CHAPTER - 2

THE TIGER'S DAUGH
CHAPTER – 2
THE TIGER’S DAUGHTER

The Tigers Daughter, the first novel of Bharati Mukherjee published in 1972, depicts the protagonist Tara’s return journey to India after living seven years in America. Originally her homecoming is to erase and comfort her nostalgia but during this journey, when American Tara Cartwright encounters the Indian Tara Bannerjee, she discovers a new self and constructs a new definition of India. The old memory of her motherland seems to be ambiguous and dissolving because the sights Tara sees cannot help recalling any familiar feeling towards the land. There is a huge difference between Indian born Tara and that of Tara, the resident alien of America - India becomes new to Tara and Tara becomes strange to her Indian friends. In this chapter, we are trying to discuss the changing process of Tara’s identity from her being Indian form, educated in a foreign land, married to an American, having Indian appearance and American thinking.

The protagonist, Tara is a daughter of Tiger Banerjee who is an upper-class member of Indian society and owns a tobacco firm, which he received as his dowry. Bengal Tiger was not like other men. He was a very strong man and mediator between divine and mortal fates. While the restive city
forced weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty, the Bengal Tiger remained powerful. Tara was lucky to study in St. Blaise where she was trained by good nuns who taught her how to be composed and ladylike in all her emergencies. This western education had a positive impact on her childhood.

Beneath that stern affability of the Bengal Tiger, there must have been a deep suspicion or pain, which had urged him to send his only child, a girl of fifteen out of India for collegiate studies. The motives for that decision remained a secret, but its consequences were terrifying. It had but rather fragile young woman on a aircraft for Poughkeepsie and left out of account the limits of her courage and common sense. Courtesy, politeness and western manners becomes very important and useful tool for her to adjust well in the United States; otherwise she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first week from US.

Tara decides to return to India out of homesickness and shadowy fears that haunt her in living abroad. In other words, it is nostalgia that impels her homecoming. Nostalgia happens when a person wants to retrieve the past and to return to the good old day or in simpler way nostalgia is a longing for that which is lost. Yearning to return to the place of origin begins to creep when there is a long distance to travel. As each action of newness
bombarded Tara, she longed for Casual Street, where she had grown up. The fact Tara’s homesickness arises from the experience of being excluded in her dormitory overseas. She senses discrimination from her roommates. The girls in the residence hall tried to draw her out. They lent her books and records and hand lotions unasked, but would not like to share her Indian story or the mango chutney. Images such as the population explosion, the loop vasectomy in the railway station became her identifications, which signify the Indian poverty. Tara knows that India is misunderstood. Being a daughter of India is like “a bedside intellectual” [1] to instill the truth of India into dormitory girls. Therefore her homecoming is to testify what her identity is and to rediscover what India is.

Tara feels alien and hostile when she arrives to India where she has dreamed to return. Tara is confused with the word homesickness. Perhaps she was too impulsive, confused with the fear of New York with that of homesickness or perhaps Tara’s, acceptance of alien culture makes it hard for her to accept what she had left behind in India. Tara feels sorry for coming to India without her husband David. Tara was too impulsive, confusing her fear of New York with homesickness or perhaps she was getting insane.

Tara on the way to her dream city Calcutta is worried to even drink coffee. Tara buys a coke and the vendor in the train gives coke without straw, she closed her lips around the wet, warm bottle, and then suddenly panicked, because she was worried about the hygienic conditions. Old worries flooded her, warnings from her mother about VD contracted in public toilets, sinister sexual germs bulking in railway station.

Assimilation and acceptance of the new culture appear impossible if the past is not forgotten. Life without the consciousness of the past is going to be reduced to the contemporary present only; the clash coming between what you know already and what you are going to learn. For Tara learning to be like an American is to adjust, but it turns (American culture) out to become powerful and dominant in ones life.

Bharati Mukherjee while narrating all about the American Culture clearly makes the reader notice the native Indian culture, especially when she beautifully describes the house of Bengal Tiger:

*The hall was electrically furnished. Italian marble tables and mahogany tables in the shapes of hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades occupied the dingy corners. On two heart-shaped tables stood enormous ebony elephants. On the high-ceilinged walls,*
hung framed photographs of earlier Bannerjees. From legend one knew these Bannerjee had noble faces, that some had been photographed in yogic positions, bare chests girdles by Brahminie thread. But the grime on the glass made their facts impossible to verify. As a child Tara had often amused herself, especially in the rainy season, by scratching the grease with her long fingernails. But she could only reach the toes and ankles of the photographed men. In a poorly lit corner hung one headier tiger skin.

