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Abstract :

This paper examines notions of return, home, and identity in Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter through the lens of diaspora theory. It explores how the protagonist, Tara Banerjee Cartwright, experiences an impossible return to her native India after seven years in America. The paper argues that Tara's journey challenges the traditional, fixed notions of homeland and essentialist identity. Her idealized memories of home clash with the reality of a changed India, generating feelings of disappointment, alienation, and a profound sense of unbelonging. The paper demonstrates that this disconnect leaves Tara suspended between two cultures, unable to reconcile her Indian and American selves. Ultimately, the novel underscores that physical return does not guarantee a return to one's origins, thereby highlighting the fluid, fragmented, and hybrid nature of identity for diasporic subjects. The analysis draws upon the work of key theorists such as Avtar Brah, Homi Bhabha, and Carole-Boyce Davies to demonstrate how Tara's experience redefines and complicates established concepts of home and identity.

Keywords : Bharati Mukherjee- Diaspora- Home - Identity- Return

1. Introduction

An examination of Bharati Mukherjee's writings, one finds that they reflect her personal experience whereby she projects and fuses her life as a woman living in two worlds in her works. In other words, "the beauty of much of her fiction lies in its being informed by her personal experience. . . this lends her novels a flavor rarely found among expatriate writers" (Amar Nath Parasd, 2005, 149-150). Mukherjee's thematic concerns center around the experience of South Asian immigrants in the United States, Canada, the problems of adaptation, assimilation, the struggle of living between two worlds and cultures, the question of nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of expatriation, identity fragmentation and transformation. Her characters are always mobile and in a state of constant change. More important, her works focus on the issues of Indian women and their struggle in migration whereby feminism is a major issue in Mukherjee's fiction.

Mukherjee's debut novel *The Tiger's Daughter* similarly tackles themes of displacement, nostalgia, and the struggle to identify one's home and sense of belonging. The novel depicts the journey home of Tara Banerjee Cartwright, a twenty-two years old Bengali Brahmin, to India after an absence of seven years in America. The novel has received much criticism and analysis. In "Hyphenated Identity: Immigrant Mindscape in Bharati Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughter*," Asha Susan Jacob (2013) states that in *The Tiger's Daughter*, Bharati Mukherjee exposes the complexities confronting an immigrant who is suspended between two worlds and two cultures. Jacob argues that Tara's marriage to an American does not allow her to bridge the gulf between the two contrasting cultures. More importantly, instead of strengthening her belonging, Tara's return to India only accentuates the feeling of rootlessness and estrangement and thus she becomes alien to her native culture. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel in "Immigrant" or "Post-colonial"? Towards a Poetics for Reading the Nation in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*," maintains that Mukherjee deploys the immigrant aesthetic to construct national identity by contesting the "postcolonial" myth of the nation's stable spatial and temporal dimensions.

Oliver-Rotger theorizes that these narratives revisit and redefine fixed and rigid concepts stressing that "literature about return dramatizes a form of hybridity that not only testifies to the conflicted allegiances of culturally hybrid subjects but also accounts for a self-critical position toward several narratives

about self, community, nation, place, and culture” (2015, 5-6). Similarly, Anastasia Christou adds, “[r]eturn migration challenges, translates, defines, narrates and constructs new meanings of who I am in connection to the where I am” (2006, 15-16). Based on these authors’ statements, the present paper seeks to argue that Mukherjee’s novel *The Tiger’s Daughter*, a narrative of return, destabilizes and interrogates notions of fixed and stable home and identity. The novel captures the dynamic intertwining of physical “place” and mental “space.” In other words, Tara’s return to India enables her to realize the mismatch between her imagination and the reality encountered. Such a situation leaves her psychologically oscillating and straddling conflicting cultures and nation-states, and instead of reasserting her identification with her original homeland, Tara ends up caught in a state of in-betweenness unable to negotiate her belonging.

Through Tara, Mukherjee reveals one of the aspects of the actual and physical return where she depicts an impossible homecoming. In the novel, Tara states that “the return had brought only wounds” (Mukherjee 1971, 30). Behind these words, we deduce that Tara’s return does not bring sense of satisfaction and belonging; rather, it brings only disappointment, frustration and alienation. As such, India becomes, to borrow Brah’s statement “a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as a place of ‘origin’ ” (1996, 192). This means that home is reduced to a place of unbelonging and estrangement which consequently leads to the articulation of divided and fragmented identity. Importantly, Tara’s estrangement from India therefore does not only stem from changing homeland and her idealized and mythologized and mental constructs of India but also from her changed perspectives. As such, she finds it difficult to reconcile the constituents of her diasporic self and becomes foreigner in both the Indian and the American cultures. Therefore, this article will add a new perspective in diagnosing the issues of home and identity in narratives of return through the prism of diaspora theories. Mukherjee’s text is examined through the critical lenses, such as, John McLeod, Avtar Brah, Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, Sara Ahmed, and Homi Bhabha.

