

# Bengal: An Inspiration of Bharati Mukherjee's The Tree Bride

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## Abstract

*My article is a description of the role of Bengal in the book The Tree Bride. The traditions of Bengal are very different from other states of India. Bharati Mukherjee gave us a picture of the traditions which is prevailing in Bengal. It's effect in the lives of the natives as well as all Indians. It inspires us to search for what the protagonist is searching for. We are so sure about our roots but the reality is we are missing the basics of our existence. Before the search for our identity, a search of our ancestor's history is necessary. The search for one's ancestors is what the book is all about. This article is a glimpse of Mukherjee's perspective about her native place.*

**Keywords:** Bengal, Traditions, Culture, Early marriage, Society

Bharati Mukherjee was a diasporic writer who survived India as a slave country and saw it flourishing in almost all the areas needed. She was born in India and finished her schooling as well as college in Bengal and Gujarat. When she left her homeland, it was a chance for her to achieve a degree unavailable in Indian colleges. But she also took the chance as an opportunity to live the dream of her own. When she was about to leave the country: her father told her only two things. In her own words,

"I flew into a small airport surrounded by cornfields and pastures, ready to carry out the two commands my father had written out for me the night before I left Calcutta: spend two years studying creative writing at the Iowa writer's workshop, then come back home and marry the groom he selected for me from our caste and class." 1

That was the first experience in her life when she was on her own. After that: the two commands she never followed and kind of revolt against that. The rest of her life and work is now an inspiration for all the Indians, especially the migrants.

She had written her first book 'The Tiger's Daughter' in 1971. Almost all of her novels are related to India and Indian culture. She started depicting her views about India and experience as an Indian in a foreign land in her books. In 2002 she published her book 'Desirable Daughters'. This book is a story of three sisters born in Calcutta, after

marriage, settle in different parts of the globe. The youngest one, Tara is the protagonist of the novel. She is trying to decipher her life and also the life of one of her ancestors who was also named Tara. But the time difference between both of the Tara's is of hundred years. The simple life of a girl from a prestigious family of Calcutta who is married to an NRI Bishwapriya spins and collides with someone from her past. She is unaware of what the future beholds for her. One thing she is sure of that she will not submit herself to the rules of society and its shallow traditions. When she divorced, her surety is that she does not wish to spend her life with a rich husband without her own identity. The story of Tara and her journey to the past and the past of her whole family continues in the sequel, which is "The Tree Bride".

Tara spends her whole life in Calcutta then her family marries her off to America. There is always a kind of surety in Indians when it comes to the root of our existence. This surety is something unacceptable for the protagonist. She has an infatuation with the fact that Americans are allowed to search for their own identity. The willing disbelief of one's root is the core of the story.

Mukherjee is willing to leave the age-old theories and search the old stories and their characters in a new way and from a new perspective in this book. Tara and her family are attacked by someone named Abbas Sattar Hai. She packed her bag and return to India. Because of the surety of her connection with her great great grandmother and a belief in the possibility that she is the incarnation of the lady who once lived in the remote area of East Bengal and was named Tara; an exploration starts.

The character who starts her journey in America comes back to India. The book revolves around Bengal and its role in the fight for India's freedom. The culture and way of living of native Bengalis are depicted in a way that one can understand how was life years ago in the remote area of East Bengal. The story starts with a marriage ceremony of a young bride. The ceremony is of a different kind. It is going on a jungle which is Sundar Bon. This ceremony is very different because the bride and all the relatives are in deep agony. The rule of marrying a daughter at an early

age is common in India. That is what's going on there. When the groom died because of a mishappening, the bride's father decides to marry his daughter to a tree. This ritual is also common in many parts of India. That is how the story starts and goes all the way in the life of a new Tara.

The story revolves around an identity search of a girl who is in search of her own identity. She is always sceptical about the purpose of her life and also believes that she is not here only to run a husband and a family. After an accident, Tara realized that the search for Identity is not a hobby for her. It is essential to know who she is to know that villain who is interfering in her life continuously.

In the process of her search for identity, she somehow searches for the reality of her family too. But the irony is we Indians believe that we know our roots but we don't know about the present life of us and also of our family's. Mukherjee has described Bengal in a very different way. The East Bengal and its role in our freedom fight is something which can be done only by someone familiar with not only the place but also the time and events of that era. The story which is passed by a grandmother to her granddaughters, which is not written in any book but which is in the heart of every old woman is the story of *The Tree Bride*. The relevance of that story in our modern times is perfectly depicted. Everyone mocks the protagonist and believes that she is doing something fancy by searching her known roots. Ironically, a girl who lives in America is more curious to know the history of her ancestors rather than those residing in India. We think that it is a wastage of time. Mukherjee states her own emotions from Tara's mouth, "My friends and even my sisters thought I'd gone crazy, or very American."<sup>2</sup>

The description of a place that is not in India now but once was, the portrayal of a culture that is old and is never experienced by Mukherjee herself makes us feel that she is trying to link all the ancient cultures of Bengal together. Indians' prestige is what their surname is. It is not linked to caste and religion, well sometimes it is but not all the time. So, the way Tara gets her first clue of the query is from her doctor who decides to let her know that her surname must remind something important to Tara. The doctor says to Tara, "She leaned forward. I'll ask again, Mrs. Chatterjee. Does the name Treadwell ring any bells?"<sup>3</sup>

That is the first time when a migrant is searching for her roots of homeland and a foreigner gave her not only the clue but also the box of all the information she needed. The next part of the book is about how the former Tara Lata, becomes a tree bride and what went wrong in her marriage ceremony.

The ceremony is to be held in a remote village Mishtigunj. All the events and process of the ceremony is depicted as it should be. All the relatives are trying to do all the rituals and also, they try to pacify those gods who are believed to be the angry ones. But destiny plays its part and the groom was engulfed in the anger of Mansa Mata. Who is responsible for the death is not a topic of discussion here. Everyone accepted the tragedy. The father of the bride is a famous lawyer and many of his cases are related to age-old traditions. But when it comes to his daughter, he is helpless.

Years after all this happened in a remote village a girl from Calcutta decides to know the truth of her great-great-aunt which is *The Tree Bride*. In the search of the past Mukherjee depicts the present too. When she mentions the traditions, she also mentions those traditions which are useless. When her protagonist confesses that, "I come from a highly religious, orthodox Hindu Brahmin family, but to know me in California, you'd never guess. My sisters and I received a typical upper-middle-class Calcutta convent school English Language education, but we were not of that cultural persuasion. We left school and returned to a world of tales, prayers, and a shadow universe of myth and legend."<sup>4</sup>

She also depicts the reality of Bengali society. The intermingling truth of past and present is depicted in the story. The book is not only a single story of a single character. It is a story of the traditions and cultures of Bengal and also the role of Bengal in the freedom fight of India. The book and its characters are inspired by the amalgamation of different religion, their differences, their love and respect, and all the traditions whether it be past or present in Bengal.

#### Works Cited

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