Shreya Bera

Understanding the Postcolonial Woman: Home, the Sublime, and the Uncanny in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

Keywords

Indo-American literature, Home, Postcolonialism, the sublime, the uncanny

Introduction

> "Today I feel that I shall win through. I have come to the gateway of the simple; I am now content to see things as they are. I have gained freedom myself; I shall allow freedom to others. In my work will be my salvation."
> — Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*

In *Home and the World* (1922), Tagore wishes for a postcolonial Indian society free from colonized oppression. Even though it is impossible to appropriate Rabindranath Tagore within a singular discipline or the discourse of Postcolonialism, he can be seen as a postcolonial thinker who wished to look beyond colonial rubble. His works present vivid accounts of the colonial past in India, the British reign, the mass inculcation of cultural norms, the manipulation of ancestral glory and the elongated Indian struggle for freedom. Similarly, Postcolonial writers such as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee focused on the idea of breaking the "walls of religions and caste" in their novels, favoured global secularism and prioritized freedom of self over that of the nation. Their novels also resonate with the need for cultural assimilation rather than appropriation and both the merits and demerits of cosmopolitanism (Donald 2008, 91), and thus, through the writings, these writers proposed a world of unity in diversity. Bharati Mukherjee, on the other hand, does not only showcase the popular trends and indulgence of Western civilization, but also reflects on the flimsy bridge of modernity that connects Eastern and Western lifestyles. Opposed to Tagore and many other postcolonial writers, Mukherjee focuses on the traumatic process of assimilation rather than on the idea of assimilation itself.

Homi Bhabha, in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) observes the existence of postcolonial literature through the category of the unhomely. Bhabha observes the collapse between the public and private spheres as the genesis for the unhomely in postcolonial literature and how mundane events get politicized. From daily events being racialized or sexualized or to even the age-old process of en-gendering the society, the perplexity of unhomeliness and alienation becomes a trait for diasporic communities (Bhabha 1994, 17). 'Home' generates an undeniable problem in the discourse of the Indian diaspora and the encounter with the idea of 'home' is not merely an intellectual quest for the diasporic Indians to resolve their existential and individuality issues (Karmakar 2015, 80). The nostalgia of the ancestral roots of the writers connect with the idea of home and hence their literary practices showcase the ambiguity over home. To trace the sense of belonging and capture the continuum of the past and present experiences in the figure of the home, its necessary to recognise that home has two spaces in Indian diaspora — one that pins

down with traditions and the other that liberates. Bhabha states that, between two nations, these two spaces create an 'interstitial space' (Bhabha 1994, 3) which consistently gives rise to narratives that erases the defining boundaries of the nation. Inferring from Bhabha, this grey zone between homes becomes a home. This article traces the construction, exhilaration and unfamiliarity of that home through the theories of the sublime and the uncanny.

In *Desirable Daughters* (2002) Bharati Mukherjee treats the issues of home, cultural adaptation, and conflicts of socio-political origin as necessary constituents of self-transition that Indian diasporic women go through while adjusting to American expectations. She reconceptualizes these issues as she explains in her interview with Dave Weich in 2004:

> It's that moment in diaspora: – discard your past if you can, or suppress it, and reinvent yourself as often as you need to (and some of those reinventions are hopelessly excessive) until you find a new autobiography. (Mukherjee 2004)

The new autobiography that is formed by discarding one's familiar relationship with one's roots deals with cross-cultural conflicts, hyphenated existence, and an overall anguished feeling concerning the resettlement process in America. Bharati Mukherjee's women express different ways of becoming American and assimilating to the American dream that helps them to come to terms with their selves and recognize their position in the world — not the one they were taught to follow but the one they created for themselves. The vision of the West among Indian women has always been quite controversial. On one hand, their desire to experience different cultural norms runs quite strong, but on the other hand, their fear of being ostracized from Indian origins is entrenched into their consciousness. The unfamiliarity of the hostland (in this case the USA) and the familiar yet repressed upbringing of the homeland refocuses on the uncanny presence surrounding Indian American diasporic culture.