1. From Fixed to Flexible: Reconceptualizing Home and Identity in Diaspora Studies

Increased mobility and movement of people across national borders problematize several issues relevant to home and identity. The once considered fixedness of identity and home have been challenged and contested. Consequently, the dispersion of people away from their countries of origin engraves “a homing desire while simultaneously critiqu[es] discourses of fixed origins” (Brah 1996, 188). Home has been usually conceived as a fixed, stable, and pure (rooted) concept. John McLeod, for instance, defines home as “a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated from and where we belong. As an idea it stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort” (2001, 210). In his view, home is a place of comfort, of communion, and of belonging. Likewise, Sara Ahmed (1999) defines home as the place “where one usually lives, or it can mean where one’s family lives, or it can mean one’s native country” (338). In this sense, home is understood as a fixed, familiar, and static physical place. Moreover, Rosemary Marangoly George demonstrates that “the primary connotation of home is of the private space from which the individual travels into large arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day [...] Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography” (1999, 11). For George, home has two meanings or understandings, both literal and figurative, which means that it can be the geographical location where one belongs to as it can be an imagined construction.

In fact, the meaning of home has changed in today’s globalized world and instead of being uniform and homogenous, it becomes plural and flexible. For instance, Brah establishes the difference between home where one lives and where one originates from. She asks, “Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells” (1996, 192). In this sense, migration and the relocation of people divides the notion of home into home as the place of origin and as the locality of everyday experience. In diasporic writings, therefore, the concept of home becomes complex, multifaceted, and plural. Similarly, Mukherjee’s novel problematizes the fixity and the stability of the original homeland and its role in providing the individual with a sense of belonging.

The interaction between home and identity is an essential component in diaspora studies wherein the construction of various and plural identities is important to our understanding of the ways in which the notion of home is expressed. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, Carole-Boyce Davies understands the construction of identity as a function of movement and border-crossing. "Migration and exile," she argues "are fundamental to human experience. And each movement demands another definition and redefinition of one's identity" (1994, 94). Therefore, the notion of home is crucial in the formation of identity because identity is shaped in part by location and each move to a new location adds to and changes identity. She adds that the "migrations between identities, or the articulations of a variety of identities, are central to our understanding of the ways in which writers express notions of home in their works" (1994, 86). In other words, identity is seen as a provisional state, always in a state of becoming, and a product of cultural encounters. This encounter leads to the alteration of people's identifications whereby their identities become in motion and in a state of constant change and flux. For instance, those who left their original homeland, their identity seem fragmentary, divided between two allegiances of the old and the new home. Accordingly, Tara's return to India affects her identity as she ends up caught in a state of in-betweenness, unable to position herself and her belonging.

To comment on the impact of return on Tara's identity construction, I use Homi Bhabha's notions of identity. In his outstanding book, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explores identity issues related to diaspora people or those who live across borders. For Bhabha, borders interrogate the dominant ways of thinking about identity and nation state. They are intermediate locations where one contemplates moving beyond. The 'beyond' is an in-between site of transition: "the beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind the past [...]we find ourselves in the movement of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1994, 1). Bhabha has termed this space of the beyond as "liminal, interstitial, and hybrid"(1994,3). Therefore, the process of crossing geographical borders entails cultural crossings whereby the diasporic subject's identity is seen as a product of both cultures, never complete and in a state of process. The position of hybridity thus destabilizes the notion of fixed, pure, and essential identity whereby it is seen as discursive, flexible, and in state

of becoming. In other words, the identity that emerges from identification with these multiple homes may be a liminal one, allowing the subject to straddle and oscillate various cultures and identities and thus forming an identity based on hybridity. Thereof, the first part deals with Tara's life in America and her attempts to assimilate and adapt in the new setting. This is clearly embodied in her recreation of a home like India and her marriage to an American. The part ends with Tara's decision to leave to India. The second part respectively traces Tara's return to her home country. Her homecoming generates feelings of alienation, estrangement, and rejection all of which lead to question the fixity of home and identity.

2. Tara's Life in America and Diasporic Discontent

Tara's recreation of home in the diaspora is achieved through negotiation between "the mythic place of desire" and "the locality of every day experience" (Brah, 1996, 192). The analysis suggests that in addition to these two factors, the changing circumstances of the original homeland play a major role in Tara's estrangement from India. Therefore, before delving into the analysis, it is important to address Tara's life in America and her attempts to come to terms with her life in the host country.