It had been acquired by Tara’s maternal grandfather, a hunter of moderate renown, before he had given up big-game hunting. Tara’s father was not a sportsman [2].

During Tara’s home coming journey, wherever she goes, her new experience impels her to discover the city again and again.

She had dreamed of this return to India for years. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time aboard would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had bought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive,

then the deformed beggars in the railway station, and now the inexorable
train ride, steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an
embittered woman, she now thought old and cynical at the twenty-two and
quick to take offense.

However, disorder becomes her description for India. Both Tara
herself and her Calcutta relatives are impressed by the city’s physical
danger. They are shameful to show Tara, the ugly side of India. The only
pollution she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution.
Tara’s relatives say to her that she should promise not to look at the bad
parts of India. She promises to keep her eyes shut! Some parts were horrible.
She ought to cover her nose because of the stinkiness of the city.

Ironically Tara is treated as an outsider who seems to be unfamiliar
with India because they see themselves as natives who wish not to scare her
and dare not to display India to her.

India is also changed. The Catelli-continental Hotel which was the
hovel of the universe during the British colonial period symbolizes the
center of India. It was splendid in the earlier decades when Europeans loved
to drink tea at the first floor balcony, but now the place is no longer
crowded, no more Europeans, but beggars take advantage of the shade, to
roll out their torn mats or rearrange their portable oven and cardboard boxes.
It is marked by poor people and is painted with obscenities and political slogans.

Although India has political independence, though freed Indians from the Imperial rule, had many negative effects on the Indian society. Situation within India even after independence was miserable. India was disunited, a country without systematic procedures for governance, a country with chronic political unrest and many voices from different political parties who fought for power and ignore the people’s livelihood.

Tara from the roof of Catelli-continental for the first time witnesses the fate of her city. The procession jabbed its arms through the dusty air. From Tara’s perch as she climbs on a chair for a better view, at first the procession looked like a giant caterpillar, sluggish and quite harmless, on the busy road. Then she was able to make out banners, picket signs, bricks, soda bottles, bamboo poles. The leaders ran back and forth, coaxing people to shout louder and to get in the way of the traffic. It was strange, thought Tara, to see two cars, one a Morris minor, the other a Fiat, bearing the only press sign. There were no television cameras, no US marshals. There was no one to manipulate or interpret the course of Calcutta’s history. From the roof of the Catellie, Tara saw Calcutta, squeezed horribly together, men, women, infants, some scratching their crotches, others laughing like tourists in an
unfamiliar section of town. And always the heartbeat of slogans “Blood bath! Blood bath! Blood bath!” [3].

Tara shaded her eyes to see better. She felt safe on the roof, watching the slogan bitter through the marchers row by row, blending and changing, till the last ragged lines merely said, “Shed blood, blood shed, and shed blood, blood shed” [4]. Customers darted out of expensive Chowringhee Avenue stores, carrying Swiss confectionery hand made silks, Sterling Silver coffee sets, while store owners tried to lock up their display cases.

Calcutta had become more dangerous than Tara remembered. In order to understand the new India, Tara starts her search on her trip to Tollygauge, with the invitation from Mr. Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, owner of tea estate in Assam. Tollyguage had once promised to be a splendid residential area, smaller than Ballyguage. The road to Tollyguage was circuitous. At first it was pakka, black and handtopped, though very uneven, full of cracks and bumps. It crossed tramlines and railway tracks. It hedged half-finished apartment houses where tubercular men shouted slogans from verandahs. Then as it neared Joyonto’s compound, the road was kutcha, dry, brown and dusty before the monsoons. It was flanked by huts, cowsheds and stalls.

[3] Ibid., p.75.
[4] Ibid., p.75.
The dust and the squalor forced young ladies from Camel street roll up their windows of the car they were traveling. She would have refused Joyonto’s invitation, if she knew that the journey was ugly, danger and the viruses that were stocking the street and the dogs and cows scrapping in garbage dumps. She would have remained at the Catelli, sipping expresso and reading old issues of “The New Yorker”.

Tara was bewildered by her first view of the large and dusty compound. She thought if she had been David, she would have taken out notebook and pen and entered important little observations. All she saw was the obvious. Goats and cows grazing in the dust, dogs chasing the friskier children, man sleeping on string beds under a Banyan tree. Children playing with mud beside a cracked well, rows of hovels and huts. The huts were made of canvas cloth, corrugated tin, asbestos sheets, bamboo poles, cardboard pieces and occasional bricks torn loose from compound walls. Posters were used as building materials by the more desperate squatters. There were no doors to these hovels. Though they were open, these homes seemed to her secretive, almost evil.
Tara tries to understand this place, but her innerself shrinks back little by little. Even the little girl with leprosy who tries to block her way makes Tara feel terrible except for her size, there is nothing childish in the little girl's face. There are sores on the little girl's legs and these sores oozed blood. Tara does not feel sympathy or pity and all that she is able to do is to scream "Don't touch me, don't touch me!" [5].

