



## THEME OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVUKARUNI

**Arun Govinidrao Mitragotri**

**HOD (English) Ch. Shivaji Night College, Solapur.**



### ABSTRACT:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the leading writers of the diasporic literature. She has written seven novels, numerous stories, Anthologies and poems. Many of her works deal with the immigrant experiences, especially of women in general. She highlights diasporic women protagonists, living in two cultures, their delineation, isolation, exile, mental trauma, dispersion, dislocation at the level of diasporic consciousness particularly. Her themes include women, immigration, the South Asian experience, history, myth, magical realism and diversity. She writes for adults and children. Two novels, *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart*, have been made into films. Her short stories, *Arranged Marriage*, won an American Book Award. Gender issues find primary representation in the novels and short stories of Divakaruni. Her novels feature Indian-born women torn between old and new world values. These women characters change identities many times to arrive at a final definition of their self-hood. These women evolve different strategies to assert their individuality and act independently with a sense of freedom and conviction. She gives more importance to women characters.

**KEY WORDS:** Diasporic, Immigrant, Alienation, hybridity, ambivalence, transcultural, centrality

### INTRODUCTION:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author and novelists. Her work is widely known as she has been published in the Magazines. Some of the Selected fiction like- *Arranged Marriage: Stories* (1995), *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), and *The Palace of Illusions* (2008). The first Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Collection of short stories *Arranged Marriage* (1995) is a collection of short stories about women from India caught between two worlds. In the works Female protagonists nameless women in *Arranged Marriage* are delicately portrayed, credible characters. Divakaruni narrates the concerns of migrant women, depicting the harsh realities they face in leaving traditional India for a supposedly better life in the "liberal" West. In the *Arranged Marriage* contains detailed references to Indian clothing, food, festivals and religious practices. Some of the her characters bring these customs to the united States, asking American Society recognize the traditions of diasporic communities and so enrich itself. In this Works establishes the theme of female itinerancy that *Mistress of Spices* collects the issues of the racism and assimilation into new societies. The main theorists of Diaspora are Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. These theorists are also the exponents of 'Colonialism' and 'Postcolonialism'. But while colonialism refer to the political and historical aspects of country. The diasporic theory is more preoccupied with the question of centrality, hybridity, ambience, transculturation of the people. Diasporic writings is concerned with what Edward Said calls "not only of basic geographical distinction but also a whole sense of interests" (12).

In her novels she has explored the physical and psychological tensions and the tortures to which the immigrant women are subjected. She has represented women as actively upholding and shaping class, cultural and gender structures within the community, home and marriage. The search for identity is a major element we find in the delineation of her female characters. She deals with the lives of women both at home and abroad. Even when they visit abroad they face the same gender issues. For them a foreign land has not yet changed their status much. Some people fight against this drawback and carve their identity and escape the drudgery. Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* (1995), is a collection of short stories. It deals with conflicts arising out of love, chronicles the assimilation and rebellion that Indian born girls and women in America undergo as they balance old treasured beliefs and surprising new desires. The collection has eleven short stories, and majority of the stories deal with the immigrant experience along with the socio-cultural encounter that an Indian experiences when he moves towards the west, which is an important theme in the mosaic of American Indian culture. The author skillfully tells stories about immigrant Indians who are both modern as well as trapped by cultural transformation, who are struggling to shape out an identity of their own in an unknown land. The book addresses issues such as racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion, and divorce. The book is awarded the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Prize for Fiction, the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award for Fiction, and an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation. The women characters in the short stories are portrayed as the victims in the hands of men and society. They are suppressed in various ways. The woman in the short story *The Bats* appears as a victim of a man who frequently comes home drunk. He batters his wife so that she has marks and scars on her face as described by her daughter, "A couple of days later mother had another mark on her face, even bigger and reddish-blue. It was on the side of her forehead and made her face look lopsided" (AM 3). In this story both the mother and daughter are the victims of men. They are silent sufferers in this drama of male oppression. The women are physically weak and financially insecure. They dare not fight for freedom and also they don't know how to survive without the support of the man. The women are either afraid of their father or husband. They do not want to go away from their homes because people will be spreading false propaganda on them.

