. Her comfortable life ended with the arrival of a young man claiming to be her nephew. The quest of information about the man becomes her own quest of self-discovery.

Tara also becomes quite confused because of her cross-cultural civilization passage she has undertaken. As much as she attempts to be modern like American one, she seems in memory of her past culture and constantly becomes aware of being different. Her position remains in the void of "no-man's land". She longs for a sense of belongingness but it becomes a mirage.

She says, "I have lost my Indian radar" (71). She suffers from dislocation, placelessness, fragmentation and loss of identity. Throughout the novel, Tara's selfhood is in flux. She questions herself, "Who I was?" and answers, "I could have been anyone looking into a mirror and being returned a vision" (205). She herself

¹ assimilate to different culture

² adaptation to different culuture

cannot conclude where her self remains. No one can say whether she is the daughter of Bhattacharjee family of Ballygunge Park Road, or an independent lady. Her personal identity is split.

A man cannot exist without a proper identity. Identity gives meaning to one's life. If one's identity is in flux, existence is also in flux, uncertainty and critical turn. Such is the situation of Tara in the novel. She thinks herself "thrown into the middle of modern enigma" (26). Since she has already left her original culture and failed to adopt a new one, she feels displaced and encounters the lack of identity. She tries to impose order in her life and thereby, reconstruct her identity. She returns to India with Rabi like a sannyasain, she loses interest in the worldly pleasure, and desires.

Thus, in the novel, the protagonist wanders for her identity. She has already left her Indian cultures and failed to adopt in the new American society.

IV. Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*, which basically deals with the issue of female identity. Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*' protagonist, who makes her grand quest for her female identity moving from one society to another i.e. from India to America. In course of her quest journey, she suffers a lot.

The title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* has taken an ironical sense. In Hindu societies especially in the over protected patriarchal families daughters are not at all desirable, they only bring trouble. In fact, a mother who brings forth only daughters is looked down and considered unlucky. Daughters are taken as burden to family whereas in traditional Hindu family, son is taken as the means to the heaven. So the title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* is ironical. In patriarchal society, Daughters are always undesirable.

Tara, as a representative character of all the females of Indian society, whose identity bogs on the patriarchal norms and values. Because her upbringing was in patriarchal society. In India her female self cannot fully bloom in patriarchal society.

In order to assert her femininity and reconstruct her identity, Tara leaves her husband, Bish for an independent life of her own. She gets divorced from a millionaire husband. She lives independently with her son, Rabindra, and freely sleeps with Andy, her carpenter as well as with friend of her ex-husband. In short, unlike her ancestress, she enjoys complete social, financial, and sexual freedom.

Desirable Daughters depicts the problem of female identity which is always in crisis be it Indian Hindu patriarchy society or western American society.

Mukherjee presents striking portrait of three sisters living in two worlds, the traditional Brahmin society of upper class in Calcutta where they were born, and secular world of modern west they moved to as adults. The two sisters are remarkable women but they lead largely unexamined lives. Tara, the youngest of them, is examining her life as she lives it, and is planning to write book, which is going to be about the making of consciousness. The first chapter of the book written in italics gives description of five years old Tara's wedding to a 'Tree' after her thirteen years old bridegroom died of snake bite. Jaikrishna took his daughter, Tara into deep forest and married her to a tree, and thus Tara became known as "Tree-Bride".

Tara grew up among Bengali family. She was married to an Indian computer designer, Bishwapriya Chatterje (Bish). After marriage Bish took her to California. In due course, she gets a divorce and walks away from Bish. She lives independently with her son, Rabindra. In her earlier marriage days, she thinks that her parents choose an absolute person for her.

In order to assert her femininity and reconstruct and redefine her identity, Tara leaves her husband for a life of her own, chooses a school for her son and even takes the bold step of sharing her house with her lover Andy. Tara Chatterjee, the protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* currently living in America, divorces Biswapriya Chatterjee. From Tara Banerjee, female characters who negotiate their identities in the New World, and although this transformation is not without violence or loss in which one self seems to annihilate another, it is still seen as liberator.

Tara moves to America, she tries to create a new self i.e. female identity, but she finally returns to India. Tara cannot get her stable identity. Her identity is fluctuating, it didn't get chance to bloom. Her return to India shows the problem with her identity. She even cannot find her self in America. As a surrender she returns back to patriarchal society, India. Tara is guided by the patriarchal norms and values because of her upbringing. She can't get out of her consciousness which was set in her childhood. Thus, Tara's quest for female self and female identity falls on crisis.

Tara should have stayed in America. Her earlier activities show her as radical feminist but her later activity presents her as cowardice, who surrenders upon patriarchy. Thus, from beginning to the end, Tara's self is unstable and she can't get her real female self, the cause of this is the patriarchal norms and values which has deep rooted upon her psyche. Hence, Tara's identity in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Desirable Daughters* is in problem.

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