

Sense of Rootlessness and Alienation in Chitra Banerjee's *Arranged Marriage*

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, is an Indian-American English writer who traveled to USA in 1976 at the age of 19. So, she has firsthand experience of diasporic life. She belongs to the group of Indian English writers who appeared on the literary vista with a postcolonial sense of rootlessness and alienation. Her status as a South Asian writer in English writing is not only diverse but also recognized. The main theme of her writing is to express the life of the Indian immigrants in the America who feel alienation. Most of her main characters are young females who immigrated to America from their motherland India for the betterment of their life; but they face problems and are not able to adjust in the Western culture. She tries to show the reflection of Indian women who have tried to incorporate the foreign culture in their exile life but their culture and tradition haunts them always. In her works, there is ambulation of Americanization and Indianization. The transformation in characterization becomes lucid in her works. This Research paper focuses on the troubles and the problems of rootlessness and alienation faced by the immigrants in a foreign land through her important novel "Arranged Marriage".

Keywords: Diasporic, Rootlessness, Alienation, India and America

Chitra Banerjee Divadaruni was born at Calcutta in India in July 29, 1956. She received her B.A. from the University of Calcutta in 1976. She went to USA for higher studies, as she had done her Master's degree in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. She is a famous award winner and bestselling writer, campaigner and teacher. Her books have been translated into more than thirty languages. Most of her books have been rendered into films and plays. Her work has been published in more than fifty magazines. She started her career as a poet; her most important poetry books are "Black Candle" and "Leaving Yuba City". Her first collection of stories "Arranged Marriage" won the prize of American Book Award. Her important novels

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are: “The Mistress of Spices”, “Sister of My Heart”, “Queen of Dreams”, “One Amazing Thing”, “Palace of Illusions”, “Oleander Girl” and “Before We Visit the Goddess” etc. She has achieved great recognition and her works are published in many publishing houses. Her works are great and important. They reveal the efforts made by diaspora women to achieve authentic identity and to widen an assessment of patriarchal structures that arranges the life of the Indian Diasporas. Her own migrant experiences addressed in her works what means facilitate the Americans to observe the prosperity of India. They portrait how Indian immigrants can generate delight in solving the problems of alienation and rootlessness faced in ones exile life.

She gives stress on the immigrant women and their will for freedom. In her works she depicts USA as a place where one is free to accept or to reject history even though one can create a new history. Her works depict solitude and failed relationship as the part of migrant people. Her characters are always ready to take active participation in the exile life’s culture and tradition; but they are haunted with their own native culture in one way or other. They express their culture and tradition by their dress, food or by their home decoration. The most important cause of rootlessness and alienation in diaspora is the discrimination faced by the immigrants in the name of race, region, religion, colour, and cast etc. All these discrimination are faced by the main characters of Chitra Banerjee; as most of her protagonists are attacked by the whites because they think the immigrants of underdeveloped countries as burden on their so-called developed country. Her works confirms that diaspora is not only a spreading or scattering but also an understanding made up of collectivities and various journeys. It’s an understanding that achieved by who travels, where, how and under what situation. All of the emigrants of India who emigrated from their motherland India to Western countries face the conflict of divergent cultures, a feeling of rootlessness and alienation which is pursued by the efforts to adjust, to assume and to admit. Though she had migrated willingly from her motherland for getting higher education but she feels the rootlessness and alienation in her exiled life. She recalls her motherland India through her work “Arranged Marriage” and as a foreigner watches minutiae with impartiality. “Arranged Marriage” (1995) which has also won a PEN Josephine Miles Award and a Bay Area Book Reviewers Award, deals with the migrant practices, particularly of women at broad-spectrum. It mirrors as a reminder of her identity crises of rootlessness and isolation. She makes an investigation the relationship of women with common problems of intolerance, disarticulation, annoyance and chaos thus clearing the nostalgic feeling of rootlessness and isolation in this work. .

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, as an Indian-American English writer observed the plight faced by the alleged inferior ‘black people’ in a country of the self-styled superior ‘white people’. As she spends her life in exile so, she is aware about her personal identity crises due to her nostalgic feelings and hence her works echo with the sense of rootlessness and alienation. Her personal identity crises does not express only her individual feelings but

have universality as they generalize the feelings of all diaspora community. Differences between natives and foreigners in her exile life influenced her to found a hotline for South Asian women who were the victims of inequity, meanness and violence. Their pathetic situation of immigrant woman forced her to write most famous and an award winner book “Arranged Marriage”. In this book there are stories about women – women in love, women in relationships, and women in difficulties. The stories draw out suffering of each woman's struggle while trying to adapt to foreign culture. Through the characters of her stories in “Arranged Marriage”, she investigates the troubles of identity disaster, emotional seclusion and non- announcement, the practice of immigration, etc.

The book has eleven short stories based on arranged marriages. The stories are generally based on the woman side of marriage. The women characters are of India and migrated to America. These stories deal with the unhappiness in marriage that leads to an extra-marital relationship. It expands the different viewpoints of the people involved. Some of these stories are based in India and others in America. The stories bring out suffering of each woman's struggle while trying to adjust to foreign culture and to accumulate their arranged marriages. The stories also show as to how women flock lived their lives not just for themselves, but also for men flock. The stories have the cross-cultural themes. Some of the important stories of the book are:

Bats: - The first story of the collection, “Bats” is about the corporeal and emotional pains and the bravery of an Indian woman in America who leaves her wild husband and returns to her motherland India without any fear.

