

A GLIMPSE ON THE SHORT STORY 'THE WORD LOVE' BY CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

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INTRODUCTION

The conflict a woman undergoes regarding marriage may be an arranged marriage in most of the cases when the choice taken by the parent's women find it difficult to adjust. Especially when her cultural adjustment is towards values and virtues women finds it difficult in searching new pastures. Hence Indian women writers started to pen down their feelings. Indian Writing has become a tool to explore the conflicts arising within. Indian women novelists have made the best use of this flat form. For an Indian woman to express her sexuality is to risk the reputation of both herself and her extended familial community, the two of which are inextricably linked within Indian culture. This close relationship between the individual and the community in Indian culture is based upon the communal nature of marriage as a social contract, not between two people, but rather between two entire families.

Keywords - Marriage, Community, Relationships, Culture and Indian immigrant.

CONTENT

The purpose of this paper is to throw light on the assumption that many of the women's lives are full of crises and conflicts between what they want and what they are. It is a universal social phenomenon that in any society, women primarily aspire for pure love and sacred relationships in life and marriage, but when such aspirations become mirages, paradoxically, they want to free themselves from such confusing relationships.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes with insight and consideration, in a language that is expressive as well as uncomplicated. In all her stories, she takes the readers deep into the many-layered worlds of her characters, the world that is crammed with terror, optimism, and discovery. Almost all the stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are known for their strong symbolism and others for exposing the hard hitting truth hidden behind the veil of privacy. Sensitive reading and sensible understanding is essential to interpret the meanings and the messages of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's motivating short stories.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* (1995) is not a novel but a collection of eleven stories, covering almost all the aspects of marriage, be it first love, demanding kids or the unsatisfied couple quitting their relationship to search for newer pastures. The stories are diverse in theme, characters and narration, and yet bound together by the common thread of marriage.

The diverse shades of man-woman relationship constitute the central pattern of narratives in *Arranged Marriage*. While appreciating the quality of these stories, the well-known writer Roshni Rustomji-Kerns says:

The characters in *Arranged Marriage* do not remain dazed into inaction by the memories and traditions of India. . . The lives these women lead as individuals, as members of a family, and of a society bleed into and flow through the main texts of contemporary American society and American literature. This collection of short stories reminds us that so-called "marginalized" and so-called "ethnic" literature... It is this literature which eventually defines, redefines, changes, gives new shapes, introduces new dimensions to American literature (Rustomji-Kerns 283).

The story 'The Word Love' depicts the dilemma of an Indian immigrant woman who falls in love with a U.S. born young man. She lives with him but does not want her mother to know of her affair with a foreigner, perhaps considering it a sin. She suffers as she tries to cross the boundaries of age-old Indian traditional cultural ethos in which Indian mothers can never marry their daughters to the Americans. The narrator uses the second person narrative in confessional mood. It is a contrast between physical love of daughter with a boyfriend and a spiritual love and emotional binding of a mother towards her child.

The story reveals the notion that sexuality in India is a suppressed desire. The narrator confesses her love affair with a man called Rex. She is brought up by her widowed mother who is traditional and conventional in attitude. She lives in Calcutta

alone. The narrator does not like to reveal her love affair to her mother. She sleeps with Rex and enjoys the lovemaking. Shobhan Bantwal's character Anjali Kapadia in *The Sari Shop Widow* (2009) too gets involved with a man physically and another one emotionally which she does not intend to reveal to her parents with staunch Indian virtues.

Every time she calls her mother in India and knows her mother's plans to arrange a marriage for her, she feels guilty for concealing her love affair. The speaker suffers from guilt and so begs for forgiveness. She remembers a story narrated by her mother in which a motherless daughter is spoiled by her father's excessive affection. She is given extra freedom by him. By the time he arranges a match for her, she is already pregnant. The father's heart is broken and his family name is ruined. So, he is forced to leave the village.

The Indian mothers try to preserve the family honor and so restrict their daughters from getting involved in sexual relationship. Having realized the enormity of sin, the narrator thinks of committing suicide in the river. She writes a letter to her aunt Arati and to her mother. But there is no reply from her. A turmoil which goes on in her heart eventually results in the estrangement of her relations with Rex, her boyfriend. She changes her attitude towards Rex and so does not cooperate with him in lovemaking. The letter sent to her mother is undelivered and returned. So she swallows sleeping pills in an attempt at committing suicide. She imagines her dead body left unidentified and uncared for. She knows that her mother cannot come to the USA to wipe her tears.

Finally, she wishes to go for a long walk. She laughs in a hysteric way seeing her inner self carrying an umbrella in the rain. The imaginary girl suddenly leaves the umbrella and stands in the open rain.

It means that the writer is tormented by the new and forced circumstances in the US and she is longing for some relief. Then a word comes from the sky like rain. It cleans her face and washes the inessentials. The story suggests that the narrator is victimized by the new culture in America. As she is an Indian girl, she finds herself in dilemma and cannot choose either Indian way of life or American style of living. The title indicates true love comes from above which cleanses all human sins.

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