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## Cross- Cultural Conflicts and Diasporic Sensibilities in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The primary goal of this paper is to define the essential aspect of migration in order to highlight the suffering and difficulties that immigrants encounter by comprehending the meaning of the term "Diaspora" in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's collection of short stories, Arranged Marriage. The anthology features numerous diasporic expressions that the female characters must deal with. They discovered that they were caught between traditional and modern values, experiencing alienation, identity crisis, and cultural clash.

**Methodology and Approach:** A detailed reading of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's collection of short stories served as the research methodology. As part of her research, the author has consulted both primary and secondary materials. Qualitative literary analysis of Arranged Marriage is used in this study. The purpose of the paper is to investigate how migration affects the construction of identity using textual analysis supported by secondary sources.

**Outcomes:** As the research found that, the story collection Arranged Marriage attempts to portray the lives of female characters who are caught between the worlds of the East and the West. They are having difficulty identifying as neither American nor Indian.

**Conclusions and Suggestion:** The present study focuses on the main idea of this story collection is that the native tradition always peeps through the live of these women characters unable them to cope with in alien culture, leaving them with a sense of nostalgic pain. The voice for these underrepresented women has emerged in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage.

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Later half of the previous century saw the emergence of globalization and with the rise of globalization the world has shrunk. Now one nation can engage with the culture and community of other nation. This engagement has given rise to a new kind of phenomena called Diaspora. The term diaspora refers to people who are dispersed from their homeland and came into the contact of a different culture. As Bauman states, “Diaspora was increasingly used to denote almost every person living far away from their ancestral or formal homeland” (313). Etymologically, the term has been derived from Greek word ‘diaperian’ in which ‘dia’ mean ‘across’ and ‘sperian’ means ‘to sow and scattered seed’. For so long, this word has been used for the Jews who were dispersed from Babylon. But down the ages, the whole meaning of this word has been changed. As Braziel and Mannur State, “Diaspora in rapidly changing world we inhabit speaks to a diverse group of displaced person community moving across the globe” (8). This dispersal brings many chaos in the head and heart of immigrants. Cross cultural clash, displacement, rootlessness, and identity crisis are among these. As Uma Parmeswaran has talked about this diasporic consciousness:

The first is nostalgia for the homeland, left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is the phase in which one is busy in adjusting to new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is shaping of the diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have ‘arrived’ and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (Qtd. In Agnihotri 2)

There is no doubt that during the colonial period, Indian begun to disperse but after the Second World War Indian diaspora has emerged globally with a new perspective. Indians have created a new Identity for themselves in almost all the countries of the world. Indians have succeeded in making a position not only economically but also on socio cultural levels. Indian diaspora constitutes a major part of South Asian diaspora in the world. We can find reflection of this diasporic sensibility in literature also. As many writers of Indian origin live outside their country and also feel jolts of cultural assimilation. Their feelings and experiences

have found place in their writings. Generally, these writers encounter with the sense of alienation, rootlessness, identity crisis and nostalgia in foreign country.

In the literary world, Indian diasporic community has many popular figures such as V. S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, and Arvind Adiga. These writers share their struggles in a totally different culture. Not only male writers but women writers also share their diasporic consciousness in their works. Agony of female writers is compounded by the fact that they belong to traditional and conservative culture. When they migrate to a new culture, they feel push and pull between the eastern and western values. These feelings find place in their writings. These feelings can easily be seen in the writings of Bharti Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamla Markandeya, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1990), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Kamla Markandeya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1996) depict the clear vision of females living in foreign land.

Bharti Mukherjee is one of the great writers of Indian Diaspora. Born in Calcutta, she moved to Canada and USA. She writes about the isolation, nostalgia, and displacement of female characters. Her first volume of short fiction *Darkness* (1985) reveals racial discrimination in Canada. Her another collection of short stories *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1998) has also focused on the diasporic conditions of women. This collection has won her National Book Critics Circle Award for best fiction in 1988. Her novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002) focus on females who try to adjust in a new environment and challenges the traditions of Indian society. Jhumpa Lahiri, another well-known author of Indian diaspora. She is best known for her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) which won her Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Her debut novel *The Namesake* (2003) depicts an Indian Family living in America but longing for their homeland always haunted them.