The story of Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) revolves around the stories of the homes of three sisters. Tara, Parvati, and Padma were born and brought up in Calcutta during the tumultuous conditions of post-independence Bengal and who are rediscovering whatever was left of the Bengali traditions. The novel starts with a mythical recalling of the story of tree brides who were married to trees as children to restore their honour in society (Mukherjee 2002, 4). The reference to the "tree bride" at the beginning of the novel hints at the relationship between Tara and the tree bride from mythologies, Taralata—both daughters, and in the root search of their identities and being desirable. Among the three sisters, Tara and Padma are part of the Indian American community whereas Parvati lives with her husband in Mumbai, India. The novel peaks when Tara is confronted by Padma's supposed illegitimate son Christopher and she takes on the moral duty to find out the truth of her sister's past as well as to confront her own. The conflict between the two sisters regarding the extent of possible Americanisation gives a new perspective on the tensions between expatriates and immigrants and their journey through nostalgia and their guilt over abandoning their homeland as explored in the novel.

Bharati Mukherjee articulates that the dilemma of traditions is "the price that the immigrant willingly pays, and that the exile avoids, is the trauma of self transformation" (Mukherjee 2004, 274). The inconsistencies that contributed to this dilemma were generation gap amid immigrants, different orientation towards "roots" and changing political situation India. Amid these issues, the diaspora still tries to create a place to anchor the self (Karmakar 2015, 85). Tara's attempt of creating different homes in various American cities was an attempt to recreate the home in Calcutta, as a beacon of light and familiar warmth as she reflects:

> The city I knew was (and remains) the magnet hope for the world's third-largest population, the target of all their ambition. To be a native-born Calcuttan was (and is) to be a Londoner, a Parisian, a New Yorker, at the zenith. (Mukherjee 2002, 22)

To her, California or San Francisco were no different than Calcutta and she did not want to create a new home devoid of her ancestral attachments but to create a space with old and new memories. The diasporic Indian home in USA represents both reinvention and repression; homeliness and unhomeliness; peace and trauma at the same time. On the one hand, this ambiguous idea of home is formulated through notions of reason, terror, and awe as primary faculties, it contributes to elevation or as Bonnie Mann suggests it contributes to the liberatory sublime (Mann 2006, 153). On the other hand, this ambiguous idea of the home reflects on the hostility of the home due to traditional repression.

I suggest that the ambiguous idea of the home in Mukherjee's novel can be analysed through the employment of the notions of the liberatory sublime and of Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny. By focusing on how the concept of home is both homey and hostile, it is possible to shed a new light on the relationship between Tara's postcolonial self and her idea of home.

1. The Postcolonial Woman and her American Home

> "for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself."
> — Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*

In *Home and the World*, Tagore depicts that revolution starts from home and the women of Indian households know the meaning of revolution and struggle for freedom since they have been fighting for it for decades. They are the tools of liberation and they uphold postcolonial desire—that is, the will to rebuild and reform. The term 'postcolonial' is engaging yet unformed, so much so that its usage has become multifarious and volatile—always containing the risk of misinterpretation. On the one hand it engages with the end of colonial reality. On the other hand, it seems to provoke diasporic discussions signalling the social and political concerns of the late twentieth century such as alienation, and eventual loss of identity in the cultural limbo.

David Spurr advances a concise understanding of 'postcolonial' as a critical term as he explains:

> 'Postcolonial' is a word that engenders even more debate than 'colonial,' partly because of the ambiguous relationship between these two and I shall refer to postcolonial in two ways: as a historical situation marked by the dismantling of traditional institutions of colonial power, and as a search for alternatives to the discourses of the colonial era ... The second is both an intellectual project and a transcultural condition that includes, along with new possibilities, certain crises of identity and representation (Spurr 1993, 6).

