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Bharati Mukherjee's Reclamation of Women's Space in the Crossroads of Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract

This research explores the literary works of Bharati Mukherjee, a prominent Indian-American writer, focusing on the themes of displacement, identity, and cultural hybridity present in her novels. Employing a theoretical framework encompassing New Historicism, Hybridity, Self-identity, and Self-representation, the study aims to analyze Mukherjee's portrayal of cultural spaces and materiality in the diaspora. The research specifically examines the interplay between homeland, host land, and the concept of the "Third Space," investigating the dynamics between tradition and modernity in shaping characters' identities. The study explores the contrast and intertwining of host culture and home culture within Mukherjee's selected novels, including "The Tiger's Daughter," "Jasmine," "Desirable Daughters," and "The Tree Bride." Through literary analysis informed by the outlined theoretical framework, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the diasporic experience, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals navigating multiple cultural contexts. The anticipated outcomes include fresh perspectives on cultural hybridity, self-identity, and self-representation, thus enriching the discourse within the broader field of postcolonial literature.

Keywords: Hybridity, Diaspora, Identity, Cultural shift, Postcolonial literature

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee, one of the first Indian novelists to gain prominence in the American literary landscape, has been widely recognized by Indian scholars, particularly those in the field of postcolonial literature. Her identity as an Asian-American writer and the characteristic features of her novels have been extensively discussed, yet her position within postcolonial literature remains a matter of debate. Her novels, which explore themes of displacement and belonging, often inhabit

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the liminal space between tradition and modernity, reflecting the author's own ambivalence towards her cultural heritage and the complexities of transnational migration. Through her creative writing, Mukherjee attempts to capture a lost space, a quest that remains elusive yet shapes her imaginative and emotional landscape.

Literature, a reflection of humanity's intricate life, is enriched by its diverse facets of existence, bound by principles and values, yet differentiated by religion, caste, culture, and rites of passage. The challenge, therefore, lies in the novelist's ability to weave these elements into their narrative, sparking thought-provoking discussions that transcend the boundaries of creative writing. Bharati Mukherjee, a frequent spokesperson for India on the foreign stage, interweaves her personal experiences and opinions into her writings, offering valuable insights into the lives of those caught between tradition and modernity. Critical analyses have explored themes of national identity, self-exile, history, and cultural hybridity in her works, yet the cultural materiality and epistemology underpinning her postcolonial narratives remains underexplored. Addressing this lacuna in research is crucial to gaining a deeper understanding of Mukherjee's writings and the experiences of the diasporic generation she represents.

Literary Background

Postcolonial literary discourse is essential for comprehending the historical backdrop of the research problem in question. Postcolonial thinkers have consistently challenged the injustices and oppressions of the past while simultaneously striving to establish their own unique identities. Whether for a writer, poet, nation, religion, or national or regional literature, the question of identity remains paramount. Niranjana Mohanty, a prominent postcolonial poet, epitomizes this preoccupation with identity, proclaiming, "no order of things obscure/ my identity." He is, undeniably, a "frail, common human being born here" who is "bare to the bones." (Interview) Postcolonial Indian English fiction and poetry have extensively explored the lives of ordinary people and their cultural milieu. The perspectives presented in this literature are as diverse as the authors themselves, hailing from various backgrounds within the Indian English literary sphere.

In Indian English fiction, colonialism is depicted through the lens of notable literary figures such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and A.S.P. Ayer. Their life experiences and literary styles are deeply influenced by Indian culture, and their works frequently engage with the rich landscapes and traditions of India. While authors like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Kushwant Singh, and Arun Joshi focus on specific socio-political issues plaguing the nation, R.P. Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, and Anita Desai examine both socio-political and personal dilemmas from a feminist perspective. More recent novelists, including Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Githa Hariharan, and Amitav Ghosh, have turned their attention specifically to postcolonial concerns.

Indian literary works often expose the harsh realities of ignorance, illiteracy, famine, poverty, pain, and humiliation. The quest for identity is a recurring theme in postcolonial literature,

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as authors grapple with their place in a postcolonial society. This quest for identity alludes to the search for one's roots after a period of colonial rule. Humans are inherently social beings, and their sense of identity is inevitably shaped by their interactions with various social groups. India is a land of immense diversity, with people of various castes and religions coexisting, each with their own distinct way of life.

