



A Narratological Analysis of Internal Focalization and Identity Construction in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

Preetha R and Dr. J. Balasubramaniam

Department of English, Government Arts College, Ooty, Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract— *Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters* presents the experiences of migration, cultural negotiation, and personal transformation through the perspective of Tara Chatterjee Bhattacharjee. The novel is particularly significant for its use of internal focalization, which allows readers to perceive events through Tara's consciousness and subjective understanding. This paper examines how internal focalization functions as a narrative strategy in the construction of identity in the novel. Drawing upon Gérard Genette's concept of focalization and later narratological developments by Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, the study analyses the relationship between narrative perspective and identity formation. Through Tara's memories, reflections, and interpretations, the novel presents identity as a dynamic process shaped by migration, family history, cultural displacement, and self discovery. The study argues that internal focalization is not merely a technical narrative device but a structural principle through which Mukherjee explores the complexities of diasporic identity. The paper demonstrates that the reader's understanding of characters, events, and cultural realities is mediated through Tara's evolving consciousness, making identity an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a fixed condition.



Keywords— *Bharati Mukherjee, Desirable Daughters, Internal Focalization, Narratology, Identity, Diaspora*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee occupies an important position in contemporary Indian American literature because of her exploration of migration, cultural transformation, and identity formation. Her fiction frequently portrays characters who move across geographical and cultural boundaries and attempt to reconstruct their identities within unfamiliar social environments. Among her novels, *Desirable Daughters* (2002) provides a nuanced representation of diasporic experience through the life of Tara Chatterjee Bhattacharjee, an Indian woman living in the United States. The novel explores the tensions between tradition and modernity, memory and experience, and cultural inheritance and personal freedom.

Narrative perspective plays a significant role in shaping the reader's understanding of these themes. Rather than presenting events through an objective narrative voice, Mukherjee filters the narrative through Tara's consciousness. As a result, readers encounter people, places, and events through her perceptions, memories, emotions, and interpretations. This narrative strategy corresponds to what Gérard Genette identifies as internal focalization, a mode of narration in which the narrative information is restricted to the knowledge and perspective of a particular character (Genette, 1980).

Internal focalization has attracted considerable attention in narratological studies because it influences how readers interpret narrative reality. According to Mieke Bal (1997), focalization concerns the relationship between vision and narrative representation, while Rimmon-Kenan (2002)

argues that focalization determines the angle through which narrative information is presented. In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara functions as the primary focalizer, and her perspective shapes the reader's understanding of family relationships, cultural identity, migration, and personal transformation.

The importance of focalization in the novel becomes particularly evident in the representation of identity. Tara's identity is not presented as stable or complete. Instead, it emerges gradually through memories of childhood in Calcutta, reflections on family traditions, experiences in America, and encounters with different cultural expectations. The movement between past and present reveals identity as a process of continual reconstruction. Through Tara's perspective, Mukherjee presents identity as fluid, fragmented, and constantly negotiated.

This paper examines how internal focalization contributes to the construction of identity in *Desirable Daughters*. Using narratological concepts developed by Genette, Bal, and Rimmon-Kenan, the study analyses the ways in which Tara's perspective shapes narrative meaning and influences the representation of selfhood. The paper argues that internal focalization serves as a central narrative strategy through which Mukherjee explores the complexities of diasporic identity in a globalized world.

II. TARA CHATTERJEE AS THE INTERNAL FOCALIZER

The narrative structure of *Desirable Daughters* is primarily organized through the consciousness of Tara Chatterjee Bhattacharjee. The events of the novel are presented not through an objective narrative perspective but through Tara's perceptions, memories, reflections, and interpretations. As a result, the reader gains access to the fictional world through her subjective viewpoint. In narratological terms, Tara functions as the principal internal focalizer whose consciousness mediates the narrative experience.

According to Genette, internal focalization occurs when narrative information is restricted to what a particular character knows, perceives, or experiences. In *Desirable Daughters*, the reader's understanding of family history, cultural traditions, migration, and personal relationships is shaped by Tara's perspective. Information is not presented as an external reality independent of the character. Instead, it emerges through Tara's interpretation of events and experiences. This narrative strategy creates an intimate relationship between the narrator and the reader.

The significance of Tara's focalization becomes evident from the opening sections of the novel. Her recollections of childhood in Calcutta are not presented as historical records but as personal memories filtered through her present

consciousness. The past is reconstructed through selective remembrance, emotional reflection, and subjective interpretation. Consequently, the reader encounters family traditions and cultural practices through Tara's evolving understanding rather than through an authoritative narrative voice.

