

Immigrant Feminine Experience in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the pain of Indian women immigrant characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni novels. She is one of the famous writers in IndianEnglish writings. Her works expresses the shade of immigrant women sufferings in new land. Her works surrounded by two worlds that is Indo-American struggling. Women are caught in the two worlds and which made them to feel hard to adjust in the new environment. It shows the difference between the first generation and second generation of immigrants; it also disturbs the harmonious relationship of family members. Some immigrants successful in the new land but some lose their life and become victim. Immigration nearly becomes death and rebirth. Chitra Banerjee's novels *The Mistress of Spices* 1997, *Queen of Dreams* 2004 and *The Vine of Desire* 2002 which explores immigrant women experience. It mainly deals with the agony of women characters that are displaced from India to America. It also focuses on the portrayal of Indian modern women who torn between past-present, desire-ability and tradition-culture.

Keywords: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Immigrants, Nostalgia, Displacement, Weakness, Deep feelings, Rootlessness, Patriarchal.

Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the Indian-American author and wrote about fifteen books including the award winning short story, the arranged marriage, the novels the mistress of spices, queen of dreams, sister of my heart, the palace of illusion. She born in India and settled in America. Most of the works are translated into eighteen languages and her two novels made into films. Divakaruni also writes for children. The mistress of spices was on several best books lists including the San Francisco chronicle's 100 best books of the 20th century. Divakaruni beautifully tells the stories about immigrant brides who are both liberated and trapped by cultural changes

and who are struggling to carry out an identity of their own. Her novels deal with the immigrant women and their soul struggle.

Immigration is a worldwide phenomenon in this present age which is an age of globalization. The educated and ambitious people displaced from developing countries to developed countries in search of better prospects. Some join their children who have gone abroad. When they are stay abroad for a longer time, they are disconnected from their families, relatives, lifestyle and culture of their homeland. It gives a cultural shock for the immigrants and it makes them feel lonely, alienated and isolated. Ti becomes difficult to cope up with new environment. Some of the people accepted it but some are frustrated. Many immigrants struggle to survive in a world which has no compassion especially women suffer a lot.

In *TheMistressofSpices* the female protagonist Tilo was a mystical woman and faced loneliness along with immigration in America. Tilo belongs to the first generation and run the spice bazaar in California. She had given many names in the novel and also had the power of mind reading where she becomes very famous. In island she met an old lady who trained her to learn the spices and their power. Tilo settled in California and sell spices to the western people. Through power Tilo was able to solve the sufferings of customers. In California she faced lots of problem being immigrant and fall in love with raven an American man. Tilo has transformed herself like her names changes in every steps of life. Immigrant characters lead a life of warrior and fight against the struggles to live. Divakaruni through her writings raised the problem of immigrant women faced in the society as well as in the life.

“You doubt? Ah. You have forgotten the old secrets your mother’s mothers knew. Here is one of them again: vanilla beans soaked soft in goat’s milk and rubbed on the wrist bone can guard against the evil eye.”(MOS 3)

Through these lines it shows the importance of Indian spices which sale by Tilo in as an Indian immigrant in America. The Indian spices made her to recall her traditions, native myth and values. The customers who came to Tilo to buy spices and their explanation remind her grandmother advice in childhood days. When Indian immigrant settled in alien country as they forgot their family and society where they grow up. They attracted towards the beauty of American modern world and lifestyle which change them overall.

“All day at home is so lonely; the silence likes quicksand sucking at her wrists and ankles. Tears she cannot stop, disobedient tears like spilled pomegranate seeds, and Ahuja shouting when he returns home to her swollen eyes.” (MOS 15)

After Tilo the female character Lalita Mr. Ahuja's wife. She also Indian immigrant took away by Ahuja after their marriage. Mr. Ahuja was born in India but settled in America for work. He got married to Indian women and never gave respect to her. After marriage his character was totally changed, and he used to beat her for every mistake. Lalita was a quiet and brought up in Indian tradition that never raised her voice against husband. Women are not treated equally in any country and their lives are controlled by male dominant society. Lalita Indian immigrant suffered a lot in the family and modern world America by her husband.

"I Tilo architect of the immigrant dream." (MOS 28) .This lines explain about the protagonist of the novel Tilo who displaced to California by pirates. Being immigrant Indian women Tilo had sacrificed lots of dreams for her identity and struggled to settle in the alien land. In America there was no one for her to support as born in India and lived in modern land it becomes a difficult for her to survive in the society. from the childhood she had never led a happy life where she lost her family, identity and remain loneliness, alienation and homeless feelings in the American country. Indian immigrant women found very difficult to settle down in the others country.

"Geeta who is India and America all mixed together into a new melody, be forgiving of an old man who holds on to his past with all the strength in his failing hands." (MOS 87).

Geeta was next important character she born in India but brought up in America. Her parents were settled in the America to earn for their survival. Geeta was adopted the modern culture and lifestyle of America but her grandfather came to meet them. Being an Indian man who totally against the American society their lifestyle dressing sense and behavior. Geeta's grandfather always holds the tradition of Indian culture. Even immigrant women are not allowed to go for job. They should get married and settle in their life.