Tara's diasporic discontent has intensified as she fails to adapt to life in New York; she remains always in the periphery, an outsider defined by her Indianess. Her difficult adjustment in the host country has been due to the cultural gap and the difference between her and the Americans which make communication and mutual understanding impossible. In this vein, Said maintains that "for an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occurs against the memory of things in the other environment" (1990, 366). Owing to Tara's sense of loneliness and estrangement, she attempts to find solace and comfort to her misery in the memories she holds in her imagination about her home country. These memories are vital in the construction of her mythic India because they keep her in constant attachment to her homeland. In other words, the recalling of these memories allows and helps her to deal with the alienation and the loneliness of the present. Keya Ganguly maintains that memories are significant in the articulation and the formation of identity in the diaspora. She asserts that the recollection of the past is not an easy process but it necessitates a selection and renewal of certain memories. The latter are selected in a way to help the

diasporic people to adjust in their new environment and to minimize the trauma of being away from their home country (2001, 93). She stressed that diasporic women often look at the past with idealization and romanticization so they can live and cope with the present whereby they “attest to this truism and compensate for their lack of place and voice by remembering a fabricated past” (2001, 106).

The construction of a “mythic” home away through resurrecting past memories is then vital for the diasporic women to carve a niche for themselves where they feel they belong and be at home amidst the marginalization of the diasporic life. Likewise, Zahia Salhi pinpoints that exiles and immigrants “all keep an idealized image of home as a paradise [...], and never manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings” (2006, 3). In order to survive and to challenge the racial discrimination and the isolating reality, Tara has been subjected to, she tries to concretize her Indian home, and creates what Salman Rushdie terms, “the India of the mind”, whenever she feels depressed and nostalgic.

Through displaying Hindu practices, artefacts, and certain types of food she brought back with her, Tara tries to recreate her home which Brah defined as “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (1996, 192). Tara transposes the idealized memories of her life in India into her new one in America. Instead of assimilating in the new setting, Tara takes refuge in her past life. For example, she has always prayed to goddess Kali “who sat under silk saris in a suitcase at Vassar, smiled put at her mischievously” (Mukherjee 1971, 14), for power that she should not break down in front of the Americans. Whenever she feels lost and alone, she took out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more “Indian”. Moreover, as far as food is concerned, Tara has curried hamburger “till David’s stomach had protested” (Mukherjee 1971, 42). The curry is an important ingredient in the Indian cuisine and thus currying hamburger can be read as her attempt to create an ethnic identity in the diaspora. As a typical Indian woman, who is protective of her customs and practices, she has burned incense sent from India, “till the hippie neighbors began to take an undue interest in her” (Mukherjee 1971, 42).

Tara’s recreation and revitalization of her past life provide her with sustenance and a sense of belonging to her native country. Her construction of an imagined India creates what Salhi calls “an unnatural world whose *raison*

d'être is to ease the pain of being cut off from one's country and culture" (2006, 5). Therefore, the articulation of home in the diaspora is a mere mental construct that helps to lessen the aches, the agony, and the suffering of living far away from the original home country.

As a survival strategy, Tara goes even farther to adjust herself to American mainstream culture by marrying an American, David, and articulates what Brah calls "the lived experience of locality" (1996, 192). Her marriage is seen as transgressive and rebellious for it defies the Indian traditions and conventions of arranged marriages where the parents take the responsibility of choosing the grooms for their daughters. It can be best described as a "love match" because she and David arrange their marriage on their own. Although they are married and love one another, their different cultures and backgrounds handicap and hinder a mutual understanding between them. Tara cannot share and communicate with him about her life in India and the particularities of its culture and tradition. He usually makes fun of and ridicules the Indian culture, customs, and conventions. His naïve questions about India make Tara uncomfortable and out of place in America. Immediately, she is forced to acknowledge the contrasting quiet loneliness of her life in America: "Madison square was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner" (Mukherjee 1971, 30). Therefore, Tara's marriage offers no hope as it only records disappointment and frustration. Consequently, Tara's attempts to come to terms with her life in the new setting are doomed to failure; they are flawed endeavors since these can sustain her only minimally. They do not satisfy and cure her nostalgic aches and eventually leads her to make the decision to return to the real India.

Unlike Tara who is haunted and preoccupied by the notion of return to India, which she believes is the only place she is meant to belong to, Mukherjee in *Jasmine* urges us to move beyond originary identities and to think of identity as an evolving process. Jasmine does not remain sentimentally attached to India; instead, she succeeds in assimilating in the American mainstream culture through her agency, determination, and mental strength to challenge all the obstacles she encounters. Mukherjee depicts her as a "fighter and adapter" (Mukherjee 1990, 40) who keeps "shuttling between identities" (Mukherjee 1990, 77). Jasmine keeps producing and reproducing her identity without being entangled and enslaved by her past. Jasmine's journey of becomingness is marked not only by the construction of new identities but also by the destruction

of the old selves. She undergoes psychological metamorphosis and transformation.

