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Trauma and Survival Instinct: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's One Amazing Thing

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Abstract: The last two decades has witnessed the outstanding grown of women writers in India. Women Writer most of their works highlight the women's struggle for man-made rules of conduct in the society. One such writer is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Her social experience with reality is an immigrant. She portrays immigrant experiences in her writings. The picture of imagination with expatriate writings mainly signifies the struggles for identity and construction of new identities. Divakaruni's One Amazing Thing is a complicated history of different people from the United States who are caught in the deadly embrace of earthquake which has caused an uncomfortable residue of enmity and amity amidst insecurity, uncertainty and doubt. It is story, there was a woman behind the slashed in customer service window, but she was not looking assured to Uma who wanted to get an appointment with the Visa officer Uma. She did not trust her. This paper focuses a cultural politics of Diaspora and discrimination. The anxiety is provoked by hybridizing of language. It is activated in the anguish, associated with vacillating boundaries are Trauma and survival instinct (psychic), cultural, territorial. It results in the emergence of cultural difference or the diversity of cultures.

Keywords: trauma, cultural, migration, home, sex, marriage, agonies, frustrations.

Introduction

In Indian literature in English, the last two decades has witnessed the outstanding grown of women writers in India. Women Writer most of their works highlight the women's struggle for man-made rules of conduct in the society. One such writer is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Her novels are mostly based on the theme of inter-racial marriages, home and sexuality through which she articulates a perspective of women's experience of exile in particular and women's alienation in general. Divakaruni's social experience with reality is an immigrant, herself from a middle class educated family from Kolkata, India. She portrays immigrant experiences in her writings. She delineates the expatriate young women living in the U.S, who struggles hard to sustain self-identity in fluctuating alien culture. She writes of as an Indian in America and about people migrating to the west and are caught multiple cultures. She depicts the women in special caught in multicultural challenges, sometimes and also affected by such multiple levels by both cultures she brings out the state of flux and reflects the mirror image of the particular environment and the world around her, the relations are torn between belonging and not belonging.

Divakaruni focus in the picture of imagination with expatriate writings mainly signifies the struggles for identity and construction of new identities. The location drift causes individuals to get dislocated, migration to different countries governed by different reasons at different times of history. America for the characters in the fiction means dream of freedom of traditional restrictions and intellectual freedom where she gets opportunity for financially, she achieves liberation from Indian expectations. The whole reasons for immigration are the pursuit of high standard of living opportunities for work, research and freedom to discuss a few. Divakaruni has expressed the themes of immigration, dislocation, home and exile in her novels; she explicitly portrays nostalgia faced by contemporary women. Her depiction of Diaspora shows deliberate immigration and thus occurrence of

whole hearted adaptable attribute towards change. She writes an equal right should be given to women. She is also a human being and everyone has to understand the sufferings and pains experienced by her. Divakaruni has beautifully brought out the women's voice, expressing her longings, agonies and frustrations through her simple narrations.

Discussion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's One Amazing Thing is a complicated history of different people from the United States who are caught in the deadly embrace of earthquake which has caused an uncomfortable residue of enmity and amity amidst insecurity, uncertainty and doubt. She filled her fiction with immigrants from all over the world. It was evident in the first few pages of the novel where she made the lobby of the visa office proves a vision of people who remain in their own sullenness. There was a woman behind the slashed in customer service window, but she was not looking assured to Uma who wanted to get an appointment with the Visa officer Uma. Uma did not trust her. There were also a Chinese woman dressed in a traditional tunic accompanied by a sullen girl of thirteen or fourteen, a concession couple a decade older than Uma's parents, a young man to Uma's left and to her other side there was a lonely African-American.

