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Image of women in Arranged Marriage.

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Abstract:

The main objective of this paper is to study the Image of woman in *Arranged Marriage*. With growing awareness of woman subjugation and education system, various literary works consisting of different themes like social strata, social values, woman subjugation, dowry system, woman abuse and domestic violence are written. Many Indian contemporaries of Divakaruni like Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur influence the readers to be courageous young woman. Their books encourage woman to liberate themselves from the conventional Indian system. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's characters shift boundaries and oscillate between belief systems, values and cultures. Her woman characters are rebellious, mentally strong, stubborn and adamant. The woman in her novels does not hesitate to liberate themselves from the male chauvinistic society. Their images are portrayed in a way that liberates the soul from restriction to freedom, both mentally and physically.

Keywords: Chauvinism, liberty, image, self respect, woman, marriage, patriarchy

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most successful writers in India. She is a credential activist, poet, best-selling author. In the year 1965 she was born in Kolkata and in the year 1976 she migrated to America to pursue her studies. In order to help liberate South Asian woman from domestic violence, a helpline is found it is called Maitri. Divakaruni is the co-founder and the former president of Maitri. Around Houston, Divakaruni has associated herself with many non-profitable organizations. She is a prolific writer who has contributed seven novels, two short story collections, two poetry volumes, Brotherhood and Conch series and many more volumes of writings. Divakaruni has many awards to her credit such as The American Book Award, PEN Oakland/ Josephine Miles Literary Award, Allen Ginsberg and Pushcart Prize. Most of her writings are based on the Immigrant woman in America who grapples against the hardships and distress of life.

Exquisitely written eleven short stories are present in *Arranged Marriage*. The Falgulike undercurrent of feminist image runs through the nucleus of all the stories. In all the stories Divakaruni has her woman characters as foci and these characters lay bare their inflicting problems, psychological conflicts, their identity crisis, their demythologizing of the womanhood, their rebellious angst against the patriarchal domination, their vulnerability, their self-independent and self-actualisation in their lives. Tandon says:

The most Indian women characters, as appropriately depicted in the modern and postmodern English fictions of Indian women novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Das “cannot be fully grouped with their western counterpart in their evolution from the ‘feminine’ to the ‘female’”. (Tandon 127)

Arranged Marriage is Divakaruni’s testament for the image of woman who sought liberation, right to self-expression and their way-out to individualization. Some of her heroines take control of their destinies single-handedly and some with the assistance of other woman. In the story “The Bats” the mother is a Indian stereotype who is sandwiched between the social prejudice and male chauvinism. She is a victim of the society who asks her to play the role of a submissive and a voiceless creature. She lacks courage to move forward and she is frightened to liberate her from the by-gones.

The daughter in the story is stuck between the love of her mother and her father's violence. Though the bruises in her mother's face are evident of the father's violence, the daughter is incapable to understand what her mother has been through and goes through frequently. They both move to the mother's grandfather's place but they eventually return to the father when they receive a letter from him. The depiction of the bats being killed in the large number is symbolical of her mother's return to her husband to be abused violently.

According to Anita Desai:

The Indian Woman is always is working towards an adjustment and compromise. Few Indian feminists really contemplate total change. Working towards and adjustment through the traditional role is much less drastic much more Indian. I think Indian feminism is more practical than theoretical. It is expedient rather than ideological. (Desai 168)

In this story a reader is able to draw a comparison between the life of bats and the life of woman. In order to safeguard their lives bats move to different trees, likewise most of the woman in the patriarchal society and women who are under domestic violence move to parents place very frequently but eventually they come to their husband thinking that there will be a new dawn someday.