3. Tara's Disenchanted Return: When Reality Confronts Memory

Christine F. Vogt-William maintains that "[u]sually South Asian women engage in the exercise of return in order to establish a narrative of belonging that is crucial to the articulation of their identities" (2014, 161). Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) is a case in point as it depicts the journey back home of Tara Banerjee Cartwright, a twenty-two years old Bengali Brahmin, the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee and the daughter of the Bengal Tiger, the owner of famous Banerjee and Thomas (tobacco) Co. LTD, to India after an absence of seven years in America. Homesick to come back to her country, Tara makes the decision to return to India hoping to recover her roots and her Indian identity. Indeed, Tara thinks that her trip to India will solidify and reaffirm her belonging to her original homeland, yet she feels out of place. Consequently, her naïve expectations of belonging to India are quickly shattered on her visit there, where she recognizes the wide and the unbridgeable gap between her imagination and the reality encountered. Tara's India is yet a mere nostalgic construct of memory and, therefore, the mythologized and romanticized memory of home cannot be recaptured and restored.

Returning home often embodies a failure of memory because the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the fixed home has changed and does not live up to the returnee's aspirations. In fact, these memories are not always the accurate reflections of reality because they are "always flawed, always tainted by distortions of the exile's imagination and desire" (Sophia A. McClennen 2004, 59). As such, the novel demonstrates that the original homeland is not a stable and a fixed place by depicting Tara as a stranger in her original home country. Again, Vogt-William reminds us that the narratives of return permit South Asian women to portray unsuccessful "reverse migration" whereby they present "troubling, temporary return of the native" (2014, 161). Tara has expected her return will enable her to cure the loneliness and the solitude she suffers from while living in New York:

For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had

brought only wounds. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offense. (Mukherjee 1971, 30)

Her desire to find a place of love and security which she missed in New York ends ironically and tragically in frustration. Depressed and disappointed with the deteriorating situation of India, she finally determines to leave for the United States and to her husband. Thus, Tara encounters the paradox of being a foreigner in the United States and a stranger in her native homeland. Tara finds herself caught in a state of in-betweenness unable to negotiate her belongingness.

Whereas Tara Banerjee's return leaves her suspended between the Indian and American cultures, unable to fuse them to construct a healthy and undivided self, the journey back home of Tara Chatterjee, the protagonist of Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002), enables her to discover more about her diasporic identity as a transnational one that encompasses the Indian and American cultures simultaneously. Despite her attempts to reject her Indian background and assimilate in the American culture, her return leads her to accept both the Indian and the American aspects of her identity. As such, she exhibits what Edward Said calls "contrapuntal consciousness" (2000, 186) because she feels comfortable in both and accepts the hybridity of her identity.

As such, her homecoming has turned harmful and deleterious enough to "desecrate her shrine of nostalgia" (Mukherjee 1971, 31). The India she finds does not reverberate with the stereotypical image of India she holds in her mind and imagination. Tara expects her return will help her to regain her belonging and identification with India and thus she seeks what Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty defined as "being home". In their essay "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?," they argue that "'being home'" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries" (2003, 90). Yet, the novel subverts this illusory understanding of home by emphasizing Martin and Mohanty's other modality, "not being home." In their view, "not being home is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences within oneself" (2003, 90). The novel reveals that Tara has become estranged from her home country in various ways, ranging from the cultural, to the religious, the linguistic and the physical.

With reference to the cultural alienation, in her visit to Aunt Jharna, Tara cannot accept Aunt Jharna's religious attempts to heal her child. The incense which she has used to burn in her apartment in the United States to make it more Indian, now appears suffocating and unbearable. Out of her sympathy with Aunt Jharna's daughter, Tara asks her to try plaster casts and special shoes instead of following traditional treatment. Aunt Jharna, however, has been outraged by such suggestions and sees them as humiliating and accuses Tara of being American: "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 *mleccha* husband"? (Mukherjee 1971, 45) These two different views concerning the ways of healing highlight the wide cultural gap between the Americanized and modernized Tara, and the native traditionalist Jharna who still confides in the traditional ways of healing as a truly Indian woman. Indeed, in Aunt Jharna's discourse one notices that she frequently resorts to an us / them dichotomy, emphasizing the distance between them and displacing Tara even further.

