

Research Article***Cultural Displacement in the Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Focus on The Tiger's Daughter*****K . JAYASREE¹, Dr. R. KRISHNA RAO²**¹Assistant Professor of English, Dept. of H&BS, UCEK, JNTUK, KAKINADA²Assistant Professor of English, Dept. of H&BS, UCEK, JNTUK, KAKINADA**Corresponding Author: K . JAYASREE**

Abstract

This paper examines the theme of cultural displacement in the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee with special reference to the *Tiger's Daughter*. The study explores the psychological, social and cultural conflicts experienced by the protagonist as she struggles between her Indian roots and Western influences. Mukherjee portrays the challenges of migration, alienation, identity crisis, and the feeling of not fully belonging to either culture. The novel reflects the emotional trauma faced by immigrants who experiences Tara, the paper highlights the impact of globalization, migration, and changing cultural values on personal identity. The study also discusses how Mukherjee presents the conflicts between tradition and modernity, especially in relation to women's identity and self-expression. By analyzing the narrative techniques and themes in the novel, this paper attempts to show that cultural displacement becomes both a painful and transformative experience. Ultimately the paper argues that mukherjee's work contributes significantly to Indian English literature by presenting the complexities of diaspora consciousness and multicultural identity.

Keywords: Cultural Displacement, Diaspora, Identity Crisis ,Immigration, Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger's Daughter*, Alienation, Multiculturalism, Women Identity.

Introduction

Indian English fiction has undergone a significant transformation, especially in the portrayal of women. One major reason for this shift is the migration of Indians to western countries, which introduced new cultural conflicts and fragmented identities. Writers began to move away from traditional language and themes, instead highlighting the contrasts between Eastern and western cultures.

Women writers, particularly those living abroad, often depict female characters striving to establish their individuality within family and society. These characters frequently experience a deep sense of cultural alienation and emotional fragmentation . The expatriate woman, in particular, faces multiple forms of displacement- geographical, cultural, and psychological. She becomes involved in the process of redefining herself while coping with the loss of connection to her native culture and the challenge of adapting to a new environment.

Caught between two cultures, she struggles to balance her original values with those of the host society. This in-between state make adjustment difficult and often creates a sense of confusion and instability. Despite these challenges, she attempts to reconcile her dual identity and find a sense of belonging in a new community.

As critic Chowdhary points out, understanding Bharati Mukherjee's female characters requires recognizing their position on the margins of society, where they negotiate between different cultural realities. Mukherjee's works are deeply influenced by her personal experiences as a woman living between cultures, and her writing reflects the continuous process of identity formation shaped by migration and displacement.

The Tiger's daughter is about a young girl named Tara who returns to India after living abroad for seven years. When she comes back, she sees only poverty and unrest. The story then focuses on Tara Banerjee, who belongs to a wealthy family, she is the great-granddaughter to Harilal Banerjee and the daughter of a man known as the "Bengal Tiger" because of his strong personality. He owns a well-known tobacco company. At the age of fifteen, Tara is sent to America for higher studies. She feels homesick and frightened as she tries to adjust to a new culture.

Her struggles in America are explained through flashbacks. She feels hurt when her roommate refuses to share food with her, which makes her feel excluded. To overcome loneliness, she decorates her room with Indian items like silk scarves. She also prays to Kali to stay strong and not lose her identity. These actions show her effort to hold on to her culture in a foreign land.

As one critic points out, immigrants often idealize their home country, and Tara does the same. Even after marriage, she keeps her maiden name, which shows her emotional connection to her roots. Later, Tara falls in love with an American named David Cartwright. Their marriage happens quickly after they meet at a bus station. However, Tara feels uneasy because David is completely Western. She finds it hard to explain her cultural background to him, while he asks simple and sometimes insensitive questions about Indian traditions. This creates distance between them. Tara begins to feel that he does not truly understand her, and she becomes insecure in this unfamiliar environment. In general, immigrants must face many challenges. They have to adjust to new people, language, and customs. They also deal with unfamiliar problems and must learn how to survive in a completely different world.

After several years, she planned a trip to India. Although the journey had changed her outlook to some extent, she could not overcome her fixed gender stereotypes or her attachment to old memories. When she returned to India, her Bombay relatives welcomed her and introduced her to the children as their American aunt, but she spoke to her relatives in a cold and detached way. When they called her "Tulu" the nickname sounded unfamiliar to her Americanized ears. The railway station seemed filthy and overcrowded, with sick and deformed men sitting on bundles and trunks. In the train compartment, she found it difficult to travel with a Marwari and trunks. In the train compartment, she found it difficult to travel with Marwari and a dreamland. Surrounded by her relatives and vendors at Howrah hated everything and everyone in India where she had been born raised and taught many values, largely because of her acculturation in America.