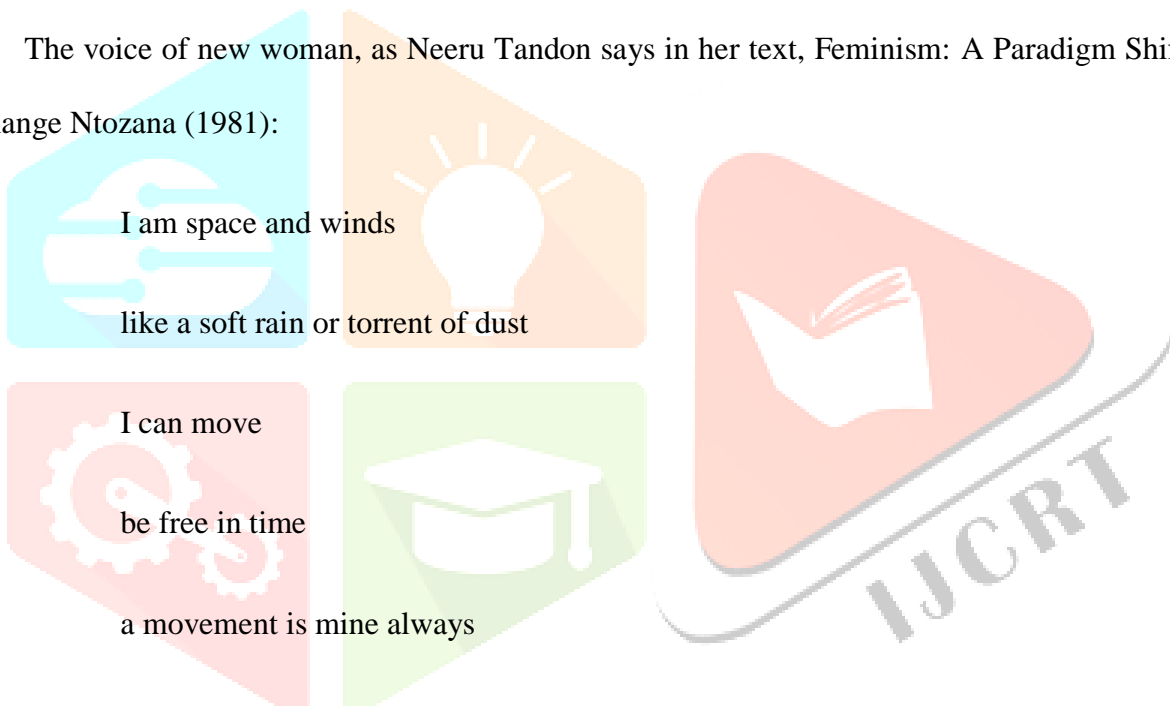
Like bats they do not know which place is really safe for their survival. The mother says "I guess they just don't realize what's happening. They don't realize that by flying somewhere else they'll be safe. Or maybe they do, but there's something that keeps pulling them back here" (AM 8). During daylight Bats cannot see but they have their vision during night. Likewise, the wife is beaten and abused and she sees and bears the violent behavior of her husband. She is blind to herself respect for the sake of society's talk. She swallows all the pain and torture and has no say regarding her life.

In her other short story "Clothes", Sumita the protagonist after losing her husband takes a decision to spend the rest of her life in America by working in a store in spite of returning to India. She is afraid of all the consequences and the names the Indian society would tag her with and the restrictions that she will be imposed with stops her from going to India. She is an independent woman who likes to live in a liberated

society. All her childhood Sumita listened to the values of fables, folk tales and stories of a girl who marries a handsome prince: “And she married the handsome prince who took her to his kingdom beyond the seven seas” (AM 18). She truly married someone beyond the seas but her destiny had different plans.

Sumita, after her husband’s death emerges as a new woman with new rays of hope and determination. Only after the death she rediscovers her selfhood. In the story 'Clothes' Sumita changes clothes at different stages of her life . The change of clothes symbolizes her changing characteristics which describes a constant clash between her emotions and external pressures which results in a new hybrid identity and individuality. Just as her and husband dreamt she decides to stay and live her life in America.

