

Cross-cultural Relations in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*

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Culture is a comprehensive term and cross-cultural relations mean the relations between two individuals or groups that belong to different cultures on account of migration for studies, business, communication, tourism and for other purposes. Now a day number of interactions of people belonging to different cultures have been increased. The cross-cultural relations depend on the recognition of uncertainty and unfamiliarity of such interactions with others that belong to another cultural set-up. In case of the mirroring of multiple cultures, the most appropriate illustrations are to be found in what is branded as diasporic literature. The diasporic writers like Bharati Mukherjee presents the turn of events in the lives of the characters who are often immigrants from the homeland to the adapted land. The stages of adapt and adopt are noticed on which the journey of the protagonist is from the centre to the periphery and then again from the periphery to the centre. The sense of alienation, the phase of adaptation, the stage of reconciliation, the process of assimilation and the destination of acculturation are the progressive steps which enable the cross-cultural shift possible. The present paper aims at studying the cross-cultural relations reflected in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*.

The Tiger's Daughter is a story about a young girl named Tara who comes back to India after seven long years of being away, and on her return finds only poverty and turmoil. The novel deals with Mukherjee's treatment of the theme of conflict between eastern and western worlds, as in her other works. Tara was born in Calcutta, schooled in the States and married to an American gentleman. After spending seven years abroad, beautiful, luminous Tara leaves her American husband behind and comes back to India. But the place she finds on her return - full of strikes, riots and unrest is vastly different from the place she remembers.

Reflecting the East

Cross-cultural relations are relations between two cultures. The two major cultural groups in the world are the culture of the East and the culture of the West. The novel presents the relations between these two cultures by reflecting the East and mirroring the West. The following illustrations show the description of the typical Eastern life styles, beliefs, conventions and all.

“He reads the names of the passengers on the reservation slip.....They are both men! he exploded. I can’t allow you to travel under such conditions.” (Mukherjee, 1971: 19)

Her uncle’s anger is on account of the fact that Tara would be required to travel with two men. The Eastern mentality of this kind does not allow travelling under such conditions. Travelling of women alone and with men is impossible and prohibited. These are the tradition-bound conventions of the East. The backwardness is due to blind beliefs, superstitions, conventions, social rules and prohibitive stigma on injunctions to perform certain activities. This is the conventional view that reflects the narrow mindedness. It is on account of ignorance and lack of exposure to the realities of life that such views are expressed. It is sheer irrationality and therefore broad- mindedness is not noticed in these views. The Oriental, the Eastern, the Indian or the native culture is based and is groping in the darkness of ignorance as the light of knowledge is denied.

‘Tara found herself shouting, “Ma, Ma, Mata!” with the rest. She found it easy suddenly to love everyone, even Antonia Whitehead, who was the only person standing in the entire room’. (Mukherjee, 1971: 173)

The religious man worships the God or God like person. Godmother is what moves the men in the East. The Orientals are forever engaged in the worship of Godhood. The broad comprehensive and all-inclusive encompassing love is possible through such devotion. To love humanity is to love God is what the Orientals believe. The worshipper was busy in chanting the name of Mother while Antonia alone was standing. The contrast between the Easterners and the Westerner like Antonia is clearly conveyed through the scene of rapturous devotion. The submission of faith characterizes the culture in the East while rational scepticism is noticed in the culture of Western.

‘Do you remember all that greenery? Do you remember Apu running through these forests?’ Tara asked’. (Mukherjee, 1971:207)

The marchers and demonstrators had surrounded the Catelli Continental Hotel. A confrontation was shaping up outside the hotel. It was Joyonto Roy who declared that the age of snakes was about to come to destroy the universe. At this moment of terror, Tara remembered the greenery, the forests around the village. She remembered the protagonist of the film by Satyajit Ray-Pather Panchali. She particularly remembered the greenery and the forests around the village. She

remembered the protagonist of the film running through those green forests. Her memories of the greenery remind of the charm of the Oriental culture that sprang in the green trees, the dark and deep forests. Greenery symbolizes liveliness, life, freshness and the period of happy innocence as depicted in *Pather Panchali*. Pronob does not understand why Tara is putting such questions at a time, a horrible time, time of terror like that. Tara's queries are reminders of the charm of the old world, the value of the Oriental culture.

Mirroring of the West

In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the protagonist Tara goes to America for studies. Her experiences there are presented as she remembers them on her journey back home to her father, the Bengal Tiger's residence in Kolkata. Her meeting with David Cartwright and her getting married to him and her experiences after that her constant remembering of the homeland and her return from America, from that experience of her life story which has mirrored the other cultural experiences. There are continuous shifts from the East to the West and also from the West to the East. Her visit to her parents' house makes her restless. She has finally decided to go back to 'her husband' in the West. The cross-cultural encounters are thus presented through mirroring of the Western culture.

The following illustrations show the mirroring of the West in the novel. The Western life-style, colonial administration, urbanization, club culture are the characteristic features of Western culture. The differences between the Eastern and Western culture are presented through different episodes. Tara's Americanization has been totally accepted by her friends who come together to talk, to drink and to eat at the Catelli Continental Hotel. In a sense, both the cultures, Eastern and Western are mirrored but the lifestyle of the West has made a great impact.