Tara's role as focalizer also influences the representation of other characters. Characters such as Padma, Parvati, Bishwapriya, and Tara's parents are introduced through her observations and evaluations. The reader's perception of these characters is therefore shaped by Tara's emotional responses and personal judgments. This limitation of perspective reinforces the subjective nature of the narrative and highlights the central role of focalization in constructing meaning.

The narrative frequently moves between Tara's present life in America and her memories of India. These transitions are significant because they reveal how focalization connects memory with identity. Tara does not merely remember the past; she continually interprets and reinterprets it from the standpoint of her present experience. Her understanding of family, culture, and selfhood changes as she reflects upon earlier events. Internal focalization therefore becomes a means through which the narrative explores the relationship between memory and identity formation.

Another important aspect of Tara's focalization is its ability to reveal psychological complexity. The narrative records her uncertainties, conflicts, fears, and desires in considerable detail. Through this access to her inner consciousness, readers witness her struggle to negotiate multiple cultural identities. She is neither completely detached from her Indian heritage nor fully assimilated into American culture. Her perspective reflects the tensions and contradictions that characterize diasporic existence.

The use of internal focalization also contributes to the thematic exploration of displacement. Tara's experiences in America are often interpreted in relation to memories of India. The contrast between these cultural spaces is not presented objectively but through her personal perception. Consequently, displacement emerges as a psychological condition as much as a geographical reality. The reader experiences cultural difference through Tara's consciousness, making the narrative deeply personal and emotionally resonant.

Thus, Tara's role as the internal focalizer is fundamental to the narrative structure of *Desirable Daughters*. Through her perspective, Mukherjee transforms the novel into an exploration of memory, migration, and self discovery. Internal focalization allows the narrative to present identity not as a fixed essence but as a continuous process of reflection, negotiation, and reconstruction.

III. INTERNAL FOCALIZATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

One of the most significant functions of internal focalization in *Desirable Daughters* is its role in the construction of identity. Through Tara Chatterjee's perspective, Bharati Mukherjee presents identity as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a stable or predetermined condition. The narrative does not offer a fixed definition of who Tara is. Instead, her identity emerges gradually through memories, personal reflections, cultural encounters, and changing self-perceptions. Internal focalization serves as the primary narrative mechanism through which this process is represented.

The novel portrays Tara at a stage in life when she is attempting to understand her place between different cultural worlds. Having left India and established a life in the United States, she occupies a position that is neither completely Indian nor entirely American. Her consciousness reflects the tensions associated with migration and cultural transition. Because the narrative is filtered through her perspective, readers experience these tensions directly rather than through external description. Internal focalization thus transforms identity into a lived psychological experience.

Memory plays an important role in this process. Throughout the novel, Tara repeatedly returns to memories of her childhood, family history, and cultural upbringing in Calcutta. These memories are not presented simply as recollections of past events. Instead, they function as interpretative acts through which Tara reassesses her understanding of herself. The past becomes meaningful because it is continually reexamined from the perspective of the present. Through this interaction between memory and reflection, identity appears as something that is constantly reconstructed rather than permanently established.

The story of Tara's family, particularly the narrative surrounding her ancestors, occupies an important place in her consciousness. These family histories provide cultural and historical frameworks through which she attempts to understand her own experiences. However, Tara does not accept these inherited narratives without question. Her reflections reveal both admiration for and distance from traditional expectations. Internal focalization allows readers to observe this process of negotiation as it unfolds within her mind. Identity therefore emerges through a dialogue between personal experience and inherited cultural memory.

The relationship between individual freedom and cultural tradition forms another important aspect of identity construction in the novel. Tara's experiences often reveal tensions between traditional social expectations and modern individual aspirations. Because these tensions are presented

through her consciousness, the reader gains access to the emotional and psychological dimensions of cultural conflict. The narrative does not simply describe competing values. Instead, it demonstrates how such values influence Tara's understanding of herself and her place in the world.

Internal focalization also contributes to the representation of fragmented identity. Tara's perspective frequently shifts between different temporal and cultural contexts. Her memories of India coexist with her experiences in America, creating a narrative structure that reflects the complexity of diasporic existence. The movement between these different worlds suggests that identity cannot be reduced to a single cultural affiliation. Rather, it is shaped by multiple influences that coexist within the individual. Through Tara's focalization, Mukherjee illustrates the hybrid nature of diasporic identity.

