



Assimilation and adjustment in the novel of bharti mukherjee "The Tiger's Daughter"

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Abstract

The words like "Expatriate" and "*Diaspora*" need no introduction in postcolonial literary scenario. Indian diaspora, today, has emerged with the "multiplicity of histories, variety of culture tradition and a deep instinct for survival." Indian Diaspora, though counting more than 20 million members world-wide, survives in between "home of origin" and "world of adoption." The process of survival of the diasporic individual/community in between the home of origin and the "world of adoption" is the voyage undertaken in the whole process from "alienation" to final "assimilation".

Bharti Mukherjee, an Indian born Canadian/American novelist, has made a deep impression on the literary canvass. Her novels, honestly, depict the issues of her own cultural location in West Bengal in India, her displacement (alienation) from her land of origin to Canada where as was "simultaneously sly invisible" as a writer and "overexposed" as a racial minority and her final re-location (assimilation) to USA as a naturalized citizen.

Keywords: assimilation, novel of bharti mukherj, tiger's daughter

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel. *The Tiger's Daughter* published in (1975) express the dilemma of belongingness in this novels is a matter of flux and agony, which explores the problem of nationality, location, identity and historical memory in Canada.

'Assimilation' is an approach towards incorporation and adjustment in different culture, through which, not only immigrants but also other marginalized groups - African-Americans in America, women condition in society, schedule castes in India- are "wrapped up" into an integrated conventional society.

Mukherjee's characters are mostly autobiographical portraits of her interpretation and reaction of her experience as an expatriate in Canada which was a cultural and psychological marginalization and her mounting identification of the self as 'an immigrant nobody in America. The two different sets of experience of an expatriate as well as an immigrant are reflected through five novels, two collections of short stories and two non-fictional works authored with her husband written in two different countries. The different periods of her literary profession can be assembled as the period of alienation, the period of evaluation an period of assimilation.

Her novel *Tiger's Daughter* (1972) was written during the period of alienation in Canada. Her characters are not controlled by one faith, one ethic, racial or cultural proclivity. The Canadian occurrence, however, has left its own scratch marks and blemishes on *Mukherjee's* inherent sense of worth and stimulated and provoked her individuality.

"I was always well employed but never allowed to feel part of the local Quebec or larger Canadian Society".

The intrinsic triangular relationship exists between her as a migrant, and the place of belonging i.e. India and destination countries-first Canada, and finally America, that in due course becomes the place of belief.

While it is difficult for an Asian person to assimilate into

American culture, it is similarly difficult for an Asian-American to assimilate back to their native country. In a paradoxical situation, *Tara Banerjee Cartwright*" in *The Tiger's Daughter* is alienated in her American set of connections and then alienated from her roots of pedigree. She suffers the spam of estrangement which is awfully unfortunate. Her pain of alienation is evident not only in Canada and American but even in her indigenous terrain of Bengal and wonders "how does the foreignness of spirit begin?", when she returns to India after seven years. It is at that moment she realizes that she is neither an Indian nor an American.

Tara Banerjee, the main protagonist, is the other, disjointed community who struggles to hook-on to the nationalized community by entering into the wedlock with an American, David Cartwright.

According to Milton Gordon

The eminent sociologist, inter-marriage leads to marital assimilation which is an intermixture of the two gene pools which the two populations represent, regardless of how similar or divergent these two gene pools may be. David Cartwright is wholly Western, the more Tara becomes cognizant of this point of divergence between the Indian wife and the American husband, the more she is apprehensive of the verity that that she is a detachable entity from the nationalized community. Her first manifestation of alienation in a territory of immigration is through *The Tiger's Daughter*.

The authors argue that migrants like Tara Banerjee are more prone to assimilate to a common (American) model but at the same time they increasingly retain their ethnicity more than ever. Tara Banerjee evaluates her life and ethics with that of her husband's. Contrary to the cultural belief, her ethnicity comes to direct blows when her conjugal life which was supposed to be based on the standard code of union identified by her right from her childhood, was actually based on the principle of contract as identified by

her husband. The wistful, passionate sensitivity of an immigrant for her mother country is dashed to pieces when it comes into direct blows with reality.

The Americanization of her finer sensibilities, her unruffled and frosty response to her nickname Tultul; her response to her relatives house which seemed elegant and chic to her previously looked shabbier afterwards, startle her.

