

Ecological Perspective: The Protagonists Of Bharathi Mukherji Novels, ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’, ‘Wife’

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee is a popular diasporic writer. Her novels “The Tiger’s Daughter” and “Wife” speaks about the immigrants’ expatriate experiences in a host land. Many research scholars presented critical appreciation on her novels with literature available and sometimes with their own perceptions. A scientific study will definitely have an advantage and help us to get authentic pictures. Immigration has become a major concern for the US and many other countries as it brings associated problems. Immigrant Psychology now offers various theories and models to understand the immigrants’ sufferings and offer solutions for their well being. The most prominent of the models, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework is applied to understand the migration and acculturation experiences of the protagonists *Tara* and *Dimple* in Bharati Mukherjee novels.

Key words: Diaspora, ecological framework, expatriate, acculturation, assimilation

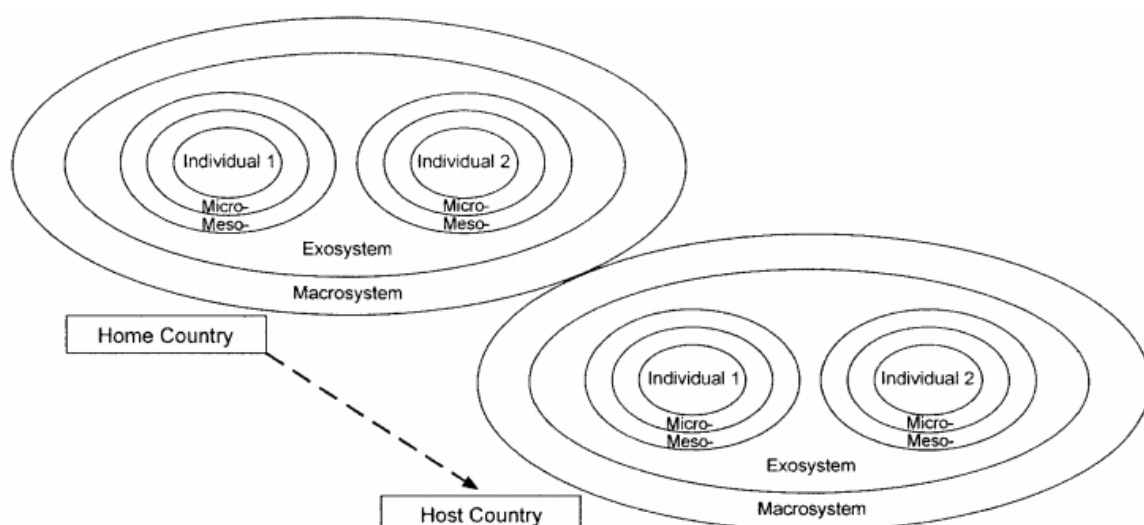
Bharati Mukherjee, the grand dame of Indian Diaspora writer has laid an indelible mark in Indian writing in English. As a post modern writer, she spoke of the Indian voices which struggle in a foreign land as an alien, immigrant, expatriate and whose constant efforts to assimilate into the host culture. Her protagonists Tara, Dimple have suffered all that a migrant faces and their struggle for assimilation became “a lifelong pregnancy”. Bharati Mukherjee was successful as a writer in bringing the inner struggle of the protagonists in a very realistic manner. Much research was done on the Diaspora aspects of Bharati Mukherjee. Researchers have added varied perceptions to the existing body of literature. Still, there is a need to study them under a more scientific method so that the authentic pictures of immigrants would come. Psychology has its own advantages. In recent times, much focused research has been going on in immigrant Psychology. Since the USA has more immigrant population, estimated to be 61% of the immigrants and their offspring by 2050 has created necessity to investigate into the immigrant psychology and develop strategies to look after mental health of the immigrants and on the whole larger part of the country.

Among the various research models, the most successful frame work to understand immigrant psychology is Ecological Frame work ofUrie Bronfenbrenner. Reports of the various committees, recommendation put forth by various multicultural psychologists (Casas et.al 2008) recommended Ecological framework as the best model to understand and work for the mental health of immigrants.Behaviours don't occur in vacuum but is affected by the larger culture and society, the local community, and its institutions. The social climate and receiving context into which immigrants arrive help shape their experiences and adaptation in the new land (Deaux, 2006). Culture is an essential element in examining the experiences of immigrants.

Immigrants experiences like migration and acculturation is better understood by applying the ecological framework of Bronfenbrenner(1989). Ecological framework functions as a guide to study cross cultural comparative studies, as it is versatile enough to capture a broad range of cross cultural factors. It is applicable to the field of immigrant research and acculturation. Ecological Framework is highly useful for conducting cross cultural psychological research with immigrant populations.