According to Spurr, the word "postcolonial" is twofold; on one hand, it marks a historical trajectory, on the other, it suggests transcultural revolutions. In the historical discussion of postcolonialism, cultural practices of the diaspora expand the umbrella term from colonial reparations to transcultural issues. The diaspora has re-examined the cultural and national possibilities and embraced transnationality in both the public and private spheres. The diasporic communities liberate themselves, legitimize their traditions worldwide, invest in their aspirations, and try out the luck of the living to attain a formidable place amid the global dominance of Western culture. When Tagore reflects on women and their strength and willpower to survive amid challenging conditions, he reconfigures the image of the Hindu woman as a being set between the

perils of postcolonialism. Bharati Mukherjee in her novels tried to delve deep in the perils of Tara and her sisters and their journey from docile Hindu women to renovated postcolonial women.

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Tara and her sisters are expected to use the privilege of their convent education, pseudo-liberal family standards, and their tolerance to create good homes in America — by speaking English, wearing American clothes but leading an Indian way of life. They create a world within their reality they are neither Indians nor Americans; where it becomes "increasingly difficult to attach human identity and meaning to a coherent culture or language" (Nicholls 1999, 10), and this difficulty transforms the Indian American woman into a postcolonial woman, in the incoherent cultural confusion. Rather than becoming an existential problem, this perplexing cultural space, according to Brett Nicholls, "opens up questions concerning cultural authenticity and political legitimacy" (Nicholls 1999, 12). In the third world, postcolonial women, such as Tara and Padma, grow out of their repressed upbringing and curve a new path for their identity.

The idea of the home is related to traditions and 20th-century urbanism, where Indian women of Bengali descent are trained to balance commitment towards traditions — commitment either to the homeland, or the hostland (Karmakar 2015, 81). When Tara recalls home, she remembers both British Calcutta and Bengali Calcutta's reminiscences — a convent-educated girl still believing in Hinduism. In her recollection, her home in Calcutta provides no peace to her soul but creates confusion regarding her identity. Her intimacy with her sisters, who were named after Hindu gods, the story of her namesake, Taralata, "the Tree Bride" (Mukherjee 2002, 4), the religious rituals, the patriarchal tension, and the fear of not following the pre-decided path — all of these contribute to the diasporic conflict of the self in relation the home and the world. The early 90s San Francisco constitutes a late 50s fragment of Calcutta in America, and the Indian American immigrant Tara could only recall a "Dirtier...Crueller...Poorer" (Mukherjee 2002, 23) yet ambitious Calcutta — a true counterpart to San Francisco.

Tara considers her home in America to be a relatively "simpler affair" than her socio-politically and sexually repressed home in 1950s Calcutta. She is part of the crowd in San Francisco where she is "ethnically ambiguous" like many others, on friendly terms, yet still distant with the neighbours, living with her "balding, red-bearded, former-biker, former bad-boy, Hungarian Buddhist contractor/yoga instructor" boyfriend Andy (Mukherjee 2002, 25). She has created a home in Upper Haight, San Francisco, with the nostalgia of the home in Calcutta — almost expecting the "chattering of monkeys, corn and peanuts and Buddhist prayer wheels" only to find "cottages in an Etruscan landscape" dominating the street with Victorian terrain and the smell of gingerbread (Mukherjee 2002, 24- 25).

Mukherjee reflects on her two different homes Tara had access to in her life — on the one hand, a 19-year-old Tara married off to a wealthy entrepreneur Bishwapriya Chatterjee who is creating a home with him in Atherton, California; and on the other hand, a 36-year old Tara who is a divorced kindergarten teacher creating a home with her son, Rabi, and her partner, Andy. The contrast between these two homes hints at Tara's ability to transit from a loveless, arranged marriage to a relationship where "love is having fun with someone...over a longer haul" (Mukherjee 2002, 27). Mukherjee observes Tara's transformation from being a submissive Bengali woman to becoming a postcolonial woman who did not limit her potentials to a provider but freed herself for endless possibilities. Even though she suffers from the inner conflict from the divorce and the modern woman enigma where self comes first and not family (Mishra 2007, 42) that supposedly made her fail in her duties as a traditional Indian wife and perhaps mother, the fact she chooses to face these conflicts in order to seize her own happiness through her own action it was her first act of rebellion.