Later Mr. Roy Chowdhury intends to lead Tara to explore more about India. He is perceptive character who represents a very traditional and patriotic Indian. His family had power before India became one of the British colonies. Mr. Roy knows from the newspaper that Tara is a returned foreigner. His purpose in extending his friendship is to make her understand the history of India. He is angry at the younger generation for caring more about foreign things like Time magazine and Readers Digest and not much worrying about their tradition, their city and their country.

For almost an hour Joyonto watched and listened to the young people, having nothing to do or him. The city had dried the blood in his body, and now he had lost even his curious phrases. *On the skeletons of cows skyscrapers well rise*. But he knew it was no use, the new guests had

---

disturbed his surface of words and now he must yield to their terrible presence. He thought they were very much as he had been in his twenties and the thought frightened him even more than he had expected. The young men and women reminded him of trapped gazelles though they were confident, handsome and brashly opinionated as they looked across the aqua tables. They spoke mainly in English, occasionally changing to Bengali in midsentence, almost always in exclamations, favouring:

*How dare you!* and *What nonsense!* He heard them list with enthusiasm movies they had seen or parties they had recently attended. As he rubbed his cracked and dirt-grained heels against the aqua legs of the table, Joyonto heard their conversation alight on imported gadgets on stereos, transistors, blenders and percolators, each foreign word was treated with a holy reverence [6].

Joyonto is very sorry to see his young cultured people in western culture hypnosis. All he wanted to do is to spread the awareness of nationalism and to inspire their passion to love their mother country.

Reading Mukherjee’s words, one finds that, culture is presented as helpless, gray and foggy. Not only the views are ugly, but also the smell of

---

shabbiness permeates through the air. Even the natives regard Calcutta as the deadliest city in the world because there is no hope and no vigour in the scenes they see, and the places they live.

What does India need? Antonia Whitehead, a white woman in this novel suggests that, to improve Indian current situation, a revolution is essential. In her view, what India needed was “less religious excitement and more birth control devices” [7].

Antonia’s views or suggestions strengthen the problem of anarchism in India - endemic violence, chronic political unrest, economic stagnation and poverty, disease, overpopulation and class conflicts demoralized Indian society.

Tara while debating with her friend Nilima also puts the same views, “Calcutta is going to the dogs. No question about it. It’s going to the left of leftist - its going communist” [8]. Political struggle brought India a great crisis. People needed a powerful government to rescue. Disintegration of British imperialism had caused disorderliness in India. In order to cure social insurrection “Indians should be more discerning”.

“They should demand economic reforms and social upheavals” [9] to promote a progression, to unite a whole new India.

The more Tara realizes and tries to understand her motherland, the more she is scared because of vast differences between these two countries she stays in.

America and India are two different countries with two different cultures and two totally different living surroundings. Indeed, when compared with her American life, Tara has started at what she witnesses back home. As an Indian citizen, one feels that it is contradictive because her inner self keeps rejecting it again and again as stranger. For Tara, India is very different and “it is going to be a lot more different and tragic” [10]. Her foreign spirit occurs on her visiting from Calcutta to Bombay, from her family to the society, from herself to anyone she meets and then the further sights Tara digs out from India can not match to her old memories. Tara’s born city Calcutta and her motherland India should be cozy and familiar to her but it is totally different and opposite from the images that bring her panic and newness to her, but now she has feeling to embrace it. Her comments on these two countries are reversed (where does he belong).

[9] Ibid., p.209.
[10] Ibid., p.57.
She feels homeless at home. Her root is in India, but Tara cannot find a right place to locate it in India by herself.

The perspective of her Calcutta relatives and friends reveals her otherness. Tara is regarded as an “American Aunty”, and they label her a ‘foreigner’. Her returning is like a tornado causing a commotion where she is. Even “there (are) many parties in honour of Tara’s return. Many teas, many dinners hosted by her friends to convince her Calcutta could be as much fun as her New York or Madison” [11]. The celebrations hosted by her friend symbolize they are enamored with westernization so as to, “(fall) in love with the Bengali young woman from the States” [12]. Tara’s relatives and friends envy her overseas experience. She seems to be exotic, even her common hairstyle and Sari looks very foreign like to her friends. Tara is alienated among her friends. In each get together with her Calcutta friends, they always study Tara with obsessive attention on her hair, the shade of her lipstick and her sunglasses. Tara is disturbed by her friends’ infatuation and curiosity towards the word ‘foreign’. Their curiosity and in their remakes on her apprentice it appears as they are enamored with foreign, which is again treated with utmost devout and reverence.

