

## **An Overview on the Diasporic Lives of Tara, Dimple and Jyoti**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Impact and predicament of immigration are the most usual theme of Diaspora writings. Bharati Mukherjee's interest is to depict the present social reality of the Asian immigrant's life in contemporary America. Being an Indian immigrant writer, she could successfully portrait the influence and consequences of immigration in the lives of her Indian immigrant women protagonists Tara, Dimple and Jyoti respectively in the novels *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife and Jasmine*. Immigration, rendered Tara as a perplex personality, Dimple became the murderer of her husband and committed suicide, and on the contrary, Jyoti who went to America to fulfil her late husband's wish and to become 'sati', ultimately adjusted herself into the American society.*

**Keywords:** *Bharati Mukherjee, The Tiger's Daughters, Wife, Jasmine, Immigration.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Bharati Mukherjee mainly pays attention to the feminine problems in her writings, especially on those women who are suffering from misbalanced psyche owing to cultural shocks and conflicts of traditional values in the foreign land. As an immigrant, Mukherjee faced cultural clash, racial injustice and identity crisis and these personal experiences are the key sources of her portrayal of women protagonists in her writings. Her female protagonists suffer the problems of immigration and are very restless to create their individual identity through their daring journeys. To attain individual identity, they dauntlessly come out from the male dominated society and it becomes the familiar narrative for many immigrant women. Here in the present study, efforts are made to explore the cause of immigration and its consequences in the life stories of the protagonists and also try to correlate the cross cultural conflicts and their transformation leading to diverse outcomes basing their own inherent personality, immigration expectation and reality.

### **II. IMPACT OF DIASPORIC LIFE ON TARA IN THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER**

In the novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*<sup>1</sup>, Tara Banerjee is the female protagonist. When she was only fifteen years old, her father sent her to America for higher studies. There Tara suffered the problems of adjustment, racial discrimination and home sickness. She tried hard to assimilate to the changing situation but fails due to her 'otherness'. She felt lonely and insecure in the alien atmosphere. "For Tara, Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake"<sup>2</sup>. She fell in love with an American, David Cartwright, and marries him, though, her parents desired an upper class Bengali boy as her husband. She weds David to erase the stamp of 'other' on her and to attain an identity in the American society. After marriage, she feels that there is a big mental gap between them as they born and bought up in two contrasting social values. For this reason she becomes helpless to explain her Indian social traditional values, customs and also her nostalgic feelings for her home in Calcutta to her husband. She tries all possible ways to transform her from an Indian girl to an American wife but fails due to her nostalgic memory for her native traditions. She was helpless to refuse her Indian self and was unable to remain fixed in her newly discovered American self. Actually the causes of all sufferings are her unstable self and her poor mental strength that never completely chooses any one world. As a result, she becomes sandwiched between her two selves.

Tara wants to come out from this situation but never gets much support from her husband. David likes to see her as a caring Indian wife who will accomplish her domestic services without any question. Tara does her domestic works and also does the works such as "cleaning bathroom" that she never did in her father's home but never gets any appreciation from the part of her husband. She becomes puzzle to think that whether she was happier in her father's home than in the house of David. Now she realizes that her decision to marry an out caste person was wrong and emotional. It becomes very clear to her that she has lost her identity of an individual woman in her utmost attempt to become an American wife. She is unhappy with her life as she has no independence in the house of her husband. She becomes depress by thinking that before marriage her life is governed by her father and now after marriage she is dominated by her husband in the name of bondage of marriage. Her woman self seeks freedom from male governing society. To escape from this situation Tara decides to come back to India to find out her lost root.

Tara returns to India with the hope that her search for individual identity will be come to an end here. But she does not feel any excitement here. She does not find the peaceful Calcutta of her childhood where the children run through cool green spaces. She sees that her peaceful and loving city is now in a very unrest condition due to Naxalite movement. Everywhere in the city, she finds poverty, industrial agitation, riot and different political manifestations that make her very sensitive. She wishes that her family, relatives and friends will welcome her whole heartedly. She regularly meets her friends, Reena and Pronob in the Catelli-Continental Hotel to share her experiences being caught between two conflicting situations. But she never gets any sympathy from them. She feels in their company the same feelings of otherness like in America. She realizes that her childhood friends are indifferent about the sufferings that she had faced in America. Her friends “were curious only about the adjustment she had made”<sup>3</sup>. They never accept her marriage with a foreigner and regard it as an unconventional act of a Hindu Brahmin Bengali girl. Her mother also thinks that by marrying an outcaste person her daughter brings shame for the family.

