Research Paper English Literature

Home Without Space: A Study of Chitra Divakaruni's Women Characters With Special Reference to Arranged Marriage

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ABSTRACT

Indian woman has remained entrapped in a world coded by patriarchal order. By and large, she is subjected to the unjust treatment meted out to her. Her mute sufferings, unshed tears and unexpressed sorrows have been delineated effectively in Indian English Literature. Even the poets, dramatists, novelists and prose writers all over the world lay bare the unbearable pain of woman out of her exploitation in their respective works. One such eminent voice is Chitra Divakaruni. Settled in the United States, she brings into portrayal the different strata of Indian women in her magnum opus Arranged Marriage(1997). A unique collection of stories, Arranged Marriage presents a panoramic view of Indian society in true colours. Discrimination against the 'Fair Sex' in the forms of domestic violence, economic dependence, female foeticide and wife battering highlights the plight of women in the words of Chitra Divakaruni.

KEYWORDS Exploitation, Patriarchal and Indian women.

PAPER

The exploitation of women has been a matter of deep concern across the world. Considering her as masochistic and dependent, her role is confined to the threshold of her home, known as her paradise. Her identity even her existence is at stake. The oxygen of freedom for self fulfillment is denied to her. At every stage, she has to accept the dominance of patriarchy and never enjoys the equal status with her male counterparts. As Sudhir Kakkar aptly remarks, "First, she is a daughter to her parents. Second, she is a wife to her husband (and daughter-in-law to his parents).Third, she is a mother to her sons(and daughters)" (45).

The subjugation and unjust treatment meted out to the 'fair sex' gets echoed in English literature and Indian writing in English as well. Women's oppression and her desperate struggle for her independent entity find prominent place in Chitra Benerjee Divakaruni's literary works. Settled in the United States Chitra Benerjee Divakaruni has been working for the upliftment of South Asian women in the San Francisco. Through her magnum opus, Arranged Marriage (1995), a short story collection, she has highlighted the inner world of Indian women where she is exemplified as a puppet in the hands of her master, protector and guardian, i.e. man. A short story collection of eleven stories with different themes Arranged Marriage portrays the miserable plight of Indian Women. All the female protagonists of mentioned stories feel suffocated and find the realities of life too hard to put up with.

Bats the first story is a moving tale of a sensitive woman who suffers the atrocities of her husband without showing any sign of protest. He tortures her, bullies her and treats her like an animal. Her life becomes an unending bout of miseries and sorrows. In the words of her little daughter:

"That year MOTHER CRIED A LOT, NIGHTS OR MAYBE she had always cried, and that was the first year I was old enough to notice. I would wake up in the hot Calcutta dark and sound of her weeping. Would be all around me, pressing in, wave upon wave, until I could no longer tell where it was coming from." (P.1)

It is mentioned in Indian scriptures that a woman must be kept under man, i.e., her master and protector. She is expected not to break this bond of control made by man-orientated society. As a sole bread earner of the family, man takes the responsibility all the members of his family for the fulfillment of their basic needs. In such a case, woman is remained in a state of child like dependent upon him. She is not allowed to spend a single penny without taking permission of him. As a result, she faces humiliation and degradation at the hands of her husband. Her lot is no better than that of a servant whose duty is to follow the command of her master without having any sign of protest. The protagonist of The Bats comes across the situation of similar kind. "She never had much money, and whenever she asked for any, Father flew into one of his rages" (P.3)

The fate of the two intimate friends in The Ultrasound is of similar kind. Renu and Anju, young girls of middle class Bengali family are conditioned with traditional feminine traits like tolerance, self-sacrifice, obedience and empathy. The prosperity and happiness of her family is her first and foremost duty. As Jean Baker Miller in his A New Psychology Towards_Woman aptly remarks, " They have developed the sense that their lives should be guided by the constant need to attune themselves to the wishes, desires and need of other"(P.65)

Both Runu and Anju get married and go to their husbands house. Runu becomes a part of a narrow-minded Bengali family where her position is not better than a caretaker. From morning till night, she works constantly like a machine showing no sign of tiredness. Like an ideal woman, she takes care of the needs of everyone in the house. She prepares the food, gives instruction to the maid servant, and arranges the beds. But she fulfils all the household duties under the supervision of her mother-in-law. "As it is in the most traditional households, her mother-in-law handles the finances. When Runu needs something, she has to ask her for it" (P 224.)

The inhuman behavior reaches to its climax when it is revealed that the child in her womb is female. Besides her mother-in-law, her husband is not in favour of giving birth to that female child. "He agrees, at least for this time. He says I' m young and strong we can start trying for another baby right away. It is a girl again, and then he'll think about whether to keep it or not" (P.224).

