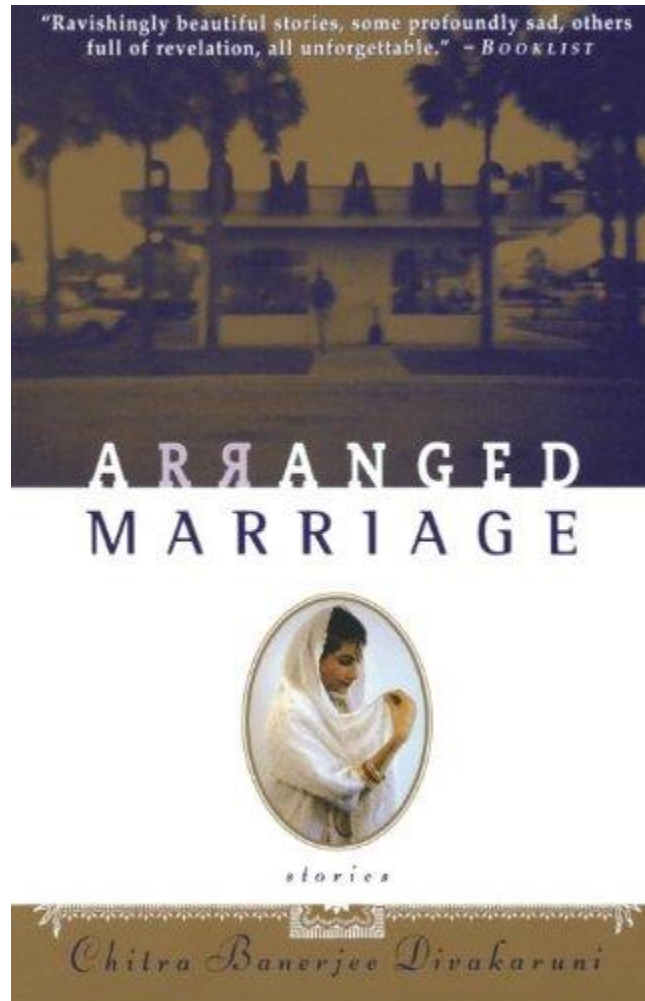


Expectations and Acceptation in
Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs

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Abstract

Arranged Marriage by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a collection of short stories where young women move to America for their higher studies. The author analyses the negative aspects of arranged marriage. The husbands, especially Indians are portrayed as selfish, insensitive, wife

abusers and unpleasant in the book. The female characters, however try to solve their problems and assert themselves. The characters of women are torn between the culture variations.

Jayanti, the protagonist in *Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs* resembles Sumita in *Clothes*. They are immigrants and they struggle to assert themselves to in the new land, America. They are put to trials and they overcome with their optimism. Their trial of immigrant status is akin to that of Sita in *Ramayana*. The new era of feminism avows to lead a happy life in spite of tribulations.

Key words: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage*, immigrants, culture variations in responses between men and women.

‘Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs’

Chitra’s story ‘Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs’ expresses the narrator, Jayanti’s journey to America for her higher studies. She goes to reside with her aunt Pratima and uncle Bikram. Bikram is a mechanic there and though appears rough has much love for his wife. She is given a tiny room “it is the same size as my bathroom at home”. (p.41) That tiny room is decorated with rose in a jelly jar placed on the windowsill by her aunt.

Insult by American Boys

Jayanti and her aunt Pratima move for a walk out of Jayanti’s compulsion where they encounter a strange sense of alien feeling and insult from American boys playing in the road. The boys pick a fistful of slush and throw at them only to shame. They return back home where they have to face Bikram uncle. He gets irritated when he understands the situation. The couple expresses their grief of being in the alien land. Bikram uncle pathetically cries, “...it pretends to give and then snatches everything back”. (p. 54)

Aunt Pratima tries to console her husband by saying, “They are just boys after all”. The dialogues given by the characters explain how gracefully they are ready for adaptability. The same way aunt Pratima bereaved by her feelings makes her effort to reconcile things holding her love for her husband.

Life in the Alien Land

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Jayanti is now in extremely new situation where she doesn't know what to do and how to communicate with them. When they search for the key in a hurried situation after seeing Bikram uncle when they return from the walk, awkwardly insulted by the boys, she says "It's all right, calm down, Auntie, we'll find it". (p.52) There develops a courageousness rather than distress in managing the situation. She is ready to find her new abode of living, understanding the alien place. But naturally a longing comes in for her, "Home, I whisper desperately, home home home", which is quite distant and beyond reach. Her dizzying sensation is as if seeing her distorted face reflected in the brackish water. The distortion is just temporal and will gain clarity by the passage of time is the message given. She is reminded of the significance being given in her native land where one may ask, "Isn't that Jayanti Ganguli, daughter of Bhavanipur Ganguli" if she walks out. She is not going to expect that in the new land even if she wears a nice new fashioned silk saree. But she definitely has her own dreams of marrying a prince in the magic land where the pavements are silver and the roofs all gold. When there is doubt upon her dreams she accepts and affirms that 'beauty and pain should be part of each other'.

The story begins with the dazzle – bright clouds packed tight as snow cones, which are 'deceptively solid'. But ends with her hand covered with silver snow that leads to hope in the face of new 'rerooting' in the new land.

"Clothes"

Sumita, the protagonist of "Clothes" another short story in 'Arranged Marriage', is an Indian girl, married to an immigrant called Somesh. She travels to America with a lot of dreams. She joins her husband in the United States, and discovers happiness in the new life with her husband. She steps into the new world with lots of fear and expectation. Her husband motivates her to go for a job. He wants her to be educated there and pick up teaching profession in the new land. She gradually fits into the new place along with her in – laws. But she is also daringly ready to lead a lonely life in the new land, America after her husband is gunned down. Her in – laws invite her to go back to India, their native place along with them. But she is ready to assert herself alone to bring in new meaning for her life, live as expected by her husband. Although Chitra has portrayed her as a weak character she stands as an optimist in the end.