Nationalism, a sense of shared ethnic, racial, geographic, or cultural identity, plays a significant role in postcolonial literature. It is a unifying force that brings together diverse populations, fostering a common sense of belonging and nationality. In India, nationalism has been particularly prominent in partition literature. Novels by authors such as Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amitav Ghosh powerfully capture the anguish and upheaval experienced during the partition of India.

The concept of "otherness" is frequently employed in postcolonial literature to refer to anyone who is not part of the dominant group. In colonial discourse, the "other" was often portrayed as primitive, even cannibalistic. This binary distinction between colonizer and colonized served to reinforce the power dynamics between the two groups. The theme of alienation is particularly prevalent in the writings of Indian women, who explore the experiences of modern, educated, English-speaking Indian women and the challenges they face. Authors like Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, and others have given voice to these women, challenging stereotypical representations.

Hybridity, a term that denotes the mixing of races and cultures to create new forms of culture, is another critical concept in postcolonial studies. Hybridity was a source of anxiety for Europeans in the nineteenth century, who viewed it as a threat to their racial purity and identity. The concept of purity has been challenged and deconstructed by the concept of hybridity. Indian postcolonial literature explores the hybridization of culture in post-independence India, resulting from the fusion of native Indian and European cultures.

Diaspora, a term that encompasses the dispersed network of ethnically and culturally connected people, is also a significant theme in postcolonial literature. It encompasses concepts of travel, migration, dispersal, displacement, and the complexities of home and borders. Diaspora literature refers to works written by individuals from a diasporic community, often reflecting their longing for their homeland and culture while grappling with their identity as outsiders in a foreign land. Authors like Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, and others are notable examples of Indian diaspora writers.

Bharati Mukherjee, a prominent postcolonial writer, exemplifies the complex interplay between identity and migration in her works. Born, raised, and educated in a third-world country, she has achieved literary acclaim within American academia. Mukherjee's American citizenship, her Bengali upbringing, and her personal history of displacements and expatriations have all profoundly influenced her life and writing.

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Conceptual Framework

Spatially oriented literary studies, which examine the relationships between space, place, and literature, have transformed contemporary criticism. Spatial critique puts into question the division between real and fictional places, and has been applied to both recognizable and otherworldly spaces. Another frame of Mukherjee's novels situates with the major theme of alienation. Alienation, a concept essential to understanding Mukherjee's work, occurs as a natural consequence of the existential predicament and can be understood in both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Hegel's two forms of alienation, one resulting from a person's uniqueness and the other from the surrender of rights, are contrasted with Marx's more comprehensive and nuanced concept of alienation, which takes into account the socioeconomic aspects of human existence. The relevance of the concept of alienation in the present study is justified by its frequent recurrence in Indo-English literature. Tradition and modernity, two opposing forces, have significant impact on postcolonial studies of diaspora literature and in Mukherjee. Traditionalists uphold cultural and religious beliefs as societal pillars, while modernists embrace new ideas and seek personal freedom. The modernist movement centers on urban living and the fast-paced city life, while anti-modernists favor rural areas and community life. Individuality is taking the place of community life, and the concepts of tradition and modernity have far-reaching implications in postcolonial studies particularly with Mukherjee.

Aim and Objectives

This research aims to examine Bharati Mukherjee's novels through the lens of selected cultural theories and concepts, specifically exploring the cultural spaces and materialities depicted in her works. The theoretical framework encompasses New Historicism, Hybridity, Self-identity, and Self-representation. The focus is on tracing the lived experiences and spaces of the diaspora and migrant, encompassing homeland, host land, and the 'Third Space,' as portrayed by Bharati Mukherjee.

This literary analysis aims to explore the intricate relationship between homeland, host land, and the concept of "Third Space" as portrayed in select novels. It examines the nuances of host culture and home culture, examining how they are contrasted and intertwined within the narratives. It investigates the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, highlighting how these forces shape the characters' identities and experiences. The analysis further interweaves the concepts of New Historicism, Hybridity, and Self-representation, demonstrating their significance in shaping the literary landscape of these novels.

