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IDENTITY CRISIS IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER*

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Abstract

This paper focusses on the dilemma of immigrants, quest for self and feeling of alienation. Mukherjee also delineates the problem of immigrants and analyses the optimistic depiction of Indian expatriates. The main theme lies in her novel is immigration because of her strong bond with America, which she experienced by becoming the citizen of US. Writings of Bharati Mukherjee has achieved noteworthy acknowledgement where she depicts the experience of immigrants mainly of the South-Asian diaspora in North America. The varied immigrant experience in Bharti's novel focusses on the issues faced due to cultural identity. The geographical space is that in which immigrant faces the issues of identity and which Mukherjee depicts, not as the remembrance for one's own country of birth but as a requirement for the immigrants to produce a shelter for themselves. Her work reinforces the requirement for immigrants by continuously adopting the new land and also by continuously adjusting their relationship with their home land

Keywords:- Alienation, Quest for oneself, Cultural Identity



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Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee has proved herself to be a strong member of the American world of literature, she not only gives the glimpse of Indian heritage in her work, but she also takes a pride to glorify America. In this way the changing shape of American society has been well manifested by the writer's own experience which she gained in America. The immigrant experience in the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee is the outcome of her own life, with its displacement and dislocation, from India to Canada and then to America. In an interview with Chen and Croudie:

I describe myself in terms of ethno nationality, I'd say I am an American writer of Bengali-Indian origin. In other words, the writer/political activist in me is more obsessed with addressing issues of minority discourse in the US and Canada, the two countries I have lived and worked in over the last thirty odd years. [...] At this moment, my Calcutta childhood and adolescence offer me intriguing incompletely comprehended revelations about my hometown my family, my place in that community: the kind of revelations that fuel desire to write an autobiography rather than to mythologize an Indian national identity. I

In Mukherjee's view, she treats immigrant as optimistic, cosmopolitan and serene who does not mix into an American mainstream but truly enlarges area which she referred as 'The American experience.' These new Americans are neither longing for their past being an expatriate nor have a fear of their totally new present being a stranger in an alien land. Their main motif is the adaptation of the alien land rather than surrendering the tradition of their native land. Actually, she herself reinforces on her American citizenship. At several occasions she ignores to give answers about her 'Indianness'. Still readers feel the fragrance of Indianness in her fiction with her use of Bengali-Brahmin name and other Indian components.

In the Tiger's Daughter Mukherjee show that the native nation as the place of ultimate refuge and gratification, the destination of a narrative retour, is a myth to which the immigrant can



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never return. Once tradition is denaturalised it loses its meaning, and naturalness is impossible to recover. So Tara's quest for self proves frustrating slowly leading her to disillusion, depression and alienation ending in a tragedy.²

The novel is the masterpiece to show the immigrant's psyche and theme of alienation through the protagonist. It is a novel which beautifully delineates the issues of quest for identity and cultural conflict. Mukherjee attempts to explore how the immigrants continuously struggle to adapt an American society and also its affects which portrayed as rootless.

This is a story of an upper middle class Bengali Brahmin girl Tara, who goes to America to complete her higher studies, is now an immigrant marries to an American, David Catwright. She came to India to enjoy her trip, feels like an alien when she reaches the airport after 7 years. Where she treats like a western aunt, she feels as if she is a stranger in her homeland. Her relatives assumed that been there for 7 years, Tara has now been changed possessing an American outlook so she will not like the dirt, politics, hierarchy, division of class and population of India. When Tara visits India, the western culture is so overshadows her real identity that simply results in the clash with the culture of her native land. This clash is so deeply felt by Tara that she is not able to cop up with her friends and relatives in India and also with the traditions of her own family.

Tara accepts her mistake to come to India, when she stepped up in the Bombay railway station, the surroundings made her sick. She admitted that America and culture has really overshadowed her real identity. Tara meets her parents at the Hawrah station. A sense of loneliness amidst her parents and relatives threatens her. The degrading social changes and her new vision towards the poverty and dirtiness in India pester her annoyance, bitterness and disgust. She thought that her visit to India will fade away the annoyance of living abroad which is described in the following lines:



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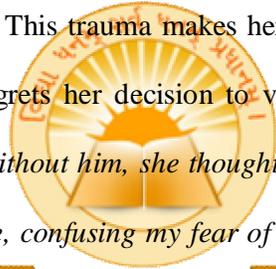
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For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowing fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could first return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. 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 offence.³

Her arrival at Bombay railway station gives her a sense of gloominess, her heart is full of melancholy. Bombay railway station "was more like a hospital, there were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks".⁴ This trauma makes her think of her husband David, this thought signifies as a second self of her. She regrets her decision to visit India, as she continuously misses her husband: *Perhaps I was stupid to come without him, she thought, even with him rewriting his novel during the vacation. Perhaps I was too impulsive, confusing my fear of New York with homesickness or perhaps I was going mad.⁵*



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The journey of Tara from Bombay to Calcutta brings the same feeling of depression and despair. She finds that even the Calcutta has been changed and degraded. Violence, riots, diversion of class conflicts engulfed Calcutta. she is unable to cop up with the company of her friends and relatives. She is not able to be a part of any ritual functions at home because of the possession of second self in her. She also feels that her mother's attitude is no more same as her when she was living in India. Her mother feels annoyed of Tara's marriage to an Englishman.