The Vine of Desire 2002 narrated the story of Anju and Sudha they shown as victims of immigrant, marriages and dominated in both societies. Women in the different place, country, location and how they face the problem as an immigrant. Some way they react to the situation and stand for their own rights. Anju female character that married and settled with husband in America but it was new place for her to accommodate. The next character Sudha who divorced in India after marriage she goes to America to start new life with daughter Dahitiya. This novel explores the struggle of Indian women and throws lights on the pain. The immigrant woman wanted to establish themselves as individual.

"It's gone now. Demolished to make space for a high rise apartment building. And I' m the one who kept at your grandmothers do you know you have three

grandmothers: my mom, Sudha's mom, and Pishi, who's my dad's sister... sometimes I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry to come America."(VOD 13)

These lines explore the sufferings and experience of immigrants in alien land where they have to connect themselves to become the part. The culture and customs are totally different from their mother land and they have to learn the social habits of alien land the novel vine of desire parted the immigrant women sufferings and their dilemma to live. It has shown the vast difference between the Indian and American culture. For Indian born women they are roasted and hand in the mid of new and old world ethics. All the immigrants' characters in the novel had highlighted their pain, discovery and alienation in America. Especially woman goes through the pain with society, love, difficulty and relationship. The character Anju wanted to know about the American country and their lifestyle she read lots of books to clear her vision about American people but when she experienced it she find it painful to leave her mother land.

"So in my teenage years, I read things like Anna Karenina and sons and lovers and the great Gatsby and a room of one's own. I' m glad I did but maybe aunt Nalini- that's Sudha's mom- was right. They were no good for me... I read about it would transform me. But transformation isn't so easy, is It.?" (VOD 14)

These novels throw light on the immigration becomes so painful for women at the initial stage and life turned into several problems in alien land. The female character Anju was interested to know about the American country their lifestyle through books. When she became the victims of immigrant women from India to America which made to raise the question about sufferings in alien land. Anju finds difficulties to settle down in America because it was totally different from mother land.

"I don't know says Anju. You are too romantic about what goes on in America. There are a lot of silenced woman here. The no – money, no- rights rule works here too. And liberty. It just not as blatant." (VOD 156)

Sudha tried to get a good job in America to take care of her daughter without any support others. It was not an easy task to find a job in America as is immigrant. American people won't trust Indian people easily and they are ready to dominate them in every field. Sudha didn't know about the American people's behavior and immigrant women are misused by male society of this land. There are lots of rules and regulation to work in America advised but Anju to Sudha, it was not easy to survive here.

Queen of Dreams is the novel based on Indian immigrant Bengali family who settled in America but at starting they suffered a lot to survive in the alien world to be in safety. The

protagonist of the novel Rakhi struggled to exist in America. These novels explore the immigrant women pain in the alien country and missed their home country. It also highlights the generation gap between the women in the society. The three generation in the novel is immigrant mother Mrs. Gupta, Rakhi a single mother in Berkley in America and her daughter Jonaki. The second generation immigrant characters in the novel tried a lot to create an identity and survival. The women characters in the novel tried to highlight their fearless individuality to create. The narrator of the novel throws light on the lives of Indian immigrant women struggles through her description. “I hungered for all things Indian because my mother never spoke of the country she’d grown up in just as she never spoke of her past.” (QOD 35)

Mrs. Gupta belongs to the first generation immigrants from India to America. The major jobs of her to interpret the dreams of people and help them too aware of danger happen in the future. Her daughter Rakhi born and brought up in America but she always had the feelings for the motherland Indi. Rakhi was settled in America but had the strong connection towards her Indians. But Rakhi’s mother had always tried to keep the secrets of past happened in India and she had the ability to read dreams.

“What could I tell them? They knew her better than I did they knew her in her essence. Until now I would on to the hope that someday I would know her, ... I realized that it was never going to happen. My mother secret self was lost to me forever” (QOD 114)

This novel is based on east west encounter and story moves how women transformed and try to settle in the life. The female character Rakhi hangs between her life and death. The focus of the novel was on family, culture, tradition and relationship and how they understand each other. Rakhi’s mother death made to think and search about the oats of her mother’s life. Rakhi’s important relationship changed forever in the alien count. Rakhi’s discovery made her to lose in the alien country and she was not able to survive in the new world.

“Some wear western clothes, and some are in kurta – pajamas, but what I noticed most are their faces. Lined unabashedly showing their age, they hint at eventful pasts lived in place very different from this one difficulty and triumphs I can’t quite imagine.” (QOD 193-194)

These lines explain about the Rakhi’s pain and sufferings for accepting the other style and settled down. Rakhi always like Indian tradition and culture she had lots of passion for motherland. She observed the Indian clients in her shop and tried to maintain a good relation to know about the mother land. She born and brought up in America but always curious about the

Indian style and dressing sense. Though she adopted western style but not consider themselves as foreigners but Indian in alien country.

Conclusion

Throughout the novels the readers can find a longing for homeland or the past life mainly the women characters Anju, Sudha, Tilo, Mrs. Anju, Rakhi, Mrs. Gupta. All the lives of women longs for homeland and motherland. Women victimized of the patriarchal system of the country. There is a feeling of rootlessness, alienation and marginalization. It is well structured so as to arrive how the women characters in Divakaruni's novel encounter immigrant issues within the framework of Indian side. Divakaruni wishes that women need to be bold, courageous and independent. They can create their own identity, destiny and find out the solution.

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