Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education
Vol. XI, Issue No. 22, July-2016, ISSN 2230-7540

A Study on a Novel of Bharati Mukherjee's 'The Tiger's Daughter'

Manjeet Kaur*

Flat no. 218, Kendriya Vihar -2, Sector -25, Panchkula (Haryana)- 134109 – India

Abstract – Mukherjee's writing largely reflects her personal experience of such febrile subjectivity in crossing cultural boundaries. In novels such as Jasmine, The Tiger's Daughter, Wife and The Desirable Daughters, as well as in her award winning short stories, Indian born Mukherjee adds to her character's multicultural background a delicate undercurrent of translational upsurge which sometimes expresses itself through violence and existential disorderliness. Mukherjee's women characters such as Tara Cartwright, Dimple, Jasmine or Tara Chatterjee, all quest for a location and show a subaltern dread and anxiety to be visible. They are not concentric to adopt racial stereotype at the cost of identity. They accept a mutative change through displacement and replacement of culture. 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 American ness and Indian ness 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.

----------X----------

INTRODUCTION

In her first novel, The Tiger's Daughter (1971), Mukherjee uses the return to India of her nostalgic and 'homesick' Bengali Brahmin heroine as the context for undermining national myths of origins and foundations. In other words, the migrant's return 'to recover her roots' and the stability of her cultural identity as an Indian is not equated uncritically with an unexamined sense of what being 'Indian' means. Instead, Mukherjee uses the migrant's moment of return to elaborate a much more complex and mediated understanding of national and cultural identity. In The Tiger's Daughter Mukherjee examines the reception of the Indian expatriate returned home and there is the same practical feeling of disjuncture and dislocation expressed in Days and Nights in Calcutta. On her return home, she laments at the low condition of the Bengali-Indian society: 'What is unforgivable is the lives that have been sacrificed to notions of propriety and obedience.' Blaise, her husband, however becomes very much intrigued by the magic of the myth and culture that surround every part of Bengal. He realizes that in India family is all, and in the structure of an Indian joint family, nothing is a bigger issue than going against the family. He notes how in the West identity is shaped by maturity and self- independence, whereas in India 'identity (is) never to be sought; it's the lone certainty that determines everything.' He has likened their stay in Bharati's father's house as 'a closet drama of resentment and dependence. 'He complains, 'If in the West we suffer from the nausea of disconnectedness, alienation, anomy, the Indian suffers from the oppression of kinship. from his privileged position of the enlightened Western sojourner he was trying to understand his wife's culture which naturally could not be a comprehensive account of Indian society as a whole. Mukherjee's attempt to find her place in the family, to reconnect with the past and her frustration at being taken to be a foreigner marks her initial disappointment. She experienced subjugation and othering in Canada while in India she is looked upon as a sojourner from an alien shore. She sees herself through the eyes of others; she rues 'as if I had no history prior to going abroad.'Her looks seem 'too progressive, too westernized, and therefore too rootless, to be a predictably middleclass Bengali woman born on as exceptionally middle class Ballygunj street.'She is treated differently as an exceptional Indian woman married to a foreigner. As she meets Meena, the wife from the Marwari household, who is discouraged to read in her home, Bharati is saddened by the plight of women in Indian society. It is inexplicable to the West 'that a young Bengali woman could rebel by simply reading a book or refusing to fast.The sabbatical years in Calcutta make her realize that she is more of a misfit in the old world and though she is unable to reconcile with her new world, still it is the world which she prefers- 'There was surely nothing ignoble in our desire to better our condition. In a city that threatens to overwhelm the individual who is passive, there was

nothing immoral in self protection. But we had refused to merge with the city.'

The visit to Calcutta made Bharati Mukherjee realize that India had changed a lot. The colonial attitude still existed among the elite Bengali social circles. The exploited and the downtrodden had reached the precipice of endurance and started agitations leading to chaos and disorder. The changed situation forced Bharati Mukherjee to realize the nuances of the two cultures. Mukherjee writes- 'Of course I had other reasons for going to India. I was going because I had discovered that while changing citizenship is easy, swapping culture is not.' Mukherjee's self-imposed exile created confusion with her life in Canada and a feeling of uprootedness seeped in, after the realization that India of yesteryears had changed beyond recognition. She felt more comfortable in America where life was easy- 'It is, of course, America that I love where history occurs with dramatic swiftness and interest of half-hour television shows. America is a sheer luxury, being touched more by the presentation of tragedy than by tragedy itself.'

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Christine Gomez (2008): Mukherjee's mention of the article 'The Tigers Daughters' by Kenneth J. Hsu in this story is only to propagate the idea that, "There is perhaps a longing for the world according to Hsu, a one world free from cultural collisions, dilemmas and separation". Therefore, the very title of the story suggests a desire for a world free of racism and cultural conflicts, where everyone can feel secure and free.