Scope and Methodology

The research methodology aligns with the social constructivist perspective, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of reality. It employs qualitative research methods, encompassing capturing, analyzing, and seeking to understand the deeper meaning and significance of human behavior and experience, beliefs, behaviors, and emotions. Researchers prioritize developing a

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deep and intricate understanding of individuals' experiences rather than gathering data applicable to broader groups. Qualitative researchers typically adopt an inductive approach, formulating a theory or identifying patterns of meaning based on the gathered data. This methodology is suitable for analyzing Mukherjee's novels, fostering a deeper understanding of feminist displacement and self-imposed exile within the context of the author's artistry and ideology.

Mukherjee's oeuvre can be interpreted as an inter textual component to examine the nature of country spaces, social space and individual space occupied by Mukherjee's protagonists in general. Mukherjee has written several novels, some of them are best sellers, including "The Tiger's Daughter" (1971), "Wife" (1975), "Jasmine" (1989), "The Holder of the World" (1993), "Leave it to Me" (1997), "Desirable Daughters" (2002), "The Tree Bride" (2004), and two anthologies of short stories, "Darkness" (1985) and "The Middleman and Other Stories" (1988). Documenting Mukherjee's work should start with her first collection of short stories, which might be considered a transitional work, demonstrating the shift in sensibility that occurred when she moved from Canada to the United States. Three of the book's twelve stories reveal a lingering bitterness about Canadian prejudice toward its Indian citizens, and they deal with the problems that such prejudice causes in the lives of people who are still debating whether they are in voluntary exile or undergoing hopeful self-transformation. In contrast, the stories set in the United States treat the immigrant experience more dynamically and give "a collection of fluid identities to be cherished" as a result of Mukherjee's personal "joining creative forces with a nameless, driven underclass of immigrants." Mukherjee's Indian characters, who live in the United States, tell stories about "broken identities and discarded languages, as well as the desire to engage with a new group, despite the ever-present fear of failure or betrayal." "Darkness," her debut collection of short stories, is set in North America and focuses on the issues of expatriation, immigration, and cross-cultural assimilation faced by immigrant Indians. Three of the twelve stories in this collection are set in Canada, while the others are set in America. The Canadian stories are referred to as "uneasy stories about expatriation" by Mukherjee since they are based on the author's personal experiences with racial prejudice in Canada. "Tamurlane," another novella in "Darkness," illustrates the life of Indian émigrés at the opposite end of the socioeconomic structure. It dramatizes the desperate circumstances of illegal aliens who, seduced by the promise of a better life, are smuggled into Canada and compelled to live an anonymous, subhuman, underground lifestyle. The dramatization of the immigrant experience in American fiction is less about the humiliations inflicted on the newcomer by New World intolerance and more about the newcomer's inner struggles in balancing the pull of old cultural loyalties and the pressures to assimilate to the new surroundings. In "A Father," the war between OldWorld and NewWorld takes on a new shape. Mr. Bhowmick, a traditional Bengali, works as a metallurgist for GM and lives in Detroit with his Americanized wife and engineer daughter, who is 26 years old. In his home shrine, he worships the goddess Kali, believes in the sanctity of Hindu traditions, and lives in continual awe of the

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invisible forces he believes control his fate. He has to make numerous concessions between his convictions and the American pragmatism that surrounds him on a daily basis. Although “Darkness” focuses primarily on the experience of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, Mukherjee’s second collection, “The Middleman, and Other Stories,” is broader in scope and range, as it explores the American experience of immigrants from India, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Uganda, and Vietnam. Four of the eleven stories in this collection feature white American characters that provide a different perspective on today’s immigration crisis. Almost every story looks at the compromises, losses, and changes that come with acculturating newcomers to American culture and altering it to reflect their presence: In fact, the book paints a picture of current American cultural diversity in a variety of settings across the country. Like “Darkness” before it, “The Middleman and Other Stories” has a lot of theatrical scenarios and a lot of violence. A young Ugandan kid living in Flushing works as a middleman for a hustler named Danny Sahib (formerly “Dinesh,” a Hindu from northern India), whom the youngster refers to as “a trader of chance.” Danny began with selling tickets to Indian concerts at Madison Square Garden, then arranged beauty pageants, and finally, the business of arranging green cards for Indians seeking permanent residency in the United States through proxy marriages. Jasmine tells the story of a determined Trinidadian girl named Jasmine who enters Detroit illegally through an intermediary at Windsor, Canada. She gets a job cleaning and maintaining the books at the Plantations Motel, which is owned by the Daboo family, who are also Trinidadian Indians seeking to build a new life for themselves in Michigan. Jasmine eventually moves to Ann Arbor and works as a live-in domestic with a laid-back American family (Wikipedia).

