



A STUDY OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S "THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER"

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee is Indian-born American Novelist and short story writer. She went to America for her higher studies, and then lived in Canada with her husband Clark Blaise for a few years. In 1980 she went back to America where she currently lives. She is one of the writer, who would rather be considered as being from her adopted homeland, rather than as an Indian Expatriate writer. Mukherjee's fiction portrays expatriate characters and their experiences. Mukherjee's works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates as well as on Indian women and their struggle. Her own struggle with identity first as an exile from India, then an India, then as Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as a immigrant in the united States has lead to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants. Bharathi Mukherjee is called as an Asian-American writer, Indo-American writer, Indian Diasporic writer, writer of immigrant fiction and non-fiction, and American writer of mainstream today. This paper aims to analyze how the protagonist is suffered in fatherland due to cross cultural identity. This paper is an attempt to observe, the novel *The Tiger's Daughter* based on the concept of identity crisis.

Key Words: Identity, Expatriate, Immigration, culture, diaspora.

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This novel shows about the protagonist Tara is the girl who is studied at convent in Calcutta, who went to America for her higher studies, and married with an American writer, David Cartwright. After seven years she came back to India for a trip, which is similar to Bharathi Mukherjee's own personal experience from her own trip back to India with her Canadian husband, Clark Blaise. Tara feels more alienated on her return, as she encounters the clash of cultures and values in Calcutta. Hence, the westernized Tara feels like an alien in her own country. Therefore in the end, she decides to return

to her husband David in America. Aparajita Ray rightly comments: "The protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright makes a trip home to India to soothe her ruffled feathers but becomes painfully aware that her memories of a refined Brahmin lifestyle are usurped by her westernization" (84). Instead of being comforted by middle-class Bengali Brahmin traditions, Tara is now struck by great impressions of poverty, hunger, disease, and political turmoil.

Tara's father "The Bengal Tiger" sends Tara to New York for higher studies at the age of fifteen.

As a student, Tara faced discrimination on the alien soil. She feels home sickness:

“For Tara, Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake... she would have rushed home to India at the end of first week.” (10)

Though she confronts discrimination in the foreign land, she faces it boldly and even reacts aggressively to defend her family and her native country when her friends try to ridicule it. Whenever she feels broken, she prays to goddess Kali for strength. She hangs silk scarves around her apartment to make it more Indian at times of her loneliness. “Like any expatriate in a country like America, Tara creates a little India”. Physically and emotionally without any communication whatsoever with the host culture. As Tara’s relationship with India too is fragile, she feels homeless” (Stephen 21). During her stay in America, Tara, at first, finds it difficult to adjust to the alien culture, hence, her sense of loneliness. But with the exposure to American culture and its strangeness, Tara learns to develop qualities of courage, determination and strength. Tara’s stay in America for seven years has totally changed her attitude. She thinks on her own and gives importance to her desires. When she comes across cultural conflicts in America, she tries to resolve it by herself. In the meantime, she meets David Cartwright an American, falls in love with him and takes a bold decision to marry him overlooking her family customs and traditions. Tara who had defended her Indian heritage breaks it with courage by marrying an American who is considered an outcaste by her family. She believes that her marriage with an American will give her new meaning to her American life. Tara’s American attitude to life is easily sensed by her relatives in India. They find her “stubborn”: “the relatives attributed Tara’s improprieties, to her seven years in America” (19). It is America’s influence on her that has changed her perspective about India. Tara’s rootless self makes the scenery, outside, “merely alien and hostile.” (25) The dullness, Emptiness and desperation are evoked by her American life:

New York, she thought now, had been exotic. . . . There were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like

her...were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings.... The only pollution she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution. New York was certainly extraordinary and it had driven her to despair. (33-34)

Tara is torn between mutually contradictory emotions on seeing Aunt Jharna since she cannot sympathize with her aunt’s religious attempts to heal the child, and also, she does not hate them all. Her innocent remark, whether Aunt Jharna has tried plaster casts and special shoes for her clubfooted child is seriously mistaken by Aunt Jharna as she rebukes Tara:

“You think you are too educated for this, don’t you? . . . You have come back to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your *mleccha* Husband?” (36-37). In India Tara finds nothing to her liking. For Tara, Calcutta appears to be a city with riots, political upheaval, buses burning, and workers surrounding the warehouses.

Seven years ago, Tara had admired “the houses on Marine Drive” (18) but her stay at Vassar has changed her outlook on Indian life. The very houses she admired then, “now their Shabbiness appalled her” (18). Aparajita Ray remarks: “She discovers she is more an outsider than a native, having an objective concern with the complex and confusing web of politics, Privilege and the hierarchies of power and class in India” (84). To her dismay Tara Understands that Calcutta, the city that she loved so much, is slowly becoming a nightmare. The streets were crowded with people shouting slogans, looting shops, breaking Windowpanes and assaulting of upper class people.

Tara and David lead a contended life in the United States, yet Tara is apprehensive of the fact that she is a Westerner. When David asks Tara minute details about her family background, and Indian tradition, she fails to communicate its finer aspects. Nagendra Kumar comments: “Her failure to do so is rooted in their cultural differences. In India marriage is not simply a union of two individuals, it is coming together of two families as well. But in Western countries like America, a marriage is simply a contract between two individuals” (30). Tara’s apprehension about her husband’s inability to

understand her country through her leads to doubt, fear, and misunderstanding in their personal relationship. The cultural differences between Tara and David cause the feeling of insecurity in Tara. To overcome this feeling, she decides to visit India after a gap of seven years. Tara arrives to India with little awareness that her attitude has changed after her seven years stay in America. In turn, her hope of getting comfort on her native soil gets shattered. She feels lonely and insecure even when she is in the company of her friends and relatives. Stanley Stephen rightly states: "Her Problems of alienation, loneliness, despair, loss of identity and total anonymity in America springs forth from her rootless condition. Ironically, Mukherjee makes a criticism of the conservative attitude of the Indians who are crazy of foreign things and clothes but they do not appear of marriage with foreign people. In the presence of her mother, Tara feels alienated. Within herself, Tara becomes mentally turbulent and makes her return to the USA. Thus, in the first novel one finds the feeling of alienation of Tara.

CONCLUSION

In this work of fiction *The Tiger's Daughter* Bharati Mukherjee provides us with a very worthwhile perspicacity in most fascinating feature of the evacuee that they don't have any indestructible identity of their own. They are unshielded and bohemian everywhere. Tara, the protagonist in this fiction is a grief-stricken self, mangled with no lineage and feels estranged from her own indigenous land. Tara felt as a Martian, where she was ethnically a pariah. She finds herself unshielded and her pursuit for her own identity ensues in her tragic end. Finally to conclude, one should first be cognizant with their own self completely to have their own identity.

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