

Realization, Reconciliation and Pains of Adjustment in Bharati Mukherjee's Novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*.

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian-born writer. Her fictitious prose narratives characterize principally Indian women as central characters. Her books deal with concerns of application for numerous migrant women in the present day—in expressions of sexual category identification, equal opportunity, and assimilation.

*The aim of this paper is to evaluate Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* for commitment with the diversity of dilemmas that women are confronted with today; centering particularly on concerns of diaspora, the article will investigate the means in which the work of fiction deals with the hurting of emigration, estrangement and separation, which being an essential component of the immigrant woman's incidents. Their importance is how each portrays the potential for alteration through the Indian woman's diasporic understanding. I intend to discover, specifically, individuality predicament and cross-cultural inconsistency in the transformative occurrences of the female personality represented in Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*.*

The narrative discloses the tale of Tara Banerjee who is exposed to cultural shock, isolation and lack of recognition from both her indigenous land and America. Tara's passage all through the story satirically demonstrates annoying gradually culminating to her deprivation of individuality, false impression, and hopelessness and ultimately her destroyed self. Using this novel, I will discover the consequences of the great effort of diasporic people accept the option between 'home' and the embraced nation of their preference and the cultural predicaments which occur from deciding to put together these options.

Key Words: Diaspora, Displacement, Exile, Identity, Transformation

Bharati Mukherjee's work of fictions and short fiction often address current facts and subjects such as disturbing and emotional consequences of the pursuit of one's probable and calibre of a person principally in correlation to societal situation. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the central character, Tara visits her motherland after living in America for several years. Facing difficulties in adjusting to the American manner of life style, she goes back to Calcutta eager to experience the feeling of association she once relished there. She is saddened and recognizes that America is the right place for her.

Mukherjee outlines an Indian culture from the viewpoint of diasporan Tara, who grapples for compromise connecting expatriation and homeland – her adopted nation and the motherland. The idea of homeland is very significant in a person's existence. Homeland provides a feeling of wanted, and portrays sanctuary, protection, permanence and solace. The word Home is suggestive of the idea of a comfortable place where one is welcome and is surrounded with household individuals where one finds comfort and is free. Tara, a diasporan, does not find this solace. She does not find the impressive reassurance of her motherland anymore, the one she was used to. She experiences estrangement and makes an effort to merge her Americanness with her Indianness and adjust to the transformed setting of Calcutta.

Tara Banerjee changes to Tara Banerjee Cartwright after she marries David. It is a obvious sign of the permeation of feminist philosophy into Tara's consciousness. The changed name is suggestive of the psychological condition of an immigrant.

An Indian woman after her matrimony gives up her unmarried individuality and takes up her husband's. The changed Tara's perception is because there is a blend between the American customs with her in-depth Indian customs in her consciousness. The western liberated accepted wisdom allows her to accept a new identity without giving up her Indian individuality.

Tara is the essence of a youthful woman immigrant who is missing her home and prefers to return to her homeland rather than live in her adopted country. According to Shobha Shinde, "An immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it" (cited in Kumar, 2001: 31). When Tara is in America, Tara wants to return to Calcutta, but once there she meets head-on with the callous changes that are now in place. The memories of her early days and passionate imaginings of her home country are destroyed:

For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, then the deformed beggar in the Railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offense (*TD*: 25).

Tara's sees countless alterations in the imperial city of British India, Calcutta. The warnings of its deteriorating condition are clear. The once magnificence Catalli Continental hotel, now has a multitude of vagrants. Opinionated turbulence and group clashes are out of control (Mukherjee, Accessed 2 April 2010). She is disappointed with her return journey home is and she knows to hope for herself better expectations in Calcutta is futile, "Calcutta's going to the dogs. No question about it" (*TD*: 44). "It's all so very different," Tara said. And it's going to be a lot more different... and tragic" (*TD*: 45). The readers along with Tara is exposed to the realization of the insensitive state of postcolonial Calcutta as the novel progresses, "that the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one. That it was fatal to fight for justice; that it was better to remain passive and absorb all shocks as they came" (*TD*: 131).

