Realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Arranged Marriage

Jasmine Fernandez,
Guest Faculty, Department of Humanities, CUSAT, Kerala.

Abstract: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author, born in Calcutta, who spent the first nineteen years of her life in India. Divakaruni has won a readership for her poetry and fiction of immigrant life in the US which takes us into the female psyche and interruption through real forms of violence. Her spatial and geographical boundary is always the immigrants to the US. Divakaruni’s works captures the female caught in the closed up Indian society who once crossing the Lakshman Rekha of marriage is deemed to be a passive victim suffering in silence both at home land and abroad. Her woman character becomes the centre for stories of dislocation- geographical and emotional, recollected narratives of mother and daughter and narratives of women who accept change.

I. Introduction:

Divakaruni is a much celebrated diaspora writer whose preoccupation is to deal with realism faced by the immigrant women and women in traditional Indian society, unlike the other writers. This is evident from her stories like The Bats, Clothes, Maid Servants story, ultrasound, Meeting Mrinal which has Calcutta as its geographical locus and Silver Pavement, A Perfect Life, Doors, Affairs which has the US as its geographical setting. Divakaruni, by painting the lives of the women in detail, points to the realities of life after marriage: most of these women who became dislocated both geographically and emotionally. They become institutions of passive suffering both in India and abroad alike. Marriage mostly undoes women, and they are brutalized and marginalized and becomes victims of a patriarchal society in India. For those abroad find themselves dissatisfied with their new lives because of the clash of the opposite cultures and the constant thought of being trapped in an atmosphere which they are not wholly ready to accept because of a sense of hypocrisy. As a feminist writer, she could see them as her neighbours and could sympathize with them in their little joys, sorrows, and could reveal the pretty selfishness and strong bond which dominates human life, the harsh realities faced by Indian women once they are married, and the brutality and inescapability from the patriarchal society’s glaring and determining their rights as human. Even if the women wanted to escape the institution of marriage, she has no choice but to stay as a passive sufferer.

On close analysis of her Indian women abroad a trace of the trapped feelings of these women becomes evident which sometimes even destroy their ‘self’ too. Culture for them can never be equated with the more free and open western women. A sense of guilt predominates once they abandon their native culture. The real life dilemma and troubles of the immigrants are captured in vivid detail.

As a realist Divakaruni copied their customs, institutions, traditions, beliefs, superstitions, myths etc. into her stories. It is worth keeping in mind what realism means. To adapt, M.H. Abrams’s definitions of realistic fiction, “represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evolving the sense that its characters might in fact exist and such things might well happen”.

The story “The Bats” is an excellent example of this realism. The mother is a typical Indian woman stuck up in the web of social stigma and prejudice that she finds it difficult to shed off the past and move towards a renewed life and vision away from the patriarchal society. The young child, a girl (daughter) is caught between an abusive and cruel father and a helpless mother. The young girl for then realized that her “mother cried a lot” and faced the trauma each night of disturbed sleep and sees the sound of her mother crying “the sound of her weeping would be all around me, pressing in wave upon wave, until I would no longer tell where it was coming from”. Divakaruni vividly portrays the child’s incapacity to understand her mother’s agony initially and why her mother had to share her narrow child’s bed. The child’s gradual understanding and apprehension of her father figure who never gives any affection for her. “I didn’t see him much. I heard him, through shouts that shook the walls of my bedroom like they were paper, the sounds of falling dishes”. For this child well acquainted with the draconian father it is not very hard to discern the foggy and painful life of her mother, she understands the cause of her mother’s blotch that appeared after nights of falling dishes and sounds. So at the mere suggestion of her mother to escape to their grandpa uncle’s house brings a thrill into her heart. Though this escapade was a short lived, it was a life of unending happiness.

“Grandpa Uncle soon became my best friend. All day I would follow him around as he went about his job which was taking care of the Zamindar’s orchard. He taught me all the names of trees – mango, lichee, kul –
II. Conclusion

The arranged marriage was a collection of realistic stories dealing with the personal and social difficulties of Indian women living in the USA and Calcutta. In one of her interviews she says “First, I believe a writer should draw fresh boundaries and I wanted to try something new”.

In one of the reviews by the San Francisco Chronicle it says “beautifully told stories of transformed lives. Both liberated and trapped by cultural changes on both sides of the ocean, these women, struggle fiercely to carve out an identity of their own”. (San Francisco Chronicle).
In Arranged Marriage, Divakaruni “beautifully tells stories about the immigrant brides who are struggling to carve out and identity of their own.” (Holf 1). Realistic setting of the geographical area Calcutta and USA, enlivens the characters and bring the city with its colours dust and rivers, the old folk tales and customs all pass before the readers like a motion picture. The joy of marriage bells and the anxious family all bring life to the stories Arranged Marriage.

Works Cited