The story of Uma was going to India "because of her parents' folly". Uma parents had come and settled in United States before twenty years, when she was a child. Naturally they loved their profession, celebrated their weekends and enjoyed their life with other suburbanite Indian families. Yet, Uma's mother had chosen early retirement and her father had quit his position as a senior administrator for a computer company to accept a consultant's job in India. After they had rented out their house and returned to their hometown of Kolkata. Her parents enjoyed their life in India. They spent happily their leisure time in shopping, visiting their childhood friends, attending Rabindra Sangeet concerts, watching movies, and walking hand in hand by the lake. They vacationed in Kullumanali in the summer and Goa in the winter. Although Uma secretly disapproved of their newly hedonistic lifestyle, she was happy for her parents. " when it was so much better than what she often saw around her; couples losing interest in each other, living in wooden togetherness or even breaking up". (6)

Frequently called by her mother and urged her to visit Agra and Taj Mahal, the place they are saving it for her. Uma gave her consent to visit India after six weeks. After her mother's calling Uma realized that her boy friend Ramon, who had given an Indian nickname Ramu by her father, had not been included in the invitation. Uma, Malathi and Mrs. Pritchete also wanted to visit India for different reasons; so that only they came to the basement of the Indian consulate. Where, Malathi became a victim. When Malathi approached Mr. Mangalam for Visa, he seemed to have a liking for her. Later, when Mangalyam kissed Malathi, she for the first time experienced elation by his kiss and sometimes allowed him to kiss her. Then only the earthquake struck the place and all were caught under the debris.

The character, Mrs. Prichete was a meticulous sincere housekeeper as she used to have a pride on taking care of her big house by herself. But after her ailment, the house became "a dent in the disorder" (43). Once while tidying up the house, she came upon an article on India from which she learned that old palaces in India had been made hotels to stay on. Then she decided to visit India, but "Now they were trapped beneath several storey's of rubble. It was not Mrs. Pritchete's fault but Mr. Pritchete couldn't stop himself from blaming her" (43).

When the story first rumble came no one in the visa office knew that it was an earthquake. Uma noticed a flake of plaster floating from the ceiling. She watched it but could not understand that it was really an earthquake as she thought about her boy friend, Roman. It was like a giant who had placed his mouth against the building's foundation and roared. The floor buckled, throwing Uma to the ground. The visa house's ceiling collapsed, beams broke, a light fixture shattered, and electricity failed. When somebody wanted to open the door

Cameron asked them not to open the door because "The door may be what's holding up this part of the room" (12) in the Visa office. He had to hit the boy and then relate his experience at the earthquake hit area in Mexico. He said : "people who had been too impatient and had tried to dig themselves out of the rubble often died as more debris collapsed on them, while people who had stayed part sometimes without food and water for a week or more were finally miraculously rescued" (13). In fact, "they were struck here until a rescue team arrived or until they decided to take the risk of pulling open the front door" (24).

Another character Malathi was caught in the customer service center. When she came to America, her relatives warned her about America and particularly about the black men. She shared a tiny apartment with three other women. The women in America had to go by bus to their working place and save money for their dowries. "The other women wanted to get married. From their salaried, which had sounded lavish when translated into rupees but were meager when you had to pay for everything in dollars, they put money aside, each month for their dowries" (15). Certainly Malathi tried to rise above the floor carefully avoiding the broken glasses that littered the floor but she was equally afraid of being watched by the black man, Cameron because she was warned already by her relatives in India, when she was coming to America, to stay away from black men, who were dangerous "to stay away from white men, who were lecherous, and Indian-American men, who were shy" (14). She thought that no one in India cautioned her about earthquakes.

Uma's hand was swollen and she could not move her wrist. Cameron had given her three aspirin tablets which were nothing for the pain. She feared that she would die of the internal bleeding and wanted to escape to "something outside this dreadful prison of a room" (22). "She had believed herself to be the kind of person who could handle a crisis with cool intelligence. Now she was abashed at how quickly pain had eroded her resources" (22). Cameron summoned everyone to the centre of the room. He checked people's injuries. He worked on the wound of the old woman which was bleeding copiously with the help of the granddaughter Lily. Cameron needed some long strips of cloth for bandages and a sling to work on the broken arm of Uma. He asked Malathi's sari for that and for which she regretted. Then Uma gave her sweatshirt and got her sari. Cameron hit Tariq when he tried to open the front door of visa office. Tariq happened to be a bad guy. His mother, Ammi, wanted to make him a gentleman but America had transformed him. "What made him change? Was it 9/11, or was it Farah?" (28). Farah was the daughter of Ammi's best friend from childhood, who came to America two years back on a study – abroad scholarship from her University in Delhi. She had to manage her mother who thought that America was ruled by "the unholy trinity of alcohol, drugs and sex" (30). Only after having a talk with Ammi, the widowed mother of Farah allowed her go to America.