Tara view of India changes negatively, as she is making judgements, not through her vision of formative years, but through the western influence of amended viewpoint of. As Jasbir Jain comments, "Tara's consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States and when she looks at India anew it is not through her childhood associations or her past memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband David." Thus, "[h]er reactions are those of a tourist, of a foreigner" (cited in Kumar, 2001: 35).

She regrets coming to India alone without her husband and he is in her thoughts, not able to forget him; reflecting that "[p]erhaps I was stupid to come without him," Tara considers herself to have been "too impulsive, confusing [her] fear of New York with homesickness" before finally questioning her sanity: "Or perhaps I was going mad" (*TD*: 21).

Mukherjee, through the doubts creeping into Tara's psyche demonstrates that she now considers the unfamiliar country her home. Many immigrants come to this realization on their return journeys to their native country. When they are in their alien land, they dream of their motherland. Back in India, Tara as a migrant visitor observes sickness, misery, demonstrations and scarcity. Tara' is influenced by her western philosophies and this causes her to distinguish the vacuum between her adopted country and her native country. This consciousness arouses a incessant argument in her psyche. The diasporans become aware that their adopted country is their homeland now and not their native land. Through her narrative, Mukherjee indicates that this acceptance and awareness is a widespread happening for women immigrants.

Certainly cultural conflict experienced by diasporan individuals is an issue explored in *The Tiger's Daughter*. Bengal Brahmin girl of a higher rank goes to America for further education. After seven years of living in America, she arrives in India to be with her family. She experiences a strange feeling of being an outsider in an unfamiliar locale. She wakes up to the realization that she is now neither an Indian nor truly an American. She is absolutely bewildered and feels odd.

Now she is required to examine her inward self which consists of two immensely dissimilar ways of life and principles. After her marriage, Tara experiences cultural conflict when she fuses her maiden name and her husband's surname – Mrs Tara Banerjee Cartwright - the American-ness and inborn Indian-ness in her consciousness are in conflict- the two diverse traditions. The integration of the two cultures is averted by this inside conflict causing an intellectual hindrance.

In America, she feels she does not belong and in India, she searches for a sense of belongingness, to be accepted as an individual, but realizes that reunion with her native India is unattainable. Tara, though a migrant, is very much an Indian woman.

Assimilate

Indian women face dualism and divergence early in their lives. Parents differentiate between their male and female children in their childhood itself. The constant reminder by the parents of their impending marriage and their displacement to some other place after getting married and to remain subservient and be acculturative is a torture for them. An Indian girl has to change to a new way of living at her in-laws after marriage. She loses her identity to become somebody else, leaving behind her the identity given by her parents. With migration to a new nation, an Indian woman's inner conflict is doubled. Tara's predicament should be looked at from this point of view. According to Brinda Bose:

Duality and conflict are not merely a feature of immigrant life in America; Mukherjee's women are brought up in a culture that presents them with such ambiguities from childhood. The breaking of identities and the discarding of languages actually begin early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of rich cultural and religious traditions, on the one hand, and the "new learning" imposed by British colonialism in India, on the other. These different influences involve them in tortured processes of self-recognition and self-assimilation right from the start; the confusion is doubled upon coming to America (cited in Kumar, 2001: 41).

In India Tara experiences out of place with her family and friends on numerous happenings because of her marriage with an American, David, who has an active role in specific events, plays an important role in the narrative. Tara's and David's relationship is used by Bharati Mukherjee to illustrate difficulties that can exist in cross-cultural bonds (Alam, 1996: 32). The disparities linking the conditions of a "Third World" country and a developed country create the cross-cultural predicaments greatly sensitive. David is unable to appreciate Tara's strange incidents of the disorganized and worthless incidents in the disturbed and anxious society of Calcutta as David's world is safe and steady. David "expected everything to have meaning or point" (*TD*: 130).