Bharati Mukherjee, a celebrated Indian-American author, has garnered acclaim for her insightful exploration of identity, culture, and the experiences of displacement through her novels. In her work, *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1972), Mukherjee shows the complexities of homecoming and the disillusionment that can accompany it. The novel follows Tara Banerjee Cartwright, an Indian immigrant who returns to Calcutta only to encounter a city plagued by political unrest and personal alienation. Tara’s upper-class upbringing and Brahmin caste status further isolate her, reinforcing her sense of foreignness. The narrative, dominated by Tara’s detached perspective, highlights the grotesque, madness, and chaos that pervade her experience, emphasizing the disorienting nature of returning to a homeland that has transformed.

Mukherjee’s subsequent novel, *Wife* (1975), shifts focus to the challenges of navigating marital expectations and the disillusionment that can arise when romantic fantasies clash with the realities of domestic life. Dimple, the protagonist, harbors girlish dreams of a fairytale marriage, envisioning a life filled with romantic passion and fulfillment. However, her marriage to Amit, an arranged match, falls short of her expectations, leaving her disillusioned and trapped in a monotonous existence. Dimple’s yearning for escape from the confines of her marriage and her desire to experience the perceived freedom of America underscore the complexities of balancing

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personal aspirations with societal expectations. In *The Holder of the World* (1993), Mukherjee explores the themes of expatriation and cultural transformation. Hannah Easton, a New Englander, finds her life intertwined with the destiny of the Mughal emperor, the holder of the world. The novel follows Hannah's journey as she navigates the geographical and ethnic transitions from America to England to India, highlighting how individual identity is shaped by these cultural shifts. Mukherjee emphasizes expatriation as a mental journey, underscoring the psychological impact of displacement and the challenges of adapting to new cultural norms. *Leave It to Me* (1997) marks a departure from Mukherjee's usual focus on immigrant experiences, delving into the complexities of identity within a seemingly homogeneous American setting. Debby DiMartino, the protagonist, grapples with her identity as an Italian-American woman, feeling out of place in her predominantly white, middle-class community. Mukherjee exposes the subtle nuances of alienation and the challenges of forging one's identity within a seemingly familiar cultural landscape.

Desirable Daughters (2002) revisits the themes of immigration, displacement, and the impact of cultural transitions. Tara, the youngest of three sisters raised in Calcutta, narrates the story, recounting the divergent paths each sister takes as they venture beyond their homeland. Tara, now living in San Francisco, embodies the complexities of being an Americanized Indian, constantly navigating the intersection of her adopted and ancestral cultures. When a young man claiming to be the illegitimate son of her sister Padma appears on her doorstep, Tara is forced to confront the past and re-examine her relationships with her sisters. The novel poignantly illustrates how the past intertwines with and shapes the present, highlighting the enduring influence of one's heritage. *The Tree Bride* (2004), the sequel to "Desirable Daughters," continues Tara's journey of self-discovery and reconciliation. In the aftermath of a terrorist attack that leaves her ex-husband Bish severely injured, Tara delves into her family history, seeking to unravel the mysteries surrounding her ancestors. The novel explores themes of healing, forgiveness, and the enduring power of family bonds. Through her novels, Bharati Mukherjee masterfully portrays the complexities of identity, the challenges of displacement, and the transformative power of cultural exchange. Her works offer profound insights into the human experience, resonating with readers across diverse backgrounds.

Critics have analyzed the influence of her upbringing in an upper-middle-class family and her experience as an emigrant on her creative writing. These literary scholars have delved into the key elements and distinctive features of her work. Mukharjee's early life in India, followed by her expatriate years in the United States and Canada, exposed her to a rich literary heritage. Some critics evaluate her within the context of her national identity, while others situate her in the global literary landscape. Her stories exploring the theme of migration have garnered significant recognition in Canadian literature. Critics have identified multiple dissonances in her perspectives and literary approaches, including migration, post coloniality, ethnicity, gender, and nationalism. This complexity in her outlook stems from her multiple displacements and her creative ability to

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articulate her vision and imagination. The review will encompass diverse approaches, ranging from post-structuralist, biographical, and cultural analysis to comparative studies. The review will employ theoretical, methodological, conceptual, and pragmatic frameworks, and its contents will be distributed across the chapters based on the specific topic under discussion.

