

## Hindu Mythology And Its Profound Propensity Visualized In Bharati Mukherjee's Novels

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### Abstract:

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most influential writers in the history of Indian diaspora literature. Her literary sojourn mostly focuses on the cross cultural conflict juxtaposing Indian and American Literature. Her multiple displacements enable her to represent the voice of immigrants all over the world. She is one among the fifteen writers recruited by the US government to write essays on certain American values of freedom, diversity, and democracy. Furthermore, Bharati is an activist for civil rights, an educator, an author of highly praised novels, collections of short stories and non-fiction works. Bharati's genesis and her life in India and America render the raw material for all her works. She has won so many laurels including the Canadian Government Award in 1982 and National book critics circle award in 1989. She has written about eight novels, nonfiction, short stories and memoirs. Her themes in her works revolve around immigration, assimilation, Hindu mythology, etc.

**Key words:** Cross cultural conflict- Indian- American – immigration- assimilation-Hindu mythology

Bharati's etymology as a Bengali Brahmin acts as a stimulant to introduce enticing features related to Hindu mythology in all her works. The readers can find a reference with ancient scriptures, famous spiritual spots of India, specific reference to Goddess Kali of Kalighat and the myth of Sita in Ramayan in almost all her works. In her second novel, *Wife* (1975), there are references related to Durgah Pooja, which is an important Hindu festival celebrated grandiosely with feasts and rituals for nine days. Dimple, the protagonist of the novel gets exhausted explaining about Hindu customs and religions to her friends in America. Another reference is noted when Dimple's husband Amit wishes to die in Varanasi and his ashes to be burnt in the holy Ganges. Dimple from the beginning of the novel is connected with the mythical figure, Sita, as she wants to be the perfect wife, but her psychological attributes makes her to hate everyone including her husband. In Part II of the novel, Bharati creates a visual imagery by carving the painted picture of Ramayan like, the framed wall hanging with king Ram and his court surmounted by the attention of trees, mountains, monkeys and holy men, a small bonfire and Sita in the pale orange flames.

In her third novel '*Jasmine*' (1989), Bharati has used enormous Hindu elements to elate the novel's reading. The writer's flair for Hindu mythology is visualized, when she quotes the story of Behula from ShivaPurana, emphasizing the element of fate. Yama, the God of death is referred to compare between the characters- Jasmine and Vimala. Vimala commits suicide dousing herself with kerosene and flung herself shouting 'Yama bring me to you' (15), whereas

Jyothi as Jasmine after brutally killing Half Face. She says ‘Lord Yama, who had courted me, and with whom I’d flirted with on the long trip over, had now deserted me’(120). Cultural attachment is unveiled in the lines, when Jasmine reveals on her travel to America, ‘I keep my sandalwood Ganapati hidden in my purse, a god with an elephant trunk to uproot anything in my path’ (102). In another incident, a transitional shift is pictured from sweet Jasmine to retaliating image of Kali, the vengeful goddess of Hindu mythology. Like Kali with her tongue rolling out, she slits open half-face’s throat and kills the captain who rapes her. She could find nobody around except her and bloody dead Half –face. In the beginning of the novel, Bharati illustrates beautifully about the spiritual abode – Kasi or Varanasi; and its nexus with the purification of the soul, in the words of Jasmine’s grandmother. During her migration to Iowa and New York, the stories which, Jasmine says to Duff and Du are all about mythologies specifically the fables on gods, demons and mortals. Tales from Puranas and famous mythological stories like Nachketha’s encounter with Lord Yama forms the part of her story. To quote Maya Manju Sharma: ‘In her fiction Mukherjee handles western themes and settings as well as characters who are westernized or bicultural. Yet she is forced to admit that the very structure of her imagination is essentially Hindu and essentially moral’. (3)

In her subsequent novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Bharati beautifully displays her cognizance related to Hindu culture in these lines:

For Hindus, the world is constructed of calamities. The stories are wondrous, lurid and beautiful, full of shape-changing, gender bending, grand scale slaughter, polymorphous sexuality. Miss a ritual and a snake will invade your wedding. The gods destroy and remake the world every four billion years (148).

Along with this a special reference is rendered to Manasha, Goddess of snakes, worshipped in Bengal and other parts of North and North- Eastern India, chiefly for the prevention of snake bites and also for fertility and prosperity. The writer also mentions another prominent goddess in Hindu mythology Shitala, an incarnation of goddess Durga, who is believed to cure poxes, sores and other diseases. In the sojourn of the novel, there are references related to the virtuous ladies of Hindu mythology like Behula, Sita and Savitri.

Part –III in *Desirable Daughters* depicts about Tara’s meeting with her parents. She, along with Rabi travels to Rishikesh, where her parents lived in tranquility. Incredible India is rendered as a visual retreat in illustrating the beauty of the holy town, Rishikesh. Rishikesh is a small town located in the northern state of Uttarkhand in India. Lord Vishnu, the preserver God of Hindu mythology killed many demons in this place to bestow happiness to human beings. It is the starting point of Chardham Yatra and the whole place is considered to be sacred as it is believed that meditation and offerings to Lord Vishnu leads to the attainment of salvation. Rabi , though born and brought up in America, likes to be with spiritualism dedicating his time with his grand father and sadhus who visits and grants their blessings .The healthy lifestyle of people is illustrated in the way Tara’s father mixes isabgol (kind of husk seed) with milk and gives it for everyone to drink as the seeds makes the health fit free from diseases. Swami Vivekananda, a famous Indian figure is penned out in connection with Hindu mythology. The banks of Ganges, Ramjulahbridge and Lakshmanjuhula are some of the famous tourist places of repute in the holy town. Tara’s dad is pictured as a man of perfect habits. In his old age, he dedicates to the path of spirituality and believes in divine voice: ‘That morning, daddy heard the voice of the goddess.