In her letters to David, Tara writes to her husband, a broad-minded North American and he reads about the occurrences in Calcutta. Tara frequently speculates about the problems of exchanging effectively her emotions about her city, Calcutta and its populace to David. She finds it difficult to confide her thoughts with David who was, "a foreigner" (*TD*: 46), her mother's passion with indemnity guidelines. There are some things about her holiday in Calcutta, Tara believes, that she cannot disclose to David as she is understanding a Calcutta that is beyond her understanding and disorganized (Alam, 1996: 23). A migrant woman, who has made a decision to marry a foreigner, finds reservations in revealing the problems that she is confronted with in Calcutta to David. Tara does not mix her homeland and her adopted country keeping them separate in trying to construct a pleasant marital association. Though Tara, who has failed to integrate into the American community, is an Indian by birth, yet is treated as a foreigner in India by her family and friends. Tara's inability to discuss her family environment and lifestyle in Calcutta with David is suggestive of their cultural distinctions. In Mukherjee's words, "David's failure to understand and Tara's inability to discuss freely with David about her concerns expose the problems of cross-cultural bonds" (Accessed 2 April 2010). She could not explain to David, who "was hostile to genealogies and had often misunderstood her affection for the family as overdependence" (*TD*: 64). His failure to understand stems from the fact that he is secure in his country of established individuality and free from unsurprising proceedings. Tara thinks she cannot open her heart to David some things about her holiday in Calcutta specifically because "he expected everything to have some meaning or point" (*TD*: 130).

Bharati Mukherjee suggests that migrants suffer hurt and incomprehension journeying into India and vice versa. She reiterates that it is not easy to construct a crossing to conquer cultural obstructions; factors such as misinterpretation, bewilderment, and lack of understanding are bound to exist. According to Alam, there are limits to David's understanding of and tolerance for Indians; and there are limits to his in-laws tolerance of him in that Tara's family has difficulty understanding and accepting that Tara has taken an American husband (1996: 23-24). Either way, a limitation exists which needs to be conquered to overcome this cultural gap.

Washington McDowell and Antonia Whitehead are two minor foreign characters in the narrative. Their contact with Indian culture illustrates the confusion caused by their presence. American student McDowell arrives in Calcutta on a swap over plan and arranged to stay to reside with Reena's family.

The family, looking forward to his visit, is astounded to find that he is a black American and disappointment mars their anticipation and eagerness. Assuming that her daughter is having a relationship with McDowell an “African”, Reena’s mother’s astonishment gives way to apprehension (TD: 138). Before long, McDowell leaves their residence to support Calcutta’s revolutionaries, of the type he was familiar with in America. American Antonia Whitehead is recognized with having red hair is in Calcutta on missionary service, to help the Third World, “...I’m here...really I’m here because India needs help. The third world has to be roused to help itself” (TD: 166). Sanjay, a journalist is Tara’s friend, and his editorial on Antonia Whitehead reads:

It has been said that she is really a blessing in disguise, that she is a missionary defrocked, that she is Deepak Ghose’s special lady friend. But I say to you she is dangerous. She is like a snake tightly coiled. I say to you get rid of her before she spreads further discontent. She talks in Shambazar of “democratization” and “politicization”, of parity and socioeconomic balance. But I urge you Calcuttians to throw out this perilous lady before it is too late (TD: 164-165).

Tara becomes conscious that there is a similarity between her and Antonia Whitehead. Whitehead’s behaviour is like Tara’s in her early weeks on her return journey to homeland, “impatient, menacing and equally innocent” (TD: 166). Tara knows that Antonia Whitehead will cause a great deal of bewilderment for the period she is in India. Antonia blunders her way through India and is. Antonia is not well versed with Indian culture and politics; she wishes to help and is keen to bring about transformations but her mistakes are frowned upon and Indians, with whom she comes in contact with, fail to understand her and her motives are questioned. In the process, she generates crisis for herself. Her attempts and purposes are not appreciated. She creates a danger to the country in terms of culture and political affairs. Antonia Whitehead is making a mistake hurrying in where angels dread to put their foot. Tara has learned earlier that “it was impossible to be a bridge for anyone [...] bridges had a way of cluttering up the landscape” (TD: 144). Both The Indians are uneasy about Whitehead and McDowell and their presence creates distrust, confusion and anxiety in the Indian society. Using them, Mukherjee attempts to demonstrate that misunderstanding and bewilderment are expected in cross-cultural associations.