2. The Postcolonial woman and the liberatory Sublime

To show the developments in the sublime's aesthetics, Longinus and Edmund Burke have to be acknowledged. The term of sublime comes from Latin *peri hypsous* (Shaw 2005, 9) meaning elevation; to elevate listeners through speech, enchant the listeners to a different dimension. On the other hand, according to Burke, the sublime manifests its power to elevate through sensory realization. The sublime emotion depends on the relationship between three mental states: pain, indifference, and pleasure. A simple introduction or deduction of pain cannot create sublime emotion. However, it can push the person to a state of indifference that may signify an apathetic mind, and there is no chance of self-elevation. Cessation of pleasure, on the other hand, does not signify the presence of pain either. He uses the terms' joy' and 'delight' in signifying the manifestation of pleasure beyond the state of indifference. The simplistic 'joy' that may occur, irrespective of indifference, is equated with the aesthetic concept of beauty and 'delight,' which is thus the "strongest emotion that the mind" can evoke. It is not caused by to the removal of pain but by the subject's relief in not being directly under pain or being involved with danger as Burke puts it, "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience" (Burke 1990, 36). Moving away from the general idea of the sublime's aesthetics and its development up until now, we can focus on the feminine sublime and push its boundaries to the extremes in postcolonial literature. The journey of Tara and her sisters on the path of self- elevation and self-reflection over a global citizen's true identity marks the sublime journey of their femininity.

Even though Tara and Padma live in America, they have separate lives miles apart from each other. Though Tara is living an unconventional life, she still acts judgmental when she finds out that her elder sister Padma had a child out of wedlock from a Christian guy named Ron Dey. She feels that the American society's ambiguous lifestyle has destroyed the traditional boundaries in Padma, and that is against the "Hindu Virgin Protection," as Mukherjee puts it. Bharati Mukherjee plays on Tara's insecurities regarding her heritage, weak ties to Hinduism, and her disillusioned existence as a Brahmin (the high priest caste of Hinduism). Tara having a "white" boyfriend and Padma having a son out of wedlock elevate them in breaking away from the Bengali society's repressed culture. The relationship between feminine and sublime is an answer to the sublime's masculine traditions' aesthetical experiences. The feminine sublime explores fear, power, and freedom regarding oneself and others' relations. From Longinus' to Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, the sublime has been an explicit domination model. Within the romantic aesthetics traditions, the sublime was conceptualized as a struggle of the self and an attempt at appropriating whatever would exceed and demoralize it (Freeman 1995, 2). Currently, it is possible to observe the sublime as a process of:

> elevation of the self over an object or experience that threatens it...rather than an allegory of the construction of the patriarchal (not necessarily male) subject, a self that maintain[ed] its borders by subordinating difference and by appropriating rather than identifying with that which present[ed] itself as other (Freeman 1995, 4).

Bonnie Mann alludes to this notion of the sublime being a process of the feminine journey, appropriation, and reformation that "entails the elevation of reason over an order of experience that cannot be represented" (Mann 2006, 2). According to Mann, the sublime's misogynist history took feminists by surprise for them to realize its aesthetical value and affirm its position as a kind of counter-sublime in women's lives or their creative vigour. The involvements of vulnerability are to "re-assert individual sovereignty, to shore up the boundaries of the subject" to

"dominate," "appropriate," "colonize," "consume," or "domesticate" the alterity one encounters to "demonstrate mastery over the experience that had seemed overwhelming" (Freeman 1995, 8). Freeman's idea of the feminine sublime rejects submission to masculine ideas acknowledging struggle, crisis, and reformation. The female subject, according to Freeman, "enters into a relationship with an otherness — social, aesthetic, political, ethical, erotic — that is excessive" (Freeman 1995, 5) and unpleasant that reduces Tara's ability to categorize and reason that leads to subsequent liberation of the self-concerning other.