CLOTHES: - In “Clothes,” Sumita moves from a small Indian village to America with her husband who runs a 7-Eleven in California. She is firm to make the most of her life in California and incorporate with the culture over there. Her legend dream of California is traumatized when her husband is murdered and she is required to face the future on her own, in alienation.

SILVER PAVEMENTS, GOLDEN ROOFS: - In this story the protagonist Jayanti goes to America, with her aunt, for getting higher education in Chicago. In India she imagines that her aunt spends dignified and happy life; but in America she observes herself her aunt's poor and pathetic situation. She feels her aunt's alienation in and her rootlessness in America.

THE WORD LOVE:- In this story an Indian girl spends her life in Berkeley with a boyfriend Rex of America. She agonizes over whether and how to tell her mother back in India about the relationship. She was not able to make this friendship for more time because when her family members came to know about this they make objection to her for such type of relation. So, the girl spends her remaining life in alienation without having any type of such relation.

THE ULTRASOUND:- The story is about two female characters Runu and Abha who were fast friends in India. Runu got married in India and gave birth to daughter, while as Abha got married in America and gave birth to a son. Runnu wants to live with her friend in America

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because she has been tortured by her in-laws in India. So, she wants to alienate herself from her in-laws.

AFFAIR:- The narrator of "Affair" suspects her husband of sleeping with a close friend, realizing eventually that, whether or not her suspicions are correct, her marriage to an old-fashioned, judgmental and bossy man is troubled. Thus the perfectly arranged marriage goes haywire and after few years it culminates in a divorce.

In this book "Arranged Marriage" Chitra makes significant workmanships and portrays diasporic women characters, spending their life in two different traditions and customs, struggling the insecurities of exile life, and are curious about their identities. In this famous book which has eleven short stories, she highlights the pain and anguish of women and their adjustment to such pathetic situation. All of these stories have their specific message of diasporic alienation and rootlessness. In the most of the stories, she exposes with her talent, the stories of Indian women immigrants living in the eternal mental conflict. The main theme in all these stories of "Arranged Marriage" is about those Indian emigrant women who live in West and are not able to make adjustment with Western culture and tradition. The second story "Clothes", which is about the unhappy pledge of a marriage between a couple, is the discussion of mysterious horror of resettlement and amendment of the main character Sumita, who was with her husband Somesh at California. She states her pain and suffering, as she longs to see her 'parents' in her motherland. She wants to expresses her inner feelings that she does not like to go 'far away' from them; but she wants to suffer than to express her feelings for the sack of her parents as a faithful daughter. She expresses in this way: Would I ever see my parents again? 'Don't send me so far away', I wanted to cry, but of course I didn't. It would be ungrateful. Father had worked so hard to find this match for me. Besides, wasn't it every woman's destiny, as Mother was always telling me, to leave the known for the unknown? (18)

The clash of diasporic alienation and rootlessness are clearly evident in this book when she says 'I cannot go back' to motherland but she has confusion and chaos that she does not 'know' in which way she can 'manage' in the foreign land which she considers 'dangerous land'. There is also clash in her mind about the custom difference of 'widows' in her native land India and in her exile land of America. She expresses the joint family concept of India while as in America there is nuclear family system; as in her mother land the women respects the elder family members and serve them very politely. As she expresses this: That's when I know I cannot go back. I don't know yet how I'll manage, here in this new, dangerous land. I only know I must. Because all over India, at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings. (33)

In the story "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs" Jayanti who has immigrated to America willingly but she does not expect what she viewed with her own eyes there as a foreigner. She narrates an episode of her life when a group of wild boys yelled at her and her

aunt Pratima with racially prejudiced disgraces and assaulted them. Jayanti, who was arrogant for being an upper class Indian who are mostly respected in India but are abused in America. She express this incident of her life as : Now the others take up the word, chanting it in high singsong voices that have not broken yet, nigger, nigger, until I want to scream, or weep. Or laugh, because can't they see that I'm not black at all but an Indian girl of good family? (51) So, an immigrant person like Jayanti is forced to live between two worlds: the motherland and exile land, the unreal and the factual, the earlier period and the current, and the practical and the material.

In the Western society there one feels isolation and loneliness, because there one has to spend life in isolation. As in the story "Affair", Abha narrates the story about Meena, who was her close friend. She was not able to make proper adjustment in America because she found herself friendless and secluded in the over- attachment of specialized obligations of her husband, Srikant. Abha narrates the story about her friend who feels upset in America due to the isolated atmosphere as: I hated being alone in the house. It was so deathly quiet, not like India, where something's always going on – Street vendors, servants, and people dropping into gossip (239). Meena feels too much isolation when nobody takes her care after her first miscarriage; she feels the difference between the care taken in her motherland India and in exile land of America. She wants to keep some type of relation with someone so that she will express her pain and suffering from her inner to outer; so she comes close to Ashok, who is the husband of Abha. This relation is expressed by her as: that was another bond that held us close, unspoken sorrow of being childless" (ibid). So, Meena expresses her all emotions and feelings to Ashok, Abha's husband, without a care and fear as she wants to conquer her anguish and anxiety. She does not bother about Abha who felt pain and isolation because her husband does not take her heed. She feels 'sleepless' and sheds tears in the whole night. She exposes her heart in this way: "I wondered how many women were lying sleepless like me, through the night dark, eyes burning tears that wouldn't come, because their husbands were having affairs with their best friends". (265)

In shot, it is clear from above that Banerjee's "Arranged Marriage" is set in America but has the story of Indian women who suffers in America due to isolation and nostalgic feelings about their mother land. The stories of the book "Arranged Marriage", deal with different subjects such as racial discrimination, interracial dealings, financial difference, abortion, and break up etc.

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