

Bharati Mukherjee's 'The Tiger's Daughter' As a Study of an Immigrant's Psyche

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Abstract: *Here is the study of Bharati Mukherjee's novel 'The Tiger's Daughter' as an immigrant's psyche. There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and Indianness in the psyche of protagonist Tara and they are always at a note of confrontation with each other. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. The outcome of this situation is her split up psyche.*

Keywords: *Alienation, Depression, Immigrant, Psyche, Disillusion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Here is an attempt to analyze the character named Tara in the novel 'The Tiger's Daughter' by Bharati Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee is a well-known Indo-American writer of recent decades. She depicts cross-cultural elements, female psyche and search for identity very skilfully in her novels.

In the novel 'The Tiger's Daughter' the protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright is the daughter of a Bengali industrialist and married to an American named Devid. She feels alienated in her own native land when come back to India after seven years. She meets a tragic and at last.

The aim of writing this paper is to study psyche of Tara as an immigrant's psyche. Tara's psyche depicts how an immigrant feels alienated in his/her own native land when treated as a foreigner.

2. TARA'S PSYCHE AS AN IMMIGRANT

She takes up the life of the Indian immigrants in the USA as the subject-matter of most of her novels. There she tries to vivify the image of those women who have tried to assimilate the alien culture and have tried to accept the changed identity, over throwing the Indian cultural heritage in which they took their first breath. What is most important in them is their spirit with which they overthrow their old culture and adjust themselves with the new surroundings. The psyche of an immigrant is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia.

When the protagonist Tara visits the unknown land, she is an outsider in a no-man's land and there she has to struggle a lot for her survival. Conquering the new feeling of nostalgia, she carves out a new territory and wraps herself totally with the lure of the west. She recreates herself into a new personality and forms emotional ties with the place she lives in. This discovery of a new self slowly makes her forget her own native culture. On her return to her native land she finds that her native taste and touch have turned alien to her. Her mind is again torn apart between the cultural clash of two environments and she is forced to fight with her split personality.

Tara comes across a kind of bewilderment on her visit to India after seven years. The protagonist named Tara Banerjee Cartwright is an autobiographical presentation of the author herself who is also married to an American. Bharati Mukherjee describes herself as an American author, but after reading the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, the reader feels more the Indian pulse throbbing in her. It appears that she has not been able to come out of the shadow of her Indianness, which is always with her. There are numerous scenes in the novel where we find the typical spirit of a Bengali which is found in her

use of the typical Indian terms. The protagonist's habit of retaining her maiden surname after marriage symbolically reflects her subconscious mind which is still deeply rooted in her native land and has not been able to forget it in spite of the changed identity of a European adopted by her.

There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and Indianness in the psyche of Tara and they are always at a note of confrontation with each other. Sometime she makes futile effort to establish her American self.

But it clashes with the pulse of Indian life on her visit to Calcutta. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. The outcome of this confrontation is her split up psyche. The protagonist being depressed and disgusted with the deteriorating situation of India and her new personality finds herself difficult to adjust with the situation and finally wishes to go back to the USA to her husband, but she becomes a victim of violence in India.

During those moments when she is caught up in the violence, her mind is preoccupied with her husband David in America.

The Tiger's Daughter is Tara Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin of Calcutta and daughter of an industrialist known as Bengal Tiger, schooled at Poughkeepsie, New York and married to an American named David, who is a writer. After her marriage Tara becomes Tara Banerjee Cartwright and makes a trip home to India after being there for seven years. When the twenty-two-year-old Tara visits India, the alien western culture which has almost become a second self to her is constantly in clash with the culture of her native soil. The clash is deeply felt in the psyche of Tara who finds it difficult to adjust with her friends and relatives in India; and sometime with the traditions of her own family. The greatest irony of her return is that she feels loneliness in her own native land. Her new self is no doubt responsible for this disruption of her pleasure, but the deteriorating social changes and her new perspective towards the poverty and dirtiness in India aggravate her discomfort, frustration and disgust. Tara expected that her return to India would remove her displeasure of staying abroad which is described in the following lines:

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.

