



ABUSE AND COURAGE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN DIVAKARUNI'S
"ARRANGED MARRIAGE"

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ABSTRACT

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a writer who immigrated to the USA from a Postcolonial Indian background. Her works are largely set in India and the United States and often focuses on the experiences of South Asian women immigrants. Divakaruni's immigrant characters analyze the tension between postcolonial origins and an adjustment in new country. *Arranged Marriage* is Divakaruni's debut collection of short stories. The collection has eleven short stories and majority of the stories deal with the immigrant experience along with the social – cultural encounter that an Indian women experience when she moves towards west. *Arranged Marriage* includes stories about the abuse and courage of immigrant women. Divakaruni skillfully tells stories about immigrant women struggling to shape out an identity of their own in an unknown land.

Key words: Postcolonial; Immigrants; Diaspora; Women; Experience; Abuse; Courage; Divakaruni;

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a writer who migrated to the USA from a Postcolonial Indian background. Her works are largely set in India and the United States and often focuses on the experiences of South Asian Women immigrants. Divakaruni's immigrant characters analyze the tension between postcolonial origins and an adjustment in new country. Immigration has directly or indirectly affected several generations of contemporary writers writing in English. Divakaruni is among those writers affected by the corollaries' of immigration such as colonialism post – colonialism ad neo – imperialism.

The term 'diaspora' is used to refer to any people or Ethnic population forced or induced to

leave their traditional ethnic homelands. In the beginning, the term 'diaspora' was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the empire. In particular, undergoing diaspora means to reexamine the meaning of home, its different senses of where, what and home. Diasporean people find themselves restricting, expanding their new and old homes, their new and old lives and identities.

Much of Divakaruni's work deals with the immigrant experience an important theme in the mosaic of American society. Leaving India caused Chitra to reevaluate her homeland's culture and specifically its treatment of women. Divakaruni's

writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women. Her interest in women began after she left India. Her book '*Arranged Marriage*', winner of an American Book Award, is a collection of short stories about women from India between two worlds. Divakaruni writes to unite people. Her aim is to destroy myths and stereotypes. She hopes through her writings to dissolve boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities and age.

Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* is all about marital relationships. Many of these relationships are arranged, and almost all of them involve some oppositional encounter of Indian and American values and customs. One obvious thing about that book is arranged marriages do not work because they are based on an invalid and unfair custom. Indian women are also characterized by many limitations in Divakaruni's short stories unless they already are, or in the process of being, westernized. Many of the stories in *Arranged Marriage*, the women readily accept being cheated, dominated and sexually manipulated.

Arranged Marriage is Divakaruni's debut collection of short stories. The collection has eleven short stories, and majority of the stories deal with the immigrant experience along with the social – cultural encounter that an Indian women experience when she moves towards the west, which is an important theme in the mosaic of American Indian culture. Divakaruni skillfully tells stories about immigrant women struggling to shape out an identity of their own in an unknown land. Divakaruni herself is an immigrant. Consequently, she seems to have a first – hand knowledge and experience about life in India as well as that of USA. It is therefore customary that she draws heavily for the plots of her short stories upon Indian women, Indian beliefs and changing principles of the Indian immigrants, especially women as they are exposed to the western ideas and values.

Arranged Marriage includes stories about the abuse and courage of immigrant women. All characters in this collection of short stories are women of potency and energy, who in some way or other question the value and tradition of the age that has ended. Mita in *Clothes*, Aunty Pratima in *Silver Pavement*, Shona in the *World Love*, Meena in

A Perfect Life, Monisha in the *Maid Servants Story*, Meena and Ashe in *Affair*, Asha and Mrinal in *Meeting Mrinal* are women torn between two worlds. In all these stories, women protagonists constantly try to strive a balance between the old conventional beliefs and their new life in America.

In the life of immigrants, their longing to return to their home is not only to satisfy their nostalgia but to reclaim the past and to recreate a collective history and myth of their people. Through the antithesis of homeland and hostland, Divakaruni ventures to explore the significance of human relationship in Indian social life. In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni encompasses a wide variety of themes including racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion, and divorce. Divakaruni focuses her critical lenses on arranged marriages of Indian women living in India and India born women living new lives in America. Specially, the women in India are subjected to ghoulis, brutish and nasty treatment in married lives that they become a martyr as a result of their ages – old servitude. The tradition of finding matches by matching the horoscopes of the boy and the girl sometimes miserable fails to assure domestic bliss to the beleaguered women, instead the domestic violence predominates.

