

TEACHING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION LITERATURE: A STUDY OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER*

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Abstract:

The cultural roles and adjectives in the quickly transforming world of reality enhance Oriental English writing. The Third-world authors of English-language fiction have grown emotionally attached to their homelands while still being outsiders in their nations. The primary subject of Bharati Mukherjee's writings is her conflicted relationship with both Eastern and Western traditions. She is both an Indian and an Indian Canadian. Due to the cultural clash between two various patterns and methods of living, an individual feels grief, annoyance, and loneliness. A person who leaves her/his own culture and enters another finds that the old and new values conflict since adjusting to and assimilating to the new ways of life is challenging. This paper demonstrates how understanding the distinctions between the native and assimilated cultures may help an Indian tax exile in Canada and America manage issues; Mukherjee uses cultural shock as the central theme of her story, *The Tiger's Daughter*, the best example for cross cultural communication teaching.

Keywords: Homeland, assimilation, culture shock, oriental literature etc.,

Introduction:

The tradition of studying literature in language teaching for cross-cultural communication has an important place in our rapidly changing world. The content of literature is the part of culture which its people wish to preserve. For many, "literature is a source of pleasure, of individual hope, and therefore new energy". Pleasure, hope and energy

are greatly needed by the international student struggling to acquire information and understanding that most of his associates seem to possess innately and use to their advantage. The relationship between literature and cross-cultural awareness is of increasing interest. The present multilingual societies facilitate an eagerness to reinvest in cultural exchange.

At the international level, English literature is essentially cultural; it is the medium for subcultures which cut across national and political boundaries. At the national level, it is in the interest of a society to promote its cultural accomplishments and values through its literature. At this level, the question is, What is 'Culture'?

'Culture' is an inherited wealth which all can share, but it is passed on to us from different sources, and we share it in different parts with different groups to which we belong. *No Man is an Island, entire of itself*; two is because all men and women are presented with given conventional features of their social environment (that is, their 'culture') to which they may respond. It is worth examining these features more closely, and we may usefully label them as;

- memories.
- metaphors.
- maxims and
- myths.

Memories are the substance of group recall. Groups of different kinds thus define themselves and communicate based on shared knowledge. Moreover, we all belong to many groups- the loving couple, the family, the generation group, the nation, the language group, the universe of humankind, and many others.

Metaphors are not shared knowledge but shared perceptions, captured in language through allegory, allusion, Simile, and cliché. The body of metaphor is a group, generally a language group, conventionally used as a significant insight into underlying shared values and assumptions.

Maxims comprise implicit and explicit guides to behaviour in a group. Much of contemporary applied linguistics is concerned with making explicit the conversational and behavioural norms which govern language use, and this preoccupation shows itself in some current literature teaching materials.

Myths: literary myths, religious myths, contemporary myths and role models. The media encourages the recognition of contemporary myth (the worlds of sport, pop culture, soap

opera, and the doings of the royal family).

Literature teaching addresses, as it must, the issue of intercultural communication. It is concerned with transferring to members of another language group those common elements which, with individual variations, bind together the members of our own. Cross-cultural confrontation has received a pronounced impetus since the emergence of the Modernist movement at the very beginning of the twentieth century. The globalization of the world economy can be viewed as a natural offshoot of multiculturalism and intercultural interaction. In ancient times, Western culture was practically confined to a certain territory, and likewise, Eastern culture also had a limited area to flourish with hardly any possibility of mutual exchange between them.

Culture is too vast and a baffling term to be precisely defined. T.S.Eliot, one of the pro-founders of the Modernist movement, defines culture as “Culture may be described simply as that which makes life worth living”. He uses the term ‘culture’ in three ways, the culture of the individual, the cultural ways of a group or a class and the culture of a whole society. The cultural standard of an individual, a group or society depends upon their language, which is moulded and shaped by their educational status. A culture deeply owes to the environment from which it gets nourishment and life.

The new capitalistic culture that emerged in post-modern times resulted from American dominance. Notwithstanding their intention, people who migrate to that land experience qualitative cultural transformation, which gets appropriated in literary works.

