

HOMELESSNESS AND ROOTLESSNESS IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER*

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Abstract:

Commonwealth writers and literature are in the lime light very promising writers, who depict their culture and conflict under a new light. We are witnessing many writers who were settled in various countries like England, Canada and the U.S.A but having strong Indian roots. Their works depict both the native and the adaptive one. The commonwealth was a multicultural entity as it extended all over the world which is constituted by settler colonies, e.g. Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where the native people were completely annihilated.

In India, in the 20th century, several significant writings were produced in English. Today, it is possible to distinguish a different category of writers who have Indian origins, but who now live in West, mainly England, Canada and the USA. Klain presents the meaning of "home" as important for immigrants or exiles who come from a distant land to America where in the hop of freedom they want to fulfill their American Dream. Also when they quest for belonging in the new country, they are blocked between their old world and a new land.

Key words:

Culture, conflict, commonwealth, multicultural, colonies

Objectives:

Indian female immigrants have to take more steps to locate, to be sustained, and to identify themselves.

Introduction:

Bharati Mukherjee is an adventurous emigrant. She was born in Calcutta, India, but in order to gain the educational degree, Mukherjee came to America and received a degree from the University of Iowa. The intermarriage is another transformation for her because Mukherjee threw off the Indian love match, and married Clark Blaise, a Canadian-American. In Canada, Mukherjee regards that the origin of oneself blocks the cultural interflow, and emigrants will be treated as “other” by the restraint of the mosaic. Therefore, during her Canadian immigration, Mukherjee was treated as an outsider, and even so, Mukherjee does not return to India, but she decides to embrace the melting pot-America instead. All her carrier presents Mukherjee’s adventure in her change from an outsider to an insider’s to the society. as a person of Asian origin and being naturalized American, Mukherjee in her writing attempts to allude to the cultural differences and inner self identity between two different nations, life style, cultural aspect and the appearance as well as identity.

The Tiger’s Daughter is the manifestation of cultural conflict, a story of a young woman who is Indian by birth. But the circumstances lead her to the United States and get her married there with an American. Birth in one culture and marriage in another culture creates a kind of identity crisis in her existence. Tara, upper class Bengali Brahmin girl, though afraid of the unknown ways of American in the beginning goes to America for higher studies. She tries to adjust herself to it but entering into the wedlock with an American, she returns to India after seven years only to find herself a total stranger in the inherited milieu. She realizes that she is now neither Indian nor truly American. She is totally confused.

In Poughkeepsie she feels homesick. She sense discrimination even if her roommate refuses to share her bottle of mango chutney. As it is typical of Indians who are proud of their family and genealogy, she defends her family and her country instinctively. At such moments when she thinks like breaking she even prays to goddess. Tara's husband David Cartwright is wholly Western and she is always apprehensive of this fact. She cannot communicate with him the finer manses of her family background and of life in Calcutta. Her failure to do so is rooted in their cultural differences. In India a 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. David is hostile to genealogies and often mistakes her love for family for overdependence. He asks naïve questions about Indian customs and traditions and she feels completely insecure in an alien atmosphere because "Madison Square" was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner.

After a gap of seven years Tara plans a trip to India. For years she has dreamed of this return and thinks that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the stay aboard would be erased quite magically. If she returns home to Calcutta, but it never happens. The new Americanized Tara fails to bring back her old sense of perception and views India with the keenness of a foreigner. Her entire outlook changed. Shobha Shinde refers to this expatriate weakness, "An immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it", and so does Tara in America but when she comes to confront the changed and hostile circumstances of her home country, all her romantic dreams and ideals crumble down. She realizes that she has drowned her childhood memories in the crowd of America.

On landing at Bombay airport, she is greeted warmly by her relatives but her response is very cold and dispassionate. When her relatives address her as 'Tultul', a nick name which they

always used former, it sounds strange to her Americanized ears. Seven years ago while on her way to Vassar “she had admired the house on Marine Drive, had thought them fashionable, but now their shabbiness appalled her”(P.18). Her reaction towards the railway station is also one of despise. She “thought the station was more like a hospital: there were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks” (P19). In the train she happens to share her compartment with Marwari and a Nepali. She thinks that both will “ruin her journey to Calcutta” (P20). The tiny Marwari is a very ugly, and appears insolent while the flat –nosed Nepali is also equally disgusting. Her reaction is voiced in the following extract: “ I have returned to dry holes by the sides of railway tracks, she thought, the brown fields like excavations for a thousand homes. I have returned to India”(P21).