The other story by Mukherjee that foregrounds the expatriate experience of Doctor Miss Supariwala is "Isolated Incidents". These incidents are viewed through a native Canadian, Ann Vane, whose job is to file complaints from immigrants against problems related to Human Rights. These problems are considered by the native Canadians to be some 'isolated incidents' not needing much emphasis. This story is another evidence of Mukherjee's grievances against the racist set up in Canada.

Doctor Miss Supariwala is a stern, stocky woman of forty-three, with doctorates from Western Ontario and Bombay, who claimed to have been passed over at job interviews in favour of lesser candidates. She was a Canadian citizen, she'd published numerous articles, she'd won a few research grants. No one could fault her promptness, her discipline, her preparedness. Through these discriminatory incidents of Canada, Mukherjee has put forth her own expatriate experiences. She states that: Such a complex position induces diasporic women to write their lives. Their literature is generally charged with intense anxiety of dislocation and adaptation. In their endeavour of self-expression, they make fictions out of their lives and as a result, their novels become autobiographical.

Therefore, Mukherjee is one such displaced author whose works are mostly an attempt at self-definition. Women are the worst victims of cultural collisions, as they fall prey not only to cultural marginalization but also to multiple patriarchies. But in the postmodern context, the ideas of nationalism and patriotism have altered significantly and in place of the 'homing desire', a possibility of 'fluid identities' is created. As a result, women break out of the patriarchal limits, and reject any 'hyphenation' of identity to celebrate a liberated identity. For them, crossing the border is a mark of liberation from all oppressions.

Leela Lahiri in "Hindus" is one such creation of Mukherjee that reveals an immigrant's fluid identity. In the very first month in America she dropped the 'h' in her old name "Leelah" to Americanise it to Leela. Being a Bengali Brahmin, she marries an American named Derek, by breaking 'the caste etiquette'. Within a short span of two years she has "tried to treat the city (New York) not as an island of dark immigrants but as a vast sea in which new Americans could disappear and resurface at will". Her tendency to follow her will assists her rebirth in a new world. Though she is well aware of her Indian origins, yet she proudly declares, "I am an American Citizen" ("Hindus" 133). Therefore, Leela is one such hybrid identity that doesn't allow any cultural or patriarchal hurdles in her path of relocation. Awareness of her roots doesn't compel her to live between the two worlds: the imaginary and the real. Indianness is only a metaphor for her not an identity.

Wick-ramagamage further argues that Mukherjee's fictions demonstrate that both responses are enabled not so much by the new homeland of America but by the act of migration which makes possible the recovery of the suppressed heterogeneous models of identity already present in Hindu culture. In other words, it is the experience of migration that provides the context for unleashing the productive potential of Hindu conceptions of identity.

It is on this basis that her first two novels, The Tiger's Daughter (1972) and Wife (1975), can be separated from the rest of her work. Her first volume of short stories, Darkness (1985), negotiates the ideological divide between these periods; the four stories ('The World According to Hsu', 'Isolated Incidents', 'Courtly Vision' and 'Hindus') can be described as belonging to the early phase. These pieces, written while Mukherjee lived in Canada, are, in the words of the author, 'uneasy stories about expatriation' which depict her migrants as 'lost souls, put upon and pathetic', set 'adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong'. In articulating the experience of deracination and alienation of her characters, as well as their homelessness which is as much psychological as it is physical, these stories employ 'a mordant and self-

protective irony' that assured Mukherjee of 'detachment from, and superiority over her characters. 'Everywhere in these stories as one reviewer aptly remarks, 'are echoes of V. S. Naipaul'.

Indeed, Mukherjee herself identifies Naipaul as a model for this phase of her literary life. From him, she says, she learned the benefits of irony in 'exploring state-of-the-art expatriation'.

Gillian Beer (2009) in her article, 'Discourses of the Island', points out that 'the emphasis in plate tectonics is on fracture, drift, the lateral slide of plates against or alongside each other'. Beer suggests that 'the earth, rather than being thought of as one rigid, stable body with fixed continents and permanent ocean basins, is now considered to be broken into several large plates and a few smaller ones, which move very slowly and then collide with or jostle one another'.

Significantly, how her characters respond to the island's heterogeneous composition distinguishes them from each other. Graeme, a white Canadian who embodies the liberal rhetoric of multiculturalism and its idea of tolerance toward racial and cultural diversity, busies himself on his vacation by 'training his Nikon on the island's chaotic greenery to extract from it some definitive order'. Ordering and cataloguing the differences he sees around him, Graeme regards the island's exotic tropical beauty, its 'Ektachrome transparency', as 'commanding a commentary, every slide a mini-lecture' by which he would 'entertain and instruct' his friends back home about the world's diversity, its different 'genus and species'. Graerne's idea of 'difference' here is one that is akin to 'pure otherness'. The fact that Graeme is attempting through his photography to fashion harmony out of the 'tropical confusion' is a metaphor, the text suggests, for his conception of cultures as totalities in themselves, as objects subject to order and control. This conception of culture undergirds the hegemonic underpinning of multiculturalism as a discourse that is based on an understanding of culture as a hermetically sealed and homogeneous whole.

