
**MIGRATION, IDENTITY, AND CULTURAL NEGOTIATION:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THEMES IN *DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS*
AND OTHER DIASPORIC NARRATIVES**

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Abstract:

Diasporic literature has emerged as a significant field in postcolonial studies, reflecting the cultural, psychological, and social complexities experienced by migrants in transnational spaces. *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee presents a compelling narrative of migration, identity crisis, and cultural transformation through the lives of three Bengali sisters navigating modernity and diasporic realities. The novel explores the tensions between traditional Indian values and Western individualism, particularly through the experiences of the protagonist Tara Bhattacharjee. This study examines the major themes of identity formation, migration, feminism, cultural hybridity, and tradition versus modernity in *Desirable Daughters* and compares them with the works of other prominent diasporic writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shashi Deshpande, and Salman Rushdie. Through comparative thematic analysis, the article highlights how Mukherjee's representation of migration differs from other diasporic narratives by portraying immigration as a transformative process that enables self-reinvention and empowerment. While many diasporic writers emphasize nostalgia, alienation, and cultural displacement, Mukherjee foregrounds adaptation and agency. The study demonstrates that *Desirable Daughters* contributes significantly to diasporic discourse by redefining migration as a dynamic process that reshapes gender roles, cultural identity, and personal autonomy within the global context.

Keywords: Diaspora, Migration, Identity Crisis, Cultural Hybridity, Feminism, Postcolonial Literature, Indian Diasporic Writing.

Introduction

Diasporic literature occupies a central place in contemporary literary studies as it addresses the experiences of migration, displacement, and cultural transformation. In the context of Indian diasporic writing, *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee provides a nuanced exploration of how migration influences identity and cultural belonging. The novel narrates the story of three sisters—Tara, Padma, and Parvati—who are raised in a traditional Bengali Brahmin family but later pursue different life paths shaped by globalization and migration.

The protagonist Tara Bhattacharjee moves to the United States and encounters a radically different social environment that challenges her inherited cultural values. Through Tara's experiences, Mukherjee illustrates the tensions between tradition and modernity as well as the challenges faced by immigrant women in negotiating their identities within multicultural societies. Unlike earlier immigrant narratives that emphasize nostalgia and loss, Mukherjee's fiction presents migration as an opportunity for transformation and self-reinvention.

This thematic approach can be compared with the works of other writers of the Indian diaspora such as Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, whose narratives often focus on cultural alienation and generational conflict. Similarly, writers like Shashi Deshpande and Salman Rushdie explore identity and cultural hybridity from different perspectives. By examining these thematic intersections, the present study seeks to analyze how Mukherjee's novel contributes to the broader discourse of diaspora and identity in contemporary literature.

Identity Crisis and the Search for Self

One of the most significant themes in *Desirable Daughters* is the struggle for identity in a diasporic context. Tara Bhattacharjee represents the psychological conflict experienced by immigrants who are caught between the cultural values of their homeland and those of the host country. Raised in a conservative Bengali household, Tara initially conforms to social expectations by entering an arranged marriage. However, her migration to the United States exposes her to new possibilities of freedom and individuality. Tara's journey becomes a process of self-discovery as she begins to question the cultural norms that shaped her upbringing. The novel reveals how migration destabilizes fixed notions of identity and creates opportunities for personal transformation. Tara's reflections illustrate her realization that identity is not a static concept but a fluid and evolving process. A similar theme of identity crisis appears in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, particularly in *The Namesake*, where the protagonist struggles to reconcile his Indian heritage with his American upbringing.

However, while Lahiri emphasizes the emotional fragmentation of immigrant identity, Mukherjee portrays identity as adaptable and dynamic.

Migration and the Diasporic Experience

Migration serves as the central narrative framework in *Desirable Daughters*. Mukherjee portrays migration not merely as a physical movement across borders but as a transformative experience that reshapes personal and cultural identities. The three sisters in the novel symbolize different responses to globalization and migration. Padma fully embraces Western modernity, Parvati maintains strong ties to traditional Indian culture, and Tara occupies a hybrid position between the two. Through these contrasting perspectives, Mukherjee illustrates the diversity of diasporic experiences. This portrayal of migration can be compared with the narratives of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, whose novels often depict immigrant women navigating cultural displacement and emotional nostalgia. In contrast, Mukherjee's characters view migration as a catalyst for self-reinvention rather than a source of loss.

Tradition versus Modernity

The conflict between tradition and modernity is another important theme explored in *Desirable Daughters*. The novel contrasts the rigid social structures of traditional Indian society with the liberal individualism of American culture. Tara's arranged marriage represents the expectations imposed on women within patriarchal societies. Her eventual decision to leave the marriage and live independently symbolizes her rejection of restrictive cultural norms. Through this narrative development, Mukherjee highlights the transformative potential of migration in challenging traditional gender roles. This theme is also present in the works of Shashi Deshpande, whose novels examine the psychological struggles of women within patriarchal Indian society. However, while Deshpande focuses on internal resistance within the Indian social framework, Mukherjee emphasizes the role of migration in enabling women to renegotiate their identities.

Feminism and Women's Agency

Feminism forms a central dimension of Mukherjee's narrative. The title *Desirable Daughters* reflects the cultural expectations placed on women in traditional societies, where daughters are expected to embody obedience, modesty, and conformity. Mukherjee challenges these expectations by portraying female characters who assert their autonomy and independence. Tara's decision to redefine her life outside the confines of marriage demonstrates her refusal to accept traditional gender roles. This feminist perspective resonates with the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, whose novels highlight the emotional and social struggles of immigrant women. Both writers explore how women negotiate identity and empowerment within diasporic spaces.

Cultural Hybridity and Global Identity

The concept of cultural hybridity plays a crucial role in understanding Mukherjee's representation of diaspora. The characters in *Desirable Daughters* inhabit a multicultural world in which cultural boundaries are constantly negotiated and redefined. Tara's life in America reflects the emergence of a hybrid identity that incorporates elements of both Indian and Western cultures. Rather than abandoning her heritage, she reconstructs it within a new cultural framework. This idea of hybridity can be linked to the postcolonial theories associated with scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, who argue that cultural identity is formed through interaction and negotiation between different cultural traditions. Mukherjee's novel demonstrates how diasporic identities emerge through such processes of cultural exchange.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Desirable Daughters* with the works of other diasporic writers highlights the diverse ways in which migration, identity, and cultural transformation are represented in contemporary literature. While writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni often emphasize nostalgia and cultural alienation, Bharati Mukherjee presents migration as a dynamic process of reinvention and empowerment. Through the character of Tara Bhattacharjee, Mukherjee illustrates how diasporic individuals negotiate complex cultural identities while challenging traditional gender roles. The novel ultimately portrays migration as a transformative experience that reshapes personal identity, cultural belonging, and social relationships. By situating *Desirable Daughters* within the broader framework of diasporic literature, this study demonstrates the novel's contribution to contemporary discussions of globalization, feminism, and cultural hybridity. Mukherjee's narrative emphasizes that identity in the modern world is fluid, evolving, and shaped by continuous interaction between cultures.

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