She herself feels her foreignness when she becomes unable to remember the family rituals of worshipping god. “When the sandal wood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the slimy table with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual.”<sup>4</sup> She went to the house of her aunt, Jharna, to see the polio infected child. Tara expects her aunt will be happy to see her after a long gap and will welcome her very cordially. But there too she experiences the same feelings of a foreigner. Due to her westernized outlook she cannot accept her aunt’s superstitious attempt to heal her child by religious aids instead of medicinal aids. She feels sympathy for the child. But her aunt does not understand her sympathy. She gets hurt when her aunt says, “You think you are too educated for this, don’t you?”<sup>5</sup> It becomes clear to her that she is no longer ‘Tutul’ of seven years ago to her family members but now has become more Tara Cartwright to all.

The greatest irony of Tara’s life is that in her native land and in the midst of her own people, she is haunted by the feelings of otherness and rootlessness as she felt in America and becomes more outsider than a real foreigner. She is convinced that her personality has changed due to her stay for a long time in abroad and it becomes a hindrance in the path of her reintegration to her family, old friends and relatives. To get mental tranquillity from these situations, she went to Nayapur along with her friends for a trip. There she is raped by a Marwari politician Tuntunwala. She does not dare to share this incident to any one for fear of personal dishonour. Tara loses her confidence on her friends and thinks, “In a land where a friendly smile, an accidental brush of the fingers, can ignite rumors”<sup>6</sup>. This incident opens her eyes on the fact that she is an immigrant in her own land. She becomes conscious that it is very difficult for her to reconcile again to her native land. Her dream to rediscover her identity in her own tradition ultimately shatters and she decides to go back to the Western country and to her foreigner husband for solace. Through the portrayal of the character of Tara, the novelist gives the hint that if once one crosses the boundary of native land; it becomes very difficult for the person to find out his root and identity there again if he or she has lack of mental strength.

### **III. IMPACT OF DIASPORIC LIFE ON DIMPLE IN WIFE**

*Wife*<sup>7</sup> is the story of twenty years old Dimple, a middle-class Hindu Brahmin modern girl, who is very romantic about her marriage. From the interesting title of the novel, we can easily guess that it will be the tale of a wife who will always maintain all the traditional codes and conducts of a wife. But through the character of Dimple the novelist gives a sharp twist to the story. The novel highlights the impact and consequences of immigration on Dimple’s life.

As a teenage girl, Dimple has romantic outlooks about life. She has always lived in imaginary world, which is created by her fantasy. She always reads novels and film magazines which keeps her away from the ruthless and dreadful realities of life. She thinks marriage as a gate pass to enter into the world of happiness and liberation. Dimple is a member of middle-class conservative family which never gives permission to a woman to take decision of her marriage and it is also the duty of a daughter to respect her father’s decision and choice. So Dimple’s wish to marry a neuro-surgeon was not fulfilled and she had to marry Amit Kumar Basu, a Consultant Engineer, a perfect boy chosen by her father. Her dreams shatter into pieces when she enters in the house of her husband. In Amit’s little house, she feels like a prisoner under the supervision of her mother-in-law. The old fashioned interior decoration of the house irritates her and she feels suffocated there.

Besides irritation, Dimple is very excited with the news that she is going to immigrate with her husband in America and all her desires will be fulfilled there. But her all excitement vanishes at a moment when the truth comes to her that she is pregnant. Pregnancy is seemed as a blessing of God for women. In our society, it is a matter of pride for a woman who can carry baby. If a woman fails to beget a child she is condemned and becomes an object of hatred not only in society but in her family also. Without considering her pregnancy as a best gift of her marriage life, she regards it as an obstacle of her journey to abroad. She is unwilling “to carry any relics from her old life”<sup>8</sup> as in her new world she hopes everything will be nice and far away from old frustrations and irritations. So to get rid of this obstacle, she wants to terminate her pregnancy. She starts to eat “hot green chillies in the hope that her body would return to its normal cycle”<sup>9</sup>.

The scene, in which Dimple kills a pregnant mouse in the bathroom, indicates that for a restriction free life she can go any limit in her life. Her joy on killing the tiny creature expresses her mental abnormality. She becomes so desperate that she deliberately skips in order to kill the unwanted foetus in her belly. For self-abortion, "She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head"<sup>10</sup>. Her attempt to abort her own baby is very stirring to any woman who welcomes it as blessing from the Almighty. At last Dimple migrates to America with her husband leaving behind all hindrances. Now another phase of her life starts in her desired abroad. But she does not get any consolation in her new surrounding in America. She feels disturbed and lonely again in New York as Amit is busy in search of a new job. Just after their immigration to New York their economic condition was very poor so they had to stay at Jyoti and Meena Sen's house. Their house is decorated entirely with Indian taste that is very contradictory to Dimple's imagination. Meena Sen's behaviour and all her activities remind Dimple every time of her native land. So, she wants to runaway from their apartment and wants to merge herself with new surroundings. She tries to maintain balance between her old world (India) and her new world (America) and wants to become a perfect wife like Sita, icon of purity, patience and sacrifice of Indian mythology, but could not resist her from the glittering world of American society and the concept of self freedom of women of the Western society. She expects necessary helps and mental support from Amit but does not get for his business. Being depressed Dimple's condition is gradually going to worse. In her loneliness she comes close to Ina Mallick, an immigrant Indian in USA. She becomes an important agent to intensify Dimple's tragedy. She wears pants and mascara, smokes, drinks and goes to night school and also possesses extra-marital relationships with Americans that make her more American than a native American. Dimple is highly influenced by Ina and considers her as icon of her new land. Dimple meets Milt Glasser as a friend of Ina and fell in love with him.