She was saying to him, “it is time, Motilal Bhattacharjee, to prepare for the beginning of the third phase of your life.” He understood from the swami that his worldly mission was a success and it was the time to begin preparing his spirit.’ (295)

Hindu mythology and its significance are highlighted by the writer in part III. Lord Krishna, the God of Beauty is a great admiration for Tara ‘s father and he along with his cook takes subtle care of gardening, the objective behind is to provide fresh flowers for adoring God. Rabi becomes a diehard fan of swami Vivekanda during his tenure in Rishikesh. Furthermore, Bharati through Tara pictures about four Chardham temples, very famous trip to holy towns in India such as: Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. It is a belief that this trip to the Chardham temple cleanses the sins and purifies the soul.

*Tree Bride (2004)*, is a novel of assimilation. The search of protagonist’s self identity and her retrieval of past forms the crux of this novel. *Tree Bride* is a sequel to Mukherjee’s prior novel, *Desirable Daughters (2002)*. The story of *Tree Bride* discusses in detail about the Indian people in nexus with the Indian culture. The writer has epitomized Tara Lata Gangooly as a traditional Indian icon as she obeys the order of her father immediately to marry a colossal tree. She not only acquires her name as the tree bride, but she also develops the characteristics of a tree. She stayed rooted in her father's house all her life. She never left it until her death, except for three occasions when she stepped out of it. She devoted her entire life to the service of poor and actively participated in the freedom struggle of India. Her house remained open to all. Ultimately, she was arrested by the British authorities and is declared dead in police custody. Her death remains a mystery to the people of Mishtigunj where she lived all her life.

Bharati reflects in the first few pages about the life style of Brahmins, a member of the highest Hindu class noted for their long term inbreeds. The people belonging to this sect are branded for their piousness, mannerisms and vegetarianism, along with their aversion for another religion. In one instance, Tara says, ‘we were trained to despise Anglo Indians’ (25). She also reflects on the concept of horoscopes and mangalik dosha revealed in the plot of *Tara Lata*. A note of Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, famous communal reactions is brought into limelight by Bharati. The former is a theist reaction initiated by Raja ram Mohan Roy followed the principles of Upanishads, scriptures and Vedas whereas Arya samaj, another religious sect established by Swami Dayanda. Both the movements encouraged the activities of women’s education and stood against all the caste discriminations, implementing the rule that society is equal for all. Hindu reformers, scientists, writers and artists are the members of the Brahma samaj, on the contrast, the communal reaction against secularizers constituted Arya samaj. Along with this description, a note of British colonizers and their rule in India is visualized.

The plot digresses to Kolkata, the place always takes its complement with Hooghly river and Goddess Kali temple. River Hooghly also called as Hugli provides access to Calcutta from the Bay of Bengal and it is the distributor of the holy river, Ganges. The most famous Kali temple, Thakshineswar and Kalighat are on the banks of the Hooghly river. The name Calcutta is said to be derived from the word ‘kalighat. Kalighat according to legend goes with is the place where sati ‘s(another name of Parvati) body are said to be fallen in the course of God Shiva’s rudra tandava ie..dance of violence. Kali in Kolkata, is visualized with three huge eyes, long protruding tongue made of gold and four hands. Two of the hands holding scimitar and severed head of asura king Shumba. The other two hands are in the abhaya and varadha mudras blessing

the devotees whereas in Thakshineswar kali temple, the main deity is Bhavatarini, another form of Kali. The temple is famous for its association with Ramakrishna paramahansa, an Indian mystic and yogi during the 19th century whose notable disciple is Swami Vivekananda.

Bharati presents Hindu myths impeccably in the words of Tara Lata:

Hindus are prone to excessive forms of idolatry. There are more than three hundred and fifty million Indians and someone once calculated that there are more than three hundred million named gods. A god for everyone and everything. A god for sun, god for rain, god for tree, for the fruit on the branch, the worm in the fruit, the bird that eats the worm, the bat that eats the fruit, the monkey that eats them all....(210)

To put in a nutshell, Bharati Mukherjee has made her novels exuberant by adding beautiful visual imagery of Hindu mythology and its magnificence. The impeccable details of Gods and goddesses specifically- Manasa, Shitala, Kali, Yama, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva reverberates the aura of spiritual India. 'Athulya Bharat' i.e., incredible India is pictured by Bharati covering several geographical locations of India from Kolkata to Rishikesh, then to Mumbai, Varanasi etc. Though she calls herself as an American writer in many of her interviews, she wholeheartedly accepts that India and her Indian upbringing is the sole reason for her emergence as a successful diaspora writer of international acclaim.

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