Mukherjee shows that nostalgia and cultural memory are essential parts of an expatriate's mental state, but over time the strength of these feelings decreases in the same way, Tara Banerjee Cartwright reaches a stage where she cannot cope with the culture of Calcutta, which she left seven years earlier, even though she still longs for the loneliness and belonging she once felt there. At Vassar, she feels alienated and separate from the white students, and she is isolated. However, her privileged Bengali background and the strong discipline given by the nuns at St. Blaise school in Calcutta helped her survive her early cultural struggles. She held on to religious symbols and old customs, which gave her some comfort. Later, socializing with other Indians at meetings of the Indian White students, and her attempts to communicate with them mostly fail. The invisible barrier between Tara and White students keeps her isolated. However, her privileged Bengali background and strong discipline given by the nun at St. Blaise school in Calcutta helped her survive her early cultural struggles. She held on to religious symbols and old customs, which gave her some comfort.

Later, socializing with other Indians at meetings of the Indian students' Associating helped reduce her loneliness. She also stayed in touch with her parents, relatives, and friends through letters, which gave her emotional support. Her visit to Calcutta was intended to reveal her expatriate identity and emotional sensitivity.

The passage explains that Tara's psychological and cultural struggle is the result of both internal and external tensions. She no longer feels completely at ease in her home country or in the life she once knew, yet she has not fully accepted the value of the new society either. Her "assimilation" in to a new culture remains incomplete because a deep attachment

To her Indian identity still exists. This causes her to feel divided between two cultures, which leaves her feeling rootless, nostalgic, and mentally split. Her inability to choose one world over the other creates a lasting inner conflict. It also says that Tara finds it difficult to connect with others because marriage to an American and Western education have made her feel alienated from her own people. Although she has absorbed western values, she remains emotionally linked to India. However, it is weak and uncertain, and it does not allow her to fit comfortably into either culture. The passage further suggests that her change in attitude has made her appear socially and emotionally disconnected, and that she feels unhappy in America, despite its modern conveniences and attractions.

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 difference and arrogance as these are associated with the Westernized India. (Tondon 32)

Tara is trapped between two cultures and cannot fully belong to either. Her western education and marriage have distanced her from India, but she still cannot completely accept American life, leaving her emotionally divided and unhappy.

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 their own apartment buildings. New York was certainly extraordinary, and it has driven her to despair. (qtd. in Sunitha 264)

Tara's mind is continuously torn between two identities – one rooted in her Indian background and the other shaped by American culture. Trapped between these contrasting worlds, she begins to feel disconnected from her traditions. Over time, she realizes that she has forgotten many Hindu rituals she has observed while watching her mother during childhood. This realization deepens her sense of alienation, especially when she cannot recall the proper sequence of ritual practices. To her, this forgetting is not a minor loss; it feels like a gradual emotional death, a hardening of her inner self, and a disturbance in her sense of balance and identity. The idea of a "cracking of axis and centre" symbolically reflects her inner turmoil caused by losing touch with her cultural roots.

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)

American culture, in many ways, seems to have overshadowed Tara like an unseen force. Despite this, deep within her, she longs to live like a typical Indian. However, having built her life in America, these once-familiar customs now feel strange to her. She begins to recognize her sense of rootlessness, feeling like an outsider even in her own life. Viewing everything through an Americanized Indian, which leaves her feeling psychologically divided and isolated.

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.(Choudhury 95)

The conclusion of this novel reflects the confusion an emotional struggle within Tara's Character. The violent and destructive crowd outside the Catelli- continental hotel shows no mercy. Trapped inside a car, frightened and trembling among the cruel mob, Tara experiences the helplessness and insecurity of human life. The chaos outside symbolizes the conflict within her mind, and by leaving her in the middle of that unrest, Mukherjee suggests that such inner and outer conflicts may never be fully resolved.

Tara feels herself, as misfit everywhere she goes. She is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultural 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 Sharma70)

The novel closes with a scene of confusion and disorder, offering no hopeful or spiritual resolution. Tara's inability and inability to act reflect the gender expectations imposed on Women. In India, she experiences a deep sense of displacement an emotional isolation. Her journey to India becomes a search for identity and self-understanding, but her immigrant experience ultimately leads her towards feelings of illusion, loneliness, depression, and finally, tragedy.

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