This perception of culture denies hybridity through its assertion of simple plurality and the existence of pre-given cultural forms. While G. Taeme devotes himself 'to shaping and reshaping the tropical confusion' of the island's physical and cultural terrain, Ratna, in contrast, revels in the mixed, indeterminate, ethos of the island's cultural composition: the 'Peruvian-looking Africans' who to her appear more Gallic than the Montrealers back home; the 'gaudy paratroopers' patrolling the island; the 'black faces from the coast, ubiquitous sentinels among the copper-skinned, straw-hatted natives of the capital'. Ratna discerns in what appears to her as the creolized cultural community of the island -- along with the Indian shops, the nineteenth-century Lutheran churches built by Swedish missionaries, the mission school run by Quebec priests, and the colonial relics of the King's palace and Band -- the signs of heterogeneity and difference that are not suppressed in the interests of forming the political and cultural community of the new nation. It is this intermittent, scattered and fragmented space of an island caught in the reflexive and formative processes of nation-making that offers Ratna the possibility, however 'momentary' and transitory, of discovering the feeling of 'at-homeness' of belonging which eludes her in white-hegemonic Toronto.

CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY

Mukherjee's first published novel,The Tiger's Daughter (1972), is the only fictional text in Mukherjee's oeuvre which foregrounds the process of national construction through the trope of the immigrant's return to the ancestral homeland. The immigrant's return to India in the hope of recovering her "roots" and the stability of her cultural identity as an "Indian" is not equated Uncritically with and unexamined sense of what "Indianness" means or constitutes. Thus the text foregrounds and often overlooked dynamics that structures the immigrant perspective –that the material and ideological implications of the immigrant writer's in between location necessitates not only an interrogation of the presumed unities of the new homeland but also a dismantling of the nationalist narrative of a unitary originary homeland. Written in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Canada was experiencing what Mukherjee has said were the first "visible effects of racism."1 and when India itself was reeling from the immediate after effects of the Naxalite uprising, the text reveals the author's heightened awareness of the instability of the signs of national identity, for if what the Indian immigrants in Canada considers "home" is unwilling to accept her as an embodiment of its culture because she does not conform to the dominant image of white cultural acceptability, then "the de-colonized nation as the place of ultimate refuge and gratification, the destination of a narrative retour,"is represented as another nationalist myth to which the immigrant can never return. Bharati Mukherjee in a recent interview has clearly stated her aim in her novels: "We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries which are placed by civil and religious conflicts .when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society. I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country." Mukherjee in The Tiger's Daughter reflects her exilic preoccupation with Calcutta. In this

novel, written in Montreal more than a decade after she had left the city, she projects vividly through the experience of her protagonist, an Indian woman called Tara Banarjee Catrigh t who is in Calcutta for a visit, the city she remembers. Tara, however, cannot help wondering if it could still be home for her and people of her class, especially since the scenes she had witnessed pointed clearly to the end of their way of life. The Tiger's Daughter uses the motif of the return home from voluntary exile in an alien country and concludes the expatriation is more desirable than what "home" has become. The central theme of the Tiger's Daughter is the discovery of the heroine, Tara Banerjee Catright that the city and the people she had come back to be with after seven years abroad were in a state terminal decline, her growing awareness of her "foreignness of spirit", and her eventual realization that her future lay not in it but in exploration. 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 amleccha.‟ 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 personality's 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 of 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 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 me taphorically. 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.

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. The dimensions of novelistic complexities as subject of critical attention are now far extended beyond simple thematic study of diaspora, exile, isolation and alienation, to encompass all the meanings and features such as margin, construction of homeland, hyphenated identity, displacement and assimilation, 'unhousement' and 'rehousement', and above all the complexity of a point of view of a woman diasporic South Asian writer in North America. Our century that is, the last two decades of twentieth century and the starting of twenty first century witnessed the breaking of barriers between national/regional literature and the global/continental literature. It has provided the requisite framework and the rigorous tools to analyse the complex themes, so that it has become possible to break new grounds in postcolonial diasporic studies.

The expatriates are unable to understand the nature of their unbelongingness both to their native country and the adopted one. They are entrapped between two cultures belonging to none and aspiring for a 'third space', where they try to explore their true existence between their hyphenated identity and assimilatory tendencies.

