



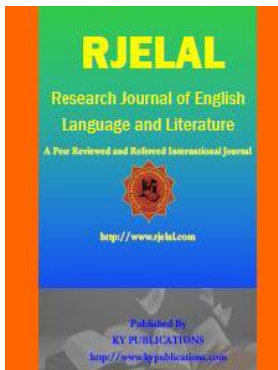
## THEME OF DISPLACEMENT AND ALIENATION IN BHARTI MUKHERJEE'S *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER*

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### ABSTRACT

Bharti Mukherjee is an Indian born American writer. She raises her voice for the rights of migrated Indian women and highlights their sufferings faced in abroad. The main aim of presenting this paper is to depict the effect of displacement on Indian women and how much they feel alienated outside their native country. The picture that emerges from the study of the novel is not only those of women being alienated and depressed due to the circumstances but also those of women coming out as bold character to overcome the challenges those come in their lives. The present paper throws light on social and cultural issues through the mouth of protagonist who gets success in bringing about social and cultural change by presenting her condition in society. So that, she presents feministic perspective and also creates an image of oppressed woman due to displacement and alienation. Displacement not only leads to separation but it also leads to alienation and rebirth in a new country, new culture, new society and new adjustments in an alien land. The protagonists of their novels look back to their native country with pain and nostalgia but after all these sufferings they are not ready to look back.

**Key Words:** Displacement, Alienation, Women, Immigrants.

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### INTRODUCTION

Bharti Mukherjee has discussed the problems and experiences faced by the Indian immigrants in United States or the Western world. She is one of the most significant contemporary novelists and short story writers whose writings have received world-wide recognition. The novelist depicts how the immigrants try to adapt to western society and how they feel rootless. In the present age of diaspora one's biological identity cannot be one's real identity because due to immigration both physical and psychological changes come.

In the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, the heroine, Tara Banerjee, comes back to India, her native land after seven years to meet her relatives and friends. But when she reaches, she finds the condition of India has been changed and she does not feel comfortable herself in such situation. She realizes that her ways of thinking and living are changed and she is no more an Indian now. She even does not remember about the rituals and Indian festivals. She also realizes that the attitude of her relatives, her friends and even her mother has been changed. Due to these conditions, she feels

alienated even on her native land. This situation appears because of her displacement to USA from India. She does not feel happy while her journey in a train and now for her America is a dream land. When she first time goes to America for higher studies, she is afraid of unknown and unfamiliar ways of American culture but now for her Indian ways are also unfamiliar. First she feels isolated and alienated in America, now she has same feeling for India. She realizes that she is now neither Indian and nor American and due to these circumstances, she is totally confused and lost in the world. Sometimes she also thinks that she is going to be mad.

*The Tiger's Daughter* illustrates the uprooted condition of Tara, the protagonist of the novel. Born in the family of Banerjees in Calcutta, Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes to the United States for higher studies. She marries David, an American and settles down in New York. After seven years she returns to Calcutta to locate her 'home' to trace her cultural roots and to reclaim her inherited identity as the daughter of Bengal Tiger and as the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Pachapara. She shunts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of encountering reality. The primary concern of the artist is to underscore (her futility of the expatriate's search for roots).

The novel emphasizes the need to reinvent and redefine the notion of 'home/homeland' and the notion of 'identity' from an immigrant's perspective. The term 'home/homeland' has the immediate connotation of a natal territory or space that takes Jove, warmth and security for granted. Though 'home' basically implies a specific geographical locale, in the context of immigrant experience, because of the need to belong in the immediate reality, its parameters are enlarged.

Tara's impulsive marriage to David bristles with a lot of problems. Doubt, fear, suspicion and misunderstanding surface in their personal relationship. Oscar Handlin's words in *The Uprooted* can be used to describe Tara's condition in America.

He says:

You long of course for the safety, you cherish still the ideals of the nest. But danger and insecurity are other words for freedom and opportunity. You are alone in a society without order; you miss the support of the community, the assurance of a defined rank. (5)

But Tara fails to make use of the freedom and opportunity offered by the host culture. Her problems of alienation, loneliness, despair, loss of identity and total anonymity in America spring from her uprooted condition. Her impulsive decision is to get back to India and belong there.

Tara's relatives refuse to treat her as an insider not even as an insider-turned-outsider. They ask her not "to look at the bad parts of India. [. . .] Promise to keep your eyes shut! Some parts are horrible" (18). Tara is quick to see her world of nostalgia crumbling. Marine Drive looks run down and crowded. She had admired the houses on Marine Drive seven years ago, but now their shabbiness appalls her. To Tam the train station looks like hospital. She feels, "I have returned to India" (21). The Howrah Station with its all-pervasive squalor and unending noise upsets and outrages her. In the midst of an army of relatives who profess to love her, vendors who ring bells, beggars who pull fit the sleeves and children who cough on tracks, Tara feels completely alone.

Tara understands that she and her friends do not see eye to eye on many things. To Tara, life in Calcutta is easier simpler than life in New York. She confides in Sanjay, "How much easier [. . .] it was to live in Calcutta. How much simpler to trust the city's police inspector and play tennis with him on Saturdays. How is humane to accompany a friendly editor to watch the riots ill town" (69). But life in New York is a gruesome nightmare. She says:

It wasn't muggings she feared much as the rude little invasions. The thought of a stranger, a bum from Central Park, a Harlem Dandy looking into her pocketbook, laughing at the notes she had made to herself, observations about her life and times, old sales slips accumulated over months for merchandise long lost or

broken, credit cards, identification cards with unflattering pictures by which a criminal could identify her. And more than the muggings the waiting to be mugged, fearing the dark that transformed shoddy innocuous side streets into giant fangs crouching, springing to demolish this one last reminder of the Banerjees of Pachapara. (69)

New York is so exotic that it drives Tara to despair. She is frightened of the place because policemen prowl the underground tunnels with dogs, and girls like her get stabbed in the elevators in their own apartment buildings (33-34). It is irony of ironies that New York is enchanting to a resident of New York whereas to Tara's friends in Calcutta, it is a lovely place. They refuse to believe that there are ghettos and demonstrations in America. Tara's friends in India romanticize New York as an exotic place whereas Tara romanticizes India only to be disillusioned at the end when she faces the stark Indian reality. There seems to be no point where these two incurable romantics can meet.

Moreover, Tara becomes aware of the fact that she has lost touch with her native tongue 'Bengali.' She has also forgotten Indian English words like 'fuss pot' and the common idiom of her friends. So there is a breach in communication. Veronica Brady in her article "Straddling Two Cultures" says that Tara does not belong here as she does not share their language (111). In fact, one acquires a language through one's interaction with the outside world. In the process of acquiring a language, one imbibes the culture too because culture is transmitted through language. So when Tara loses her language, she loses her culture too.

Through her work Bharati Mukherjee mentions the desires, wishes and expectations of immigrant women who want to live their native culture in abroad. Above discussed work is related to the diasporic situation of the lives of Indians and Indians-Americans. It also discusses the theme of cultural transformation. The writer shows how this female character keep hold on their native cultures and also create their new identity in foreign cultures. But the fact is that, relationships, language, rituals and religion all help these

characters to maintain their culture in new surroundings. Migrated women are isolated from their families, parents, home, culture, relatives, friends and the communities also in which they live.

The lives of such women in the select novel end with a sense of loss. All the time they feel that they are missing something important in their lives and this feeling defines them.

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