
AGONY OF DISPLACEMENT: A REFERENCE TO BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVEL "TIGER'S DAUGHTER"

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Abstract: The word "Diaspora" is a much talked about term in the present era. It is used as a blanket term for any "transnational displacement". The circumstances may vary according to the situations. Diaspora has been regarded as a history-specific term in the 21st century. Traditionally it is a term which refers to the dispersed Jews after Babylonian captivity. It refers to the Jews living outside Palastine in the apostolic age. Jews fled to other lands in the wake of the Nazi holocaust. Thus 'Diaspora' denotes a particular phenomenon which has its origin in 1940s. The word Diaspora has acquired a greater connotative significance by transcending its historic specificity. Today the word Diaspora refers to people who have immigrated to an alien land. Immigration from India to other alien lands especially to the West is termed as Indian Diaspora.

The phenomenon of Diaspora movement has emerged as a result of colonialism and uneven economic distribution. The financial disparity is also the root of this situation. The expatriate migration takes place with a hope of emancipation, prospects of a better standard of living and search for opportunities to fulfill one's potentiality. The people who migrate to an alien land are urged to construct a new identity owing to an inevitable clash between the culture of their origin and the culture of the host country. They perform the dual roles of ambassadors and refugees simultaneously. They have to accomplish the roles related to an amalgamation of their native culture with alien culture. Such efforts result in the synchronization of the inherited culture and the adopted culture. In the process of hybridization of culture an encounter takes place between the culture of the centre and the culture of the periphery. In an interview Edward Said remarks:

"The whole notion of crossing over or moving from one identity to other is extremely important to me, being as I am-as we all are a sort of hybrid."¹

Some people who migrate to alien countries do not suffer from culture- shocks. They feel at home both in the native culture and the alien culture, while some others fail to feel at home in both the cultures. A sense of homelessness prevails in their minds. According to an eminent writer Clarke Blaise, ' every immigrant undergoes the experience of 'Unhousement' and 'Enhousement'². There has been much debate on it in the present era since a number of people and writers have been migrating to the west from the third world countries lured by better employment opportunities and better standard of life. The immediate concern of migrants in an alien country is to find a job, a shelter and make fortune. Being situated in an unknown and insecure setting they undergo a sense of uncertainty and restlessness in their attempt to fulfill their immediate needs. They feel panic-stricken as they are discriminated from others. On one hand they have a sense of uncertainty and on the other hand they have to face

discrimination. They are crushed between these two. This feeling of restlessness differs from person to person based on their perception. Some, in course of time adapt to the alien culture. Some others suffer from a feeling of discontent as they miss the warmth and coziness of the native country. Being nostalgic they look forward to the company of the people of their native soil. Adaptation to an alien culture becomes an arduous task for them as they have assimilated their native culture since their birth. Native culture is ingrained in their blood. Since financial considerations alone cannot gratify one's psyche a feeling of homelessness stems from this uncertain state in an alien land. The discrimination that is shown against the immigrants in many ways is also one of the contributing factors for this feeling of homelessness. The only choice left to them is either to get absorbed and assimilated in the host culture or remain isolated. As Bhiku Parekh says:

"Diasporic Indian is like the banyantree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life. He spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world"³.

The migration of many writers from the third world countries, especially from India is for a search for an intellectually stimulating climate and wide readership which is lacking in the country of their origin. The West is a literary home for many Indian writers. Though they are closely conditioned Easterners they have made a conscious choice to migrate to the West. It is obvious from their literary experience. With the Indian writers in English it's a desire for wider acceptance abroad as well as for enjoying the atmosphere of literary affluence and material advancement. The migration of many Indian writers from India has paved way for new directions in modern Indian English literature. The theme of expatriation has occupied a unique place in the Third World literature in general and Indian English