For the investigation of the relationship between femineity and the sublime and the search for the independent female voice within Indian American literature, there is a need to enter the realm of the immigrant experience. Bharati Mukherjee explores Tara's femininity, her multicultural upbringing, and her longing for Indian traditions through her novels. I would like to address this theme through the concept of the liberatory sublime that stresses the idea of a woman and her femininity in a "position of resistance concerning the patriarchal order, whether it is perpetuated and sustained by biological women or by men" (Mann 2006, 132). That refers to both the inner conflicts and the universalization of the problem that concerns diaspora women and their self-elevation process worldwide. In this case, Tara's appropriation of the social and cultural demands of the host country (while keeping the traditions of the homeland in mind) and her language and literary practices will be targeted as feminist practices within transnational communities. Her alert experiences, reflections, and imitations "reoccur from the subconscious mind, memory, desire, menace or apprehensions" (Singh 2017, 51).

The uncomfortable and orthodox peripheries of Indian society, such as the Indian marriages, are extremely patriarchal. Indian families are generally strict regarding the classist and casteist divisions of society. According to Tara, These Indian families, no matter wherever in the world, cling onto the old moral values that create a culturally, socially and sexually repressed condition for marriage as she reflects:

> For Hindus, the world is constructed of calamities. The stories are wonderous, lurid, and beautiful, full of shape-changing, gender-bending, grand-scale slaughter, polymorphous sexuality. Miss a ritual, and a snake will invade your wedding (Mukherjee 2002, 148).

Even though this space is ever-changing, the majority of Indian women are part of the unhomely reality, stuck within the religious shackles that they cannot relate to, restricting their physical, emotional, and psychological movement in a society that is made by and for men. Hinduism's masculinist interpretation also contributes primarily to women's subjugation. Bharati Mukherjee explores paternalistic dominance with through characters, including life skills such as a positive self-image and emotional intimacy with their father. However, most of Mukherjee's protagonists share a distant, almost negative emotional relationship with their fathers and how the fathers shape their daughters lives and their prospective marriages. Manisha Roy in *Bengali Woman* comments on the tolerance, control, and absenteeism of emotionally damaged characters with the twisted father-daughter relationship in a Bengali family:

> The daughter must also obey the father and father figures who give her instruction in schoolwork, in music, and in introducing her to the world of literature, music, imagination, and introspection. In this case, she is permitted to ask for indulgence through their affection, and she demands overt demonstration of their affection ... the cultural ideal in this case is supported by the religious ideal based on the Hindu myth of Durga who, as a little girl Uma was loved and adored by her father, the king, and his subjects. Every girl in her father's home should be treated as Uma, soon to leave for her husband's home (Roy 1975, 157).

Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* is basically a story of transformation from damaged and twisted fragmentation to a more coherent sense of the self. The question of the sublime in feminism is an enquiry of a multifaceted aesthetics of knowing that our lives and experiences are spread between intellectual and political practices, especially due to cross-cultural differences, transnational disparities or sexualities. Hence, it can be observed that the theory of the sublime can explain the construction of a more coherent self and the elevation of consciousness. Simone de Beauvoir's earth-shattering sentence, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 1952, 301), is a contextual remark regarding the construction of female identity and Catherine Mackinnon declutters the idea of the premade woman and focuses on the unmaking of that premade self. This journey towards a more coherent self is a necessity that poured in women's lives no matter the country, no matter the language (Mann 2006, 151). For the sublime to take upon this idea of unravelling the "consciousness-raising" propagated by Catherine Mackinnon and established as a feminist method (MacKinnon 1989, 106–25), the very idea of 'raised' complies with the process of elevation or raised above from the current state concerning the sublime. Nevertheless, the question that always introduced at this point is raised above what? Raised to what degree? And why? The sublime's masculine traditions 'raised' the men and raped the women, and the history of women testifies to that. Indeed, if women are made, they can be unmade, and the liberatory sublime alludes to that process. It is the daily struggles of women, their mundane tribunals, and constant challenges in and out of their domestic sphere that unknots their consciousness, reasoning and elevates them to a state of their exceeding the one relegated to them.

