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## CROSS CULTURAL GENETICS: A STUDY OF BHARATI

### MUKHERJEE'S THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER

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**Abstract:** Post-Independence era has witnessed the development of various perspectives regarding Commonwealth literature in India. In this context, the contribution of women takes a special position. The domain of women writing has experienced sparks of novel thinking and futuristic genetics of the women writing. The Indian women writers in English have purveyed in-depth details of cross cultural relationships. Bharati Mukherjee, one of the outstanding women diasporic writers, has portrayed the world of Indian women immigrants with their physical and mental traumatic experiences and predicaments in the alien land. Her almost all characters experience the dilemma of the Eastern and Western confrontation. The present research paper aims at exploring various cross-cultural relations depicted in her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* which is a unique example of cross-cultural crisis and is based on the interaction of both the Eastern and the Western cultures. This paper brings forth various reasons of cultural variations and possible causes of cultural conflicts in the journeys of immigrants.

**Keywords :** acculturation, immigrant, cultural displacement, dilemma, western confrontation

Bharati Mukherjee begins her analysis of the theme of strife and struggle between Eastern and Western worlds in her first novel *The Tiger's Daughter*. *The Tiger's Daughter* is the first novel of Bharati Mukherjee, written during her stay in Canada and published in 1972, revolves around the life of Tara and brings out the cross cultural conflicts faced by her. Her female protagonists suffer the most due to their multiple dislocations. She is the typical representative of a young female associated with Third World countries.

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All migrants are nostalgic and keep a strong psychological bond with their ancestral

cultural past. Sentimentality and yearning about past are two important parts of migrant's mental state. But as migrants migrate to new places and spend much of their time in hostlands, the intensity and clout of those feelings eventually get diminish. Thus migrants face many troubles in adjusting themselves according to the life styles in their homelands which they left many years ago due to socio-political crisis. Similarly Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes through this in the middle of stage, one hand she can't adapt to the social space of Calcutta of which she is a huge piece of which she has given up seven years prior and then again she is confident to beat her seclusion she encounters in a new land.

The novel *The Tiger's Daughter* moves independently with the story of Tara Banerjee who belongs to an upper class Bengali Brahmin family. She is the great-grand-daughter of Harilal Banerjee and the daughter of the Bengal Tiger (name given to him due to his aggressive temperament). She protects the dignity of her country, India and her family at all costs. He is the owner of famous the Banerjee and Thomas Co. Ltd. of tobacco. Tara is sent to America for higher studies at the age of fifteen. She receives her education at Vassar College, New York. She has to face cultural discrimination in the hostland. She is scared and homesick and tries to adjust to the demands of the hostland. Her displacement creates a cultural duality which splits her subjective personal self into halves. Due to this, she does not feel at home in both of her homes. For Tara cultural integration through acculturation becomes very difficult due to her cultural plurality. Her friends ask her about America and her relatives call her the wife of an American man. Nobody care about Tara's feelings. When Tara tries to rediscover her roots in her native land, her this attempt goes useless and she takes this conception in her mind that she is an outsider because of her marriage with an American. Being an Indian born- girl, it is quite hard to swallow American cultural values. She is left to lead a life of an exile in the absence of native culture, identity and sense of belonging.

Tara is an expatriate, she hangs scarves around her apartment for her Indian look and her physical and intellectual attachment to Indianness, she wants to replicate a little new India around her. Tara has a very sentimental and delicate relationship with India so she feels a sense of detachment during her stay in America. With the confrontation of American culture Tara becomes more determined and courageous. Tara's perception and personality has changed due to the impact of American culture. She bears all cultural conflict without any outer support and tries to resolve at her own. In America, she marries David Cartwright

by ignoring all traditional Hindu customs and traditions. She gives up her relationship with her family because of David who has been thrown out and excluded by his family from his caste. She takes the step for marriage for finding a new meaning in a new culture.