The Indian-born American novelist Bharati Mukherjee’s creative world best manifests the cross-cultural confrontation, which can be advantageously analyzed. Bharati Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, deals with an upper-caste Bengali girl named Tara Banerjee Cartwright, who goes to America for higher studies. This analyses how Tara, caught in a gulf between the two contrasting worlds, leads to her illusion, depression and finally, her tragic end in a violent incident.

A blend of Indian and American traits

The Tiger's Daughter is about the cultural conflict of Tara Banerjee, who goes to America for higher studies at sixteen. After marrying a white American, she returns home for a holiday trip to visit her parents. The theme of the novel is the fusion of Americanness and Indianness in her mind of Tara and the resulting split personality due to the cultural conflict.

New impressions of poverty, hunger and political unrest usurp memories of a gentle lifestyle.

Title Justification

The title of the novel can be interpreted in various ways. The novel's location is Bengal, which is known for its tiger. Bengal's well-known deity is Kali, who rides on a tiger or lion. So Tara is compared to Kali, who tames the powerful force. Valiance amidst adversity is represented here. Bengal Tiger is also the nickname earned by her father because of his entrepreneurship. Tara's heritage does not begin with her father. Her grandfather, Harilal Banerjee, was a renowned *Zamindar*. The Bengal tiger represents elegance, awe, strength, vitality, and money – Indian coins used to have the visual of a vibrant Bengal tiger! Tara, portrayed as the daughter of a Bengal tiger, represents all these characteristics, undergoes tremendous strain, stress and intellectual confusion, and creates her own cage with her reasoning prowess. The white tiger has become an interesting phenomenon in several zoos worldwide, including those in India; Kali is also the name of the rare white tiger in the Knoxville Zoo. Does it mean that the cub of an original Bengal Tiger becomes a White Tiger, losing some of her original features and adopting some strange features alien to her? Tara's reincarnation – predicament, misunderstanding, and incomprehension in her cross-cultural encounter- is brought out more vividly through this metaphor.

Defending Her Family and Country Abroad

Like other Indians, she defends her family and her country. She prays to Goddess Kali for strength to not break down before Americans. Initially, she could not digest the culture of the United States because of her deep-rooted Indianness. Unfortunately, she falls in love with an American named David and marries him. Due to cultural differences, she finds it difficult to communicate the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta. "For her Madison Square was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner"⁴ (Shinde quoted in R.K.Dhaawan 50).

Tara visits India after seven years, and she fails to bring back her old sense of perception and views India with a keenness of a foreigner. She finds herself a total stranger in the inherited group. She feels herself a misfit at her home and among her friends. As Shoba Shinde has rightly observed, "An immigrant away from home idealizes her home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it"⁵, and Tara does the same in America. When she returns, she confronts a restive city which forces weak men to fanatical rebelliousness and dishonesty. Tara makes her realize that life in Calcutta, despite all the dark spots, has features

not found anywhere else and her husband would not be able to understand.

Constant Conflict

Tara is caught in the gulf between the two contrasting worlds-one is of Indian, and the other of an American. Tara has forgotten many Hindu rituals of worshipping, which she had seen her mother performing since childhood. Tara's mother, Arati, is a saintly woman who spends a great deal of time praying. Tara is forced to lead a pious life by her mother, to sit and listen to Sanskrit slogans which she tries to tolerate. For Tara, singing 'Ragupati Raghava Raja Ram' becomes artificial when she returns from America. Tara has an intense desire in the deepest core of her heart to behave like an ordinary Indian, but she realizes that she has become rootless.

Loss of Indian Identity and Sensitivity

Tara is always in a clash with Indian identity, with the culture of her native soil. She finds it difficult to adjust to her friends and relatives in India and sometimes with the traditions of her own family. At the Bombay airport, she responds coldly and dispassionately. The railway station looks like a hospital with many sick and deformed men. It also became difficult for her to travel with a Marwari and a Nepali in the compartment. When surrounded by her relatives and vendors at the Howrah railway station, Tara feels uncomfortable. She likely hates everyone and everything in India, where she was born, brought up and taught many values, because of her acculturation in America.