Urie Bronfenner ecological model suggests that individuals are rooted in multiple ecological contexts. These contexts influence the individuals. Ecological system theory also called development in context or human ecological theory identifies five environmental systems with which an individual interacts.

Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989)



The five levels of ecology which form the ecological framework are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem. First, the microsystem consists of communities as well as people with whom the single individual comes into immediate contact. The microsystem factors consist of family members, school, religious institutions, neighbourhood and peers. Communities and people in the microsystem typically exert a direct and frequent impact on individual development. Second, the mesosystem belongs to the kind as well as quality of interactions among microsystems, but doesn't include the person. Third, the exosystem consists of the interconnections between one or more settings in which the individual is not directly involved. Public policy and government activities, economic system, mass media, social settings are examples. Individuals have no role to play in this system. Fourth, the macro system represents social blueprint, and consists of values, cultural beliefs and norms, social structures, gender role, socialization, race relations and global resources. Finally, the chronosystem consists of socio-historical circumstances, environmental events and transitions over the life course.

Application of the Ecological framework to character analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's protagonists:

The Tiger's Daughter

Bharati Mukherjee's debut novel is an account of a protagonist as an expatriate. The ecological model articulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner provides insights into the individual interaction with the surroundings and communities. The micro system consists of individuals' gender, cognitive factors and communities like family, friends, work and religion. Tara Benarjee, the protagonist of 'Tiger's Daughter' hails from Bengal Brahmin family in Calcutta. She is the great granddaughter of Harilal Benerji, an industrialist, often called as Bangal Tiger and the owner of famous Benerjee and Thomas Co. Ltd. She was schooled at a colonial convent in Calcutta, St Blaise's convent school. She went abroad for higher education at the age of 15. Tara's family is a traditional family. Cultural customs and traditions, rituals like pooja are highly observed.

The mesosystem is the interaction between the micro systems family, religion, neighbourhood and school. Tara's family is a rich class zamindari family. Her father earned a good name. From the religious point of view she hails from an upper class, strong traditional Brahmin family. Contrary to conventional education, she was placed in a colonial

convent school. Sending children to a colonial school seems to be the privilege of the children of upper class. Lure for the west made her to go to New York for education at the age of 15. She was schooled at Ponghkeprine, New York.

Exosystem consists of social setting like economic systems, local Govt, mass media etc where an individual has no role to play. The economic system of India is poor whereas the host society is economically strong. There are no traces of effect of local governments and no major threats seen. Riots and racial discrimination were found both in the host society and native society.

The macro system of Tara speaks about the values, cultural beliefs and norms, social structure and socialization process. The macrosystem of Tara has enough interactions contrary to the smooth sailing in the host society. There are ties, massive impact, threatening to the relationships etc. Cultural clash is a major concern. Tara went to America and stayed for seven years for her education. She fell in love with David Cartwright. Tara hails from traditional Brahmin family but marries David, an American. She abandoned caste by marrying a foreigner. Indian system of life has great value for marriage. Wife considers husband as god and wants to stay with him in word and deed. Marriage is coming together of families not just two individuals. For David, marriage is only an agreement. David is unaware of wife's apprehensions. David considers Tara's love for family as "over dependence". Tara finds it difficult to communicate with David. Tara is a foreigner to David and a sinner for her friends and relatives. David is western in ways and thoughts. Though she does not feel safe and secure with David, she continues to live with him. At the end of the novel, she wants to return to her husband. When she was caught in a mob, she desperately felt secure in the hands of her husband. Though marrying an American is a break from the tradition of native culture, she upholds the value of marriage.

The cultural beliefs and norms of native land of Tara are very strong. She has great love for motherland, she follows the rituals scrupulously. During her early years of stay in America, she often prays goddess Kali for strength. She was disappointed when she was called as *Americanwali* by her friends and her husband as *mlecche*. Her mother hates Tara for abandoning caste by marrying a foreigner. Her stay in America brought changes in her and she often finds difficulty in performing religious ritual procedures and bhajans at home.

The social structure of the native country gives importance to marriage. It also gives importance to culture. Interaction with foreign culture brought changes in the outlook of Tara. Riots and violence are seen common in both societies. Racial discrimination is seen in a host society. Tara has developed a longing for native society as an ideal environment. But her long stay in host country created a new critical outlook towards host society. On her return to India she finds things in a different way. Bombay railway station seemed like a hospital. She hated Marvati, Nepali on her journey from Bombay to Calcutta. Calcutta seemed as a riot torn city. The houses on Marine drive, beggars on street affected by leprosy, the superficialities in the lives of her friends, all seems to be a torn society. The social structures of both societies have not given her fair chances to adjust with them.