"The Bats" is the opening story of *Arranged Marriage* which portrays the pitiable plight of a woman who becomes a prisoner in an arranged marriage. The domestic violence is unleashed upon her each night.

THAT YEAR MOTHER CRIED A LOT, NITHGTS OR MAY BE She had always cried, and that was the first year I was old enough to notice. I would wake up in the hot Calcutta dark and the sound of her weeping would be all around me, pressing in wave upon wave, until I could no longer tell where it was coming from [Arranged Marriage P.1]

It seems she has formed an interminable alliance with sobs, sighs and tears. Ma bears with the subhuman existence as she has no one to go back to expect an old uncle in the countryside. After some days, she returned to her husband's place which provides her neither any relief nor any sense of respectability.

In the "Clothes", Marriage was fixed to Sumita with Somesh. She surrenders to Somesh only for the reason that she feels that it is her wifely duty. Somesh is trapped into the deeply rooted cultural bashfulness. He is very much conscious about the American way of Life – of impartiality and emancipation. Even though Somesh loved his wife, he is wholly devoted to his parents. The story reached the climax when Somesh is murdered by some unknown persons. This is an enormous shock to Sumita as she realizes that her life has also ended with Somesh's death. When she thought to go back to India, she refused her thought about India.

That's when I know I cannot go back. I don't know yet how I'll manage, her in this new, dangerous land. In only know I must. Because all over India, at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving teas to in – laws. Doves with cut – off wings. [33]

So she decided to stay back in America and to start work in Somesh's store. She visualizes new independent women in the mirror. Thus in this story she is able to reject the widow's cloths and position that the society and the family customarily imposes on a women.

"Affair" is an interesting story involving two couples – Ashok and Abha and Meena and Srikant. Like other stories, this story too throws up the existential dilemmas of the immigrant Indians who carry the baggage of Indian cultural values, which in the changed scenario of freedom and choices, becomes anachronistic. The revelation of Meena having an affair becomes the flash point in the life of Abha who begins to evaluate herself and the insipid marriage in which she feels trapped. Unlike her friend Meena, Abha seem to have good Indian culture. But at the end of the story, it becomes clear that like Meena, Abha too has cleared the gates of her vision. "It's better this way, each of us freeing the other before it's too late... so we can start learning, once more, to live" [271 – 72]. In Divakaruni's stories, the women frequently leave their marriages or their relationships in order to reconceptualize their notions of self and home.

"Disappearance" is another short story which gives the cross – cultural experience of

women through a feminist perspective. The protagonist and the narrator of the story faces a very difficult situation. In this story, the wife wants to be economically independent and wants to show her own social identity. When she disappears from the house, her husband searched to find her in all possible way. But at the end only, he came to know that his wife went out with all her jewels. Then only he comes to know that she left the house with her own interest to form her own social identity.

In the "Maid Servant's Story", the maid of the house had gone through all the sufferings throughout her life. Started from her mother, she was tortured by her husband, house owner and by most of the people she met in her life. When she was a good girl, everyone tortured her after she becomes a whore, people afraid of seeing her. Because of her curse, the whole family collapsed and they lost all their wealth and health. The quest of happiness and harmony, and the abuse and courage of women immigrants are what the characters in this collection of short stories have – Mita, Jayanthi, Preeti, Abha, Meena, Mrinal are trying to achieve. All these immigrant women characters face some abuses and also showed their courage.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes about what she feels strongly about and one of these is the complicated position of Indian women and their challenges. She writes about the positive things too, about strong family bonds and courage of people who finds themselves in a different world after immigration. In short, we can say that she portrays Indians in a balanced light. Like other Diasporic women writers, Divakaruni articulates in her books, the deepest tear and trauma faced by women in India and in USA and shows them as stronger and self – reliant women.

Divakaruni with her sensitive imagination, innate sympathy for human relationship, the awareness of perpetual binary of gender prejudices, man's innate bond of affinity with fellow beings, changed the stream of Indian women diaspora.

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