Jayanti and Sumita

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Sumita in many aspects reminds Jayanti of “Silver Pavements , Golden Roofs”. Both the characters have many expectations which may not or cannot be true. The sense of fulfillment is attained even though they are in the verge of the negative environment. The new land gives them hope and courage to face situations in a worthy manner. They are not going to lead a sad and poor life in the exiled place. But they are determined to make the best fortune with their optimism.

Diasporic Bangs

“Unaccustomed Earth” of Jhumpa Lahiri responds to the diasporic pangs of the migrants. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* “The Custom-House” he writes:

Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces and so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth. (302)

Stories Which Examine the Life of Expatriate Bengalis and Their Children

We have eight stories which examine the life of expatriate Bengalis and their children in the foreign soil. It takes the diasporic realities into account, including the increasingly multiethnic character of life in the US and the conflicts and dilemmas of first generation children of the immigrants face. But they are determined to get through the hurdles they face. The new generation’s negotiation with their native heritage, identity, socio-cultural challenges in specific diasporic location has been brought to the surface in the stories. The stories offer significant insights into how the Bengali community negotiates its diasporic existence. The intensity of the despair and alienation due to displacement is more in the first generation immigrants than in the subsequent generations. The later generation fills their minds interrogating the relevance of the past to the present, of old customs to the new and different environment while the first generation immigrants fear the impending loss of their fondly nurtured original culture and identity. While occupying the dissimilar spaces in the host culture, the parent as well as the children in their own ways feel the pangs of rootlessness wandering between the two worlds. propelled by the zest for survival, Lahiri’s Bengali American women in *Unaccustomed Earth*,

despite the sense of insecurity and uncertainty develop an ability to get into negotiation between the native culture and host-culture to strike roots in the unaccustomed earth.

Sense of Loneliness: An Illustration from *Ramayana*

Let us analyse this sense of loneliness from the context of *Ramayana* where Sita is a much revered figure amongst the Hindus. She has been portrayed as an ideal daughter, an ideal wife and an ideal mother in various texts, stories, illustrations, movies and modern media. Sita is often worshipped with Rama as his consort. Rama and Sita start their life in Ayodhya. But fate puts them in forest, being exiled due to the boon which Kaikeyi receives from king Dhasarath. She gets herself accustomed in the forest with the support of her husband Rama and Lakshmana. Next, she is taken as a captive by Ravana to Lanka, the next place of displacement. During her captivity for a year in Lanka, Ravana expresses his desire for her; however, Sita refuses his advances and struggles to maintain her chastity. She patiently waits for Rama to fight against Ravana and take her back with dignity. But she has to go through the fire to establish her purity.

The couple comes back to Ayodhya, where Rama is crowned king with Sita by his side. While Rama's trust and affection for Sita never wavers, it soon becomes evident that some people in Ayodhya cannot accept Sita's long captivity under Ravana. During Rama's period of rule, an intemperate washerman, while berating his wayward wife, declares that he was no Rama to take his wife back after she had lived in the house of another man. This statement is reported back to Rama, who knows that the accusation of Sita is baseless. Nevertheless, he sends Sita away.

Thus Sita is forced into exile a second time. Sita, who is pregnant - is given refuge in the hermitage of Valmiki, where she delivers twin sons named Kusha and Lava. In the hermitage, Sita raises her sons alone, as a single mother. They grow up to be valiant and intelligent and are eventually united with their father. Once she has witnessed the acceptance of her children by Rama, Sita gets final refuge in the arms of her mother Bhūmi. Hearing her plea for release from an unjust world and from a life that has rarely been happy, the Earth dramatically splits open; Bhūmi takes Sita away. Sita is considered to be child of Mother Earth, produced by union between the king and the land. Sita is a personification of Earth's fertility, abundance and well-being.

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In Need of Support and Assistance from the Male Folk

Sita is portrayed as someone who needs support and assistance of the male folk in the myth. However, this has to be balanced with Sita's steadfast demonstration of honour and dignity, compelling her to enter the fire, to lead a separated life from Rama in the forest and bring up her children with dignity and to ask Mother Earth to take her from a setting filled with pain and misunderstanding. The actions, reactions and instincts manifested by Sita at every juncture in a long and arduous life are deemed exemplary. The values that she enshrined and adhered to at every point in the course of a demanding life are the values of womanly virtue held sacred by countless generations of Indians. Sita also has the sense of immigrant and she has to accustom herself to new and trial environments. Sita swoons when she understands that her husband has sent her to forest again. But she consoles herself and sets her mind to live in the forest alone in the hermitage of Valmiki. With her plain blank mind she accepts the new environment to assert herself and prove her individuality. She brings her children alone in the forest. She stands as a role model of charming feminism. She doesn't choose to move to her father. She bears all the trials herself and stands as the champion of her era in asserting herself.

Feminist Protagonists

If life is a journey one has to keep going in it withstanding the situations. Sita , Jayanti and Sumita are feminist protagonists of their era. They are not going to give up their hopes and yield to the circumstances. Their life is to be lead in spite of the circumstances. Sita meditates in the challenging situation and brings up her children. Jayanti and Sumita avow to bring in happiness to them. Milton in Paradise Lost says, "The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell,".

The present era women assert themselves, they keep going in new environment with the determination to live happily and with contentment. Sometimes the price they pay is too high. The void or lacuna is filled with their optimism in future.

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