Tara shuttles between two cultures and two homes. She does analyses of her life, about her identity and asks who is she and where she belongs. After her seven years stay in America, she realizes that she has come far away from her real home. She has forgotten all Indian Hindu traditions and rituals of worshipping: “But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. 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 center”.(51).

Tara is mentally disturbed by the absence of her own ethnic roots. Even the American culture does not provide her desired satisfaction and sense of belonging and she experiences hollowness, desolation and meaninglessness:

“New York, she thought, had been exotic. . . . there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her . . . were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. . . .The only pollution she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution. New York was certainly extraordinary and it had driven her to despair”.(33-34).

Tara's self has torn between two contradictory selves so she cannot express her emotions as per the situation. She neither shows sympathy nor hate towards Aunt Jharna when she sees Aunt Jharna does religious endeavors for restoring her son's health. As Tara questions Aunt innocently if she has attempted her clubfooted son plaster casts and unique trainers, Aunt takes things in a certain sense and scolds Tara: “You think you are too educated for this, don't you? . . . . You have come back to make fun of us, haven't you? What gives you the right? Your American money ? Your *mlecchahusband*?” (36-37).

Tara's visit to Calcutta is actually mapped out to bring about her immigrant sensitivity and to manifest the measure of emotional distance constructed due to physical remoteness from her hometown. Her behaviour and reactions make it clear that she no longer feels deeply attached with Indian culture and not even at ease with her relatives and friends. This phase prepares her for her approval of new values and life styles of new place. Rani proclaims, 'In a foreign society, assimilation and recognition seem unlikely until the history is overlooked' (83).

Tara is no longer an Indian personality. She always remains in conflict with her Indian culture. She is trapped into a psychological tussle and she is not able to adjust with her Indian relatives and friends. Tara's innerself always feels wretched and desolate because of the pull between two cultural environments. At the same time she feels trapped and released. Neither her native psyche nor her newly acquired American self is able to provide her safety and solace. Her this weakness of selection lies in her failure of rejecting any one place. She encounters her fractured identity:

It's hard for the protagonist to connect as she is married to an American and her western education as an excluded individual. Because Tara is introduced to the West and absorbed her beliefs, she would inevitably be disconnected and thus, even though she attempts to speak out for her continued commitment and identification to India, the voice has no confidence because she conflicts with the normal role of ignorance and superiority associated with the West Indian. (Tandon 32)

The haughty behaviour of Tara attributes to her American outlook and view of life. Her seven-year stay in America has absolutely become an arrogant and proud icon. Her mind But her stay in America does not provide mental comfort and she feels loneliness there also:

“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)”

In India nothing is left which can attract Tara. Her birthland Calcutta has turned into a land of violence, uproars and revolutions, political upheaval, brutality and riots. Before her departure from India, 'the houses on Marine Drive'(18) has special attraction for her. She praises them for their beauty. But her seven-year visit to America has modified her view regarding India, now the same houses that caught her interest (18). She looks like an alien in Calcutta. She's frightened by the reality if that's the same Calcutta she liked so much and it's a terrifying dream.

Tara and David live happily in the United States. Yet Tara is mindful of her Western perspective. When David asks Tara about Indian customs and traditions, her family

background Tara is not able to provide minute details about her family and Indian culture. She fails to express finer descriptions and her failure to describe about her own culture is due to their cultural difference. In Indian culture, marriage is a not a simple meeting of two individuals but it is a union of two different families existing a harmonious emotional bonding of not two persons but of families. However, marriage is just a bond between two parties in Western countries which can be dissolved at any moment. Tara is perturbed with the thought that her husband does not understand her Indian culture as she tries hard to make him clear everything about Indian traditions. This doubt in her mind creates anxiety, fear and misunderstanding in their marital relationship. They belong to different cultures and this gap in cultures creates a sense of insecurity in Tara's mind. Her decision to visit India after seven years is only as she wants to gain triumph over her feeling of insecurity. Tara returns to India with a little cognizance and consciousness about her changed outlook after seven years stay in America. Her aspiration of gaining relief and satisfaction on her native land dashes to smithereens. She feels a stranger even in the gathering of her friends and relatives. Her rootlessness and lack of sense of belonging is the main cause of her isolation, trauma, psychological depression, misery and alienation. Tara reacts in an aggressive manner and expresses her disparaging remarks about the disintegration of Calcutta city and her friend Reena reveals that she has become 'self-centered and European'(105) due to American impact.