The liberatory sublime offers a safe space for the struggles to be recognized differently and a space where characters can find a balance between their inner conflicts in relation the outer world struggles. In this case, Tara, even though culturally conflicted about Padma's illegitimate child, still remains supportive of her sister and defends her when confronted by the rest of the family. In the diasporic context, the sublime experience is oriented towards feminism because it breaks open space for feminist practice across all kinds of difficulties. "Women's Liberation" as Mann observes, makes the "sealed worlds break open, over and over again, the space between re-asserts itself, and feminism, if it is to be a viable movement at all, will (re)orient itself, again and again, in place after place and time after time" (Mann 2006,138). The liberatory sublime becomes a journey celebrating the idea of raising above the razed, victimized position and emerge as triumphant.

3. The Postcolonial Woman and the Uncanny

Indian women posing a real danger to the phallocentric Indian society and upbringing is not a new concern in postcolonial literature. The rise of postcolonial women is a way of resistance against being marginalized, oppressed, and victimized under religious oppression. The en-gendering of Indian women has been an interdisciplinary discourse about gender politics, gendered expectations, and subjugation of women as an unspoken national policy. The 21st-century Indian woman is treated both as a colonized citizen and as a victim by western notions of modernity (Ray 2000, 12). If the postcolonial self suggests the rebellion of the colonized existence to reclaim one's worth and identity, then Indian women have realized their potential as postcolonial women.

To Mukherjee's Tara and Padma, being Western is not being modern, and to follow traditions is not uncivilized or pitiful. The conflict between tradition and modernity is an essential part of Bengali households. A home created by Tara's father with equal respect and freedom, however, it is also a place where he demanded unquestioned respect. As Tara observes: "The qualities we associated with our father and with God were not quite divergent from the respect we accorded the president of the country, the premier of the state" (Mukherjee 2002, 29). This

home created a resting lodge where Tara and her sisters could access wealth, convent education, enjoy years of innocent childhood until thrown into marriage "after reaching the age of marital consent" (Mukherjee 2002, 29). Mukherjee, through Tara, focuses explicitly on this 1950s wealthy, Brahmin home in Calcutta that does not contribute to the sense of belonging, and where Tara and her sisters become more and more alienated within their supposed familiar zone and are eventually compelled to leave the country by marrying strangers. Even though the 19-year-old Tara breaks free from her father and his rules, Tara submits to Bishwapriya's rules — she is freed from being an obedient daughter only to submit as an obedient wife. She becomes confused and more estranged from herself.

Das Unheimlich, or the Uncanny, a 1919 essay by Sigmund Freud, concerns itself with and unfamiliarity and alienation as the familiar appearance during the unfamiliar situation or occurrence, or the reverse. Freud's essay is a straightforward response to the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's study "Über die Psychologie des Unheimlichen" (Bronstein 2020, 7) (translated as "On the Psychology of the Uncanny"). For Freud, as for Jentsch, the uncanny is a mild form of anxiety, directed from a specific phenomenon in real life and to certain motives in art, especially in fantastic literature. Julie Hakim Azzam observes different definition of the uncanny in relation home in *The Alien Within Postcolonial Gothic and the Politics of Home*:

> repetition, doubling, coincidence, or an eerie feeling of déjà vu. The unheimlich is bound up with homelessness because, at its core, it is triggered by the revelation that at the heart of what we call home is not comfortable domesticity, but an estranging, foreign place. The word *Heimlich* means something homely, familiar, and at ease, so we may assume that the term unheimlich signifies the opposite—the unhomely, foreign, hidden, and concealed (Azza 2007, 10).

Even though Freud's theory of the uncanny invokes gothic notions, it is discussed in interdisciplinary fields ranging from Marxist, historicist, psychoanalytic, political, to (post)colonial discourse. *Das Unheimlich* can be drawn in to explain the cultural trauma of Indian American diasporic life and alienation as to focus on the self-being concealed or stuck within a seemingly familiar but unknowable zone. In the postcolonial woman's context, the uncanny may be read as to represent darkness, tyranny, cultural tension, and alienation.

Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) which can be read as postcolonial fiction is, in many respects, represents a mixed version of Calcutta, Atherton and San Francisco. Tara's hypocritical and conservative mind contributes to the feeling of unhomely hostility one sister can express for another, trying to conceal Padma's secret child's identity as if it was something unholy or unthinkable. The idea of shame and a woman's chastity is so deep-rooted in Tara that its poisons her relationship with her sister Padma, who is a more liberated woman. Even though Tara lives with her non-Indian boyfriend and is divorced, she tries to hide her guilt or disappointment as a traditional Bengali woman through her sister's setback. Tara breaks her tradition in many ways but remains entangled to her native values. As Charu Sharma observes, the immigrants experience:

> pain and agony of, displacement, and relocation, the split between the native homeland and the adopted nation, the bicultural pull between the donor and recipient cultures, and the emotional fragmentation between two identities, two mindsets. If the experience of migrancy and exile is painful and emancipating then its challenges lie in hybridization, acculturation, and assimilation despite fragmentation. (Sharma 2008, 127)

Tara processes this alienation when she subconsciously fears the existence of Padma's illegitimate son Christopher and nullifies his existence in the family of Bhattacharjee sisters, as her son, Rabi, points out in disgust: "who's going to give Chris benefit of the doubt? He is the wrong

religion... and the wrong caste for the great Bhattacharjee family" (Mukherjee 2002, 90). The unhomeliness of Indian traditions, the instilled restrictions of Calcutta life, and the patriarchal boundaries all contribute to the lack of freedom and question Tara and Padma's life choices, relationships, and decisions to love and how to love. The collapse of the private space unto the public creates an impossible ring of gendered expectations and subjugation for Indian women inside and outside India. Indian American women carry the paradoxical idea of an ideal, and they slowly emerge into unsettling and unhomely figures themselves.

Das Unheimlich grounds itself in the home and its unhomeliness, which Freud's metaphorical discourse illuminates as a metaphor for psychological interiority and the return of the child into the adult's world as Tara says," I had a long childhood until thrown into marriage" (Mukherjee 2002, 21). Tara's constant preoccupation with the ancestral home in Mishtigunj and her inability to relate with the home she built in the States shows her desire to return to the childhood protection she received from her family. She imposes her desire to have a life without care where everything was provided, and she would not have to explain or deal with the adulting experiences in America in a quite racist way as she says "Nafisa's mother and I don't speak the same dialect. We don't even speak the same language. I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien" (Mukherjee 2002, 87). In her way, Tara was looking for the communal and religious differences she was brought up around in 1947 post-partition Bengal. Tara, though they received convent education and comes from an elite background, could not look past the seeming differences between Hindu and Muslims as Tara observes the religious difference:

> The communities speak the same language—Muslims, if truth be known, more tenaciously than Hindus. Nevertheless, for the faith's outer signs—the beards and skullcaps of the Muslims, the different dietary restrictions, the caste observances, the vermillion powder on the hair-parting of married Hindu women—there is little, fundamentally, to distinguish them. The communities suffer, as Freud put it, the narcissism of small difference. (Mukherjee 2002,148)

Tara's visit to Mishtigunj, her ancestral place, puts her Indian American identity in contrast to the spiritual satisfaction and mental peace she experiences in India. She realizes the materialistic passion of America to be wasteful and futile. She invests herself in this ritual of difference to thrive as a Hindu woman rather than accepting an ambiguous identity in America. She becomes the immigrant who wishes to deny her heritage to be more accessible, yet she enjoys the elitist brahmin life and becomes a mockery of the two cultural identities. Mukherjee's mention of Freud's narcissism while explaining the fake disparity between Hindus and Muslims in post-independence, postcolonial Calcutta signifies the classism and casteism of Bengali society and how wealthy families, due to their ancestral pride and sense of being virtuous, contribute to this division. In her way, Tara enjoys the centuries of division. She relishes the attention of being elite, being high class, and being a brahmin or when the children in her village spotted and shouted at her "America-memsaheb, America-memsaheb" (Mukherjee 2002, 17), meaning, the American woman.