Tara's journey from Bombay to Calcutta brings an equally disgusting experience to her. In Calcutta too, she finds everything changed and deteriorated. The Calcutta she finds now is under the grip of violence due to riots, caused by the confrontation between different classes of society. This shatters her dream of Calcutta and makes her react in a negative manner. Slowly her changed personality makes her a misfit in the company of her friends and relatives and makes her unable to participate in the ritual functions of home. Her alienation is deepened as she is welcomed by her relatives as 'Americawali' and her husband a 'mleccha.' Her aunt Jharna and her old Catelli-Continental friends talk about her husband David as a 'mleccha.' Such labels of distinction intensify the alienation in the mind of Tara and they deepen the angst of her mind. Contrary to her expectations Tara feels that her mother's attitude towards her has changed, and she too seems to be unhappy at her marriage. The following lines bring out an impact of this on the mind of Tara:

"Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow."

Tara's mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities one of an Indian and the other of an American. During such moments she feels to go back to her husband David because she feels that she would be more at ease there. Caught in this gulf between the two contrasting worlds, Tara feels that she has forgotten many of her Hindu worshipping icons which she had seen her mother performing since her childhood. The following incident throws light on this aspect:

"When the sandal wood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the slimy stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual."

Tara feels alienation in her own native country.

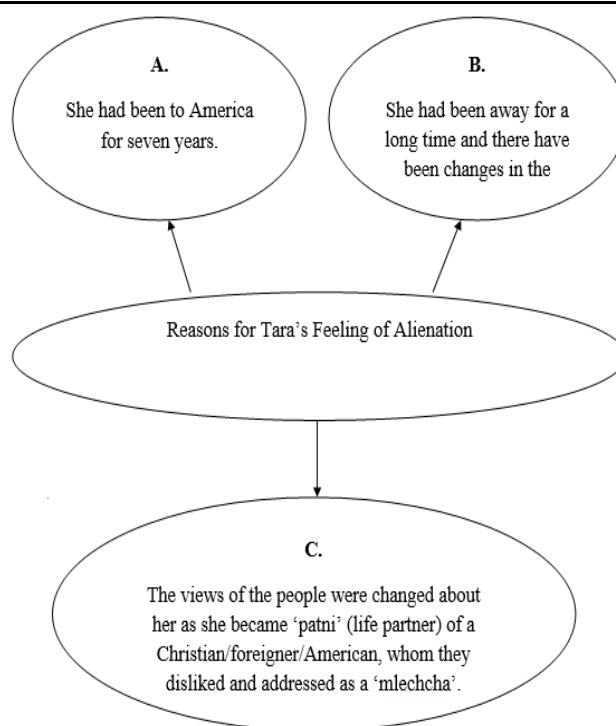


Figure1. Psyche of Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter*

Brinda Bose aptly remarks that

Duality and conflict are not merely a feature of immigrants life in America; Mukherjee's women are brought up in a culture that presents such ambiguities from childhood. The breaking of identities and the discarding of languages actually begin early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of the rich culture and religious traditions on the one hand, and the 'new learning' imposed by British colonialism in India on the other.

Thus Tara's journey to India her own native land ironically proves frustrating slowly leading to disillusion, alienation, depression, and finally her tragic end. The greatest irony hidden in the story of Tara is that she survived the racial hardships of survival in a foreign country but nothing happens to her. She becomes a victim of her tragic end in her native soil-her home, which she had longed to see since her stay in New York, and where she comes to seek peace. Her desire to find a place to love and security which she missed in New York ends ironically in frustration. The irony with which we are left is that Tara an India born young woman feels a greater love and security in the arms of her American husband and thinks about him at a time when her end is approaching. Tara's journey to India is best represented in her mood presented in the following lines: "It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse, this trip home to India." (130) The immigrant's return to her own country proves frustrating both physically and metaphorically. The world of western liberation represented by Tara and David and the conservatism and Indianness represented by her mother Arati are irreparable. The gulf cannot be bridged and Tara's psyche remains split up like other immigrants.

3. CONCLUSION

Tara's journey to India, her own native land ironically proves frustrating. It slowly leads to disillusion alienation, depression and finally tragic and of Tara. The greatest irony of Tara's life is that she survived the racial hardships of survival in a foreign country but nothing happens to her. She meets her tragic end in her native soil-her home.

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