In America, Farah had no interest in seeing "what made America, America" (30) instead, when taken by Tariq to the Museum of Modern Art, she wondered at the innovative Modern Indian Art and particularly the Muslim artists like Raza and Kuessein. Tariq had fallen in love with her while she wept for India when Tariq spoke against India and India's problems. "She said : It's easy to see the problems India has. But do you even know what America's problems are? (31). Then he began to have beard but Farah returned to India. The fear that he'd lose Farah made Tariq feel angry with an African-American, Cameron. When Cameron wanted to give some food to the people caught in the visa office, Tariq raised his angry voice : "Why should you decide what we're going to do? This is an Indian office. If anyone is to be given orders, it should be the visa officer" (32). But Tariq was left stranded when Mr. Mangalam extended his cooperation to Cameron. And so Mangalam asked everyone to follow his instructions. Tariq had to wait for the opportunity.

Uma as well as Mr. Pritchett acted as volunteers to assist Cameron. They began to share their thoughts. Cameron was very economical in sharing food and water and light. Even pencil light was used to go to bathroom and bigger flashlight was used for communal activities. He did not allow them to light the candle as he thought that somewhere gas pipes would have been broken. Even when Mr. Prichett while volunteering vigil

over the embalmed darkness wanted to smoke Dunhills, he couldn't do it fearing that it would result in danger due to broken gas lines. In the next day, they awoke to dampness and when they tried to open to door, Tariq was drowned among the rubble. Then they decided that Lily could crawl on the pile of rubble to see what had happened to Tariq. Later, Lily climbed up the debris and found him alive but buried under the debris Cameron and Mr. Prichett began to clear the passage. It took three hours to clear the passage and save Tariq.

When Mrs. Pritchett went deep delved into the nostalgic memory and she began to brood over her youthful days with her friend Debbie. In fact, "Every dream that came to her in those days was possible no, more than possible. Even dreams she had been unable to imagine yet waited like low hanging fruit for her grasp" (56). She visualized once again the palace bedroom, which she was going to visit in India and rejuvenated herself. As she noticed others, who surrounded Cameron anxiously to know what would happen next, she began to feel that "All that negative energy only attracted bad luck into your life. But she knew better than to try to explain. They would learn when they'd been through the fire themselves" (57). When Mr. Pritchett was about to explain, it was interrupted by Mangalam, who whispered angrily : "This isn't India. You can't interfere in people's lives like this. Leave them alone" (59). To this Malathi retorted by asking: "Don't you tell me what to do. What do you men think you are?" (59). On being infuriated, Mangalam slapped her at her cheek which shocked everyone in the room. It created a tussle between Tariq and Mangalam and Lily and Malathi. Mangalam tried to call the soldier (Cameron) but he couldn't remember his name. Uma heard voices raised in protest, when she was indulging in dreams with her boy friend Ramon.

Uma and Cameron rushed to the crowd where Cameron tried to stop Tariq strangling the throat of Mangalam, but he was hit hardly at his nose. Uma jumped into the fray and was hit at her unbroken arm. Lily intervened them and whispered something into the ear of Tariq and silenced him. When Uma decided to talk to the people there, she tried to grasp everyone's attention but most of them did not pay attention to her. Finally she got an idea and said, "We can each tell an important story from our lives" (65), like that of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. However, Mr. Pritchett objected the idea by saying that it was not a time for playing games. Whereas Mrs. Pritchett anxiously enquired what could they do if they did not have a story to tell. Uma readily replied her by saying : "Everyone has a story. I don't believe anyone can go through life without encountering at least one amazing thing" (65). The story telling game was initiated by Jiang.

Next, Jiang belonged to an orthodox Chinese family, who came and settled in Calcutta, India. In 1962, when she was twenty five years old, she took care of her father's shoe store and gave it a new name "Feng's Fine Footwear". Jiang got attracted towards a customer named Mohit Das and after few other meetings she fell in love with Mohit. However, circumstances did not allow them to be united in their life as a married couple as they began to get opposition from both sides as Jiang belonged to an orthodox Chinese family and Mohit a Hindu family. In spite of the parents' opposition, Mohit assured Jiang that he would marry her. Then Sino-Indian War of 1962 made Indians stop patronizing Chinese business and even the government of India ordered Chinese to register themselves and present papers for identification. Even though Jiang and her brother, Vincent, had Indian birth certificates, Mohit called her and warned her that the Chinese were being sent to internment camps.