Tara's marriage proves a cause of uneasiness, apprehension and insecurity which clings upon her mind as a load. She gets mentally exhausted due to their orthodox outlook. Mukherjee through the marital relationship between Tara and David shows the troubles of cross-cultural ties. Tara's perception about America as a land of tremendous prosperity and opportunities has strengthens more when she notices the poor children eating in the streets, the brutality and riots in Calcutta, her interaction with a poor girl suffering from leprosy and her exploitation and unfair treatment by licentious politician.

At every point of time Tara feels like an alien. In Calcutta, her relatives calls her 'Americawali'(42) and her husband 'mleccha'(36). These tags in turn sharpen her mental agony. Behavior of her mother towards her makes her dishearten thoroughly:

“Perhaps her mother sitting serenely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tarahadwilfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps, her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin,

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was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow” (56).

Even the treatment of Tara’s friends is full of indifference towards her. They do not have any interest in their American marriage and do not want to listen anything concerned to marriage: 'She wanted these friends to admire her. She needed them to regard her marriage as a sign of liberation. Yet liberation was suspicious-it was slavery.' (86). They are really attentive of American stories, dresses, posts, etc. Yet they don't embrace Tara's marriage and she's an outsider for them. The orthodox and modern mindset of Indian society is underlined in this element of the novel. Traditional Indians adore conventional cultural rituals, thus attracting international objects: 'They were race purists, urgently thought Tara. Foreigners in film magazines – Natwood and Bobwagner – loved it. But the international marriage partners were not accepted.' (86).

Religion has been a significant part of Indian culture. Any culture remains alive for centuries only if it contains the ingredients of spirituality and religion in the true sense. Going far away from religious roots is considered spiritual death. Tara is still feeling this divine death if, though she worships her own mother, she forgets to recite the acts she prescribes: 'It wasn't just a tragedy, Tara fears, it was a little death, heart hardening, a split of axis and middle' (1). Tara becomes disturbed as she has forgotten the way to perform the rituals and senses that her foreignness makes her blind and unaware about her religious customs. She has become a foreign lady with American identity and this infuses her with a sense of rootlessness. She asks herself who she is and what her identity is, but nothing comes out and she gets confused. Her feelings remains in her mind only she is incapable to convey her feelings to her husband, friends and family members. On the one hand, her husband, David assumes her a foreigner and on the other hand, her friends, relatives call her a sinner and polluter who has contaminated herself by tying a knot with an American, who is an outcaste.

Tara's inner self experiences a constant struggle between two identities one is Indian and other is American. Trapped in between two opposing worlds she feels as she stands nowhere. She grows tensed due to changed behaviour of her mother:

“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”. (50)

Her split personality can be associated with her foreign education and her foreign husband which create into her a sense of unbelonging neither to India nor America. Tara discovers the fact that her American life has changed her thoroughly. Her American attitude and foreign perception has assisted her in comprehending the vast gap between East and West which is impossible to cross. In India she only picks up negative aspects such as poverty, misery, riots, poor children wandering in the streets. She has woven a fabric of dirt in her mind for India. There is a conflict between her old perception of India and new and changed perception of India in her mind.

In her article Jasbir Jain correctly stated: "Spiritual foreignness: the universe of novels by Bharati Mukherjee" That: "Tara's current consciousness is embedded in her life in the USA, and as she stares at India anew, it is not her childhood associations or past memories but the eyes of her international husband David. Her responses are those of a visitor, an alien.' (13). Tara has adopted a changed vision to define Indian people. In her conception Indian people are poor, wild, uncivilized, unhygienic, starved, diseased and deteriorated. Upon the request of her mother, Tara visits Kananbala Mata Devi and her heart gladdened and she feels her soul enlightened by the holy view of Mata. She feels as all the anguish, enmity and evil has been washed away from within her in herself, but this spiritual fulfillment is short-lived for Tara.