[12] Ibid., p.69.
America is a myth to India from Tara’s story. It is a myth of advantage, hope and aspirations. Although American life and culture is not known to her friends, they value it as it is completely different from theirs. They are eager to discover distant land from Tara’s instructions; therefore they entreat lucky Tara to tell them more about America and what she does there. Furthermore, they want her to teach them the popular phrases or words that are used in America. Learning or copying a foreign language and culture for Calcutta people is like having an aristocratic life. America is that country they dream about, which stands for hope, wealth and freedom.

People in Calcutta regard America as incomparable and perfect place; they don’t want to believe the stories about the “ghetto or students demonstration” or the protests in the US. America is presented as a fantastic world with modern objects and inventions like television, automobiles, frozen food and record players. For Tara, the journey back to India, which she has looked forward, is altogether a different experience to her. She feels alienated in her motherland. Her old memory of “home” is replaced with her new experience. She realizes that she is not the Indian Tara anymore. Though Tara, did not believe in intense friendships, she wanted to tell her friend that little things had begun to upset her, that off late 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.

Tara’s friend, Reena says to her “How is it you have changed too much, Tara? I mean this is no normal judgment or anything but you’ve become too self-centered and European” [13].

Being married to a white American, David Cartwright, her identity is changed. Tara was an Indian daughter but now she is an American wife. She is called Tara Bannerjee Cartwright rather than Tara Bannerjee only. In identifying herself as Tara Bannerjee Cartwright, she is torn between two cultures. Her life becomes the nurture of two very different, opposed cultures.

Usually in India, parents take the full responsibility in finding the bridegroom for their daughters. Love marriages do not fit in Indian culture.

“Wanted suitable bridegroom for tall, very fair, excessively beautiful Bengali Brahmin girl of respectable family; age 20; groom must be foreign-returned, earning four-figure salary; or: wanted: beautiful, very fair

bride for brilliant Kayastha boy 38, Class 2 Gov. officer, father retd. high
court justice. Only respectable parties need apply” [14].

Unlike most Indian girls who accept the love match arranged by their
parents to marry an unknown bridegroom who accords with the ideal
bridegroom, Tara decides her marriage on her own. In regard to her
marriage, with white American, Tara gets rid of the very traditional marriage
pattern in which the “grooms takes his bride, a total stranger” [15]. Instead,
Tara meets David Cartwright inside an elevator in Madison in 1976;
moreover she falls in love with him before the elevator ride was over. Tara’s
marriage to David Cartwright is a breakthrough of a traditional custom and
venturing into the west from east although her husband knows “nothing of
Calcutta, Camac street, the rows of goods, the power and goodness of
Bengal Tiger” [16]. Unlike the other Calcutta girls, Tara possesses more
freedom in American to arrange her marriage willfully abandoning her caste,
traditions and customs. Perhaps her mother was offended that she (Tara) was
no longer a real Brahmin. Tara’s friends feel that her seven years stay abroad
has eroded all that is fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature. The inter race
marriage of the Indian Tara and American David is controversial to most of

the people around her. For Tara, David is not different as any in India, as common as an ordinary Indian man. She can understand all about David such as the language, life style and the eating habit but for her friends, relatives and for her parents, after all David is a foreigner.

In India, leading a life with a foreigner is very hard concept to accept. Tara does not feel comfortable in discussing her marriage with her friends when her friends insist on the adjustment Tara has made in her marriage outside her cast and nation. Tara’s American husband David does not show up in India. David’s letters to Tara reflect his views on India. There is huge gap between David's understandings of India from the books he has read to that of Tara’s Indian experiences.

Reading Ved Mehta’s journal on India, David sees Calcutta “as the collective future in which garbage, disease and stagnant are man’s estate “survival to the lower forms, insects and sludgeworms” [17]. According to David, India is unsafe, and his anxieties of India include the fears of “diarrhea, jaundice and polluted water” [18], from which he constructs his image of India which is a place that is full of unseen dangers. David asks Tara to remind her parents to cable him when she is sick in India.

The underdeveloped medical system without any reliable doctor is worrisome too.