When he felt sorry for her and said, "Forgive me. I love you, but I can't fight a whole country" (76), Jiang felt that her world had ended. Even she couldn't share her sufferings with her family. To her shock, she was married to Curtis Chan, a friend of Vincent and yet much older than him. After getting married, she had to go with him to America in a ship escaping from the hurly burly of Calcutta, leaving her family members to their own fate. In America, the Chans started a small grocery and got succeeded in their business. After some decades, when she found Vincent in America she could not recognize him as he seemed to be very old and she couldn't find any stray of a veterinary doctor, Vincent, who was very neat in those days.

When he spoke of their childhood she refused to indulge in nostalgia with him because she thought that only tools would chew the past. However, there was a longingness inside her about her childhood Chinatown, which made her visit India again with Vincent after the death of her husband, Mr. Chan. She questioned "Why am I going?". She shrugged and spread her hands; "Not sure. End of story" (80). After a long pause, Jiang said that she had to say one more amazing thing without which the story wouldn't be a true one. She just recollected her memories of her first night with her husband in the ship and said to the members that she could not even think of Mr. Chan as her husband because Mohit's face was fixed in her mind. Mr. Chan too knew that Jiang had a boy friend but he did not force her anyway. Instead, he was much concerned towards her which moved her much. Though they got a child, the first four years of their life went without any romance, one day Mr. Chan was affected by the flue and he was almost dying. On seeing Mr. Chan dying, Jiang unconsciously began to think that he should not die as she began to love him. She broods : "When had it happened? Looking back, I could not point to one special time and say. There! That's what is amazing. We can change completely and not recognize it. We think terrible events have turned us into stone. But love slips in like a chisel and suddenly it is an axe, breaking us into pieces from the inside." (86)

When "Uma wanted to say something about the treacherous nature of memory, how one painful event can overpower the many good experiences that came before" (102), Malathi volunteered to tell her story and as she was not good at English, she wanted Mr. Mangalam to translate it from Tamil. Even she instructed him : "Better not change even one word. I know enough to catch you if you do" (102). Malathi narrated an incident which happened in her earlier days, when she was working in Miss Lola's 'Lovely Ladies Salon', the premier beauty shop in Coimbatore, a women's beauty parlour. She accidentally went to that Salon, when her mother decided to beautify her to take a bridal photograph of her. Malathi was impressed by the atmosphere of the Salon and was attracted towards Lola, the owner, who introduced Malathi to Mrs. Vani Balan, the richest and most powerful of Coimbatore. Mrs. Balan had a young maid with her, named Nirmala, to accompany her and also a son, Ravi, who had studied in USA and returned to Coimbatore.

When Ravi wanted to open a home to improve the lives of suffering people, he started Vani Vidyalayam and insisted that the servants of the home should attend English classes. There he was introduced to Nirmala to whom he began to show much affection. When Mrs. Balan came to know the truth and she herself found them when both of them were sitting side by side in the upstairs, she decided to stop Nirmala from her service but Ravi retorted that if his mother would stop Nirmala from work, he would return to America. "She would never see him again" (111). Hence, Mrs. Balan was forced to allow Nirmala to remain there and everything returned to normal in a few days. She even began to take Nirmala outside for shopping.