literature in particular. Uma Parameshwaran opines that "Expatriate sensibility is a literary term"⁴. It sounds authentic in this context. Expatriate sensibility has given room for new dimension in Indian Diasporic writings. Expatriation and Indian expatriate writing have become the center of contemporary critical discourse. Expatriation ramified not only into the disciplines of sociology, philosophy, psychology and history but also into literature. Expatriate condition stems from one's decision to live in a country other than his own. In some cases the self-exile of the writers has generated a sense of expatriation in them. In the case of many Indian writers the expatriation is by choice and their self-exile has caused the trauma of expatriation. A scrutiny of Indian writers in English unleashes the fact that many of them have carved a niche for themselves abroad. They include Raja Rao, Kamala Markandeya, Balachandra Rajan, Ved Mehta, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahari, Chitra Benerjee Divakaruni and a host of others. All these are basically of Indian origin. Their mother tongue is one or the other of Indian languages. Still all of them deliberately and by choice write in English and have a marked expertise in handling it. They have flair for writing in English. A brief survey of their writings reflects the range and depth of the theme of Diaspora. They can neither adapt themselves to the alien soil nor get distanced from the native soil. They narrate their Diasporic experience truthfully irrespective of their birth and citizenship. Meanwhile they carry their Indian roots in the form of culture and traditions with them unconsciously and feel estranged in a new situation because of non-adjustment. What they carry with them from native country clashes with the new. They are ever haunted by nostalgia and become restless as they feel homeless. As Ronald Taft says:

"Expatriation is akin to the process of leaving one's home to join a boarding school or army"⁵.

One of the conditions causing the feeling of alienation is displacement. The writer's choice to distance himself from native soil presupposes the birth of "immigrant psyche" and the slow death of the old self groomed in the native land. As the psychologist James Tyhurst says

"A merger into the cultural mainstream of the host nation is very difficult for first generation"⁶.

As a result a new identity emerges from this position which negotiates between these two undeniable cultures and countries. They become strangers to the people they forsook and to the people they came to. They appear to be homeless literally despite having lived in two cultures. Identity crisis looms large in their minds and hearts. It can be likened to a mother-

child relationship. A child who is distanced from his or her mother yearns for the company of its mother. A mother and home country are synonymous as country is often described as mother land. Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian Diasporic writer who lived first in Canada and now living in America projects the life of Indian immigrants in the USA. She has carved a niche for herself in Diasporic writing. She married a Canadian fellow novelist, Clark Blaise at the university of Iowa in 1963. She also got Canadian citizenship and held teaching position at MC Gill University and Concordia University. She experienced the trauma of a psychological expatriate in Canada. She writes

"I remember how bracing it was to cloak myself in my own Brahminical elegance".

The gravity of discrimination in Canada made her take a bold decision to forsake her professional appointment at MC Gill University and move to America. After several brief assignments in American campuses, Mukherjee finally settled in New York. The problems of adaptation to the alien land are mirrored in her writings. Her creative output consists of five novels. They are 'The Tiger's Daughter(1971), Wife(1975), Jasmine(1990), The Holder of The World (1993) and Desirable Daughters(2002) two books of non-fiction, Days and Nights in Calcutta(1997) and The Sorrow and the Terror(1973) and two collection of short stories, Darkness(1985) and The Middleman and Other Stories(1988)'. She is the recipient of the 'National Book Critics' award in 1988 for her book, 'The Middleman and Other Stories'. In spite of Mukherjee's claim to be an American writer and a transformation in her from expatriation to immigration gradually, familial ties continue to have a bearing on her. Her earlier novels unveil many references to the country of her birth, India. In spite of her assimilation into the host culture, her attachment with home land is not completely broken. Her novels chart the evolution of her characters from expatriation to immigration, almost chronologically. With each subsequent work Mukherjee's involvement with alien country increases and that of attachment with her native country diminishes. The characters in her fiction are moored to their Indian origins. Like Mukherjee they shed their external connections with India, but carry a core of beliefs in the bottom of their self against which all new experiences are measured. The Indianness of Bharati Mukherjee is discernible in her fictional characters. To what extent Indianness is retained through the adaptive process can be examined in her own words. She says: "Instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration, I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated". As Mukherjee is caught between two conflicting cultures, her

experiences have a great bearing on her writings and outlook of her life. Jasbir Jain says:

“Mukherjee’s novels are representative of expatriate sensibility”⁷.