Bharati Mukherjee is considered an American author even though she was born in India and raised in an Indian culture. She believes that her inspiration for writing comes from her Indian heritage, but she feels more comfortable expressing herself in North America. Mukherjee has written nine novels, including *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, *Jasmine*, *The Holder of the World*, *Leave It to Me*, *Desirable Daughters*, *The Tree Bride*, and *Miss New India*. She has also contributed short stories to *Darkness* and *The Middleman and Other Stories*. *Wife* is a novel set in America about a young woman named Dimple who is forced into an arranged marriage with an engineer. The novel explores the conflict between Dimple's Indian heritage and her Western aspirations. Dimple's husband, Amit, expects her to be an ideal Indian wife, but Dimple is not happy with her role in the marriage. She feels neglected and abused by Amit, and she eventually kills him in a fit of anger (www.myget.org/feed/vp075/package/nuget/).

Bharati Mukherjee's debut novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, exhibits the intricacies of the expatriate experience, particularly the dislocations faced by expatriate women. Her writings challenge the stereotype of the perpetually suffering woman, instead presenting a narrative of independence and adaptation as these displaced individuals navigate the challenges of a new cultural landscape. Mukherjee's works effectively capture the liminal space occupied by migrant women, torn between their native traditions and the demands of their adopted homes. This sense of in-between-ness poses a constant challenge as they strive to maintain a balance between their cultural affiliations.

The trauma of displacement and dislocation serves as a catalyst for Mukherjee's exploration of the female expatriate experience. Her works emphasize the need to re-examine the concept of nature and identity from the perspective of the immigrant. The idea of home, once associated with comfort, love, security, and safety, is transformed into a geographical location that represents both familiarity and alienation. Mukherjee's novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Desirable Daughters*, consciously seek to redefine the concept of home and identity in the context of the immigrant experience.

The Tiger's Daughter chronicles Tara Banerjee's journey back to India, her homeland, in an attempt to reconnect with her roots and rediscover her identity. However, her return is met with a stark realization that the India she once knew has drastically changed, leaving her feeling disoriented and out of place. The traditional poverty and social unrest she encounters shatter her idealized image of her homeland. Mukherjee's portrayal of Tara's disillusionment highlights the complexities of reconciling one's past with the realities of the present.

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Mukherjee's autobiographical novel, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, further explores the themes of adaptation and acceptance in the context of exile and immigration. Drawing from her own experiences, Mukherjee paints a vivid picture of the challenges faced by an individual grappling with cultural duality and the pressure to conform to societal expectations. The novel's parallel situations and autobiographical elements reinforce the idea that the self-imposed exile often returns to their homeland with a heightened sense of awareness, leading to a re evaluation of their relationship with their native culture. Mukherjee's works often feature Westerners who are captivated by the mystique and traditions of India. Blaze, the husband of one of the protagonists, exemplifies this fascination, drawn to the warmth and interconnectedness of Indian families. However, despite his assimilation into Indian society, he cannot escape the realization that his identity is ultimately rooted in his Western heritage. This highlights the inherent tension between cultural assimilation and the preservation of one's roots. Through the eyes of her characters, Mukherjee exposes the plight of women in Indian society, particularly the constraints imposed upon them by traditional norms. In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee introduces Mina, a Bengali wife bound by societal expectations, contrasting her life with that of the protagonist, who enjoys greater freedom and independence. The novel's exploration of gender dynamics challenges the romanticized notion of traditional Indian womanhood. Mukherjee's return to Kolkata, her ancestral home, serves as a stark reminder of her status as an outsider in her own land. She is perceived as an "other," a foreigner, her history erased by the passage of time. Her interactions with native women reveal the stark realities of their lives, shaped by poverty, exploitation, and domestic violence. These encounters further solidify her understanding of the complexities and contradictions inherent in Indian society.