Tara's encounter and discussion with her friends also demonstrate the failure of her expectations and aspirations. Though they appear modern, westernized and liberated, they still believe in the traditional arranged marriage where the parents initiate marriage plans with grooms from the same caste and class. She says, "[t]hey liked foreigners in movie magazines- Nat Wood and Bob Wagner in faded Photoplays. They loved Englishmen like Worthington at the British Council. But they did not approve of foreign marriage partners" (Mukherjee 1971, 86). To her naïve anticipations, Tara considers her marriage as an emancipatory act for it defies the Indian marital conventions. While in America her friends used to praise her marriage and envy her liberated and modernized way of life, back home, however, they seem more conservative and protective of their culture and instead 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, 70). She now ironically feels an outsider and outcast among them because she subverts her horoscope and enters into wedlock with an American '*mleccha*'. Thus, the attitude of her friends has estranged her from them whereby her marriage turns into an obstacle and a barrier that prevents her from reintegrating with her old friends.

As far as religion is concerned, Tara's memories of her mother's religious practices help to sustain her and whenever she feels nostalgic and homesick, she holds on to the memory of her mother doing her rituals of prayer. She believes that her mother would resent the fact that she married a foreigner and consequently she sees herself as an "outcaste," an intruder who has no place to claim in this sacred room. She even compares herself to those Australian fanatics whom her mother does not allow to enter the prayer room because she is "no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow" (Mukherjee 1971, 63). In opposition to her apprehensions, her mother asks her to stay in the room and participate in the rituals. Though her mother's act releases her and removes all her fears of being excluded and rejected, Tara forgets the next step of the ritual. This fact further accentuates and reinforces her status as a foreigner who does not belong to the Indian culture altogether. She is depressed and frustrated because "It was not a simple loss [...] this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center" (Mukherjee 1971, 64). Since these religious rituals are one of the key markers of Indian ethnic identity, Tara ironically finds herself rootless in her native country and thus her expectations to reassert her Indian identity are at stake.

Tara's alienation is not only cultural and religious, but it is also linguistic. The novel shows that Tara's language has changed during the years she has spent in the United States. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee argues that "language transforms our way of apprehending the world; I fear that my decades-long use of English as a first language has cut me off from my *desh* (country)" (qtd. in Jaspal Kaur Singh 2008, 63). Tara's loss of her language affects the way in which she looks at her country whereby her views are those of an American and an outsider. For example, when she meets her Bombay relatives, she fails to understand their Bengali language and admits that it is "the first she had heard since a Durga Pujah gathering in New York" (Mukherjee 1971, 22). In addition, when she quarrels with her childhood friend Reena, she realizes that she has forgotten many Indian English words that she has often used with her friends. More importantly, her influence by the American accent is clear especially when she insists on correcting the grammatical and the pronunciation errors of her friends and on making jokes about their mannerism. Since language is one of the main components of one's identity,

Tara's loss of the Bengali language indicates her estrangement and alienation from India and thus she becomes an intruder into her own native culture because she loses the common way of communicating with them.

In addition to her loss of shared language, Tara's life in America as well affects her attitudes toward food and diet. At the guest house, the over-eating and the appetite of picnickers astonish her; she notices that they eat too much in comparison with her lack of appetite: "she wondered the frailness of her own stomach [...] she had never enjoyed food like others" (Mukherjee 1971, 117). Since food is an essential and an integral element of any culture, and a key component of identity, which defines membership as well as expresses distance from others, Tara recognizes that she is not one of them; she becomes depressed because she cannot eat like them. Her stay in America affects her diet whereby her father calls "madcap *America wallah* doctor" because she is "too strict and diet-conscious, you can blame him for the simple fare" (Mukherjee 1971, 117). Because food holds a significant position in the Indian culture as an important defining element of its ethnic identity and a marker of one's social class and rank, Tara's changed diet means that she loses another signifier of her Indian identity.

Owing to the mismatch between the constructed and the imagined homeland, on the one hand, and the current and experienced return, on the other, coming home can be more difficult. Diasporic subject often finds the place of return bearing little resemblance to the imaginary and constructed homeland, which generates disappointment, disillusionment, and alienation from the homeland. Similarly, Tara's encounter with the real Calcutta leads her to discover the inaccuracy of her memories and the mismatch between her imagined construct of India and the present situation she encounters in her return. The India she has dreamt of returning to during her stay abroad betrays her and this only heightens her alienation and foreignness. Her first few days in India are enough to subvert and challenge Tara's fictionalized and mythologized imagination of India. In this same vein, Sara Ahmed argues that "the process of returning home is likewise about the failures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears familiar" (1999, 338). For instance, once admirer of Marine Drive, Tara now feels it as shabby; the city is unlike her expectations and dreams: "seven years earlier on her way to Vassar, she had admired the houses on Marine Drive, has thought them fashionable, but now

their shabbiness appalled her” (Mukherjee 1971, 24). Moreover, Tara’s journey from Bombay to Calcutta further frustrates and disconcerts her. As she reaches the station, feelings of shock, despise, and disdain are drawn on her face. Such a picture of decaying India crumbles down Tara’s dreams of ordered and disciplined India.