Kamla Markandya is another Indian born writer but later settled in England. She portrays the images of women struck between eastern and western values in her novels. Protagonist of her famous novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) is

a victim of alienation and racism who has lived in London for decades. Divakaruni holds a special significance among women diasporic writers with her innovative writing style. She uses her own experience as an immigrant to color the portrait of her characters. She herself asserts in her blog “How America Made Me into a Writer”:

One of the most important changes in my life that came about as a result of my immigration to American is that I became a writer. In India, growing up in a traditional Family, I have never considered being a writer. I did not think I had a talent; more importantly, I did not think I had a story to tell. Moving to a very different culture and learning to live my own made me see the world much more clearly.... Sometimes I’m asked if I would have become a writer if hadn’t moved to the United States.... I couldn’t have written the same kind of stories, hybrids born out of the melding of the Indian and American Culture. (Divakaruni)

Her own experience with the blend of magic realism, myths and fantasies gives her writings an interesting twist. By portraying women characters in an alien land, she has given voice to the issues of all the real women facing this conflict.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning Indian American author. She was born on 26 July 1956 in Calcutta. She belongs to a traditional Hindu family. She moved to United States for higher education. She has begun her career as a poetess but later turned towards fiction. She has written novels, short stories, fantasy, and mythical stories. Her poetry collection includes *Leaving Yuba City* (1997), *Dark like the River* (1987), *Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), and *Black Candle* (1991). Her poems mostly deal with the issues of man women relationship in different culture, domestic violence, physiological and psychological conflicts of women. She is best at writing novels. Her novels include *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of my Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *The Conch Bearer* (2003), *The mirror of Fire and Dreaming* (2005), *Shadow land* (2009), *Before We Visit the Goddess* (2017) and *The Forest of Enchantment* (2019). Women have always been the center of her writings as she herself asserts:

Women, in particular, respond to my work because I am writing about them, women in love, women in difficulty, also women in relationships. She wanted people, to relate, to her characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will harder to project when they meet them in real. (qtd in Softky 26)

Her works have been published in more than fifty magazines including The Atlantic Monthly and the New Yorker. Many Asian American Anthologies such as Best American Short Stories and Pushcart Prize include her works. Her worldwide fame is also known from the fact that her works have been published in many languages such as Dutch, Hebrew, Portuguese, Danish, German, and Japanese. She is the founder of organization named MAITRI. Most of her oeuvre has been shaped by her association to this organization:

My work with MAITRI has been at once valuable and harrowing. I have seen things would never have believed could happen. I have heard of acts of reality beyond imagining. The lives of many women I have met through this organization have touched me deeply. It is their hidden story that I try to tell in many of the tales in my short story collection, Arranged Marriage. It is their courage and humanity that celebrate an honor. (qtd in Shelvam 65)

The paper focuses on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's first story collection Arranged Marriage (1995) which won her American Book Award and PEN Josephine Miles Award in 1996 and Bay Area Book Reviewers Award in the same year. In this Story collection, she depicts the lives of Indian born women resuming their lives in America as well as their encounter with a new and liberal culture. These stories not only present Divakaruni as a great storyteller but also shows her interest in the discourse of diasporic condition such as exile, displacement, cultural assimilation and cultural dislocation. There are eleven stories in this collection. All the stories are centered on the migrated women who find themselves in dilemma in terms of culture. Ten of the eleven stories are set in America. All the female protagonists are born and brought up in traditional Hindu Bengali family. These stories express powerful emotions that arises as a result of cultural conflicts. All of her heroines

try to maintain a balance between the traditional values and liberalism of America.

In the story, “Clothes”, Sumita is the protagonist. She gets married to Somesh, an American based handsome boy. Her happiness knows no bound when she comes to America after her marriage with full of dreams and desires. Sumita wants to adapt completely to the ways of America. She wants to wear western clothes and help her husband in his store. But her in laws who are still adhere to their cultural conservatism, think her desires are improper but Somesh is a husband who values freedom and thinks that Sumita deserves the same opportunities. She has many aspirations for her wife. She wants Sumita to pursue her education in America. He even buys Sumita a long brown Skirt and cream top that look like “the inside and outside of an almond” (16) because he wants her to wear western attire. But destiny has something else for her. Her dreams and desires come to an abrupt end when her husband is fatally shot by a person while robbing his store. Now she has to dress like a widow, clad in white sarees. She “feels caught in a world where everything is frozen in a place, like a scene inside a glass paperweight” (25-26). Her parents in law wants Sumita to go back to India with them but she refuses. She wants to stay in America and fulfill her husband’s dreams. She does not want to end up like a traditional Hindu widow who spent her whole life taking care of her in laws after her husband’s death. She remains undaunted in her decision. The variety and colors of Sumita’s sarees represents her awakening and development in life. She breaks all the tradition and becomes accustomed to a new culture. She embraces her independence as a part of her husband’s will by “becoming American” (32). Now she is not secondary identity but a cultural hybrid.