The story, *Silver pavements, Golden Roof* which is set in Chicago, depicts the life of an Indian man who comes to America dreaming of becoming a millionaire but he ends up his life as a garage mechanic. He shows his frustration on his wife Pratima who tolerates her husband's abuses and frustration patiently, without protest and without saying a word as a traditional Indian wife. When her relative Jayanti has come to the United States, she stays with her aunt Pratima and uncle. One day she persuades her aunt Pratima to go for a walk with her. Unfortunately some boys follow them and throw slush on their faces. When they escape from the boy and There are many women characters in *Mistress of spices*. Divakaruni demonstrates the suppressed identity of women through the character of Ahuja's wife. The first character Ahuja's wife comes into Tilo's store. She is young and beautiful immigrant woman. Her name is Lalita. Tilo wants to call her by her name but Lalita prefers to be called Ahuja's wife. Lalita's story is the same story of many of the women in India. She does not want to get married. It is only before three days to the wedding, she has seen her husband. He is totally different from the photo shown to her, which has taken years back. He has come from America. She does not like him but the wedding has been arranged to an old man. She agrees to marry him for the sake of her parents. She has to be silent with tears, as she can't explain her desires to her parents. She accepts him as her husband. Lalita's life after her marriage is not a happy one. Lalitha confesses to Tilo about her married life. She also tells that her husband is extremely possessive and harasses her physically and watches her always. Lalita is an apt example of the oriental culture, where a woman hides her own identity willingly in order to pacify the male dominance of the husband, by referring to her husband's wife. Lalita knows sewing. She has been to a sewing school in Kanpur. Lalita wants to continue to do sewing in America, after her marriage to Ahuja. But she has been denied of her desire, because of her husband's dominance. He has a firm view that his woman should not take up any profession. "Aren't I man enough man enough man enough" (16). She remained Ahuja's wife. This shows how women in general care for their family and how they are restricted by the society. She longs for a child but she does not conceive, "Child-

---

longing, deepest desire, deeper than for wealth or lover or even death" (The Mistress of Spices, 16). She goes for a check up and comes to know that the problem is not with her but with her husband. When she tells this to her husband he gets furious and assaults her physically. Tilo realises that Ahuja's wife is a victim of cultural apathy and male domination.

#### CONCLUSION:

The theme of the arranged marriage and its impact on women who usually have very little say in their matrimonial destiny. In the stories carefully explain the concept of arranged marriages can victimize women. Sometime happy unions too is revealed by the relationship between Sumita and Somesh in the story "Clothes". In the arranged Marriage depicts theme like –richness, freshness and nuance. Indian contextual point of view Indian weddings are so different from Western ones. In this story clearly indicate the theme of the Indian women and their often-difficult lives as immigrants. The portrayal of males in Arranged Marriage is almost consistently negative. It shows how complex is the problem of identity crisis that Indians try to cope with in a foreign land. Majority of the characters are new settlers in the alien land and at the beginning of their life in America, they find it extremely difficult to adapt to the American way of life, American culture and personal morals. In fact, it is a cultural shock to them but slowly they understand the realities of life and it becomes a question of survival for them. Women are still undergoing sufferings because of male chauvinism. To lead a comfortable life, adjustment is an indispensable way to everyone. When there is no adjustment there will be problems in the married lives of the people

#### REFERENCES:

1. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee, Arranged Marriage. Great Britain: Black Swan, 1997.
2. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee, the Mistress of Spices. London: Black Swan, 1997.
3. Sumida, S. H. (2000). The more things change: Paradigm shifts in Asian American studies. *American Studies International*, 38, 2: 97-