In addition to the mismatch between Tara’s mythologized vision of Indian and the changed conditions of her homeland, Tara’s life between two opposing poles and cultures makes her unable to negotiate her belonging and loyalties. She is an ambivalent, indecisive, and confused character whose perceptions embody both an insider and an outsider view. In some instances, she behaves and acts like a native Indian and, in others, her attitudes are those of a foreigner. On the one hand, Tara thinks that her stay in America has robbed her from a sense of belonging to India but the opposite happens, “She had not thought that seven years in another country, a husband, a new blue passport could be so easily blotted out” (Mukherjee 1971, 30). Even her husband whom she missed impatiently, she watched “his face disappears into the fleshy folds of the Nepali’s neck and the spider’s body” (Mukherjee 1971, 31). More importantly, Tara’s meeting with her parents compensates for the loss and frustration she encounters in her way from Bombay to Calcutta. Feelings of joy and delight overwhelm her. Her parents’ unconditional love and tenderness make her realize that it is impossible “to think of the 120th street apartment as home” and thus she reasserts and reconfirms her identification as an Indian. Therefore, her home at Calcutta provides her with a sense of security and safety she has never felt in the States; it helps her to remove the trauma of solitude and discomfort she had suffered from. Mukherjee expresses her sense of joy and satisfaction as follows: “The house on Camac Street began to exercise its hypnosis on her. When she reaches Calcutta, New York, she thought now, had been exotic... New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair... She was among the ordinary and she felt rested” (Mukherjee 1971, 41-42). This kind of self-fulfillment and belonging, however, is short lived and temporary. When she arrives at the Howrah station, images of squalor and poverty outrage and infuriate her. Though she is surrounded by her parents, relatives, and children, she feels completely alone and perplexed.

On the other hand, Tara’s disappointment does not only stem from the changing India but also from her own transformation. As stated by Malettea *et*

al. "one returns to the familiar, the things that are known, but at the same time everything is different in a spatial environment that is not the same, just like the migrant who returns is not the same anymore" (1989, 200). Tara's seven years in America affect her personality and therefore her portrayals of her country. In other words, the experience that she undergoes in the host country has an impact on her identity and her perception, and consequently she will not perceive and look at her homeland in the same way as she did before she left. As such, she "will respond to [her] homeland much the way a stranger would, and for the same reason-because [she] is now an alien in [her] own country" (Storti 2001, 12). For instance, Reena attacks her fiercely and reminds her of her foreignness and estrangement. She sees that Tara's life in America has changed and transformed her into an "*America wali*," "too self-centered and European" (Mukherjee 1971, 127). In the novel, Tara's recurrent visits to the Catelli hotel, from where she sees the violence and turmoil of Calcutta demonstrates her position as an outsider and a tourist who sees things from exteriority without indulging or being part of the happenings in the real India.

In "The Foreignness of the Spirit; the World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels," Jasbir Jain points out that Tara's attitudes toward India reflect the extent of the impact of her life in America maintaining that she looks at her country in an American eye or in her husband's eye, and not through her cherished and past memories (1985, 13). More importantly, her husband recognizes that her descriptions and portrayals of the city embody a western look whereby she becomes more American than him. In one of his letters, he tells her "I have been reading a biography of William James, with all his innumerable trips through the continent. The trips you describe in India seem so nineteenth centuryish" (Mukherjee 1971, 238). Moreover, her changed perception is clear in her arrogant description of the men (a Mawri and a Nepali) who share with her the compartment. Another example of Tara's snobbish and conceited behavior appears clearly during the dinner time where she feels anxious to order food for she thinks it is dirty, and might lead to a serious illness.

There are also other incidents in the novel that reflects Tara's changed attitude and perception of her homeland. For instance, Tara's visit to Joynoto Chowdhury's compound ends up in frustration and bitter disappointment. Tara's observations towards the place are those of a foreigner and a tourist. The