Tara’s friends’ responses convey their outlook on cross-cultural matrimony and thus, in this way, Tara becomes conscious of their sentiments towards her marriage. This becomes visible at a picnic on the factory grounds of Banerjee & Thomas [Tobacco] Co. Ltd. The discussion is on the names and telephone numbers of invited guests:

“What about Roma Sen?”

“What nonsense! She married her weird Nigerian and went off at least a month ago.”

“How dare you say that. She was such a nice girl, no?” (TD: 86)

In Tara’s attendance, her friends utter their displeasure of Roma Sen’s matrimony knowing well that Tara is wedded to a foreign person. Their dissatisfaction of foreigners turns out to be even more evident when they talk about the preparations of American foreign exchange students’ billeting:

“...In any case I’m willing to take my chances with this boy rather than the two girls from Columbus, Ohio.”

“What does your mother feel about all this?”

“Come on, you know her. Of course, she expects disaster. She thinks I will follow your example and marry an American *mleccha*.”

“I don’t like that last remark. Look, Reena – how *dare* you call David a *mleccha*?” How dare your mother of all people talk like that about something that does not concern her?” (TD: 109)

Tara feels an outsider hearing this, which makes David, an outcaste. Her friends assert to be contemporary and yet are bounded by an impenetrable partition of self-confidence Tara feeling embarrassed “had slipped outside” the parameters of a world in which she belonged by birthright, and that even after only seven years outside it, “re-entry was barred” (TD: 109-110). Tara was considered an outsider and re-entry was barred because of her marriage to David. These Indians claim to be modern but their outlook is very much traditional in beliefs and practices inborn in them.

Tara’s friends want foreign clothes but do not appreciate foreign marriage partners. For instance, at a guest-house picnic, Tara’s friend, Nilima, proposed to go swimming to cool down; her intention was to exhibit the bathing costume from New York that Tara had brought for her. The spectacle of her friends in swimming garments saddened Tara, “The soft edges of their bottoms escaping the grip of the Western bathing suits” (TD: 93). Tara feels there is somewhat abnormal or ridiculously bold and completely unfamiliar to Bengali culture about their composure.

The ideas of food differ in Bengali and American cultures. In India, “eating was a class protection” (TD: 96). Culturally, Bengalis eat massive quantity of food. This is emphasized at the picnic where:

Tara watched the food disappear, not just the main dishes, but the incidentals, like shredded cucumber in spicy yoghurt, oily and wafer thin *papads*, chutneys, sweet and sour *dal* (TD: 96).

Tara’s habit of eating food is not like the others. She selects her food cautiously. She and David usually missed out lunch in New York. David is strict with the amount of food he eats and they opt not to have sophisticated dinner feasts. To David it was humorous when Tara’s parents recorded birthday menus in airmail letters, “How can they eat so much? It’s obscene! he had said” (TD: 96). Tara now realized that in Bengali culture “...eating was not a matter for amusement” (TD: 96). For Bengalis, it is considered abnormal to eat small meals whereas Americans like David are averse to “fatness” (TD: 96) and device their meals towards maintain a healthy diet.

A feature of culture difference is observed in *The Tiger’s Daughter*; entertaining but demonstrates an idea of the lack of knowledge of visitors arriving in a country where a particular thing is not necessary but may be important for a foreigner. One such remarkable occasion is when an associate of Jaycees, Pronob, is awaiting swap over students from American. Tara and Reena, finalizing the guest list for the expected students, recollect other foreign house guests Pronob had accommodated with them in the past:

“Do you remember when we took the whole Australian bunch to Kolaghat?”

