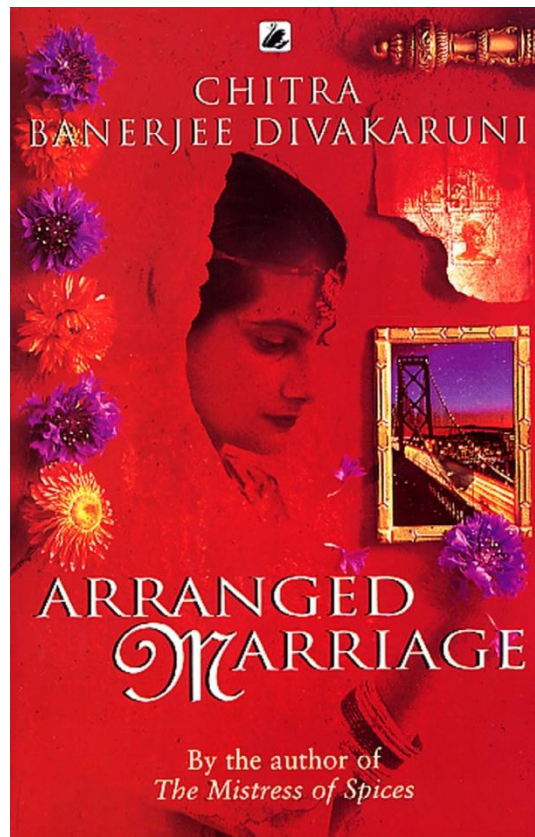


**Dislocation, Geographical and Emotional in  
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage***

**R. Phriyanga Dhevi, M.Phil. English**

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**Abstract**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author, born in Calcutta, who spent the first nineteenth years of her life in India. Divakaruni has won a readership for her poetry and fiction of immigrant life in the US. Her works take us into the female psyche and interruption through real forms of violence. Her spatial and geographical boundary is always the immigrants to the US. Divakaruni's works capture the female caught in the closed-up Indian society who

once crossing the Lashman Rekha of marriage is deemed to be a passive victim suffering in silence, both at homeland abroad. Her woman character becomes the centre for stories of dislocation, geographical and emotional recollected narratives of mothers and daughters and narratives of women who accept change.

### ***Arranged Marriage***

The book *Arranged Marriage* consists of eleven stories. Majority of these stories discuss Indian immigrants who reside in the United States. All the stories have been narrated from the first person singular point of view. Chitra depicts the experiences of immigrant professional people. Even women characters experience and fall victim in the hands of tug of war between two cultures. All of them are in search of individual identity.

### **Common Theme of the Stories**

A common theme of the stories is that Indian immigrant women walk between old beliefs and newly-found desires and dreams in the United States. The author who lived in Ohio had many such experiences as an immigrant. Divakaruni is a much celebrated diaspora writer whose preoccupation is to deal with realism forced upon and faced by the immigrant women and women in traditional Indian society. This is evident from her stories like the Bats, Clothes, Maidservants Story, Ultrasound, Meeting Mrinal which have Calcutta as their geographical lows and silver pavements. A Perfect life, Doors, and Affairs have the US as their geographical setting. All these show marriage as mostly downgrading and ill-treating women, and they are brutalized and marginalized they are become victim of a patriarchal society in India.

The women in *Arranged Marriage* are portrayed as strong and willing to change their situation in life but sometimes they do also feel themselves trapped in a myth of wife, mother and daughter-in-law. The relationship of the Indian women to marriage is one area which defines the complex narrative of gender, migration, ethnicity, and feminism. Oxford dictionaries define marriage as, “The legally or formally recognized union of a man and a woman as partners in a relationship”. On close analysis of her Indian women abroad, a trace of the trapped feelings of these women becomes evident which sometimes even destroy their ‘self’. Culture for them can

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never be equated with the more free and open western women. A sense of guilt predominates once they abandon their native culture. The real life dilemma and troubles of the immigrants are captured in vivid detail.