Perhaps her mother, sitting severely before God on a tiny rug. No longer loved her either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. 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.*⁶

Her marriage is one of the important cause of her disgust and discomfort. Tara stuck between two identities, one is Indian and the other is American. At many crucial moments she thinks of her husband, she really misses her and also thinks of going back to her husband's place, where she gets some comfort. She feels stranger in her home when she forgets some rituals in the prayer room, when she forgets to make paste of sandalwood, though it is not a big mistake but this gives Tara a feeling of shame, how she forgets her own Indian rituals. The phrase 'cracking of axis and center' actually symbolizes the feeling of alienation of Tara which come out due to forgetting her the next step of religious ritual.

As compare to India, America is a land of dreams and desires though it reminds of her 'rootlessness' but now India is no where in the frame. Tara being a foreigner in her native land, she encircled with the feeling of alienation. She continuously is in quest for her own identity. America has surely changed Tara for she has now come to know the difference between two lands. She has now become the victim of cultural conflict as America has changed her outlook completely. Such monotony, insanity and despair have emerged out by her American life.

After a very long time, at the Catelli Continental Hotel when Tara goes to meet her childhood friend she becomes sentimental as the pictures of childhood memories has come in front of her eyes. But, she gets annoyed and surprised because her childhood friend was not at all interested in her life rather he takes interest in American things and her American husband, David. Feeling of loneliness empowers her. Still she continuously goes to meet him to avoid feeling of loneliness and alienation. She wanted to get rid of India and Indian life and wants to go to America. The life of Calcutta which she is observing now is different from that when she left 7 years ago because of Naxalite environment. When she goes for a picnic, she gets



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annoyed by a very little things like water, snake, Indian food, fan etc ... She strongly shows her agony towards Calcutta. Again she dreamt of her husband and life in America. She exchanges letters with him, telling about the incident takes place, also admits again and again how much she loves him. She also wants to tell the adventurous incidents, for that she goes with Joyonto Roy Chaudhary for looking after a *bustee*, to write these adventurous incidents she needs a secluded place away from the hustle-bustle of city. But soon she realises that her decision of going to visit bustee is totally wrong, as she had never been to bustee, she was treated like a foreigner in their. She had never seen the poverty, hunger, dirtiness and playful activities of children in mud. These all things depresses her as she is hard for her to forget these things. She now realises the difference between the East and the West. She wishes that she never come to India now.

There is another incident which describes her feeling of loneliness and alienation, that she is not the part of India now, that she is now a foreigner; one day she went out for a horse riding with Pronob and Antonio in the summer vacation in Darjeeling, Tara was caught by *hooglians*, they abused, teased and insulted her. She also feels insulted when in the Beauty contest one of the judge scolded her and said that Tara is not able to co-relate herself with Indian. These incidents totally shatteres her and forces her to leave India and go back to New York. Why she was so suffered? It is only because of her American outlook which is completely different from Indian.

Tara soon realises that now she cannot become the part of India and Indian culture again, she tries her level best to correlate with her friends and relatives, but she fails to do so. She has now become the victim of cultural conflicts. Finally she decides that a reunion is impossible and it is better to return to her alien land. For the sake of enjoyment her father sends her to Darjeeling still she does not get the peace she urges for, everything seems to disgust her, frustrate her. She then books a flight ticket to go to New York from the office of Air India. Though after the reservation Tara still faces violence, the violence that does not even spare an old man. She has locked herself in the car thinking of her husband David. The novel ends with



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these lines:

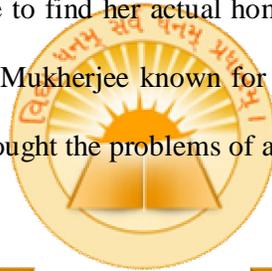
*Tara still locked in a car across the street from the Catelli-continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn't whether David would every know that she loved him fiercely.*⁷

Tara's journey to India is best described in the following lines:

*It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse, this trip home to India.*⁸

Thus, we can see how the author has described the problems that one goes through in a foreign land.

She has beautifully depicted the issues through her character Tara. Her journey of trying to find herself culturally, her struggle to find her actual home, her agony to find herself can be clearly seen in this novel. Bharati Mukherjee known for portraying the pain and miseries of an immigrant has outstandingly brought the problems of an immigrant through her character.



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4. *Ibid.* 55
5. *Ibid.* 55
6. *Ibid.* 56
7. *Ibid.* 58
8. *Ibid.* 55



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