Mukherjee has also used and exploited this 'third space' as a tool for maintaining ethnic difference and to explore those postcolonial complexities that enable her to develop her creative sensibility. Apart from it the chapter makes a close study of diasporic consciousness in relation with Bharati Mukherjee. Efforts have been made to delimit the meaning of diaspora for the purpose of the present study because Mukherjee claimed to be a postcolonial writer and always tries to demonstrate a medium, which reflects her ideology as well as cultural commitments. 'What is the mode of writing' is a question that has been answered to some extent in this chapter. She left India in her early twenties, choosing to write in the master's tongue that cannot keep her away from progressive realism. But at the same time putting herself in a contradictory postcolonial complexity, she has chosen to be nostalgic and romance/myth is a genre best suits to the purpose. The element of diaspora in this study has been dealt with the problem by balancing the glory of myth with more critical mode of reality. The chapter is concluded with a note that Mukherjee with the help of balancing genre strategy constructed a world where people can achieve harmonious balance between self and society to give some meaning to the existence of the immigrant community and its culture by adopting a mode of 'cross – culturalism'.

The next chapter takes a bird's – eye - view of the development of the South Asian Indo-Canadian novel, noting that the history of immigration played a vital role in providing the material for her early two novels, that is, ***The Tiger's Daughter and Wife*****.**

The works of Bharati Mukherjee are eminently suitable for this kind of research not only on account of her unique contribution to re-define the narrative of diaspora, but also because inspite of charges levished on her being a negative portrayal of Indian tradition and culture and to gain the benefits of Americanization over a quarter century, the new yardsticks of analysis have not so far been applied to measure her revolutionary achievements. The restructuring of narratives of diaspora that dwindle between 'mosaic' and 'melting pot' and the rigorous investigation of some of the basic problems of research on this author, are yet to be explored. The present study humbly sets out to fill this gap.

The introductory chapter of this thesis briefly describes the dimensions of post-colonialism, indicating the significance of applying this concept to the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, especially dealing with the complexities come into being in a diasporic state of mind. The complexities such as alienation, displacement, dislocation, rootlessness, marginalization and racial discrimination evolved out of diasporic consciousness.

REFERENCES

Alison B. Carb (1987). An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee. Massachusetts Review 29. no. 4. 1987. p. 41.ibid., p. 41.

Bharati Mukherjee (1971). The Tiger's Daughter. Boston: Houghton Miffin.1971. p. 37. Subsequent references to The Tiger's Daughter are to this edition and paginations are given parenthetically.

Bose, Brinda. "A Question of Identity: Where Gender, Race and America Meet in Bharati Mukherjee." Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives.Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Garland Publications, 1993: pp. 47-64.

Brinda Bose (1993). A Question of Identity: Where Gender. Race and America Meet in Bharati Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives. Ed. Ennanuel. S. Nelson. New York: Garland Publishing. 1993. p. 50.16.

Connell. Michael. Jessie Grearson and Tom Grimes (1990). An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee. Iowa Review 20. No. 3. Spring. 1990. p. 11.

Gikandi (1989). Maps of Englishness. p. 196.Quoted in Sunday Review.The Times of India. October. p. 1.

Jasbir Jain (1985). Foreignners of Spirit: The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels. Journal of Indian Writing in English. 13, 2. p. 13.

M. Sivaramkrishna, Bharati Mukherjee (1973). Indian English Novelists. Ed. M.S. Prasad. New Delhi: Sterling. 1982. p. 74.11.Oh Calcutta . Times Literary Supplement. 29. June 1973. p. 736.

Mandal, Somdatta. Bharati Mukherjee-Critical Perspectives.New Delhi: Pencraft Books, 2010.

Maya Manju Sharma (1985). The Inner World of Bharati Mukherjee: From Expatriate to Immigrant op. cit. p. 122. Sybil Steinbury. Bharati Mukherjee. op. cit. pp. 46-47.

Maya Manju Sharma (1993). The Inner World of Bharati Mukherjee: From Expatriate to immigrant. Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Garland Publishing 1993. p. 5.

Mukherjee, Bharati (1972). The Tiger's Daughter.Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Roshini Rustomji (1989). Kerns Expatriates. Immigrants and Literature: Three South Asian Women Writers. Massachusetts Review. Winter.1988-89. p. 657.

Shobha Shinde (1994). Cross-Cultural Crisis in Bharati Mukherjee Jasmine and The Tiger's Daughter Commonwealth Writing: A Study in Expatriate Experience. Eds. R.K. Dhawan & L.S.R. Krishnsastry. New Delhi : Prestige.1994. p. 58.

Sybil Steinberg, Bharati Mukherjee (1989). Publisher's Weekly. 25. pp. 46-47.

Corresponding Author

Manjeet Kaur*

Flat no. 218, Kendriya Vihar -2, Sector -25, Panchkula (Haryana)- 134109 – India

E-Mail – arora.kips@gmail.com