Tara has been turned by American culture into a secret spirit. She has a burning desire to interact and behave like Indians but her newly constructed American self creates hurdles in the way of such desires. She becomes consciousness of the fact of her rootlessness. She has turned into an alien figure, who looks at her own life. Now she has become the native of adapted land. She has adopted everything American. She observes everyone and everything with her American perception. She narrates everything from the perspective of an Americanized Indian. She sees herself on the margins of both cultures, not fully adopted by her. She experiences physical and psychological marginalization from both cultures and feels trauma of divided self:

"Tara was not here or there actually. She was flawed in her Calcutta environment, and in America she was always stressed – trying to be correct, not being a left-wing immigrant, trying to be American. Tara is smart, highly qualified and self-analytical. She is guilty of heresy, fear and dissatisfaction. (Chowdhury 95)"



It is the willingness and readiness of Tara to kill her past selves and make herself capable to act actively into unfamiliar but optimistic future. This future though force immigrants towards itself and promises for help, yet not certain for success, but it encourages the migrants for their personal growth at every level :physical, material and spiritual. These characters are much better than those who always cling to their history, past and past locations for maintaining a balance between the two cultures. But their efforts cause isolation, tension and death.

Eventually, Tara is in hurry to leave India, her native land and before leaving she does not meet her Indian friends. Tara's decision to leave India can be for two reasons first reason can be her rape by the politician Tuntunwala and the brutal and distressed condition of the country. She suffers from mental imbalance, thought she does not exhibit her disturbance caused by cultural polarity, "The political turbulence, poverty, over-population, corruption and hypocrisy that plague Calcutta seem to make her emotionally insecure and unstable"(EnakshiChowdhary 82). (Chowdhury, Enakshi. "Images of Woman in Bharati Mukherjee's novels." *Literary Voice* 2 (1995) : 81-87)

The ending of the novel presents the internal conflict and confusion of Tara's mind. The hotel is surrounded by a violent, harmful and ruthless crowd. Tremulant and restless Tara protected in a car surrounded by the riotous crowd, feels susceptibility of attack. The outside disturbance and violence is the presentation of Tara's internal restlessness and disturbed state of mind. Tara's trapping in this violent mob points out her actual psychological confusion due to staying at the margins of two cultural environments: "Tara finds herself like she goes all over fit. She has to dig at her own universe with two nations with two opposing philosophies, two continents apart. When he realises that reconciliation is impossible, Tara feels like returning to David (Sharma 70)". In India Tara feels dislocated and homeless and her visit to India is actually her search for self. Her immigrant self which is intensely disturbed gradually brings her to the path of isolation, depression, dejection and her disastrous end. Her immobile condition and inefficiency of doing something is a sign of gender stereotyping that the girls constantly embrace.

Bharati Mukherjee's work represent a real and intricate world full of disorder and transformations become apparent due to intermixing and blending of different cultures. She has constructed remarkably a territory in her celebrated novels where her protagonists encounter multiple displacements due to clash between location and culture. In this novel, she locates the troublesome areas in the life of expatriate to form a concept of Tara's divided self-trapped between two opposing worlds. She brilliantly particularize the themes of acculturation and adjustment to the hostland



culture, the afflictions, sufferings, the traumas that cause pain and troubles for immigrants in the adopted land. She explores the in-between spaces between locations, cultures, nations and identities. In this novel she tries to reconstruct and reshape the notions of transformed identities in the postmodern worldwide context. Bharati Mukherjee perceives deeply the notion of diaspora as a process of gain rather than taking it negatively as a condition of extreme loss and dislodgement with destruction of history and disintegration of homeland culture. She condemns the traditional perspectives of displacement and immigration.

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