In Ina's party, Ina offers Dimple a drink but Amit promptly restrains her to take drink by saying, "She does not like alcoholic beverages"<sup>11</sup>. Dimple thinks that even in the new land also she is not free from the male domination. She also feels that Amit never gives her permission to adopt the openness and modernity of America. The insecurity of her dream about western life makes her psychic disorder. To keep her busy, she used to go out with Ina and Milt. Her relation with Milt gradually becomes deeper and she makes a physical relationship with him. This act shows Dimple's change of personality that is highly influenced by the American notion of freedom and is free from conservative womanhood of her native culture. This relationship does not provide her permanent comfort and mental solace. She feels guilty by thinking that she is betraying Amit and is violating the duty of a wife. She is oscillating between the moral values of her native land and the values of the new land. She becomes neurotic and passing times watching TV. Amit is completely unaware of her mental condition. He never tried to understand her psychological status. Without spending time with Dimple, Amit advises her, "You must go out, make friends, do something constructive, not stay at home and think about Calcutta"<sup>12</sup>. She becomes so disturb that she losses her sleep. She blames Amit for all her problems arise in her life. She considers him as a hindrance of her life and decides to kill him. At last, in a fit of madness, haunted by depression and with the hope of liberation, she takes her kitchen knife and stabs him madly seven times in his neck. These seven stabs indicate Dimple's liberation from the prison of marriage. The tragedy of Dimple's life is that she marries Amit to free herself from the gallows of rules and regulations of her father but ultimately murders Amit for same reason and commits suicide. Analysing this story we may say that, if Dimple was mentally strong to accept the changed situation of her life in America, the consequences of her life may have been different. Moreover, it may say that the lack of adjustment power and high expectation to become free from the bondage of male dominated society drag Dimple to her drastic end.

#### IV. IMPACT OF DIASPORIC LIFE ON JYOTI IN JASMINE

Bharati Mukherjee in her third novel *Jasmine*<sup>13</sup> introduces her women protagonist as a fighter, survivor and an adapter. It is the story of a rural Panjabi girl Jyoti who owing to her immense mental strength and daring nature creates her identity on the American soil. Jyoti is a fighter from her childhood. She is born as a fifth daughter of her parents in a feudalistic society where female child is considered as undesirable and 'curse' for family. In her childhood, her mother tries to strangle Jyoti to death as she believes that her fifth daughter may bring curse in the family, but she survives. From her childhood, Jyoti is very courageous and has no faith on superstition. She, boldly protests against the prophecies of the village astrologer about her widowhood and exile. She does not believe that a human being can foretell the future of other persons—"You're a crazy old man. You don't know what my future holds!"<sup>14</sup>. She again shows her rebellious spirit to refuse to marry a widower selected by her grandmother and marries a modern young man, Prakash Vih. Prakesh is a very free minded man who inspires Jyoti to establish an individual identity and gives her a new name Jasmine'.

On the eve of their departure for America, Prakash is killed in a terrorist bomb blast. After the death of Prakash, Jasmine has to live the life of a widow in the house of her father at Hasnapur. But the poor life of a widow never robs her zeal for life. She decides to go to America to materialize her husband's unfinished dream. She dauntlessly leaves Hasnapur for America with forged documents. Jasmine's journey to America brings to

her a lot of difficulties. She is raped by Half-Face, the captain of the ship in which she has travelled. The captain raped her in a motel after landing on Florida. She murders Half-Face to take revenge for his heinous act. For a moment Jasmine decides to put an end to her life but as a real fighter she inspires herself by saying that it is not the time to die, she has not yet complete her mission. She says, "I could not let my personal dishonour disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die; I had not yet burned my husband's suit"<sup>15</sup>. This incident changes her whole life and also generates a new kind of philosophy of life that teaches her to fight for a decent existence at any cost.

