

RITUALS AND SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS

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Abstract: This paper is to be analysing the various rituals and superstitious beliefs in India, in different situations. It deals how rituals and superstitious suppress the people, especially women in India. Through the character of Tara Lata in *Desirable Daughters* by the author Bharathi Mukherjee the researcher tries to enlighten people of this great menace. Bharathi Mukherjee explains the foolishness of the people and their wrong beliefs in their traditions and customs in her writings.

Keywords: Bharathi Mukherjee, Superstitions, Rituals

Introduction: Bharathi Mukherjee's works have made an important contribution to the multi-ethnic literature of the United States. As a writer, she has moved geographically from India to Canada and the USA. Her works naturally reflect the inevitable changes that migration brings about. She is concerned with migrations, dislocations and relocations. She focuses on the inevitable consequences of cross-cultural encounters. Her works are pre-occupied with the idea of belonging, rootlessness, alienation and search for identity. She questions racial biases and prejudices and cultural and national stereotypes. In her early writings, Mukherjee depicts the cultural encounters between India and the USA. Then in her later works, she focuses on multi-cultural encounters that take place in America. In America, one comes across people from Asia, Africa and other countries. It's a melting pot of various cultures. Her protagonists are not only from south Asia but also from over the entire world and hence almost all of them are new arrivals.

The old myths of the Indian mysterious mystic world are revived by Bharathi Mukherjee, contrasting it with a very modern American world. Bharathi Mukherjee has drawn real characters into her fictitious world establishing the fact that she is comfortable with both the worlds.

India is a land of rituals and superstitious beliefs. Rituals in India vary according to the different traditions of the people. Especially, rituals in the northern side will run for several days. In the case of the wedding ritual, the bride has to pray to god every day. She has to be very clean and also she should wear a new dress always. The bride should sit and invite everybody and should also bend down and touch everybody's feet in order to get their blessings. They have mehendi function and in that the bride has to apply mehendi very neatly. If that mehendi gets erased, it is considered a bad sign that will bring bad things to the groom's family or else, if things are broken or stolen or any bad sign happens, they take that as bad sign for their marriage. These types of

superstitious beliefs exist not only in the northern India, but also throughout India.

Not only to Indians have wedding rituals, but also different type of customs and traditions, all over India. Before the wedding, the bride should not talk to any men, as that would make people think that she had lost her chastity. The bride should not show her face before the wedding, to the bridegroom. In the death ceremony also, one finds different customs and traditions. When the husband dies, the wife should not wear coloured saris or jewels. She has to live inside the house and she should not come out for any function. If she comes, people will curse the woman and send her out immediately. In some places, when the husband dies, the wife has to shave off her head, because if she has long hair, then she may look very beautiful and men will approach her for remarriage. To avoid this, she has to shave off her head. In olden days, 'sati' was a great menace.

Desirable Daughters is a brilliantly woven, thoughtful and intelligent story of three sisters in Calcutta. They are from an upper class Brahmin family, renowned for their beauty, brains, wealth and privileged position in society. Mukherjee portrays their lives as they lead a conservative and sheltered childhood, where they are inundated with culture, tradition and values and inculcated with education.

Bharathi Mukherjee begins the novel, *Desirable Daughters*, with Tara Bhattacharjee, the namesake of 'tree' bride Tara Lata, to narrate the tales of India and its traditions. Tara Lata, who is just five years old and is being carried on a palanquin, all decked up in the finery to be given away in marriage. The older sisters, seven and nine are already married.

In Hindu culture, it was authenticated that a father should give away his daughter in marriage before she reaches puberty and if the father is not able to do, he is bound to go to hell and all his good deeds would go stray:

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 her red lac dye, her

hair oiled and set. Her arms are heavy with dowry gold bangles ring tiny arms from wrist to shoulder. Childish voices chant a song, hands tap, and golden bracelets tinkle. I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girls happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. (DD 3-4)

The names, Tara Bhattacharjee and Tara Lata, are similar and their destinies too seem to be similar. The tradition has continued through ages and the great-grand daughter follows the same footsteps and her father fixes her marriage. The daughter, who cannot raise her voice against her patriarch, a graduate with an M.A degree in hand, is handed over to her groom, a suitable match in the form of Bish Chatterjee.

The child bride, Tara Lata is headed towards her destiny. She prays to god to save her groom. Before marriage, gods and goddesses are honoured and invited. Goddess manasha (mother of the snakes) has been prayed to, but unfortunately the goddess is not pacified and she strikes. The groom dies on his way due to snake bite. The groom's father is greedy and wants Jai Krishna Gangooly to give dowry. The father puts his foot down and refuses to hand over his daughter to her in-laws, dooming her to a life of servility.

An elderly man from the groom's side comes forward, pulling his embroidered shawl of fine wool tightly around his shoulders: "When the stree-achar rites were performed, some women must have been unclean. You can deceive judges, but you cannot fool goddess" (DD 13).

After the marriage ceremony was stopped, the older aunts are muttering about the girl's life. They said that she has to be saved from the fate of a despised ghar-jalani. She will remain for life an unmarried girl, till she lives in the world. A Sanskrit scholar and a Brahmin gives a suggestion to the girl's father. The father decides to marry his daughter to a sundari tree. The Sundari tree is like 'Casuarina tree' that bears the

creeper like a scarf around its neck. Torudutt's 'Casuarina tree' must be an equivalent to Sundari tree, the husband of Tara Lata. It symbolises eternity. She is united with god, and now she is eternally doomed to be a married woman leading a life of purity, sainthood and lifelong virginity. Tara Lata the virgin, the untouched, who opened the house to beggars, then to the sick, then to "the young soldiers fighting the Raj..... Tara Lata the saint, the freedom fighter, whatever the bond between us, it is less than obvious" (DD 17).

The girl retreats to her father's house, as mist mahal, she becomes Tara ma. After her marriage with the tree, she lives like the tree. All the people accept her as Tara ma. Her house became the place of refuge for the sick and the poor. She is confined to her father's place. She has the characteristics of a tree. She is rooted like a tree and she is always silent in the house. She communes with the uvaria tree planted in the mansion for the next 60 years. She spends her entire life talking to the trees. People believe that Tara has spiritual powers. She has donated her gold jewellery to Gandhi's salt march. People look upon her as a goddess, prayed to by unmarried girls needing husbands, and by women seeking sons. She is finally involved in the struggle for freedom. At last she dies due to a heart attack.

Conclusion : In this novel, Desirable Daughters, Bharathi Mukherjee talks about the Tree Bride, how the five year old girl does not know the meaning of life. Here the author expresses how rituals suppress the woman and how she ends up with melancholy. In olden days people believed in superstitious beliefs. This novel gives a clear picture, how the dominant people willingly suppressing their life. Still in India one can find many Tara Latas. This novel, Desirable Daughters, exhorts the people to stop this foolishness and understand that human life is precious.

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