landscape, the uneven road, the dust and the smell of squalor frustrate and trouble her. The compound summarizes all the images of decay, poverty, unhygienic conditions and suffering. To compensate for the disappointment she encounters in this previous trip, Tara's family, along with other aristocratic Bengali families, plan to go Himalayan Darjeeling. Unlike the first one, this place witnesses Tara's religious renewal. Tara's visit of the local shrine of Mata Kanabala Devi with her mother is of great importance in regaining her Indian identity. She feels that all the bad and upset incidents she undergoes are healed: "Tara found herself shouting "Ma, Ma, Mata!" with the rest. She found it easy suddenly to love everyone [...] She forgot her instinctive suspicions, her fears of misunderstanding and scenes, she forgot her guardedness and atrophy in that religious moment" (Mukherjee 1971, 207). Unlike her first experience with religion, Tara now feels closer to her mother, the worshippers in the room, and even to the *chela* she despises. This spiritual and healing experience is fascinating and miraculous, for it brings Tara back to her home country magically and metaphorically. Tara's self-fulfillment, however, is short lived whereby her participation in the beauty contest as one of the members of the jury accuses her of being an American and further intensifies her status as an outsider. Tara suggests that it would be better for the girls to wear bathing suits so that the contest would be just since the judgment will be based on physical appearance. The jury has been shocked by Tara's proposal saying that "really, Mrs Cartwright. I think your years abroad have robbed you of feminine propriety or you are joking with us. You know as well as I do our modest Indian girls would not submit to such disgrace" (Mukherjee 1971, 222). Therefore, Tara's Americanization and new acquired self-cause her many problems because it estranges and distances her from her fellow Indians.

After the embarrassment she has received in Darjeeling during the beauty contest, Tara's picnic to Nayapur depresses her as well. It is here she has been seduced by the national personage, Tuntunwala, the man who happened to share the train compartment with Tara. He believes that since she is married to an American, she is a liberated woman and thus she is allowed to do everything without any hesitation or restrictions. It appears that her Americanization only brings her problems and devastation. This incident makes Tara realize that Calcutta has dramatically changed entertaining:

In another Calcutta such a scene would not have happened. Tara would not have walked into the suite of a gentleman for medicine, and a gentleman would not have dared to make such improper suggestions to her. But except for Camac Street, Calcutta had changed greatly; and even Camac Street had felt the first stirrings of death. With new dreams like Nayapur, Tara's Calcutta was disappearing. New dramas occurred with each new bulldozers incision in green and romantic hills. Slow learners like Tara were merely victims. (Mukherjee 1971, 235)

This incident along with others leaves Tara frustrated and disappointed and leads her to make the decision to return to the United States and to her husband. Unlike the picnickers who unleash their fears through recreating an imagined Calcutta that is more stable and less bitter so that to live the present, Tara is haunted by the image of the past Calcutta and is no longer able to reconcile the Calcutta of her childhood with the current one. The outcome is a great sense of loss and estrangement from her native country.

As such, Tara's journey back home makes her confused and bewildered about whether she makes the right decision of coming back. She confesses: "Perhaps I was stupid to come without him. Perhaps I was too impulsive, confusing my fear of New York with homesickness. Or perhaps I am going mad" (Mukherjee 1971, 33). Tara reconsiders her return and regrets her coming to India. Tara comes to realize the futility of her return for it brings only dissatisfaction, distress, and bitter disappointment:

She had been outraged by Calcutta, that there were too many people sprawled in alleys and storefronts and staircases. She longed for the Bengal of Satyajit ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty places. She hated Calcutta because it had given her kids eating yoghurt off dirty sidewalks. (Mukherjee 1971, 128)

Because Tara's India is fictitious and mentally constructed, she fails to come to terms with the new and the changing Calcutta. This realization is fraught with disappointment, despair and disillusionment. It also leads Tara to realize that "The vacation, would not be an easy one; every trivial gesture, every tea party or card game would torture her with its suspicions" (Mukherjee 1971, 34). Vogt-William pinpoints that "often while South Asian diasporics idealize India as the embodiment of authentic cultural roots, it happens they are disabused of

nostalgic fantasy by the realities of the cultural specificity that they encounter on their visits” (2014, 161). She is unable to reconcile her memories of Calcutta with the new Calcutta she finds in reality and thus generates what Craig Storti calls a “subversive cultural shock” (2001, 3).

4. Between Two Worlds: Tara’s Fragmented Identity

Since identity is closely related to the notion of home, Mukherjee sets Tara in opposition to both the American and Indian worlds and cultures to scrutinize her identity construction and formation. On the one hand, Mukherjee juxtaposes Tara and David as the representatives of two different cultures to examine Tara’s estrangement and her difficulty to assimilate in the American culture. Her aspirations to be an American are undermined and challenged by her husband who fails to understand her and her culture. In contrast to her expectation, Tara thinks that her marriage will be the bridge and the link toward assimilation into the American mainstream culture; however, it appears disappointing and frustrating as her husband is unwilling to understand her. Accordingly, she finds herself “a married woman, victim of love match” (158). She seems aware of the wide cultural gap between them and admits that “David was painfully western; (Mukherjee 1971, 135) he is a creature from whom one hides one’s most precious secrets” (Mukherjee 1971, 150). When David informs Tara that he has bought books about India to learn more about it, she feels depressed and dejected because she believes “he had not understood her country through her, that probably he had not understood her either” (62). David’s observations and views about Tara and her country intensify and heighten her depression and her exclusion from the American culture.