The voice of new woman, as Neeru Tandon says in her text, *Feminism: A Paradigm Shift*, is voiced by Shange Ntozana (1981):



I am space and winds
like a soft rain or torrent of dust

I can move
be free in time
a movement is mine always

I am not like a flower at all

I can bloom and be a wisp of sunlight

I'm a rusting of dead leaves and so familiar with tears

Alla this is mine

so long as I breathe. (77)

Runu in “Ultrasound” is not able to conceive after her marriage. In a traditional Indian society woman like Renu is considered as a bad Omen. The Indian society is conventional and it gives a lot of importance to values, beliefs, superstitions and omens. Woman like them are humiliated, “chastised, beaten” (AM 217). Despite having a rich cultural heritage, bad treatments like this form the darker aspects of the evil. Runu was taken to the “Shasthi’s shrine” (AM 217) to receive the blessings from Goddess in order to be fertile and conceive.

Soon after that Runu and Anju conceive at the same time. Anju says, “And now, to make everything perfect the babies are coming” (AM 215). What makes the story sad is that Runu is asked to abort her child when her inlaw’s are aware of the fact that she has conceived a girl child. Anju, Runu’s sister advises Runu to save the child. She advises Runu to leave her family and live as an independent woman in America along with her child and that she would take care of her. But later feels guilty for the suggestion she had given her and questions herself, “Had I taken all of that away from her by my misplaced American notions of Feminism and justice?” (AM 227). Here Anju insists on taking a new road just like the quote by Simon de Beauvoir: “She wants her womanliness for her own satisfaction...She has no intention of discarding them (it) when she has found liberty by other roads” (694-95).

In the story called “Affair” Abha is the protagonist. She is very conservative housewife who spends most of her time cooking and housekeeping. Abha is not interested in her husband Ashok. Meena is her friend and she is in a relationship with Charles outside her marriage. Abha wants her life to be like Meena’s, Abha yearns for love that is lost in her marriage life. She thinks of having an affair but that thought comes and goes off like a lightning because she knows that it is unfair for a married woman to have another relationship. She confines the thought inside her mind. Her role as a housewife with no love in her marriage seemed monotonous and meaningless. She soliloquised “Had I really been myself? I didn’t think so. All my energy had been taken up in being a good daughter. A good friend. And of course a good wife” (AM 69). She felt resentment for the traditional rules that served no purpose. She did not want hopelessness because “that’s not what I want for the rest of my life” (AM 71). Finally she mustered all the courage and bade

goodbye her unfruitful conjugal life with a parting letter for Ashok, which reads “It’s better this way, each of us freeing the other before it’s too late...so we can start learning, once more, to live” (AM 271-272)

In “Silver Pavements Golden Roofs”, Divakaruni explicates the bitter experiences of the diasporara . The story also encourages woman to be free in a free country. The quest for freedom is the major theme of the story. Jayanti yearns to carry the chalice of her life in America despite its diasporic dangers. In order to live the life she dreamt, She deserts her country, family and its hydra-headed restrictions to fulfill her dream of marrying a prince from far-away land and enjoys complete liberation. She says: Will I marry a prince from a far-off magic land where the pavements are silver and the roofs all gold? (AM 56).

The society has seen a lot of things and their replications are recorded in literature but as time flies, literature takes its stand in contributing bold stories to the society from which woman can take a stand to be courageous. Das in his article says:

The image of women is depicted in the literature has undergone slow evolution and in spite of only dwelling around the theme of self sacrificing, submissive women and their predicament the writers of current time have attempted the conflicts and hurdles which women has to face while performing duties inside and outside the house and family. (Das 21)

Woman take different kind of action based on the deep rooted stereotypes of the society and the conservative family background. These stand taken by women are according to the shades of their experience. Some of them are successful to change the life by taking risks as the story, “Disappearance” represents while characters like mother in “Bats” returns to her problematic world. In a way *The Arranged Marriage* highlights the true image of women under patriarchal struggle and social conditioning. Divakaruni depicts the clash between wanting to be free and surrendering to slaver, between tradition and modernity, between being meek and being vulnerable. Divakaruni says,

Strong women, when respected, make the whole society stronger. One must be careful with such rapid changes, though, and make an effort to preserve, at the same time, the positive traditions of Indian culture. (Web)

There are problems of assimilation whether it is about post marriage adjustments or immigrant experience in the new culture. Sometimes they submit to the circumstances and surrender to the destiny and some of the characters are making courageous actions to fulfill their own choices and standards which help them to create their own identity.

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