Tara plans a trip to Nayapur along with her whole group of friends thereafter. Nayapur is a new township in a complex of coal mines, steel foundries and plants for hydroelectricity. It spreads across seared little hills and forests. Tara meets the politician Tuntunwalla, the same ugly Marwari fellow with whom she had shared her railway compartment while travelling come to plan his stratify for the elections in Nayapur. Earlier Tara has come across Mr.Tuntunwalla several times. She has always felt a kind of strange attraction towards this man and so when Mr.Tuntunwala proposes to show Nayapur she does not decline his proposal. At last this meeting ends with her claustrophobic rape by this wretched politician. Tara’s failure to stop Tuntunwala from seducing her suggests that more or less she too is a party in that amorous game or she might be only a victim. It seems Tara is just ignorant of the changes that have taken place in Calcutta because, “Iam outside to the new land” (P32).

The Tiger’s Daughter is an autobiographical story about an East Indian Immigrant who is unable to adjust to North American culture, but who at the same time is painfully aware that she

will never again belong to the culture she has left behind. Reading Mukherjee's words, one finds that Calcutta is presented as helpless, gray, and foggy. Not only the views are ugly, but also the smells of shabbiness permeate through the air. Even the Indians regard Calcutta as the "deadest" city in the world because there is no hope and no vigour in the scenes they see, and the places they live.

America is a myth to India from Tara's story. It is a myth of advantage and hope. Although American life is unknown to them, they know it is valuable and it is unlike Calcutta things. Therefore, they cannot help themselves dig out the American information from Tara. Her girl-friends want to discover the distant land from Tara's instructions; therefore they entreat the lucky Tara to tell them more about America and what she does there. Furthermore, they want her to teach them the popular phrases or words that are used in America. America is a country they dream about, standing for hope, wealth, and freedom.

Tara formally terminates her relationship between India and herself, even her friends suggest her marriage is "imprudent" because her seven-year stay abroad has eroded all that is fine and sensitive in "her Bengali nature." (70) The intermarriage of the Indian Tara and the American David is controversial to most people around her, and it results in criticism and censure to her. For Tara, David is as common as an ordinary Indian man because she can understand all about David, such as the language, life style and the eating habit; however, for the Calcutta people after all David is a foreigner. David's foreignness, Tara's Bengali nature and their intermarriage produce a burden for Tara.

As an expatriate, Tara is an outsider in the US; and then in Calcutta, she is treated as an outsider because of her strong westernization. Tara's foreignness to both India and America

compose for her a double marginalization.. In her motherland she is faced with dissimilarity as well. The trip to India is “so vague, pointless, and diffuse.” (157) “She is totally convinced by these experiences that she needs to discard her past and embrace her home away from home”. To erase her wonder and fear, Tara decides to go back to her adoptive country and American husband (Bose). Obviously Tara’s identity is divergent between herself and others.

The present novel is the arena throughout which she wanders for the formation of her stable identity. But the irony is that till the end of the novel she does not seem to have achieved it. While staying with her husband in America, she senses a kind of nostalgia for her land of birth. A dream for and about her home resides in her mind. For the fulfilment of this dream, she moves back to India, but, unfortunately she fails in her aim. The changing scenario of India and the family reputation of her father hinder her aim of finding her ‘true self’. Her ‘self’ disappears in the fog of Indian modernity and the changes occurred there. Her dream of achieving her ‘ownness’ shatters and in utter frustration, she prepares for her return. For most of the people, their culture becomes the medium of their identity. Tara in *The Tiger’s Daughter* is its prime example wherein she outwardly seems open, happy content and prospers but inwardly she is an embittered woman, old, cynical at twenty-two and quick to take offence. As Tara has been tormented by nostalgic past and trauma of the present, she lacks belongingness in any culture. Such problem occurs when people are culturally dislocated. And they rush behind the search of identity.

Culture is a source of identity. It is also the source of binding and dividing people. People belonging to the same nation cannot feel being the citizen of their own state if it is in the matter of cultural difference. This shows that in a way or the other, these migrant people, expatriates or exiles, become homeless or the citizen of no state. Most of the people believe there is no

meaning of life without proper identity. It provides them a sense of life. In the novel Tara's struggle is with two aspects of her society. As an expatriate she feels cultural crisis and also faces the problems of patriarchal society. Tara Banerjee is introduced as the great granddaughter of Harilal Banerjee, a intrepid man. At the age of fourteen, she flies to USA for abroad study most due to her family reputation and less by her capacity. Her father is known as Bengal Tiger from whom the novel gets its title. Although the protagonist tries to free herself from the chain of her family she fails. The frequent change in her name by her relatives forces her to strive for 'selfhood'.

Conclusion:

The novel is filled with ironies. Willingly she goes to America and marries American but that cannot make her happy. She moves back to India for the search of something she is missing. But there too she does not get that. By the end of the novel she is not able to complete her mission of finding her stable identity. Thus in the present novel, the protagonist wanders for her identity. So it would be better for her to collect her own identity through letters, words, dreams and imaginings in a world of her own.

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