

IDENTITY CRISIS- A STUDY OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S***THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER***

**Dr. Ashok Kumar, Principal
M.L.N. College, Radaur**

**Ms. Jyoti Gulati
Assistant Professor
A.C.E.A.R. , Devsthali (Ambala)**

ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee is better known as the apostle of immigrants, who experience alienation, cultural shock, and isolation as expatriates in a foreign as well as native milieu. Mukherjee's major works cover wide range of themes but the main theme is Mukherjee's concern with identity and the adaptability of people. Quest for identity being her predominant concern, Mukherjee like V. S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai, deals with the problems of identity crisis. She craves for the identity of many Asian-American women who suffer owing to the complex issues of the racism, sexism, violence, high social expectations and pressures, poverty, cultural adjustment, lack of family support and rootlessness. The present paper attempts to explore identity crisis depicted in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*. The novel unfolds the story of Tara Banerjee who experiences cultural shock, alienation and lack of identification from both her native land and America. Tara's journey throughout the novel ironically proves frustrating slowly leading to her loss of identity, illusion, depression and finally her shattered self.

This Paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the thematic concern running through the novels of Bharati Mukherjee. The second section analyses identity crisis reflected in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*; and the third section concludes the novel. Thus the present paper will be a modest attempt to analyze the novel.

KEYWORDS: Identity Crisis, Alienation, Cultural Shock, Isolation and Cultural Adjustment

ABBREVIATION: TD- *The Tiger's Daughter*

INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the major novelists of Indian Diaspora who have achieved enviable position within a comparatively short creative span. She is not only the most commercially successful among women writers of Indian Diaspora but the most controversial narrator of Indian Cultural Identity in a multicultural context. Violent and timely, contemporary and historical, true and fantastical, Bharati Mukherjee's work has been a windstorm sweeping up the major flavour of her times. Bharati Mukherjee's literary work has highlighted the experiences and journey of her female protagonists who transplant themselves from one culture to another which results in their loss of identity, alienation, aloofness, ensuing dilemmas and the chaos of the melting pot. Bhagbat Nayak says that her female characters struggle in, "a fragile identity and cultural hybridity to be preserved against obliteration."¹

In the fictional world of Bharati Mukherjee female expatriates play a predominant role. Her female characters are characterized by their rootlessness, their incapacity to belong to a particular place. Their cultural conflicts, efforts, or attempts to find identity and failures in the new culture are the main concerns of her novels. Her characters are entrapped in the process of finding their own self and identity in the boundaries of their own native land or in a completely new culture. Some of them are able to attain their identity, and some are left alienated and shattered beings. Mukherjee's character always "stands in the shaky ground where East meets West and the sound of cultures clashing could shatter glass."² Bharati Mukherjee's own struggle for identity, first as an exile from India, and then as an Indian expatriate in Canada and finally as an immigrant in the U. S. has led her to combine the two experiences in her novels- *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) and *Wife* (1975). This paper is an attempt to examine, the novel *The Tiger's Daughter* based on the concept of identity crisis.

The Tiger's Daughter, an elegant and skillfully wrought literary piece, is the maiden attempt of Bharati Mukherjee wherein she has tried to fictionalize the quest for identity led by her female characters. Bharati Mukherjee herself explained this situation in an interview given to Sybil Steinberg, "It is the wisest of my novels in the sense that I was between two worlds. I was detached enough from India so that I could look back with affection and irony, but I didn't know America enough to feel any conflict. I was like a bridge poised between two worlds."³ Bharati Mukherjee's own struggle for asserting her identity is subtly portrayed in *The Tiger's Daughter*. In this novel, Tara our female protagonist finds herself sandwiched between the two cultures. She encounters loss of identity, isolation and depression while living in both the cultures.

The novel *The Tiger's Daughter* is divided into four parts. Part one deals with the past of Tara, her family background, the process of her settlement in New York and her settlement in her native soil of Calcutta.

Part Two deals with Tara's arrival in Bombay, her journey to Calcutta and her reactions of India. Part Three concentrates on Tara's life in Calcutta with her Catelli Continental friends. Part Four of the novel deals with her visit to Darjeeling with her Calcutta friends to spend summer vacation, her coming back to Calcutta, her boredom and alienation, her victimization in a mob and her tragic end which remains mysterious. The novel's structure of an open ending tells about the dangling personality of Tara who is torn between two identities -American and Indian.