Tara visits her Aunt Jharna, where she withstands the traditional, but unscientific medical treatment. Her niece gets seriously hurt on her leg and she is asked to dangle bare feet above the smoking incense. Tara is shame to see such a kind of treatment. Tara tries to suggest on altering method, she asks her aunt Jharna to try some plaster cast and special shoes. Nevertheless, her helpful tips put her in very embarrassed situation because it is not appreciated by Aunt Jharna, who satirizes Tara instead.

“You think you are too educated for this, don’t you? Aunt Jharna laughed with a quite violence. You have comeback to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your mleccha husband?” [19].

Her overseas education, her inter-race marriage, her differences with her relatives and friends turn Tara into a complicated person with dual cultures, habits, life styles and traditions. Although David’s presence is invisible in the fiction, he has a great influence on Tara. David’s misunderstanding of her Mother Country, Tara indeed gets bogged in her

[19] Ibid., p.45.
understanding of India. Adjustments for an expatriate like Tara are an important stage living in an unknown land. May be her nostalgia is formed out of her unfamiliarity with the US culture and lifestyle.

Living seven years in The United States, she has many experiences, which accelerate her homecoming. Pronob, Tara’s friend tells her that he would hate to be an immigrant. He wouldn’t mind giving up the factory but he would hate to be a nobody in America. He is also eager to know how the whites treat Indians. Pronob’s concern seems to allude Tara’s inner world, the feeling of an outsider.

Tara’s nostalgia might be an outcome of Identity Crisis. Reasons for her nostalgia, no one can tell except Tara or Mukherjee herself. Although nostalgia prompts Tara to return to India, ironically she does not feel comfortable at all because the return brings only grief to her. Calcutta in her old memory is totally different from what she knows now - “Calcutta becomes more dangerous than she remembers” [20]. India is experiencing revolution after being an independent nation and people are experiencing struggle in a disordered society as well. All they want is to reconstruct another Calcutta, one they are longing to return.

They are eager to have a country which erase their panic and racial and class fear for a better living conditions.

Tara is an outsider in the United States. She is also treated as an outsider in Calcutta because of her strong westernization. Tara’s foreignness to both India and America compose for her a double marginalization. In her motherland she feels alienated. Though she wants her identity with her motherland, the dissimilarities that she faces because of the seven years’ stay in America are many. Hence she cannot cope up with different lifestyle of India and America. She feels that the trip to India is so vague, pointless and diffuse. She by now is totally convinced by all these experiences that she needs to discard her past and embrace her home away from home. To erase her wonder and fears, Tara, decides to go back to her adoptive country and an American husband. When she takes a cab to Airport, she is caught in the upsurge of the violent mob. She is thus “portrayed as a Tigress at the bay in the forests of dried up imagination” [21]. Obviously Tara’s identity is divergent between herself and others.

The distinction between American and Indian cultures appears, apparently because of her bicultural experiences. Tara gradually constructs

her identity from west to east, from every meeting with her friends. Swinging between the different values of east and west, tradition and modern, self and other, an expatriate like Tara judging her Indian heritage by the others standard results in homelessness and rootlessness. It is hard for bicultural individual to decide where they belong to. There is no expatriate who can really resonate their voice because of their assimilation to another culture and most have left and refuse to accept born-cultures. When facing rioters' mobs in Calcutta, Pronob runs readily out of the car to help his people, but on the other hand, Tara hides herself in a car across the street from Catelli-continental, and she wonders if there is any chance to get out of Calcutta. Furthermore, her returning to India examines her increasing discomfort with a variety of Indian cultural practices and comes to terms with her growing realization that the red India is very different from the imagined home of her expatriate nostalgia.

India is a place where she expects to rediscover her Indian self and reevaluate who she is. After returning to India, Tara does not feel comfortable, out of Indian political scenario, which accelerates her freedom. The TunTunwala, the political hero of the novel rapes her. When she is raped she puts a full stop in identifying herself as an Indian. She disowns the Indian Identity and craves to be an American. Bharati Mukherjee in an
interview with Amina Meer, expresses in anguish saying “for me and perhaps for other immigrant writers there is a death and series of rebirth. It is very painful and traumatic letting go of the old self. The Tiger’s Daughter was written while I was still an expatriate. Then comes a reconstructing of one self, which is very difficult” [22].

When we discourse at such point, Tara might have thought her decision was the better one, because if she still wants to be Indian even after a fatherly figure raping her with an Indian mentality, she would have taken a drastic move. To escape all such hardship she longs to be an American. To Tara abroad means home and home becomes abroad. In India Tara feels homeless in her home. Tara’s decision to return to America was the better one because, even after a fatherly figure raping her, had she decided to stay back, she eventually would have killed herself or gone mad. She was homeless in her own home.