In New York, Jasmine stays with Prof. Devinder Vadhera and his family. But the excessive possessiveness of the Vadhera family for their native tradition irritates her. Jasmine was in a hurry to get a green card as her status was an illegal immigrant. She tries her best to adopt all the American traditions. She leaves the house of Vadhera and re-starts her life as a day- mummy of Duff, the child of Taylor and Wylie Hayes on Claremont Avenue with a new name 'Jase'. Jasmine's restless journey from place to place and the changing of her Indian name to an American name indicates her strong determination to establish herself in the American main stream. Taylor and Wylie help Jasmine to adjust her in the new society. She fell in love to Taylor for his loving and caring nature. Jasmine stayed with Tailor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. These two years are the best period of her life in America as an immigrant.

It is Jasmine's fate that her happiness never lasts long. She has to leave the house of Taylor as she sees in the park the terrorist, Sukhwinder, who murders her husband. After seeing Sukhwinder in the park she moves to Iowa. For the decision to run away from Taylor's house one may think that Jasmine is a coward. But she is not a coward, she is a fighter and she has enough courage to face the terrorist but she escapes to save Taylor and Duff from Sukhwinder.

In Iowa, Jasmine starts her life as a teller girl of a bank and later becomes a live-in companion of her colleague Bud Ripplemayer and becomes pregnant. Bud gives her new identity as 'Jane Ripplemayer'. Bud and Jasmine's mutual relationship is based on mainly give and take policy. Bud needed caring helps of Jane as he was handicapped and on the other side, Jasmine's need was to secure a permanent identity in the new society and for this Jasmine grabbed every opportunity that came to her way. Though Jasmine wants to assimilate to the American society, she never denies the Indian part of her own self.

In Bud's house she takes care of him and always tries to fulfil his needs like an Indian wife. She has sacrificed all her individuality and happiness for Bud's happiness. But Bud never tried to understand her feelings and always tried to domesticate the Indian self of Jane's character. For this attitude of Bud, Jasmine was unable to share the memories of her past life with Bud and Bud also never gives much attention to it. She feels herself as a prisoner in the house of Bud. At this moment of her mental crisis she gets a call from her former lover Taylor who wants to take her to California. Jasmine accepts his proposal and turns back to Taylor. It may be seemed that Jasmine is very selfish for her decision to leave Bud who is totally dependent on her for his physical incapability, but to Jasmine the freedom of her woman self is most important than her duty.

In America, Jasmine's every decision was very calculative to become an American and her personality has changed gradually. Her repeated renaming Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and finally Jane show that she is entering gradually into the American mainstream. But for this assimilation she has to face so many difficulties that increased her self-confidence and paved her way for future course of action. Jasmine's frequent shifting like a nomad from place to place gradually helped her to assimilate in to the American mainstream. Samir Dayal comments about Bharati Mukherjee's woman character Jasmine as "a perpetual nomad" who "shuttles between differing identities"<sup>16</sup>. Thus Bharati Mukherjee efficiently portrays Jasmine, as a strong woman character than the protagonist of her former novels. In our previous study we were concerned with the problems that arise in the lives of Dimple and Jasmine due to their attempt to cross the boundary of their native land and we could conclude "as immigrants they face the same problems to adjustment in the new cultural milieu. Their struggle for adjustment and quest for new identity in an alien land leads their lives into two directions. Dimple because of her lack of inner strength and weak mentality was not able to cope with the changing situations and became a murderer of her husband. On the other hand, Jasmine by her tremendous mental strength and power of adoptability fights with odd situations and assimilates with the culture of new land and comes out as a winner of life"<sup>17,18</sup>.

## V. CONCLUSION

The present study summarizes as Tara migrated to USA for higher studies and there she experienced problems of immigration as an immigrant and also as a wife of a white American. She becomes confused and helpless to find out her real identity. She returns to Calcutta to rescue her root but here also she experiences the same feelings of loneliness and foreignness amongst her friends, relatives and even also in her family. Her immigration reduced her mental perseverance and also generated a sense of emptiness about her identity. She feels India as a place of her relocation and at the same time she feels USA as a place of her mental solace. Therefore, immigration rendered Tara a confused personality. In the novel *Wife*, Dimple's immigration brought fatal consequences in her life. She never came out from her Indian idealness of a wife and at the same time she

was unable to resist her from the openness of American lifestyle. As a result, she lost her mental peace and became the murderer of her husband and committed suicide. On the contrary, Jasmine who went to America to fulfil her husband's wish and to become 'sati', ultimately adjusted herself into the American society as an immigrant. Therefore, in conclusion it may be said that the circumstances that they had to face as immigrants left direct impact on their lives and the consequences of immigration in the diasporic lives of Tara, Dimple and Jyoti are diverse.

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