In *Desirable Daughters* (2002), the "unheimlich" or unhomely may become a way for a text to approach the topics of home and history; illegitimacy and interracial relations; gender, the body, and trauma which connects to the colonial history and the postcolonial self that is built upon the rubbles of the colonial remnants. The root of the word "unheimlich" is home (Heim), which frames the argument about the uncanny within homes and the families and their inner dwelling, their relationship with each other in private space and relationship with the neighbouring surrounding as part of the public space — all acts as the constituents of the familiar territory called home (Bronstein 2020, 15). Freud initially defines the "*heimlich*" as something "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, marked by a pleasant domesticity, intimate,

[and] homely" (Bronstein 2020, 10). Nevertheless, Freud's articulation of the relationship between homely and unhomely manipulates the meaning between the "heimlich" and "unheimlich", in which the "heimlich" (Donald 2008, 93) implies both safe and disturbing; familiar and foreign as Julie Hakkim Azzam puts it:

> Freud contends, house and home are constituted by the repression of the past and the threatening other; the image of the comforting sphere of home is just a screen for the uncanniness that lurks within it. (Azzam 2007, 22)

Home as a place for past repression and horrifying nostalgia also signifies the dread and gradual fear. Tara and her sisters lived under patriarchal control and religious manipulation. They related home with hostility and threatening to their individual growth, reflected in Tara's relationship with her son. Given the ever-current threat of the uncanny, the idea of home seems like an illusion and more like fearful, which is stable, coherent and everlasting. The uncanny makes an ideal vehicle for an arrangement marked by cultural ambiguity that acts as a constant reminder for both Mukherjee and her not-so-desirable daughters that they do not belong to the American society without the proper untethering with the Indian cultural upbringing and Hindu heritage. Postcolonial women and their loss of relatability with either of the homes fosters fear in their heart and intensifies the trauma regarding migration (Gallop 1982, 55). Furthermore, existence at home starts to resemble the uncanniness of Indian American diasporic life.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to put forth the dilemma that diasporic Indians go through in pursuit of their 'home.' In directive to explain on the subject, I have referred to the writings of diasporic Indian writer, Bharati Mukherjee, in particular her novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002). Diasporic Indian literature persists to grow consistently and often relies on life narratives. However, despite the numerous narratives of diasporic life, it is difficult to ascribe a definite connotation to the idea of home. The meaning of home in Mukherjee's works relates to the change in Tara's own experience from an expatriate to an immigrant and it also changed her idea of home that she associated with her parents and her sisters in Mishtigunj, India. This shifting of experience signifies her displacement from India to America. During this phase of immigration, she suffered racial assaults due to her skin colour. She acknowledges her shift from India to America as a "movement away from the aloofness of expatriation to the exuberance of immigration" (Mukherjee 1992, 2–3). Tara's search for home beyond the homeland is reflected by Mukherjee's other female protagonists in her novels who cannot emerge victorious over their sense of detachment from the age-old cultural upbringing like many other expatriates. Tara also chose to be an American citizen even though she remained an Indian, a Bengali, a Calcuttan in heart. Tara, like Mukherjee, remained alienated even in the abundance of western privileges. The unhomeliness and self-elevation resulting from displacement and migration open up new possibilities of great liberty for a transcultural subject. An analysis of *Desirable Daughters* (2002) through the aesthetics of the liberal sublime and Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* explains Tara's journey Mukherjee focuses on in the novel. Tara, through her transformation from a docile daughter to an obedient wife and a rebel mother and sister realises her postcolonial self and rejects the nationalist, physical entity of home. Through constant reinventions of her past and present, through the rejection of hostile memories of home in Mishtigunj, Tara breaks the mould and creates the future prospect of the home in herself— a safe haven for postcolonial freedom.

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