'Santana, Hari Lal's eldest daughter, left Pachpara with her husband Santana's husband, a barrister,.....Certainly the big city developed talents and emotions that the barrister hardly suspected in him.' (Mukherjee, 1971:7-8)

The migration from the rural to the urban is the mirroring of the Western culture. It was after the British Rule that the urban centres developed in India. Harilal Banerjee of Pachapara had houses and lands in Pachapara, but his son-in-law Santana's husband, the barrister did not want to exhaust his talent and strength in a village. He thought of his future prospects in the city. This caused the family to move to the Urban Centre. The barrister's line of thinking and the decision of migrating to the city mirror the life-style of the West. It was a rare honour for an Indian in

those days. Visiting clubs is a matter of prestige for the people in the Western countries. The same is reflected here to mirror the culture of the West.

‘Her friends let slip their disapproval of her, they suggested her marriage had been imprudent, that the seven years abroad had eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature’. (Mukherjee, 1971:55)

The above example shows Tara’s friends judgments. The group that gathered at the Catelli Continental Hotel assessed her personality now. In their opinions, her marriage was not a wise decision and an appropriate act. Her marriage caused her to be separated from the lifestyle in the East. Her marriage with her American husband made her a thorough American, Westerner. She had become assimilated and accultured in the American culture. She is a perfectly Americanized woman, an American wife. Her stay abroad has covered the period of more than seven years. In the opinion of her friends of the Catelli Continental Hotel elite set her seven years stay in America has deprived her of the charm and sensitivity of her Bengali nature. She has lost her old charm and sensitivity in these seven years. Her Americanization has been totally accepted by her friends who come together to talk, to drink and to eat at the Catelli Continental Hotel.

‘She described them in detail how she spent a typical day in New York, what she ate for breakfast, how much the subway token cost, how she washed and hung her nylons above the bathtub, what her thesis director looked like’. (Mukherjee, 1971: 58)

Here in the above example, Tara gave the details of her daily routine life in her home on 120th Street in New York. She reported the details of daily activities, the items prepared for breakfast, what was the fare of subway, how she washed her nylons and she dried her hanging above the bathtub and also about the appearance of her Ph. D guide. These details of the breakfast, daily routine activities, the subway fare, the washing and drying of clothes and the appearance of the research guide reflect the Western lifestyle. The Western as well as Occidental culture is mirrored in these reports. Even Pronob was curious to know about the lifestyle in America in the West. Tara’s reports have mirrored the West, its lifestyle and culture.

‘Long after on homesick afternoons at Vassar, or after misunderstandings with David, or when things went badly..... she thought of Camac Street, especially of her mother’. (Mukherjee, 1971: 49)

The above example shows how Tara remembered Camac Street and in particular remembered her mother praying to Gods. She remembered home whenever she was upset on account of

something either in Vassar where she was studying or in her other activities after her marriage with David Cartwright. At the age of fifteen, she was sent for education to Vassar. During the vacation her friends went to their homes. Tara would be all alone in her hostel. This would definitely make her homesick. After her marriage with David, there were some occasions on which there were certain misunderstandings between her and David. The mood of restlessness after such misunderstandings with her husband led her to think of her mother or Camac Street in Calcutta. The Academic sessions and the hostel life at Vassar, the difficulties in her research work and her misunderstandings with her American husband David Cartwright cover a period of seven years of her life which Tara spent in America. These seven years mirror the cultural aspects of the Western culture through educational activities at Vassar, and her married life with David Cartwright.

‘It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much when she was surrounded by the Bengal Tiger’s chairs, tables, flowers, and portraits. She made several beginnings seizing the specific questions he had asked as anchors against her helplessness’. (Mukherjee, 1971: 63)

Her commitment to her marriage is fast. She writes a letter to David trying to answer his specific questions. She just wants him to convey that she loves him very much. Her homesickness has brought her to India but her marriage is solid and steady. Both of them are equally devoted and equally concerned. The marriage of two cultures is successfully accomplished though they are separated by a long distance. They are close, near, attached. Both the cultures, Eastern and Western are mirrored but the lifestyle of the West has made both of them Westerners.

‘The thought a stranger, a bum from central park , a Harlem dandey, looking into her pocket book, laughing at the notes she had made to herself, observations about her life and times, old sales slips accumulated over months for merchandise long lost or broken, credit cards, identification cards with unflattering pictures by which a criminal could identify her’. (Mukerjee, 1971: 69)

The little encounters included a stranger, a bum or a dandy that caught hold of her pocket book, her notes, old sales slips, credit and identification cards. These notorious characters took hold of her possessions. These criminals can identify her through the identity or credit card photographs. They read her note and laugh at her. They searched through her pocket book. These little invasions are more troublesome than the violent attacks. The invasions are more dangerous than

the muggings. The private life is exposed. The criminal incidence in the West is on the rise. The reflection of crime that is omnipresent is found here.

The Tiger's Daughter has Tara as the protagonist who is the Bengal Tiger's daughter and an American David Cartwright's wife. It is noticed that the relations from the culture of the East India and the culture of West America are presented in her career. She is homesick in America but when she comes to India she is now homesick for the land to which she is migrated. This situation poses a cultural clash as Tara has become restless when she thought she would find comfort and solace in India. This state of restlessness makes Tara feel that she is undergoing an experience of rootlessness. The features of cross-cultural encounters, the cultural clash and the sense of rootlessness are presented in the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*.

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