Mukherjee's expatriation experiences underscore the disorienting effects of dislocation and the challenges of reconciling one's identity in a new cultural context. Her visit to India forces her to confront the reality that she is an immigrant; more at home in her adopted country than in her homeland. Despite her Hindu heritage and deep connection to Indian society, she cannot ignore the injustices and atrocities faced by women in her native land. The image of India she once cherished fades away, replaced by a harsh reality that shatters her idealized perception of her homeland. Mukherjee's protagonist in *The Tiger's Daughter* Tara Banerjee, serves as a reflection of her own experiences. Tara's return to India, driven by nostalgia and a yearning for her roots, is met with disillusionment as she realizes that the idyllic memories of her childhood are no more than fragments of a bygone era. The villages of India fail to evoke a sense of belonging, leaving her feeling adrift and alienated. Bharati Mukherjee's works offer a nuanced and insightful exploration of the expatriate experience, particularly the challenges and triumphs of women navigating the complexities of cultural displacement. Her novels challenge stereotypes, redefine identity, and expose the harsh realities of gender dynamics in both Western and Indian societies. Through her characters' journeys of self-discovery and cultural assimilation, Mukherjee provides

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a compelling narrative of the immigrant experience, one that resonates with readers across cultures and generations. *Hindustan Nights in Kolkata* presents a shared narrative of a journey to India undertaken by the author and her husband. Each individual offers a distinct perspective on India, providing insights into the complexities of relationships and the cultural barriers that often impede a seamless integration of past and present. At its core, the story has the concept of migration, shedding light on the experiences of new immigrants and the profound sense of alienation and orphan hood that often afflicts expatriate women. The author poignantly captures the struggles faced by these individuals as they navigate a world fundamentally different from their own.

The text eloquently explores the themes of identity crisis, the challenges of immigration, and the psychological impact of exile from one's homeland. It paints a vivid portrait of Indian expatriates in Canada, highlighting the sentimental attachment they feel for their distant homeland, yet simultaneously acknowledging their lack of desire to return. The author masterfully portrays the rites of passage experienced by individuals caught in crossfire of identity crisis, cultural politics, and the constant crossing of borders defined by language, culture, time, and race. She boldly attempts to break free from the constraints of national boundaries, all while grappling with her own sense of identity as a writer rooted in India yet shaped by her experiences living in Canada and the United States.

Similarly, Tara, the protagonist of *The Tiger's Daughter*, embodies the complexities of being Western-educated and simultaneously bound by traditional Indian values. She struggles to reconcile her aspirations for independence and self-determination with the societal expectations placed upon Indian women, who are often confined to the domestic sphere and molded into a specific feminine ideal. Tara's desire to forge her own path and embrace Western ways of life is evident, yet she remains inextricably linked to her cultural heritage, unable to fully shed the influence of her upbringing. This internal conflict becomes particularly acute during critical moments, as Tara finds herself oscillating between two distinct worlds, her private life and the larger societal context. However, upon revisiting India after her marriage to an American, Tara perceives her homeland through a vastly different lens, unable to fully embrace the traditional aspects of her mother country. The transformative power of Westernization has instilled in her a split personality, marked by the diasporic alterations that have shaped her identity. The novel *Days and Nights in Calcutta* explores the complex relationship between an expatriate Indian woman and her homeland. The protagonist, Tara, returns to India after seven years in the United States, expecting to reconnect with her roots and experience the vibrant culture she remembers from her childhood. However, she is met with a stark reality that shatters her idealized image of India. The Calcutta she encounters is a city plagued by poverty, violence, and political unrest. The people she meets are struggling to make ends meet, and the traditional customs and practices she once cherished now seem alien to her. Tara is left feeling alienated and rootless, her sense of identity fragmented by the clash between her Americanized sensibilities and the harsh realities of her

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homeland. Mukherjee's novel captures the psychological and emotional turmoil of an individual caught between two worlds. Tara's journey of self-discovery is marked by a series of disillusioning encounters that force her to confront her own cultural dislocation. She struggles to find her place in a society that has moved on without her, and her attempts to reconnect with her past prove futile. The novel's exploration of cultural identity and the consequences of expatriation are both poignant and thought-provoking, offering a compelling insight into the complexities of the immigrant experience.

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