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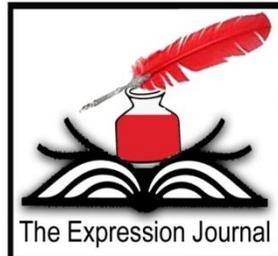
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EXPATRIATION EXPERIENCES—A STUDY IN BHARATI MUKERJEE'S *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER*

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Abstract

Expatriation has become a very popular phenomenon of the present century. Christine Gomez gives a still more perceptive definition of the term: 'Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolised by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between, oneself and the new unfriendly surroundings'. There has been a continuous quest from 'expatriation to immigration' in Bharati Mukherjee's works. A major theme in her novels has been the life of a south - Asian expatriate/ immigrants in U.S.A. and Canada and the problem of 'Accumulation, and 'Assimilation'. This movement, just by chance, coincides with her own immigration from Canada to U.S.A. Her experiences as an immigrant in Canada has contributed a lot to her writings during this period. In her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee draws a satirical portrait of Indian Society from the perspective of her protagonist.

Key-Words

Expatriation, Immigration, Accumulation, Assimilation, Psychological Osteo, Obsolete, Ideologies, Psyche, Sexuality.

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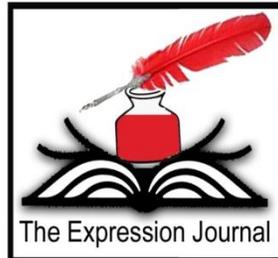
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The protagonist of the novel, Tara Banerjee Cartwright is an autobiographical presentation of Mukherjee. There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and the Indianness in the psyche of Tara. She can take refuge neither in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. The novel is divided into four parts. Part I deals with the part of Tara, her family background, and the process of her settlement in New York; Part II deals with Tara's arrival at Bombay, her journey to Calcutta, and her reaction to India; Part III concentrates on Tara's life at Calcutta and her Catelli-continental friends; Part IV of the novel deals with her visit to Darjeeling with her friends to spend summer vacation, her coming back to Calcutta, her boredom and alienation, her victimization in a mob, and her tragic end which remains mysterious.

The novel begins with Tara's return to India after seven years in America first as a student at Vassar and later as the Indian wife of her American husband, David Cartwright. Tara imagines an India, but she faces a very different India from what she expected. Tara's self-analysis brings about an unhappy conclusion. The Tiger's Daughter illustrates the uprooted condition of Tara. Born in the family of Banerjees in Calcutta, Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes to the United States for higher studies. She marries David, an American and settles down in New York. After seven years she returns to Calcutta to locate her home, to trace her cultural roots and to reclaim her inherited identity as the daughter of the Bengal Tiger and as the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Panchapara. She shunts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of

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encountering reality.

Tara returns to India after a lapse of even years. Having married David Cartwright, a writer, she is now Tara Banerjee Cartwright. On her arrival in India, she finds it difficult to relate to her relatives in Bombay and Calcutta. They treat her like a foreigner. Though her parents, relatives and friends are eager to own her with her acquired foreignness, Tara feels insecure. Her alienation is deepened as she is welcomed by her relatives as 'Americawali' and her husband a 'meleccha' which means an outcast. Even at home she finds it difficult to play the role of a typical Bengali Brahmin. She feels guilty every time she enters the pooja room. Even while sitting before the rows of god and goddesses, she is not filled with piety. She thinks only about David. She is not able to sing bhajans. Tara remembers that as a child she had sungbhajans in the same house. But now, she is not able to sing spontaneously. She forgets her various steps in the religious rituals.

At a particular point, Tara realizes that the vacation will not be an easy one. Tara's visit to Aunt Jharna's house ends on a disastrous note. Her serious and innocent remarks, about when Aunt Jharna had tried plaster casts and special shoes for her clubfooted daughter, are mistaken. With a quiet violence, Aunt Jharna snubs Tara: "you think you are too educated for this, don't you? [...] you have come back to make fun of us, haven't you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your meleccha husband? [...] or going to a school like St. Blaise's?" (36-37). But for "a strange, unexpected little twinge called love" (37), Tara would have rushed out of the house to the safety of the car. This bitter incident makes Tara wonder. Every time she meets her friends at the Catelli- Continental, she feels out of place in their company. She visits the funerary banks with Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, the owner of tea estates in Assam. She also feels that her visits are far from pleasant. All the efforts taken by her friends to treat her depression and fits of hysteria are in vain. When Tara visits Nayapur, a mining town near Calcutta with her friends, P. K. Tuntunwala, a businessman-turned-politician, he seduces her in the Nayapur Guest House. This incident undermines the little self-confidence that she is left with in a culture that is both alien and her own. Tuntunwala's seduction outrages Tara so much that she resolves to leave Calcutta for good. But before she actually leaves, she is trapped in Sanjay's car in the midst of a rioting mob on the road facing the Catelli-Continental. The rioters thrash Joyonto when he stirs out of the Catelli-Continental in a bid to save Tara. The mob also attacks Pronob, Tara's friend violently when he goes out to rescue Joyonto. Even Tara's visit to St. Blaise to meet the nuns is disappointing. To her the nuns seem "brownier than she remembered, their accents more Indian than she had expected". (200) All her early ideas of love, fair play and good manners had come from these women. But now, their quaint formation on the steps of St. Blaise's seems to be "people in a snapshot, yellow and faded". (201) Thus Tara's Indian dream is thoroughly shattered. She reconciles herself to reality.

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The story ends quite abruptly. The protagonist is left to wonder whether she will ever leave Calcutta and whether David will ever know that she loves him fiercely. In this novel, Hotel Catelli-Continental described as the “navel of the universe” becomes an important symbol of a rootless existence, a symbol of Tara’s expatriate sensibility. In India she travels from Bombay to Calcutta, visits her aunt’s place, the Catelli-Continental, Mr. Worthington’s Council, the charity carnival, the funerary banks, Tollygunge, Darjeeling and Nayapur. There is also the temporal movement from Old India to New India. The novel is open-ended as the reader is left wondering whether she could succeed in returning to her husband. The ending of the novel is used as a paradigm to question and discover – rediscover the new ways of defining reality in a world standing on the brink of the glorious mountain consisting of cash and pebbles.

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