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To Be Here or There : The Portrayal of in-betweenness in Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage

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Abstract

To be in diaspora means to be in a state of unbelongingness, to be at a place which doesn't feel at home. Diaspora is caused by displacement. The connection to the homeland is never fully broken but different relations are erected. The attachment to the traditions, culture and language of the native country gives birth to the feeling of alienation in the foreign country. The never ending urge to go back to homeland or the roots, has given rise to this form of literature which is called Diasporic literature. Diaspora has served as a ruling theme in poems, short stories, travelogues, essays and novels in Post colonial literature.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is among the foremost writers in Diasporic literature. Her works depict immigrant experience especially with a female's perspective. Being an immigrant herself she has narrated the female consciousness in foreign land in all its colours. This paper focuses on her novel Arranged Marriage, it tries to analyse the diasporic apprehension with the vital changes occurring to the leading characters Anju and Sudha after moving to America.

This age of globalisation has given rise to many phenomenons like: transnationals, expatriates, migrants, hybrids and diasporas. All these terms have become synonymous to each other because a very thin line of difference is among them. Dislocation of an

individual to any foreign land can be considered as a break from the old identity and culture which creates a problem in assimilation with the new place.

“...intensification in the creation of diverse diaspora populations in many locations, who are engaged in complex interpersonal and intercultural relationships with both their host societies and their societies of origin” (Tambiah 2000: 163)

Literature of Diaspora is a broad concept full of emotions like isolation, alienation, rootlessness, quest for identity, problems in assimilation, all these lead to identity crisis which ultimately gives rise to concept of Trishanku. The metaphor of Trishanku is used for people who live in a position of in-betweenness or it is often used for the immigrants. Frederick Monica has given the name Trishanku to diasporic community. This word has its origin from Indian mythology. She has called diasporic people Trishanku because this uneasy pull between two cultures seemed to her like Trishanku's curse. As found in Indian mythology; Trishanku wanted to reach heaven but in his mortal state. He asked for help from sage Viswamitra and he was propelled skyward with his yogic powers. But he was denied entry into heaven because nobody can enter heaven with their living body. With no hope of further success he came back to earth, but earth refused too to accept him, saying she would grant entry to nobody once they leave the earth. Viswamitra, meanwhile seeing this as a challenge to his own yogic powers, kept Trishanku in motion. The diasporic community too is swinging between the host contry and new country because they have not freed themselves fully from the native land and on the other hand they can not adapt the foreign land at once. At the end they belong to nowhere.

Uma Parmeswaran, a noted Indo-Canadian writer has highlighted the diasporic consciousness as follows: *The first is nostalgia for the homeland, left behind mingled with fear in strange land. The second is a phase in which one is so busy in adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethno-culture issues. The fourth is when they have arrived and started participating in the larger world of politics and national issues.* (1998: 108)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharti Mukherjee, Jumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander, Anita Desai, Meera Sayal, Sunetra Gupta, Anjana Appanchana are some of the renowned Indian female writers who have coloured the horizen of Diasporic literature with myriad shades.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni holds a prominent place in highlighting the female experience of immigration.

“Women in particular respond to my work because I’m writing about them women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships. I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to be prejudiced when they meet them in real life.”

Divakaruni portrays Most of her characters as being adventurous and explorers instead of being refugees and outcasts. The female characters in her novels are ready to create a new history in a new land but their old tradition peeps into their present in the form of the food habits or even home decor. Instead of all the efforts of assimilation the racial discrimination faced by brown people in America elevates the feeling of unbelongingness. Through the personal issues she portrays the issues born out of immigration

Sister of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, is an expanded version of her earlier short story ‘Ultrasound’ in her work the *Arranged Marriage*. *The Vine of Desire* These novels evolve around two cousins Anju and Sudha Chatterjee. They both were born on the same day with a gap of few hours. They were very close to each other since their birth Although they both were born and bought up in same traditional family by their aunts, mothers and maids but they had contrasting personalities and dreams. Sudha was having beautiful physical appearance wanted romantic married life and children like fairy tales but Anju not so attractive in looks was a rebel and book warm dreaming of higher education. They were departed after their arranged marriages. Anju moved to America India while Sudha was in India. But the physical distance could not affect their love for each other. Sudha had a feeling of guilt because the fathers of both Anju and Sudha died in a ruby hunting expedition planned by Sudha’s father. In turn she compromised her love for Ashok and married a weak willed man, who was in dominion of his widow mother and remained in India.

Anju was living a life of liberty in America like driving freely, studying at college and doing her outdoor works by herself, on the other hand Sudha was always busy with her domestic duties as a housewife. But both the sisters were dissatisfied with their marriages and felt hollow inside. Anju was worried about the mysterious nature of her husband

Sunil where Sudha wanted a child so that she might have somebody to call her own. Both the sister's conceived together but Sudha's mother-in-law wanted her to abort the child as it was a girl and the silence of her husband on this incident shattered her. But she kept the girl child. Anju went through miscarriage because of stress.

Sudha moved to America with the help of Anju. After moving to America Sudha could feel the silence between Anju and Sunil they only use to talk on few occasions and that too was about Dayita, Sudha's daughter. Sudha after separating from her husband didn't want to go back to Ashok also as she had experienced the life in America, now she wanted "A future built by women out of their own wits, their own hands".⁷

Sudha left Anju's house out of guilt after getting intimate with Sunil. After leaving them Sudha became a caretaker of an old Indian man who lived with his son and his American wife. The old man was mentally exhausted with the American life style. Sudha finally decided to take him to India on the condition that he would pay for Dayita's school.

With the story of these two sisters Divakaruni highlights the fact that whatever the reason of immigration may be but these migrated people face the problem of displacement, rootlessness, marginalization and discrimination. Being a female immigrant herself Divakaruni could portray the women's feelings realistically suffering through the displacement more intensely than men. Women use migration for their liberty and individuality as both Sudha and Anju did in the novel. Another character Sara says to Sudha that Indian society bounds women with marriage, children and servants so she came to California for her freedom.

American life style actually changed all the characters of the novel like Sunil meets Anju in a book store for the first time in an unconventional way in India, Anju's behaviour pattern has changed after coming to America and finally Sudha also finds a new way in life in America. But the Indianness could not be vanished from their hearts even being Americanized. All the diasporic community suffers from the clashes of opposing cultures and followed by the attempts to adjust, adopt and finally accept. The physical journey may differ but the inner suffering of all the displaced people resembles to one another so Divakaruni's *Sister of my Heart* and *Vine of Desire* are moving images of the state of diasporic community.

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