Bharati Mukherjee says

“We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate.

Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries which are (plagued) by civil and religious conflicts... when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society... I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country.”

Mukherjee’s Maiden novel, ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’ occupies a significant place in the Indian Diasporic literature. The novel lays bare the psyche of the protagonist Tara, an immigrant who always grieves as a result of tension created in her mind in view of the two socio-cultural environments of India and America. There is a conflict in Tara’s mind between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. When Tara visits the unknown land, America for her education, she is an outsider in a “no man’s land” and she has to struggle a lot for her survival there. Conquering the new feeling of nostalgia for her native land, India, she carves out a new territory and wraps herself totally with the lure of the west. She recreates herself into a new personality and develops emotional ties with the place she lives in. This discovery of a new self slowly makes Tara forget her own native culture. On her return to India after seven years, Tara is bewildered to find that her love for her old home and culture have turned alien to her. Her mind is again torn apart between the cultural clash of two environments. As a result she is forced to fight with her split personality. The protagonist, Tara Banerjee Chartwright in the novel seems to be an autobiographical portrayal of Bharati Mukherjee who is married to a Canadian novelist Clark Blasé. In a way the novel reveals how Mukherjee herself has not been able to come out of the conflicting cultural situations. There are numerous scenes in the novel that bring out the spirit and richness of the Bengali culture. Tara Banerjee is “The Tiger’s Daughter”, who is born in a Bengali Brahmin family in Calcutta. She is the daughter of an industrialist and a Calcutta Zamindar who is well-known as Bengal Tiger. At the

tender age of fifteen she is schooled in Poughkeepsie, New York. She is married to an American, David who is a writer. Being uprooted from the native soil she tries to adapt to American Society but feels rootless. As an expatriate she is caught between two worlds and two attitudes. She dwells on her “ex” status of the past while she celebrates her present in the new country, America. Since Tara is away from home she idealizes India, her home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it. Tara is homesick in New York like many other newly married Indian girls. As she is very sensitive, even trivial things pain her. She feels discriminated even if her roommate does not share her mango chutney. She defends her family and native land vehemently. Her prayer to goddess Kali to give strength to face the hardships in the alien land is an ample evidence to witness her longing for native culture. But it is of no use and New York drives her to despair. Her long stay in America has changed her outlook on Indian life. Soon after her landing in Mumbai under the spell of American influence, she feels disappointed to find filthy atmosphere. Mumbai railway station looks like a hospital to her. She feels isolated in the absence of her husband and fails to relate herself to Indian reality. Tara’s dreams about Calcutta are shattered. She finds it difficult to participate in religious rituals at home. Her sense of alienation deepens as her friends call her ‘Americanwali’. Many conflicting feelings crowd in her mind. She finds a gulf of difference between the past and the present. Her Americanness and Indianness are in conflict with each other. Tara’s failure to sing bhajan which she always used to sing in her childhood are an indication of her break up with the Indian tradition. Tara’s efforts to gain solace in the lap of India which she cherished much during her stay in America proved to be a futile exercise. She feels a misfit everywhere. As she fails to find solace anywhere she goes to Air India office and books a ticket back to New York. But her return journey is hindered by violence while proceeding towards the Airport. She gets stranded in the crowd. Locked in the car she is reminded of her husband, David. The novel comes to a close with her efforts for a return journey and her failure to do so. Tara’s longing for her husband in times of a psychologically crisis-ridden situation trace a traditional woman’s unextinguished Indian roots in her.

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