On the other hand, her friend Anju is not free from the clutches of patriarchy. Settled in the US with her husband, She

leads a comfortable life. But she too experiences several incidents of male dominance. Her husband Sunil makes harsh satires on her now and then as she regularly calls her friend and talks to her for a long time. His bitterness is reflected from his own words when he remarks "your mother should have married to a maharajah, not a mere working man like myself" (P.214)

Pratima in Silver pavements Golden Roofs becomes a victim of her husband Bikram's desire. Silently, she endures the likes and dislikes of her husband and follows them blindly. Traditionally tied with her domain, she is bound to lead a monotonous life. Her whole hearted devotion to her husband can be judged from her own words "your uncle does not like me to go out. He is telling me it is dangerous "(P.46)

What an irony of fate for an Indian woman considering her husband as her 'permeshwar'. From her early childhood, she is indoctrinated with the conception that she has to bow her head before the established social norms made for a woman by the male dominated society. According to Boudreaux,

Through the experience of a sexually 'Ordered social order and the explicit reminders addressed to them by their parents, endowed with principles of vision acquired in similar experiences of the world, girls internalize in the form of schemes of perception and appreciation not readily accessible to consciousness, the principles of the dominant vision which lead them to find the social order, such as it is, normal or even natural (P.95).

An Indian woman comes across the oppression not only at the hands of male members but also from the females of her family. Believing in century old traditions, they become a hurdle in the fulfillment of their own daughter's happiness. The protagonist of One Word Love faces the situation of similar kind. Hailed from Calcutta, She develops a love relationship with a non-Parsee boy in the United States. When her mother comes to know about it, she at once breaks all her relations with her daughter without taking care of her sentiments "Better no daughter than a disobedient one. A shame to the family" (P .62).

The life of a woman is not a bed of roses rather her way is full of thorns. Even in 21st century, an independent woman of free will has to abide by her husband's command unwillingly. Preeti in Doors is a new woman who loves her privacy. Even she does not like to get her disturbed by her husband whom she treats her as her companion. But her husband's cousin, Raj's arrival in her house proves a threat to her freedom and happiness. The real face of her husband is exposed when he starts bullying her. She has to remain in her house as a prisoner of his words and deeds. He gave her a strict suggestion in the form of command "May be then you' be a more flexible now" (P.198)

Marriage is considered as an unbreakable bond for a husband and wife in Indian scenario. But in reality, it is the wife who has to bear all the responsibilities on her shoulders. She knows no other way but to submit herself to her husband without any protest. She loses her name and identity and merges them with her husband. But on the other hand, husband is a man of free will. He does whatever he likes. The husband of Asha in Meeting Mrinal leaves her wife and teenage son to live with his English secretary. With courage and singleness of mind, she moves forward in her life. But people around her attempts to discourage her spirit by pointing out her single status. She too is well aware of this, "But I'd be the only woman in the room without a husband and the other wives, even those too well bred to whisper, would look at me with pity, as though at something maimed, on animal with a limb chopped off"(P. 277).

The heroine of Clothes also faces a number of tortures imposed upon her by the superstitious society. An Indian by origin, she goes with her husband to the United States. Her like goes smoothly but the sudden demise of her loving husband comes to her as a severe blow as it has changed her completely. She is fond of colorful clothes but now she is forced to wear a white sari. In Indian society, this colour is made for a woman whose husband has died. Moreover, it represents the meaningless existence of a woman without her husband, "The sari a thick voile that will bunch around the waist when worm, it borrowed whist widow's color, color of endings" (P.29)

An Indian woman is usually a victim of man's sexual appetite. He treats her as an object for sexual pleasure. In other words, it the female body which becomes a powerful tool for her oppression at the hands of patriarchy. A Maid Servant's Story presents the site of sexual harassment against a helpless poor woman, Sarla. Initially she is forced to play the role of a prostitute by her mother but somehow she runs away. She starts working as a maid in a rich Bengali family and becomes favourite of her kind mistress because of her selfless services. But when her past is revealed to the family, it is her husband (the master of the house) who insists her to go out of his house as it can destroy his family's honour. But the dark side of his personality is exposed whenever he gets a chance. He tries to abuse her, exploit her physically by taking her into his grip. But when she resists, he makes a sarcastic comment, "Don't act so virtuous. Once a whore, always a whore "(P.145)

So Chitra Divakaruni delineates Indian woman a victim of oppression, repression and suppression which reduces her existence into nothing. The same is the case with the female characters taken for study in this research paper. It can be concluded that a woman in Indian society under the control of patriarchy is not given space even in her home where she is confined to.

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