Tara is an immigrant sandwiched between personality women and suffers the duality and conflict very divergent to her American life. The moral fiber of Tara's character, like the novelist, suffers from the cultural dichotomy surrendering those thousands of years of pure culture. The epidemics, collision, fatal accidents, and starvation of Calcutta, the omnipresence of her husband David in the midst of rioting rabble and her own westernization over the period of seven years add to her anguish and misery. The husband and wife have different estimations and assessments of Indian encounter, her distress and his apprehension, are seen in one of their joint publications, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee, like Tara, felt estrangement at a loss of identity.

Bharati Mukherjee's writings largely reflect her personal experiences as a woman caught between two cultures.

A *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer notes "Tara's Westernization has opened her eyes to the gulf between the two worlds that still make India the despair of those who govern it."

The Tiger's Daughter has been rated as *Bharati Mukherjee's* "elegant first novel" and is considered to be "skillfully wrought with lively dialogue and full descriptive passages." However, the critic finds the novel's heroine lacking because *Bharati Mukherjee* controls her emotions with such a skilled balance of irony and colorful nostalgia. Her novel is charming and intelligent and curiously unmoving. Tara herself remains so ineffectual a focus of distress and is so unwilling a catalyst, it is hard to care whether or not she will be able to return.

As Rani says, "Assimilation and acceptance in the new culture appear impossible if the past is not forgotten" (83). Tara has no more an Indian identity and is always 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 sometimes with the traditions of her own family.

Tara's psyche 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. She feels both trapped and abandoned at the same time. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. This difficulty of choosing lies in her refusal to totally condemn any one world. It might have been easier for Tara to leave her past untouched if she could find her old home contemptible, but she does not. She does not fit in any longer. The outcome of this confrontation is her split personality:

The heroine finds it difficult to relate, since her marriage to an American and her Western education brand her as an alienated woman. Since Tara is exposed to the West and has absorbed its values, she must be necessarily alienated and, therefore, even if she tries to voice her continued attachment for, and identity with India, the voice does not carry conviction because it is at variance with the usual stance of indifference and arrogance as these are associated with the Westernized Indian. (Tandon 32)

Tara's relatives attribute her arrogance to her American attitude to life and think that her seven years stay in America has transformed her thoroughly into a strutting peacock. But the fact of the matter was that she was not happy in America either:

New York, she thought now, had been exotic. Not because it had Laundromats and subways. But because there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her, at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair, (qtd. in Sunitha 264).

Tara's mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities- one of an Indian and the other of an American. Caught in the gulf between these two contrasting worlds, Tara feels that she has forgotten many of her Hindu rituals of worshipping icons she had seen her mother performing since her childhood. She is convinced of her alienation when she forgets the next steps of the ritual after the sandalwood paste had been grounded "It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and centre" (Mukherjee 51). The phrase "cracking of axis and center" symbolically points out, "the psyche of Tara which has come in her due to the loss of her own cultural heritage" (qtd. in Sharma 69).

She even grows nervous and feels the changed attitude of her mother towards her:

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. (Mukherjee 50)

It is the American culture that has covered Tara like an invisible spirit or darkness. In the deepest core of her heart, Tara has an intense desire to behave like an ordinary Indian but her re-rooted self in America made such common rituals alien to her. She realizes that she has become rootless now. She has become an outsider looking at her own life, from outside. She sees everything with an American eye and comments on everything from the point of view of an Americanized Indian. She finds herself marginalized on the psychological level and suffers from a split self:

Tara was literally, neither here nor there. She was a misfit with her Calcutta milieu and she was always under stress in America- trying to be correct, trying not to be a gauche immigrant, trying to be American. Tara is intelligent, highly educated and capable of self-analysis. She is conscious of her instability, insecurity and unhappiness. (Chowdhury 95)

The conclusion of this novel duplicates the confusion of Tara's character. The riotous and destructive mob outside Catelli-Continental hotel is merciless. Jittery, shivery and encased within a car surrounded by ruthless humanity, Tara feels the vulnerability of mortals. The turmoil outside is an external manifestation of Tara's inner state of mind and by leaving her amidst that turmoil, Mukherjee hints at the irreconcilability of such conflicts.

Tara feels herself, as misfit everywhere she goes. She is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultures and the two different ideologies which are two worlds apart. Realizing that the reconciliation is impossible, Tara feels to go back to David (qtd. in Sharma 70).

The novel ends with a chaotic scene and unable to present any transcendental vision. Tara's stasis of imagination and general inability to do anything is also a reflection of the manner gender norms are internalized by girls. It is in India that Tara feels dislocated and displaced. In this way, Tara's journey to India proves as a quest for self and her immigrant psyche which proves frustrating, slowly leads her to illusion, alienation, depression and finally to tragic end.

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