

Tara's Reconstruction of Self in Bharathi Mukerjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*

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Abstract

Interaction between identity and culture in an alien land may result in reconstruction of self as in the case of Tara. Bharati Mukherjee's fiction *The Tiger's Daughter* portrays its central character's revisit to her motherland where she stumbles upon her redefined newer self. Having landed in a strange land cultural dissimilarity has exposed her to multicultural activities. Longing for a Western identity, the diaspora try to adapt to western ways of life. There is a marked distinction between Indian born Tara and that of American living Tara. After her seven years stay, she constructs a new meaning of her identity and of India. This paper attempts to discuss the shifting process of Tara's self. Reminiscences of Indian atmosphere thrust her to return to her homeland. The feeling of anxiety and impermanence creates a crisis within her because her imagination is constructed by Indian ethos supported and sustained by moral values. Her vague suspicions and worries preoccupy her and drives her to recreate her self.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Alienation, assimilate, impermanence, identity, Nostalgia, alien Motherland.

Tara, the heroine of Bharathi Mukerjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* is the daughter of Tiger Banerjee who belongs to the Indian upperclass society. The novel portrays the homecoming of Tara after a sojourn of seven years in the United States. With a determination to write off her nostalgic memories she decides to visit Calcutta, her hometown. But she discovers a large amount of difference between her past experience of India and the present Indian one, after her return from the strange land. Her previous memory of the familiar land seems to be vague because the things she sees doesn't help her recollect any common reaction towards the land. There is a vast variation between her conception of India as an Indian born Tara Banerjee and that of Tara Banerjee Cartwright. India seems to be unfamiliar in her perception and also appears very odd to her. This leads to her construction of new self.

Tara was educated in St. Blaise, an institution run by sisters in the convent which has a constructive impact in her life. The anglicized education helped her to keep her poise in times of crises. It served as a training ground for her to pick up Western manners and she could behave like a 'Lady', which kept her get going well in the American nation. But soon she felt neglected and discriminated. Her roommates' intolerance created a feeling of alienation in her. She was segregated in the dormitory eventhough they shared their books and records. They resisted to listen to her Indian experience and were prejudiced against her mango chutney.

With such instances of being singled out, it is not viable to assimilate and adapt to the new culture. Her civility, graciousness and western manners are very significant and constructive tool for her to adjust well in the United States. But for these nobility she would have made hurried plans to return to India unable to accommodate into the new culture of the West. She tries to overcome the impossible by deciding to return to her homeland. Her homecoming bears witness of the reconstructing of her identity and she rediscovers India. The author while recounting the American Culture undoubtedly makes the reader observe the native Indian culture, particularly when she skillfully portrays vividly the house of Bengal Tiger:

The hall was electrically furnished. Italian marble tables and mahogany tables in the shapes of hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades occupied the dingy corners. On two heart-shaped tables stood enormous ebony elephants. (2)

Tara's identity undergoes a transformation: educated abroad, looking Indian, living with an American husband, assimilating into American culture, she feels strange when she arrives in India. She witnesses a lot of changes in the country. The Catelli-continental Hotel was a mark of nobility and aristocracy, and Europeans could be spotted around it then. But the recent sight of it is disgusting and nauseating. The vicinity is populated not by the gentry but by the destitutes and disadvantaged. Penury, filth and stench is a common spectacle in it's surrounding. Crude, boisterous, undignified, foul-mouthed and boorish residents have widely occupied the nearby places. Their worn out mattress, portable ovens temporary cartons are the familiar sight in the once grand and impressive structure. Total disarray happen to be account of India in her sight and particularly the dangerous portrayal of Calcutta.

Tara is concerned about the hygienic conditions of the vendors selling tea and other edible items in the railway station. She is not able to go for a coffee and gets a coke, but taken aback when given one without a straw. She was scared about the menacing germs bulking in public toilets and railway stations. She is sure that India is misread and misrepresented, but pervelant conditions in parts of the country is threatening. Adaption and assimilation of the West is not viable because past history is so strong in her and not yet elapsed from her thoughts. Tara's consciousness trying to adjust to be like an American clashes with her already familiar consciousness, the later one being more prevailing than the former in her life.

Tara's relatives' describe the disarray in India and the city's physical danger which is frightening. They are embarassed to show the negative aspects of India. They even caution her not to be mindful of the reulsive and horrible sections of the nation. She assures to keep her eyes shut and cover her nose from the reek of the streets. Anywhere on the land she travels, new experience compels her to study about the city more and more. On her home coming, the city exposes its fate to her: the procession leading the demonstration looked like a giant caterpillar, undamaging and not dangerous, just thrusting their arms through the dusty air. Then there were banners, protest signs, bricks, soda bottles, cane poles and their leaders persuading people to shout louder.

Tara's disappointment with Calcutta, motivated her to be aware of the New India. She tries to realize this place, but her innerself shrivels. She was taken aback by her first view of the huge and dusty place. At the invitation from Mr. Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, she begins a journey to Tollygauge. Her circuitous travel braving hardships was much tedious, and she resents leaving to her homeland without her husband. She was a bit impetuous and hasty when she made up her mind to visit India. Her reckless decision was a result of her emotional confusion between fear of Newyork and nostalgia for India.

Nostalgia come to pass when a one desires to regain the past feelings that had been since lost. Craveing to revisit the land of origin begins to creep in when one feels that there is a long distance to travel to reach the homeland. Once she has come back, Calcutta seems to be more perilous and unsafe to her than she remembered. Paradoxically she is treated as an alien, one who appears to be strange with India and its culture. In Mukherjee's work, one feels that, Indian culture is pictured as feeble, gray and foggy, which Tara has obviously come to embrace. After the British had left the land, there has been a lot of disarray in India. The more Tara realizes and tries to understand her motherland, the more she is scared. She feels homeless at home. Her root is in India, but she could not find a right place to establish in India by herself.

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