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FEMININE SENSIBILITY IN THE NOVEL 'DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS' BY  
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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on sensibility exploration of women characters in the novel of Bharati Mukherjee, *Desirable Daughters*. Feminine sensibility required women to show various qualities in their behaviour such as modesty, piety and obedient, which highlight the moral standard for women. This is a story of such a woman character that is flipped between two different cultural rooms to outlive. The novel also focuses on the attitude of three sisters and their techniques of handling with circumstances. Tara feels that her life after marriage is not going smoothly and she decides to walk out of her marital life. Tara is very much distress with her cultural displacement and fragmentation. In spite of her consent to accept and adopt new culture, she is unable to manage with the traditional mould of an Indian woman. Tara is a woman migrant who belongs to cosmopolitan world having wealth, brain and beauty an honoured life as the wife of a Silicon Valley entrepreneur. She belongs to more than one nation or culture. She has the experience to live among the people of different countries/cultures. Bharati Mukherjee's imagination of feminine sensibility lies in that edifying synthesis of promise and passion, quandary and preference, positivity and promiscuity. Bharati Mukherjee has been successful in highlighting the basics of feminine sensibility through her battered literary exploration of female characters. Thus, in *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee demonstrates the efforts to search identity of three sisters who face both modern as well as traditional worlds and their changing values.

**KEY WORDS:** Cultural Displacement, Feminine Sensibility, Imagination, Multicultural, Multiple Identities, Optimistic.

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PROLOGUE

Feminine sensibility describes women's capacity to be influenced by the men dominated society around them. It also directly relates their emotional abilities with their moral growth. It required women to show various qualities in their behaviour such as modesty, piety and obedient, which highlighted the moral standard for women.

Bharti Mukherjee's latest novel *Desirable Daughter* is an attempt of her longing for her home-land which seems as her key involvement in this novel. This is a story of such a woman character that is flipped

between two different cultural rooms to outlive. The novel is very near to the novels *Difficult Daughters* of Manju Kapoor and *Enslaved Daughter* of Sudhir Chandra which are an attempt of search for protagonist roots and identities. It is an extremely good mixture of imagination and historical facts of the novelist Bharati Mukherjee. The novel has definite the feminine stand that develops near understanding with the novelist and her emotional longing.

The novel *Desirable Daughters* is a story of the persons who have come to live permanently in a nation that is not their own. The novel focuses on the attitude of three sisters and their techniques of handling with circumstances. The title of the novel, *Desirable Daughters* suggests that one type of daughter, which parents would be proud of and for whom every parent would long for. The title is ironical, significant and relevant. It shows that manners and behaviour of daughters must be desirable because daughters are the object of family status, that is to say, in tune with the rules easy-going by the society and not deviant. The three sisters are grand-daughters of Jai Krishan Gangooli and the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharya belong to a traditional Brahmin family of Bengal. Name of three sisters imagined on the name of Hindu Goddess Shakti, i.e. Padma, Parvati and Tara. They are a combination of modern and traditional prospect. They try to adjust with the changed synopsis and this is the only thing a woman could do. Thus, the research article tries to explore the sensibility of women characters in the novel.

### CONSEQUENCES OF THE STUDY

In the novel, Bharati Mukherjee reveals the instant cultural negations which are required by the immigrants. Tara is very much distress with her cultural displacement and fragmentation. In spite of her consent to accept and adopt new culture, she is unable to manage with the traditional mould of an Indian woman. However, Tara, the protagonist in the novel is unable to adjust herself within the conventional gender role of a mother and wife. The traditional setting of Tara ensures her to reckon that "she isn't, perhaps never will be, modern women". Tara feels ripped between the double place and its culture that brings her nothing else than the scattered identity. She reminds the attractive mountain resorts of India in San Francisco. She is acutely aware of her cultural differences. Her home at San Francisco seems as a sad home. She says:

"I am not the only blue jeaned woman with Pashmina shawl around my shoulders and broken down running shoes on my feet. I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I am convinced. I don't belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don't want to belong." (*Desirable Daughters*, 79)