Tara's changed personality makes her a misfit in the company of her old friends. Tara feels alienated when her relatives call her 'Americawali' and her husband 'melcha'. Her foreign spirit refuses to connect emotionally with her old friends and relatives. So, it becomes difficult for English literature students to understand the novel without understanding the culture of that particular nation, especially with reference to the regional traditions and customs followed by its people.

Disapproval of Marriage Relationship with a Foreigner

Tara hopes that her friends at Catelli-Continental, Calcutta, would offer peace to her confused mind. However, to her surprise, "Her friends let slip their disapproval of her marriage; they suggested her marriage had been imprudent, that seven years abroad had eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature". Her friends approve of foreign manners, etiquette, and fashions, but they do not approve of foreign marriage. Ironically criticize the conservative attitude of the Indians, who feel really into foreign things and

dresses and items but do not approve of marriage with foreign people.

Tara's personality change is due to her total Americanization, inspired by her Westernization. Now she cannot face the disease and despair, riot and poverty of people in Calcutta. Jasbir Jain observes this connection:

Tara's consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States, and when she looks at India anew, it is not through her childhood associations or her memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband, David. Her reactions are those of a tourist, of a foreigner.⁶

Being a Westernized Indian, she sees India as a land of people with low incomes, living in a poor environment and suffering from starvation and disease. To understand this, the student must be aware of the societal conditions of the economic disparities, why such conditions are prevailing, and what cultural aspect affects this scenario.

Beyond Calcutta

Tara's sense of boredom and alienation makes her unable to reconcile, and she feels like returning to America. So to entertain her, a trip to Darjeeling was planned by her friends to spend her summer. She becomes upset when a cardiologist passes sarcastic remarks on her: "I think your years abroad have robbed you of your feminine propriety". (*The Tiger's Daughters*, 187)

At Nayapur, Tara happens to meet Tuntunwala, a Marwari, which leads to her rape by this wicked man. Nevertheless, she hides this seduction from others for fear of disgrace.

She could not share her knowledge of Tuntunwala with any of her friends. In a land where a friendly smile, an accidental brush of fingers, can ignite rumours – even lawsuits – how is one to speak of Mr Tuntunwala's violence(199)?⁸

Because of her acculturation, as a typical Westerner, Tara looks down upon Indian culture. She is unhappy about the conservative culture of India in which she was brought up as an orthodox girl in a disciplined rural environment.

The end of the novel is full of rapid and violent incidents. Calcutta is burning with the violent agitations of labourers against their masters. In the end, Tara discovers that the greenery, the forests she had been associated with, the India of childhood, and her pastoral vision are no longer there. The communist influence, industrial development, and Western civilization influence killed them. The novel's irony is that Tara, who survived racial hardships in a foreign country, comes to her native land seeking peace and is at last killed.

A Story of Internal and External Conflicts

Bharati Mukherjee's life is of expatriation and dispossession that constitute her unique diasporic consciousness which is responsible for her creative expression. Tara represents the cultural turmoil of the novelist Bharati Mukherjee in her real life. This novel is autobiographical, for it reflects the cross-cultural experience of Mukherjee and her feeling of disinheritance. The Western World Liberation, represented by Tara and David, and Conservatism and Indianness, represented by her mother Arati, are irreparable. The gulf cannot be bridged. This novel is designed to capture the predicament – the cultural conflict – of someone returning to one's homeland after a period of self-imposed exile: to such a person, the home will never be home again, and a life in exile in an alien country or the expatriation is more desirable than what "home" has become.

From the above analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* from a cultural point of view, what we can observe is that "the nation fills the void left in that uprooting of communities and turns that loss into the language of metaphor, transferring the meaning of home and belonging across those distances and cultural differences.

Throughout the novel, Mukherjee's mode of narration activates multiple conceptions of India and Indianness. What is curious is how, despite establishing a post-colonial regime, there is an underlying current of thinking about the sociological bases of Indian politics. She describes the majority and minority communities defined in terms of wealth acquisition, religion, tribe and over various territorial units from micros to macros. She dresses this cut-and-dried construction of India with allegory and describes the slums. Thus, the reality of the independent nation is imprecated in text form in which colonial and past elide with the post-colonial present. So if the student cannot grasp the cultural background, which is the outcome of the nation's historical background, the text cannot be interpreted in the right context.

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