The Tiger's Daughter can be primarily described as the story of Tara Banerjee, the daughter of a Bengali Brahmin, an industrialist of Calcutta known as "Bengal Tiger" (TD 4)⁴. Tara goes to America for her higher studies. Though afraid of unknown ways of America, in the beginning she tries to adjust herself to it by entering into wedlock with an American. After that, she returns to India after a gap of seven years only to find herself a total stranger in the inherited milieu. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes, "Every time an exile returns, for him the problem is urgent as well as unique."⁵ She experiences loss of her own self and identity in her native land between her own friends and relatives. She is not able to feel that she is also one of them. She realizes she has neither imbibed Indian nor American culture completely in her personality. She is neither Indian nor truly American. She is totally confused and lost. Tara is the "nowhere woman."⁶

A critical study of *The Tiger's Daughter* attempts to explore and depict the identity crisis of an expatriate – Tara, a reflection of Mukherjee's own struggle and experiences as an expatriate. Tara's journey back to India, after spending seven years in The States proves distressing. The Calcutta she finds on her return – seething with strikes, riots and unrest- is vastly different from the place she remembers. She even can't identify herself with her relatives. When her relatives address her by her nickname 'Tultul' she feels a distance from them. She thinks, "It was difficult to listen to these strangers" (TD 17). The reason of this changed outlook is that when Tara comes back to India, she has not yet completely imbibed the American Culture, nor has she totally broken herself from the moral values of her native land. In this process of, "Unhousement and rehousement."⁷, she loses her roots. This distress and disorientation result in identity crisis and eventually loss of identity.

In this tout, ironic tale of colliding cultures, Tara fails to come to a conclusion, she questions where does she belongs to- to India or to America. Her efforts to reconcile the old world- that of her father, the Bengal Tiger and the brash new one that is being so violently ushered in. In spite of her best efforts she fails to communicate at both the levels emotionally and culturally with her husband and with her parents or friends. Both seem alien to her. She finds herself rootless, having no moorings or identity of her own. She can't identify herself even with her American husband. She feels that even her husband David feels that

she is from some other culture and plane. She comes to a conclusion neither David nor her own relatives have understood her. She thinks about David that, "Probably he had not understood her either" (TD 50)

Bharati Mukherjee has portrayed Tara like her other female characters who are torn between their socio-cultural milieus, in an alien soil and their nostalgic longing for India, their homeland. Tara asks herself that what is reason of this foreignness? She ponders which is the thing that does not permit her to establish her identity firmly? She realizes that she is unable to plant roots in any culture. And this lack of having her firm roots in any soil leads to her complete loss of confidence, identity and strength to adapt her own culture.

In India she was not considered Indian but called 'The American Auntie' and, on the other side New York for Tara was, "a gruesome nightmare" (TD 69). In India she finds difficult to connect to her relatives and she also realizes that her ties with America and her husband are also shaking while staying in India, "In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner and this foreignness was a burden" (TD 62). This distinction makes her feel alienated from both the cultures. She is internally split into two parts, which have become alien to each other- the Indian and the American. She realizes that she has no firm identity of her own and she takes a decision to move to America- the new home of her second self. Throughout the novel, we find Tara outpouring her antithetical and mutually contradictory emotions which symbolize the fragmentation of herself and her alienation from her surroundings.

CONCLUSION

In this novel *The Tiger's Daughter* Bharati Mukherjee provides us with a very useful insight in the most intriguing traits of the expatriates that they are without any permanent identity of their own, they are rootless, unaccommodated and misfit everywhere.

Tara, the protagonist in the novel is an anguished self, a lacerated being having no roots and feels estranged from her own native land. This is her fate that even in her own land with her western outlook and education, Tara felt as an alien, as she did in North America where she was racially an outsider. There is a loss of identity at two levels- the native and the foreign country. She finds herself rootless and her quest for her own identity results in her tragic end at the end of the novel. To conclude, we can say that to have one's own identity one must know one's own self fully- what one wants, and then coming to terms with life and reality and their own self. This realization comes to the protagonist Tara too late in the novel without any positive results.

REFERENCES:

1. Bhagbat Nayak, "Quest for Identity in Immigrant Sensibility: A Study of Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*," *Studies in Women Writers in English*, eds. Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu, Vol. 4. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005), P. 251.
2. S. P. Swain, "Anatomy of Change and the Problems of Self: A Study of Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*," *Studies in Women Writers in English*, eds. Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu, Vol. 4. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005), P. 259.
3. Anita Myles, "Bharati Mukherjee," *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists in English* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 200), P. 110.
4. Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972); rpt. (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990), P. 9. All subsequent textual quotations with page numbers in parenthesis are taken from this edition.
5. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (1962; rpt. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1983), P. 67.
6. S. P. Swain, P. 237
7. Indira Nityanandam, "Bharati Mukherjee: Striking Roots," *Three Great Indian Women Novelists: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee* (New Delhi: Creative books, 2000), P. 63.