



CONJUGAL AFFLICTIONS IN CHITRA DIVAKARUNI'S ARRANGED MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

Arranged Marriage is an anthology of short stories published in 1995 by Chitra Banerjee Divakarun, and it contains ten stories. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an immigrant writer whose stories deal with the life of Indian immigrants in America, especially women immigrants in America. As orthodox Indian women, they are unable to adapt themselves to the American culture, which they think has no value. Free society, sexual freedom, cohabitation, neglect of parents and elders are unheard of in India. This paper is based on one of the short stories titled "Clothes" in the anthology, Arranged Marriage. This paper aims at show when an Indian immigrant woman faces a big dilemma that is to adapt to the new culture and life and remain attached to her own traditional roots. When she faces encounter in America, she is shaken mentally and cultural conflict crops up in her resulting in a quandary in which she remains indecisive. Some women refuse to adapt and they suffer, and return to India or accept their destiny.

INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning novelist and poet She was born in Kolkata, India in 1956 and came to the United States for her graduation. She received Master's degree in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. Her themes include women, immigration, the South Asian experience, history, myth, magical realism and diversity. Much of Divakaruni's work deals with the immigrant experience, an important theme in the mosaic of American society. Her book *Arranged Marriage*, winner of an American Book Award, is a collection of short stories about women from India caught between two worlds.

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Disharmony in women results in conjugal affliction which jeopardizes their marital life, and their reluctances to adaptability endangers the existence of the very institutions of marriage. Chitra Divakaruni, in her anthology of short stories entitled *Arranged Marriage*, scrutinizes the reasons for disharmony in women, and the present writer aims at analysis of the female characters and their conjugal afflictions.

Marriage is a serious decision in the life of any girl and since it is a long term commitment, there are certainly many factors to be considered. One aspect of marriage in India is the system of arranged marriage. *Arranged Marriage* portrays all segments of people in the Indian society. The conservatives believe that marriage is a matter of fate. They may verbalize hopes about a girl continuing her education, but they take a much less serious stance in their decisions related to the girl's marriage. Marriage is obligatory for girls. *Arranged Marriage* is a collection of eleven short stories each story presents the tale of the life of an Indian woman living in America and the fate of her marriage. No two stories are alike, but together they weave a tapestry of transformed lives chronicling the experiences of India-born girls and women. The stories portray a variety of relationships between men and women and their success and failure.

The stories are well wrought and show the writer's concern for the lives of women, mainly women from India, and the writer's concern does not reduce the stories to a mere academic document of socio-economic, cultural problems and solutions. In *Arranged Marriage* Divakaruni explains the influences which act on Indian women. These women are effective tools in the hands of Chitra Divakaruni who portrays Indian women's struggle to gain an understanding of their lives, conflicts, strengths and weaknesses. In crucial situations in their life, they make important decisions for themselves because they are immigrants living in an alien land without the support of their kith and kin. The women portrayed by Chitra Divakaruni are not obscured by pseudo-sentiments and passions and they refuse to be hidden behind the roles and patterns set for their lives by their families and culture.

In arranged marriage, Chitra Divakaruni has proven herself to be an important writer of twentieth century immigrant literature as well as of world literature in English. Though the characters vary, the themes of the stories are essentially the same, that is, an exploration of the nature of arranged marriages as well as the bitter experiences of women against social traditions.

Mita, before her marriage, dreams of a handsome prince who will come and take her to his kingdom beyond the seven seas, but reality is something different, and her father shows her on the globe where California is situated exactly, where her man is awaiting her. Settled in



America, living in a cramped apartment with her in-laws, Mita secretly desires of fulfilling her American dream. That is, Somesh, her husband has to settle his debts in his business, and once Somesh makes enough money to pay the loan on his shop, and establish his own, they would be totally independent. In the meantime Mita maintains her status quo and remains a meek and submissive daughter-in-law. But late at night, she stands in front of her bedroom mirror donning the clothes Somesh has bought for her without the knowledge of his parents. The writer describes the pride of the girl.

I model each one for him . . . just like the models on TV, while he whispers applause. I am breathless with suppressed laughter (Father and Mother Sen must not hear) and my cheeks are hot with the delicious excitement of conspiracy. . . I'm wearing pair jeans now, marveling at the curves of my hips and thighs, which have always been hidden under the flowing lines of my saris. I love the color, the same blue as the nayantara flowers that grow in my parent's garden. . . I decide of joy, of my new American life. (24-25)

Mita's honeymoon and her joy comes to an abrupt end when one night Somesh is killed at his store by a gunman in an act of robbery and random violence. Soon after the burial of the dead Somesh, the Asian women living in California dress Mita in white and shatter her glass bangles, a part of the Hindu ritual of a woman entering widowhood. Mita is absolutely transformed from a glowing bride into a mourning widow though a widow delinked from her husband and his family, it is an Indian tradition that she belongs to go back to India, she should also return with them. But, Somesh had wanted Mita to go to college, choose a career for herself, and this makes Mita rebels against tradition. She makes her own choice as to her future path in life, and the writer describes Mita's mind:

I know I cannot go back. I don't know yet I'll manage, here in this new, dangerous land, I only know I must. Because all over India, at this moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings. . . I tilt my chin, readying myself for the arguments of the coming weeks, the remonstrations. In the mirror a woman holds my gaze, her eyes apprehensive yet steady. She wears a blouse and skirt the colour of almond. (33)

Mita's suffering and misery are extreme, but as a modern girl who has a short of initiation in American life, she takes her resole oddly unmindful of her in-laws' objections. The author's portrayal of the feminine sentiments of an Indian girl reflects the changing social scenario today in India and the west including America. The responsibility of finding a groom for a girl traditionally lies with the father. Marriage has been considered a necessity for a girl, and



only after marriage, she can achieve a place, and insure her security in the society. Adjustment should be the motto of a girl in her conjugal life. A woman's duty is to adapt her to any situation in which she is placed, even in new, different and disagreeable environs. Thus, if the parents refuse to allow her to work, she should adjust. Similarly, if she goes to live with orthodox in-laws, she should adjust to their ways.

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