The creation of identity transpires as a regular process, forever converting and never truly total, in *Desirable Daughters*. Tara is a woman migrant who belongs to cosmopolitan world having wealth, brain and beauty an honoured life as the wife of a Silicon Valley entrepreneur. She emigrates after marrying Bish Chatterjee, and reaches in America submerged in Indian culture presenting the behaviour of the representative Indian wife. Back at home, she was surrounded with Indian tradition, culture and values though directed by the Catholic nuns during her education and she had led a secured life. Thus, Tara reckons the jolt between freedom and tradition as she tries to meet expectations that are often wildly conflicting, when she reaches America. But then she at once tries to embrace American culture taking benefit of the chances it strives and affords to assimilate as best as she can to the new culture. She is constantly aware of being different, yet how much ever she strives to amalgam in with the multicultural population of San Francisco. She finds it impossible to explain to American friends of comparatively classless, mobile society how static and classified Indian identity is:

"The dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case, confidently labelled by father's religion (Hindu), caste (Brahmin), sub-caste (Kulin), mother-tongue (Bengali), place of birth (Calcutta), formative region of ancestral origin (Mishtigunj, East Bengal)....." (*Desirable Daughters*, 78)

It goes on and on in ever diminishing circles. Tara is always on the active interpreting manners, names and emphasis whenever she meets strangers of Indian origin, although Bishwapriya Chatterjee and Tara had

left Calcutta decades ago. But Tara's frustration at her strives to assimilate and Bish's lack of it eventually guides to a divorce. It marks her liberated self and transition into a new identity. She understands the double standard for sex, the unjust difference between male and female sexuality in the Indian culture. She soon acknowledges that her sexuality is also a part of her identity, which she can possess and hold, after being faced up to the same men who had been courteous towards her during her marriage. She creates a new sexual identity that does not come in clash with her prior self-insights. They only get taken over from the new and different insight. In equivalent projection are the two men in her life who symbolize two branches out cultures and her cultural predicament. She is in the trap of identity crisis as she dwells between America and India.

In the hostile country Tara knows her restrictions – she knows how hard it is to come out of the grips of culture and tradition; she understands how impossible the pull of the past is; she feels the constraints of an uprooted self; she understands the circumstances and anxiety of an isolated self in an unfamiliar nation. She decides to stand up against a community who can never connect themselves to her situation. And, she has to forego that community that can relate but has lost meaning in her life. In search of success and to achieve her objective; she stands alone to oppose it. She fails to explain the height of her distress and the blessing of their individuality. She says;

"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". (*Desirable Daughters*, 34)

Tara belongs to the Indian Bengali Brahmin culture but she is multicultural. Tara stays on in America; she is an admirer and follower of American culture being an immigrant American. The twofold identity of Tara is always at crisscross junctures creating havoc in her personal life as an admirer and follower of both the cultures, Indian and American. Although Tara is so crucial about the Indian practices and customs such as dowry system, child marriage and the costume of more than one wife at the same time etc., she is also glad to be a part of the huge family, she says "We are Bengali Brahmins from Calcutta, and nothing can touch us." (*Desirable Daughters*, 44).

Tara is also influenced by Hungarian culture because she lives with a Hungarian carpenter. She belongs to more than one nation or culture. She has the experience to live among the people of different countries/cultures such as India, America, Hungary, Argentina and China.

Tara marries Bishwapriya Chatterjee, goes on arranged marriage. Tara feels that her life after marriage is not going smoothly and she decides to walk out of her marital life, a representative American divorce settlement follows. It shows that Tara is the admonisher, the extra-modern and the rebel, she believes in adjustment policy of life, therefore she takes Andy in her life after her falling out of marriage with Bishwapriya. Tara works in a pre-school as a volunteer. She enjoys with Andy of her love life. As a divorce settlement, she sends his son with his father. Tara returns to her father's house for comfort, finally. In America, being a Bengali immigrant, she feels the sorrow of her divorce and marriage, she says:

"When I left Bish after a decade of marriage, it was because the 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 that Bish Chatterjee couldn't support his wife?"