### ***The Bats***

The story *The Bats* is an excellent example of this realism. The mother is a typical Indian woman stuck up in the web of social stigma and prejudice. She finds it difficult to shed off the past and more towards a renewed life and vision away from patriarchal society. The young child, a girl (daughter) is caught between an abusive and cruel father and a helpless mother. Divakaruni vividly portrays the child's incapacity to understand her mother's agony initially and why her mother had to share her narrow child's bed. The child develops gradual understanding and apprehension of her father figure who never gives any affection for her. For this child well acquainted with the draconian father, it is not very hard to discern the foggy and painful life of her mother. She understands the cause of her mother's blotch that appeared after nights of falling dishes and sounds. So, at the mere suggestion of her mother to escape to their grandpa uncle's house brings a thrill into her heart. Through this escapade was short-lived, it was a life of unending happiness. The first story of the collection, *The Bats* talks about the physical and emotional sufferings and the courage of an Indian woman who leaves her torturer-husband and returns home with her child to India.

### ***Clothes***

The second story of the collection *Clothes* is about the unfulfilled promise of a marriage. It also talks about unknown fear of migration and adjustment of Sumita, the central character, who has to accompany her husband to California. She expresses her anguish in this way.

“Would I ever see my parents again? don't send me so far away, I wanted to cry, but of course I didn't. It would be ungrateful. Father had worked so hard to find this match for me. Besides, wasn't it every woman's destiny, as mother was always telling me, to leave the known for the unknown. (18).

Sumita's life in America is not different from the life by other daughters-in-law in Indian society. She doesn't want to go back to India, her motherland, even when her husband is murdered at his shop as now it would be more difficult for her to adapt herself to her roots than to live in a dangerous land.

### **Dilemma of Characters in Other Stories**

Jeyanti in *Silverpavements*, *Golden Roofs* faces the dilemma of being an immigrant when she migrates from Calcutta to Chicago to live with her aunt Pratima and uncle Bikram.

The story *Ultrasound* presents a realistic portrayal of the treatment which an expecting mother meets after knowing about the arrival of a girl child. The patriarchal society's injustice meted out to women and girl-children is poignantly pointed out by Divakaruni. Female foeticide is quite a reality in many villages in India. Though various social reforms and awareness programmes are not quite uncommon in India, not much has ever changed. General statistics proves it. The ill-treatment and rude attitude of female infanticide is questioned.

*Perfect Life* is the story of Meera and Richard who were in a live relationship. But a sudden appearance of a six year old boy in a rose garden upsurges in Meera her motherly instinct. She names the boy Krishna and takes care of him. Her life completely changes. Mother's love, that tidal wave, suspends everything else away: Friendship, romantic fulfillment, even the need for sea.

### **Cultural Contrasts**

The story *Doors* is a classic example of the contrast between the culture in US and the culture of Indians who are usually brought up in large joint families. There is not so much as private and public life. Deepak who is from India marries Preeti who is settled in America. Preeti is more of a private person and finds it hard to adjust when Deepak's younger sibling who comes to stay to do his higher education in America. But hospitality is quite different in both societies which results in a great clash between the couple. Preeti always likes her doors to be closed and needs a private space which she is not ready to share with her husband.

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In the story *The World Love*, the heroine starts living with a man. Love is a magical word and it is difficult to define it easily. She accepted westernization in totality and she started to live with her boy friend outside the institution of marriage. But here her past thwarts her. She recalls how her mother had taken pains to bring her up after her father's death. Mother-daughter relationship is quite different in Indian culture. She regrets for hiding the relationship with her mother. However she finally faces the wrath of losing her mother on confessing the truth. Her boyfriend on knowing her relationship says 'it was never me, was it never love. It was always you and her, her and you.'

In *Meeting Mrinal*, the last story of *Arranged Marriage*, Asha is envious to see her childhood friend Mrinal enjoying freedom of movement, power and economic security in England but soon is disillusioned of her perfect life, when Mrinal admits, "I was going to pretend everything was fine." The disillusionment about perfect life of Mrinal and the pang of loneliness and dejection in her own life made Asha cry. Asha has been divorced by her husband, Mahesh and he is not getting along well with her teenage son Dinesh.

## To Conclude

Conclusively it can be stated that the theme of marriage plays the role of a pervasive social institution which causes turbulence and misery in the lives of all the women characters one way or the other. *Arranged Marriage* is a collection of realistic stories dealing with the personal and social difficulties of Indian women living in the USA and Calcutta.

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