



Portrayal of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage

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Abstract:

India is consist of culture oriented society, where patriarchal mind set is very prominent which does not provide equivalent place to women who occupies near about half of the population but still struggling to be recognized as a human being God has created with little different traits but not as a weaker version of man. With the growing awareness and education various works consisting the themes of subjugation, difficulties in adjusting in post and pre-marital status, domestic violence, social conditioning and the changing image of women in society by the writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapoor and many others have become popular but the contemporary literature is influenced by the impact of globalization, literary works are now crossing the boundaries of nations and cultures. In a new generation of South Asian female writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni represents the current group of writers, who are concerned with cross cultural experiences in its realistic way. In her writings, the characters with their shifting boundaries oscillate between different cultures and belief system is discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Identity crisis, Immigrant experiences, Multiculturalism, Problems of assimilation*

1. Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works chiefly evolve around the immigrant experiences that women undergo, their struggle to settle in the alien country and culture, their dilemma of new roles and the old beliefs inculcated through traditional upbringing. As a result of existing in this "in-between" space, the woman living in America develops an altered consciousness in order to preserve her own culture while at the same time adapting to her current American surroundings. Her women characters think more rationally, but they mentally retain some of the traditional believers, struggling to carve out identities of their own. Gender plays a crucial role in the way in which immigrants experience diasporic feeling. Diaspora is to be pulled in two different directions, the homeland that one belongs to and the land of opportunities and dreams to which one wants to develop a belonging. Their sense of nostalgia for the roots as well as their attachment to its traditions, religions and languages produce, what we call, diasporic literature. There is a constant craving for the homeland as well as to create a home in the new found world; there is an unbreakable attachment with the culture and traditions of the homeland countered by the desire to fit into the new one. So, diasporic literature dwells upon alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, and identity; it also involves the clash between the past and the present, between the first generation diasporas and the second, the basic concern for root and rootlessness.

Arranged Marriage (1995) is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's debut collection of short stories that won critical acclaim and has received the 1996 American Book Award, the Josephine Miles Award, the Bay Area Book reviewers Award and the Pen Oakland Award. The stories depict issues relating to the experience of South Asian female migrants. The collection has eleven short stories entitled "The Bats," "Clothes," "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs," "The Word Love," "A Perfect Life," "The Maid

Servants' Story," "The Disappearance," "Doors," "The Ultra Sound," "Affair," and "Meeting Mrinal." and majority of the stories deal with the immigrant experience and the underlying theme of her short story collection is marital relationship and the transition of the diasporic South Asian women. Some of them are discussed in this paper. Her women characters question the nature of their lives, and their roles as mothers, wives, daughters and professionals. This awareness leads them to rethink about their own lives as women, and ingrained in them the confidence and strength to go ahead.

2. Multiple Roles of Women Depicted in Different Stories

The story "The Bats" is an excellent example of realism. In the story mother is a typical Indian traditional woman caught in a social prejudice and victimized by social conditioning to be a silent, submissive, and voiceless creature who is afraid to free herself from her past and lacking the strength to move forward. Even the daughter is caught trapped between her father's cruelty and her mother's love. She is incapable to understand the reason behind the bruises that her mother has on her face which are evident of violence that she goes through frequently. Her mother's decision to move to her grandpa uncle's house filled her with happiness though this happiness lasts for very short time. The depiction of the bats being killed in the large number is symbolical of her mother's return to her husband to be abused violently.

In the story 'Clothes' Sumita the protagonist, changes clothes at different stages of her life symbolizes her changing characteristics which describes constant clash between her emotions and external pressures which results a new hybrid identity to Sumita. She wears sari at her home in India and migrates to America after her marriage. Sari is a unique and an important part of Indian identity. For Sumita it reflects hopes, her feelings and her thoughts. Her wet and yellow sari reflects her feelings about a new change which is about to come after her marriage and her immigration to America. The sari of pale- pink in color is symbolic as she thinks of herself in a new country with her partner. While blue and red are the colors of possibilities and luck. She continues to wear sari at her in-laws home as her Indian identity continues but at the same time she starts making a transition from an Indian woman to a western lady. The change in the clothes constantly and gradually indicates gradual transformation which takes place in her personality. After her husband's death, she emerges with a new identity; identity of an independent, empowered and strong woman. The clothes at different stages of her life symbolize her changing identity and at the end it symbolizes her embracing the western culture with empowerment and her freedom of choices. She finally decides to stay in America and work as her husband and she herself has dreamt.