(*Desirable Daughters*, 82)

Tara says as an immigrant "I've lost the Indian radar" (*Desirable Daughters*, 118), "Now, my radar was down" (*Desirable Daughters*, 195). 'Radar' here highlights her Hindu virgin protection. During the entire novel she swings between American and Indian culture and identity. Eventually Tara turns back to homeland. It reflects her attachment with her homeland, and search for identity in her homeland which is lost by her migration to America. Tara, the protagonist says. "I finally yielded to that most American of impulses, or compulsions, a "roots search," (*Desirable Daughters* 17). Thus, the woman protagonist is affluent with her identity of America. However, she identifies with her Indian roots. She turns back into the past – she feels the various emotional moments spent with her great grandfather and her three sisters. The novel discusses the

truth that Indian expatriates are always aware of their reputation, ex-status in both cultures. Tara confesses that:

“If we’re unhappy, we’re expected to suck it up for the kids’ sake or our reputation. We worry what our parents will think, even when they’re halfway around the world and we’re middle aged adults.” (*Desirable Daughters*, 162)

Furthermore, Bharati Mukherjee has two sisters and the novel seems to be the autobiography of her. Likewise Tara, the protagonist has also two sisters, Padma and Parvati. Padma is the elder sister of her. She has married a businessman namely Harish Mehta, who is non-Bengali and age difference of twenty years between Harish Mehta and her. He had priorly married and had children. Now she is resident of New Jersey (Montclair). She is T.V. hostess of a television program of India, held in Jackson Heights, Queens, run by her Indian lover, Devanand Jagtiani (Danny). She is totally Indian in her dresses, attire, and in her cuisine and occupation who lives in New Jersey. Once she remained with her partner as being married couple, now she lives alone without his support and fame.

Tara’s family and its past reveal to her the counterfeit identity of Chris Dey and she approaches the police to attempt help from. Tara as usual believes in her life that nothing can touch a Bengali Brahmin from Calcutta, but the presence of Chris Dey can create disturbances in her life and ruins her certain assumption. She knows the fact that her sister, Padma loves Ronald Dey, the Christian doctor and Chris’s perceived father, but she was also confident of the stringent Brahmin Bengali criteria. She is fully confident of the fact that in India, particularly within the grasp of a thorough cultural background, it is not just challenging but impossible to allow as well as approve anything that is out of control:

“But Ronald Dey was not possible. Daddy had not yet sanctioned someone for Didi to marry. And whenever that time did come, it would not be with a Christian, no matter what his social status and brilliant prospects. Therefore I must be wrong. Therefore, Ron Dey slipped under the most refined radar system in the world: Hindu Virgin Protection.” (*Desirable Daughters*, 31-32)

Parvati, her another sister is completely Indian in her whole cultural practices as she allows her husband’s relatives to be the house guests for weeks at her sumptuous flat with its breath taking view of the city. But for Tara all her treatment to the relatives, servants, and drivers seems very funny and inconvenient as she presents herself much more modern in her attitude and follows the American way of life style. She believes that her sisters lead very stressful life and make her life uncomfortable for unwanted things. So whatever Parvati does that is because of her Indian bend of her mind and she doesn’t care for American practices while as Tara shows herself as the most modern lady among all her sisters who don’t care these ways of displaying Indian life style and mean to adopt the practices of American culture. She does not like all that her other sisters do because of their Indian attachment.

The article highlights that Bharati Mukherjee revealed the cultural constraints for women in India. But Mukherjee’s women have capacity to change the people around them and themselves. The female characters in this novel depict that they have created multiple identities due to their circumstances. Tara, the protagonist is competent of living with multiple identities.

## CONCLUSION

Bharati Mukherjee’s imagination of feminine sensibility lies in that edifying synthesis of promise and passion, quandary and preference, positivity and promiscuity. She has been successful in highlighting the basics of feminine sensibility through her battered literary exploration of female characters that have not just proved their existence but have developed their identity with an optimistic prospect. The path is unpredictable and unidentified, but with the help of one’s roots and the stresses of one’s novelty Mukherjee’s female characters, along with her, move on to achieve various appreciable objectives.

Thus, in *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee demonstrates the efforts to search identity of three sisters who face both modern as well as traditional worlds and their changing values. Search for identity in the

multicultural land of America by the protagonist, Tara is perfectly presented through the differences of tradition, personal memories, different places and latest styles of life in the altered socio-cultural problems. Tara not only long for to establish herself identity, but she tries to rebuild her own identity against the traditions to which she belongs. Yet, while doing so, she also attaches her Indian identity of which she thinks proud. The efforts of maintaining American and Indian identities make her the mixture of new culture that again raises the question of her real identity. Thus, throughout the entire novel, Bharati Mukherjee reveals the female sensibility through the identity crisis of its protagonists, Tara and her two sisters.

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