In addition to the rejection she receives from her husband, Tara’s attempts to assimilate in the American culture are destined to failure due to her ‘otherness’ and ‘strangeness’. For instance, she seeks to identify herself as an American through associating herself with Antonia Whitehead and Washington McDowell. Antonia’s prejudices and attitudes toward India remind Tara of her first weeks in India. She admits that she “saw a faint rubbing of herself as she had been her first weeks in Calcutta, when her responses too had been impatient, menacing and equally innocent (Mukherjee 1971, 198). Yet Antonia’s attitudes toward the religious rituals subvert Tara’s identification as an American because these religious practices rejuvenate and restore Tara’s Indian identity. Moreover, Washington McDowell also undermines Tara’s identification as an American.

He simply sees her as a mere Indian and “the fact of an apartment on the fringes of Harlem, an American husband and passport, simply didn’t register” (Mukherjee 1971, 173). McDowell’s perception of her then diminishes her beliefs and her attempts to be an American and thus he enhances her alienation and seclusion from the American culture.

On the other hand, her attempts to readjust in her native country go in vain. Tara thinks her return will bring about fulfillment and satisfaction. Amidst these feelings of alienation and estrangement, Tara turns to her friends whom she expects will grant her a kind of acceptance. She believes that her friends are her only refuge and sanctuary from the deteriorating and the chaotic Calcutta. But gradually, these feelings fade away as she recognizes that they are not the same people she has left seven years earlier. She finds it difficult to readapt with them. Yet, she envies her friends’ self-confidence and world because she believes it is “more stable, more predictable than hers” (Mukherjee 1971, 131). Tara’s confusion and the bewilderment symbolize her shaky, uncertain, and unpredictable world and consequently her outsidership and foreignness because “[a] Banerjee in that world could only be a Bengali Brahmin, no room for nasty surprises” (Mukherjee 1971, 131). In addition, the fact her friends show little interest in her life in America makes her resentful. Similarly, Storti demonstrates that the fact that a returnee cannot tell or share his experience with his friends makes him a stranger and an outsider (2001, 20).

The accumulation of these traumatic experiences of exclusion and isolation lead Tara to wonder:

how does the foreignness of the spirit begin? Does it begin right in the center of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women?... did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched the new York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls, protestant matrons, and Johnny Mathis? Or was it not till Madison that she first suspected the faltering of the heart? (Mukherjee 1971, 45-46)

The quotation above reveals that Tara’s sense of estrangement and exclusion does not only stem from her migration to the United States but also from the education she has received from the Belgian nuns, which leads to her early displacement from her native culture. In addition, her life in Vassar and her marriage to David reinforce her alienation and foreignness. Accordingly, Tara finds herself an outsider in both cultures, both refusing to contain her. She is

caught between two different worlds, neither of which accepts her. She comes to realize that her marriage to a foreigner and her western education have a negative impact on her identity and belongingness. In other words, she becomes foreign and rootless in her native country.

Due to her split identity and psyche, Tara is torn between two different loyalties and is unable to locate herself in either. As such, Tara's migration to the United States and her return to India have a great impact on the articulation and formation of her identity, whereby she finds herself 'homeless' as she is unable to negotiate her belongingness, all of which lead to a fragmentary and divided identity. She desperately tries to reconcile the two cultures but she fails, which causes a deep split in her identity. Therefore, she is trapped between the notions of home alluded to by Brah: home as the place of origin and home as the experience of locality in a foreign country, where in both she feels abandoned and rejected.

The novel is open ended and depicts Tara being caught in mob riots and demonstrations. Her trip ends tragically with her being trapped in a locked car. The open-ending of the novel makes the reader speculate whether Tara has succeeded in getting out of the riot or does she get killed. If she succeeds in getting out of the car, she would immediately take the first plane back to her husband.

5.CONCLUSION

Mukherjee's novel demythologizes and undermines the notion of fixed and original homeland a migrant should eventually return to. Tara's journey home revises the mythical nature of homeland as it exists in her mind, because the version she encounters is just a reverse of her mental imagination. By undertaking a physical return to India, she confronts what Svetlana Boym calls the "unbridgeable gap that reveals the incommensurability of what is lost and what is found" (2001, 256). Her return proves to be impossible as it crumbles down her aspirations and dreams to regain her sense of belonging and identification with India. Her attempt to identify herself with India becomes complex and problematic because her homeland has been altered as she herself has changed. This leads her to confront the impossibility of ever fully belonging to her root country. Therefore, her return appears ironic and instead of reaffirming her belongingness to India, it intensifies her foreignness and leaves her caught between two different cultures and worlds.

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