“The toilet Paper incident?”

“That was really priceless! Wow! Those Australian boys shouting, ‘Paper! Paper!’ and our village servants chasing them in the woods with “No paper, no paper, only water, sir” (TD: 107).

Tara and Reena found that funny at that time but now it caused Tara to remember of her predicament the time she had difficulty in opening a milk packet when she first arrived in America. At that time, the Australians’ dilemma had appeared frenziedly amusing to the girls and Tara recalls Reena saying:

Serves them right for wanting to see the *real* India ... These foreigners just want to take snaps of bullock carts and garbage dumps. They’re not satisfied with modern people like us (TD: 108).

The difference in cultural upbringing of the Indians and the Australians is outlined in his incident. Tara speculates whether David would take those photographs which tourists usually if he decides to come to India, or he would make an effort to arrest the pain of Calcutta. If Tara is concerned that her association with Reena will become more strained if David decides to see “the *real* India” (TD: 108). Reena wishes to safeguard the disguise or sham of their being regarded as contemporary individuals. Tara remembered the fright at having to open a milk packet at Horn and Hardart on her first time in America and she was frightened also, of using machines containing food as she was definite she could not and dared not activate the machines.

Tara realizes that her come back to Calcutta, her homeland, after living seven years in America, her choice of adopted country, causes her only hurt. As Avter Brah says, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the mind of a diasporic individual. Actually it is a place of no return (cited in *Muse India*, Accessed 2 April 2010). The mental state of the diasporic individual in the novel is projected in their misconception of the idea of home. After the period of colonization, India has observed immigration of countless knowledgeable Indians to the rewarding life of the west. It can be perceived as a break away from financial and community disorder widespread in India.

The novel, *The Tiger’s Daughter* by Bharati Mukherjee describes the conflict between false impression and realism, realization, reconciliation and adjustment which the majority of diasporic persons face. In spite of her love marriage to Western outlook David, an American, Tara feels unwanted and unhinged in America – a complete non-conformist in the adopted nation of her choice and desires to return home to once colonized Calcutta. She is uncertain in an unfamiliar environment and conceals false impressions about her childhood days Calcutta, where she was confident and safe, and where she could be her own self.

Her daydreams are blown apart and with the thoroughness of a newspaper reporter and her friends, Bharati Mukherjee guides her protagonist throughout the narrative with adventures and misadventures one after the other to a final self-realization and reconciliation. Tara comes to the realization that she loves David “fiercely” (TD: 210) and that she is a non-conformist in Calcutta, her home town. With that self-realization comes reconciliation to the thought that America is the place where she wants to be, it is her home.

Mukherjee craftily unveils the history of Bengal and also the lifestyle of the Bengali aristocratic class that is in facing the threat of being brought down by activists and looters.

The novel includes incidents from colonial societal Bengali history and displays sights of a more elegant and well-organized Calcutta. Joyonto Roy Chowdhury remembers these episodes of Bengali history of the anti-colonial swadeshi movement. In Calcutta history is in draw back and the culture of the old Calcutta is slowly eroding.

Tara's trip to India confirms to be a search for self individuality. She realizes that the city and the people she had wanted to be with after her stay in America were not the same and was in the danger of fatal turned down. She discovers that her outlook has changed and is aware of her western thinking and ultimately realization that her future is not in her homeland but in exile. Tara, a migrant and immigrants like Tara, find such experiences frustrating and disappointing, isolated, dejected and at last leads to her impending catastrophic ending. Mukherjee describes a variety of predicaments and occurrences of life in the mother country and in the accepted country of a diasporic individual, making Tara conscious of her new direction and new means of thoughts for the western country in relation to the rapid altering opinionated, communal and enriching worldwide situation. Bharati Mukherjee competently exposes the agony of adjustment of a diasporic individual in her first work of fiction *The Tiger's Daughter*.

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