In "Silver Pavement, Golden Roofs," Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has presented the humiliating racial discrimination in the American society. Jayanti observes that something must have terribly wrong with her uncle by looking at his scar. This story depicts the life of an Indian man who comes to America dreaming of becoming a millionaire. But he ends up as a garage mechanic, a victim of discrimination, he believes. The women are afraid of their fathers or husbands and are afraid to leave their homes in protest because they fear a scandal in society. Pratima Auntie tolerates her husband's abuses and frustration patiently, without protest. She is the victim of his anger.

In "A Perfect Life," Meera first rejects the traditional roles of wife and mother in favor of her career and education. When Meera meets a six-year old orphan boy, she begins to contemplate motherhood, imagining what it would be like to adopt the child and raise him herself. Caught up in her new role as a mother, Meera begins to function in both the professional and familial realm, and sees herself as fulfilling two distinct roles. She may be assertive and even overbearing at work with her American colleagues, if she feels the situation demands it, but completely submissive towards Richard and family. This capacity for 'dual' or even 'multiple' behavior patterns has sometimes helped Indian immigrant women successfully combine work or career, and avail themselves of new opportunities without discarding the advantages of a traditional value system. The "Doors," is an example of the cultural differences between the second generation immigrants and the Indian has gone for jobs to

America are brought out clearly. Indians are generally brought up in large joint families and there is minimum scope for private and personal life where as in western culture believes in individual culture. Deepak from India marries Preeti who is a kind of private person gets disturbed after the arrival of Raj for his higher studies which disturbs their married life.

“The Disappearance,” is a story of a mismatched couple and disappearance of a wife who wants to maintain distance with her husband. The story is about how modern women can detach themselves in the case where they are in a relationship not chosen by them but selected by parents. They do not have balanced married life. The husband does not even realize what he has done to his wife before her disappearance. He physically abuses her and the way he presents his married life and he gradually began to forget about the disappearance of his wife, indicates that he never really loves her. He recalls how he took down her pictures and stopped mentioning her to their son. Finally it becomes evident that she has not been kidnapped but she has willingly left them. After this he insists not to marry a college educated girl for the second marriage. Though he plans to lead a happy married life, but the fact that his first wife has left him always hinders him silently.

“Ultrasound” is a story which represents the current burning issue of female foeticide and female infanticide. It is a story about the treatment that an expecting mother receives after the disclosure of arrival of girl child. The discriminative approach towards women and girl child by patriarchal society is very much visible in this story. The inhuman attitude of female infanticide is criticized. It also criticizes the hardcore reality of how in old times the brutal system of female infanticide was being practiced and how the advancement of technology has changed the mode of operation but this technique ‘ultrasound’ is very much responsible for the declining ratio of girl child as it is misused.

3. Conclusion

The image of women presented in the literature has undergone slow evolution and in spite of only dwelling around the theme of self sacrificing, submissive women and their predicament the writers of current time have attempted the conflicts and hurdles which women has to face while performing duties inside and outside the house and family. Different shades of experiences presented through variety of characters where women takes action according to the intensity of deep rooted traditional value system. Some of them are successful to change the life by taking risks as the story, “Disappearance” represents while characters like mother in “Bats” returns to her problematic world.

In a way *The Arranged Marriage* is a collection of stories which represents conflicts and predicament experienced by Indian women living in India or abroad. It is a realistic portrayal of women living in India under the shadows of patriarchal social conditioning, their internal clash between the hope for change in life and their deep rooted traditional programming of values. There are problems of assimilation whether it is about post marriage adjustments or immigrant experience in the new culture. Sometimes they submit to the circumstances and surrender to the destiny and some of the characters are making courageous actions to fulfill their own choices and standards which help them to create their own identity.

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