Mirsad(et al 2005) speaks 'Acculturation as a complex, multi dimensional, cyclical and oscillating process'. An individual immigrant can go towards each end of the spectrum, from mal adjustment to adjustment and change several times, depending upon multiple factors [ecological influences and personal development].

Experiences of acculturation, racial discrimination, trauma etc affect the immigrants well being. Immigrants in the process of negotiating their identities in a foreign land may undergo severe stress in dealing with environment but also in coping with related stress.

When we look at the acculturation process of Tara, she went to America for education and married an American. She got used to new ways. She did all that to acquire new cultural ways of the host society but longing for motherland, fear of forgetting rituals lead to a failure of finding acculturation. She develops a split psyche creating neither American self nor a return to native culture. Cultural shock is found in her psyche. Therefore, the individuals who struggled and who were unsuccessful in meeting challenges of acculturation may lead to maladjustment. Hence, Tara's struggle for acculturation resulted in maladjustment.

Wife

Bharati Mukherjee's second novel "Wife" deals with the theme of expatriation and cultural alienation. Dimple is the protagonist of the novel the 'Wife'. The micro system of Dimple speaks about the individual and her development of a species of the middle class women of India. She hails from a middle class Bengali family. As a representative of a common middle class family, she hates her economic and social life. Having big dreams and living in fantasy is a common feature of middle class women. They often show low self-esteem. Dimple

always lives in the world of fantasy. She dreams of aristocratic and sophisticated life. She wants to break through traditional taboos of life. She has a poor physique often hates it and makes various efforts to improve her figure. She believes that marriage would bring her freedom and love.

The mesosystem shows poor interactions among family, neighbourhood and peers. The exosystem is dominant with mass media. Commercials on television have powerful impact on people. Consumerism started stepping in every house whether rich or poor. It also created lure for the west.

The macro system speaks values and cultural beliefs, social structure and socialization process. Dimple gives value to her marriage. She feels that marriage will bring her love and freedom. After the marriage, Dimple was not happy with her married life. Her conjugal relationships resulted in unhappiness. She wants to get rid off her pregnancy. 'Marriage had betrayed her'. It disillusioned her. In hatred, she murdered her own husband. Later, she had illicit relationship with Milt Glasser. The value attached to marriage has resulted in disillusionment.

Dimple has strong cultural beliefs of the native country. She performs *Durga pooja*. She considers wearing *sarees* as her culture. She considers cigarette smoking for ladies is not a good culture. She even suggested Bengali name to her friend's child. At the same time, she is progressive in nature. She hates the orthodox beliefs of her husband.

She got used to American way of living and tries to imbibe the host country's culture. She has great aspiration to change herself and consider marriage as threat to her progress. She breaks through it by getting rid off pregnancy and to the worst of murdering her own husband. She visualized her life as "dying bonfire". She develops neurotic behavior. She felt rootlessness, neither Indian nor an American. In the process she was torn between two cultures.

Dimple has deep rooted desire to be Americanized. The desire to be assimilated was great but was unable to forget the attachments to the native culture. She made desperate attempts to assimilate into American culture. She showed marginalized identity. Dimple's dream of assimilation resulted in failure. She had morbid imagination, abnormal behaviour and fantasies. She turns grotesque, violent, and frenzy. The macro and micro systems of Dimple are very poor. Hence, it resulted in failure to assimilate into the host culture.

Conclusion:

Immigration often brings unpleasant experiences. When the immigrants arrive into a host country, they bring with them new aspirations and also strong cultural associations of the home country. Immigrants also show greater inclination to assimilate into the host country. When their aspirations are not met and unable to forget their past find difficulty in adjusting to the new environment and culture will definitely create stress. In their desperate attempts to assimilate, many feel alienated, experience expatriate sensibility. It further adds to the already existing stress and they show severe psychopathological symptoms.

Ecological framework of Urie Bronfenbrenner gives insights into the immigrants' upbringing, psycho-social aspects and cultural background. The application of this framework has clearly shown the plight of the protagonists *Tara* and *Dimple*. Their macro, meso, exo, Microsystems have given true pictures of development and interaction patterns of the protagonists. As their interactions in these systems are weak, the protagonists suffered loss of self and became marginalised, maladjusted expatriates.

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