“Silver Pavement and Golden Roofs” is another tale in the collection. The protagonist of the story is Jayanti, an Indian student. She has high ambition in her life and has dreamy vision of America. She even hopes to “marry a prince from a distance place, where the pavements are silver and the roofs are all gold” (75). She moved to America with her aunt to pursue her PhD. She is shocked to see unkempt apartment of her aunt. When she faces racial discrimination in her

dreamland, her idea of an ideal state is shattered, “the American hate us. They’re all putting us down because we’re dark skinned foreign, Kala Admi. Blaming us for the damn economy. You will see it for yourself...” (43). By describing this scenario, Divakaruni illustrates the darker aspects of being an immigrant in America.

Next story in this story collection is “The Word Love”. The relationship between mother and daughter is the main thrust of the story. The protagonist of the story is divided between American boyfriend and her widowed Indian mother. The unnamed protagonist loves her mother and wants to disclose her relation to her mother. When she talks about her relationship with her mother, her mother disconnects herself from her daughter. She relocates and does not allow her to prove herself. Caught between the ties of Hindu customs and western values, she decides to live in America without her mother and her boyfriend. She promises to start over and build a new life for herself that will run according to her rules and be unaffected by anyone.

“A Perfect Life” is the fifth story of this collection. The ecstasy of maternal love serves as the theme of the story, which sweeps away everything like friendships, romantic fulfillment and even her physical needs. Meera is the protagonist of the story. She is successfully integrated in American culture and has American boyfriend without any guilty. Meera is one of the adaptable individuals that embraces the idea of hybridity. She is not like the protagonist of story “The Word Love”. She has the courage to declare her relationship with an American and separate herself from the umbilical cord at the appropriate time.

“Doors” is the eighth story. Preeti, the protagonist of this story, is estranged from her husband due to her obsession with privacy and personal space. The story also depicts the difference between Indian and American cultures in terms of privacy and private space. Divakaruni skillfully illustrates how cultural differences can devastate close relationships such as marriage in this story.

“Affair” is the collection's tenth story. The protagonist of the story is Abha, who is married to Ashok. Abha's best friend, Meena, is married to Srikant. Abha and Ashok and Meena and Srikant are two temperamentally incompatible Indo-

American couples who married because their horoscopes matched perfectly. These perfectly matched couples divorce after several years of luxurious living in America's Silicon Valley. "Affair" is a story about a woman's search for her identity. American culture provides a woman with freedom that Indian culture does not. Meena and Abha free themselves and choose American culture to find their identity. In Indian culture, a woman is bound to the traditional role of a housewife. In contrast, American culture gives her the freedom to make her own decisions and live her life on her own terms.

"Meeting Mrinal" is the collection's final story. Asha, the protagonist of the story, is an Indian woman who immigrates to California after an arranged marriage to join her Indian husband. In America, she lives the life of a traditional Indian woman, cooking lavish meals for her family and caring for her son. Her husband abandons her for a younger white lady. This occurrence forces her to go beyond her usual role.

Divakaruni brilliantly explains the immigrant's struggle for identity and belonging in an espoused culture through this story. Asha struggles to make sense of her despondent feelings and forge an independent existence in a foreign culture. The process reaches a breaking point during a meeting with Mrinal, a childhood friend from India who is now a famous businesswoman. In the flawed lives of Asha and Mrinal, Divakaruni depicts both traditional Indian female and modern Western female roles as having their own sacrifices, difficulties, and uncertainties.

In these short stories, the women are in transition, caught between a patriarchal culture and a world of opportunities. Arranged Marriage is a collection of tales that depicts women in various roles, demonstrating how they manage to balance these tasks while also illustrating the confusion that comes with taking on new obligations in a foreign country. The protagonist of "The Word Love," "Disappearance," and "Affair" as well as the widowed Sumita in "Clothes" all come to a physical and emotional release from expectations and pre-defined forms of living. By writing lovely stories, Divakaruni achieves her goal. She does a great job of portraying her protagonists as assimilating American society while



maintaining their ties to Indian beliefs. Some tales are incredibly depressing, while others are filled with revelation, and all of them are unforgettable.



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Vidhi is a self-contained scholar. She currently resides in Karnal, Haryana. She received her education from the Board of School Education, Haryana. She grabbed the Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship from the Board of School Education, Haryana, for her excellent performance in the senior secondary examination. She earned her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. She has completed her M.Phil. from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. She has qualified the UGC-NET exam thrice. Her critical studies include Diasporic Studies and Cultural Studies, Indian Literature, and Gender Studies. She has presented seminar papers at national and international seminars.

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