Another significant feature of the novel is the way in which self-knowledge develops through reflection. Tara's understanding of herself is not complete at the beginning of the narrative. Instead, the act of narration itself becomes a process of self-exploration. As she remembers, interprets, and evaluates her experiences, she gradually arrives at new insights regarding family, culture, and personal autonomy. Internal focalization therefore functions not only as a method of presenting experience but also as a means of generating self-awareness.

The subjective nature of focalization is particularly important in this context. Since readers encounter events through Tara's perspective, they recognize that identity is shaped by perception and interpretation. Different experiences acquire meaning because of the way Tara understands them. The narrative emphasizes that identity is not merely determined by external circumstances but is also constructed through personal reflection and interpretation. This emphasis on subjectivity reinforces the novel's exploration of individual agency within broader social and cultural structures.

Furthermore, internal focalization allows Mukherjee to challenge simplistic representations of immigrant identity. Tara's experiences reveal that migration does not involve a straightforward movement from one culture to another. Instead, it produces complex negotiations between memory and experience, belonging and alienation, continuity and change. Through Tara's consciousness, the novel presents identity as an ongoing process of adaptation and redefinition.

Thus, internal focalization occupies a central position in the narrative structure of *Desirable Daughters*. By presenting events through Tara's perspective, Mukherjee transforms identity from a static category into a process of continual reconstruction. Memory, cultural inheritance, migration, and personal reflection interact within Tara's consciousness

to produce a multidimensional understanding of selfhood. Internal focalization therefore functions not merely as a narrative technique but as a structural principle through which the novel explores the complexities of diasporic identity.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Desirable Daughters* demonstrates that internal focalization is a central narrative strategy through which Bharati Mukherjee explores the complexities of identity formation. By restricting narrative information primarily to Tara Chatterjee's consciousness, the novel presents identity as a subjective and evolving experience rather than a stable social category. The reader's understanding of family, culture, migration, and selfhood is mediated through Tara's perceptions, memories, and reflections. As a result, identity emerges not as a predetermined reality but as a process of continual interpretation and reconstruction.

The study reveals that internal focalization allows Mukherjee to portray the psychological dimensions of diasporic existence with considerable depth. Tara's perspective reflects the tensions between tradition and modernity, homeland and diaspora, cultural inheritance and personal freedom. These tensions are not presented through external commentary but through the focalizer's own experiences and reflections. Consequently, readers encounter identity as an ongoing negotiation shaped by multiple cultural influences.

Memory functions as an important component of this process. Tara's recollections of childhood, family history, and cultural traditions repeatedly intersect with her present experiences in the United States. Through internal focalization, these memories become active elements in the construction of identity rather than simple representations of the past. The narrative illustrates how personal identity is shaped through the continuous reinterpretation of experience. The past acquires meaning through present reflection, and present experience is understood in relation to remembered histories.

The analysis also indicates that internal focalization contributes significantly to the representation of hybrid identity. Tara occupies a space between cultures, and her perspective reflects the complexities associated with this position. She neither rejects her Indian heritage nor fully assimilates into American culture. Instead, her identity develops through a process of adaptation, questioning, and self examination. Internal focalization enables the narrative to capture this process with nuance and psychological realism.

From a narratological perspective, the novel demonstrates the close relationship between focalization and meaning. The reader's interpretation of events depends largely upon the perspective through which those events are presented. Since the narrative remains closely aligned with Tara's consciousness, the construction of identity becomes inseparable from the act of perception itself. The novel therefore supports the narratological argument that focalization is not merely a technical feature of narrative discourse but an important mechanism through which literary texts generate meaning.

The findings of this study suggest that Mukherjee's use of internal focalization is fundamental to her representation of diasporic identity. Through Tara's perspective, the novel presents identity as fluid, multidimensional, and continuously evolving. The narrative structure reinforces the idea that selfhood is shaped by memory, cultural experience, and personal interpretation. In this sense, internal focalization functions as both a narrative technique and a thematic principle that governs the novel's exploration of identity.

In conclusion, *Desirable Daughters* illustrates how internal focalization can be employed to represent the complexities of identity in contemporary diasporic fiction. By positioning Tara as the primary focalizer, Mukherjee creates a narrative that foregrounds subjectivity, memory, and self reflection. The study demonstrates that internal focalization plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's understanding of identity and contributes significantly to the artistic and thematic achievement of the novel. The novel thus offers a valuable example of how narratological techniques can deepen the representation of human experience and cultural transformation in contemporary literature.

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