Oneday, however, she asked Lola to decorate Nirmala as she was coming with her to Mrs. Balaji's brother's birthday celebration in Chennai. Everyone in the Salon thought that Nirmala was going to become the daughter-in-law of the family, but soon they could know the truth from the other customers that Nirmala disappeared from the family. Malathi could easily guess that, "… by dressing Nirmala far above her station and keeping her constantly at her side, Mrs. Balan made sure that Gopalan noticed the maid. Nirmala herself must have piqued his interest with her amazement at the extravagance of his house. Admiration is a powerful aphrodisiac. After the guests left, it would have been easy enough for Mrs. Balan to complain of a headache and send Nirmala to Gopalan's room for some medicine. Who knows what transpired between the two of them there?..." (114)

Later, after two weeks, Mrs. Balan visited Lovely Ladies and announced there would be an engagement of her son Ravi and wanted her hair the softest with most natural-looking curls. When Mrs. Balan trusted Malathi to be with her, Malathi didn't like her for what she had done to Nirmala. When Mrs. Balan assured Malathi of a special tip if she did her job well, Malathi decided to take revenge on her by mixing wrong chemicals for the perm. Even when Lola entered the room, she sensed a wrong thing but she did not say anything when Malathi

began to wash Mrs. Balan's hair, which would start falling soon. Later, Mrs. Balan had to shriek with shock and tried to strangle Malathi for her mischievous actions. Later that night was very hard to her : "worse, I feared I had landed Lola who had understood my dreams better than anyone in the world, in deepest trouble" (117). But when Malathi approached Lola after a week, she didn't get angry as she expected; instead she warned her against Mrs. Balan and was asked to leave Coimbatore as soon as possible. She wanted Malathi to go to Hyderabad and even gave a letter of introduction to her nephew who worked in Hyderabad. Further, she added that she might go for working in consulates in abroad after getting proper training in spoken English. Malathi found no words to thank Lola. After Malathi completed her story, everyone began to discuss the fate of Nirmala. However, Mr. Pritchett did not take part in the discussion because "He had been hoping for a comment from his wife, a validation for the suffering of the boy he had been. She had said nothing" (123).

Then Tariq began to recall the pleasant memories of Farah, his mother's best friend's daughter from India, who had spent a semester there with Tariq's family last year. Farah was in India now and her family invited Tariq's family for the wedding of Farah's sister to which Ammi was ready to go with Tariq to attend the marriage in India. Ammi also wanted Abbajan to come to India, but he was running Jalal's Janitorial Services, which was dull because most of the richest customers did not like having Islamic cleaners. After sometime, when Tariq's father and his manager, Hanif were taken by FBI, Tariq's mother "was getting hysterical, banging her head on the floor calling on Allah to spare her husband" (129). After his release by the FBI, he had a stroke and he was not able to move his left arm and leg. The lawyer advised them to let things be as there were no official records of his having been arrested they could not ask for reparation. He also advised them to retire to India and as a result when Ammi called her friends and neighbours for suggestion, they warned her, "you enjoyed your visits to India as a rich NRI, with your pockets full of dollars. But living within modest means, with servants who don't show up in the morning and bribes that have to be paid to the right people in the right manner, is a different matter" (131). Tariq also had the same doubts. Apart from his lifestyle differences, there was another issue : "This was my country. I was an American. The thought of being driven from my home filled me with rage. Then again, if I stayed in India, it would be a great support for my parents. Already Ammi looked at me with longing. Farah would like that too. Conflicting loyalties warred in my head, keeping me awake at night". (131) Ammi decided to sell the house. Farah's e-mails also did not console Tariq. His friend Ali also told Tariq that to run away to India would be cowardly. As Tariq's family suddenly began to crack, suddenly there was a crack in the ceiling. Everyone was panic stricken as the walls shook and the people were showered with plaster. As Cameron was affected by hard breathing, he asked for water and as the water already saved was full of debris, the water saved in saucepans was given to Cameron. Later, when the people in the room again settled in their seats, Tariq was not in a mood to continue while Lily insisted him to continue. She enquired about Ali and his

Conclusion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's One Amazing Thing describes the homecoming. The characters full of nostalgic dreams want to return home but they find themselves in the brutish centre of the visa office a chaotic one in which one can find unrest and explosions of inescapable nostalgic tales in the form of monologues. In fact, homelessness or homeless-ness begins in the very first page of the novel. The novel is filled with grotesquerie, madness, and chaos which result in estrangement. All those who are trapped under the debris set out to discover an India that they have not understood earlier. By making her characters mouth-pieces of the historical specificities and cultural diversifies, she informs the readers a global argument which is purely gestural. It relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of existence. In fact, private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It makes the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge: a hybridity and a difference within,

a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality And the inscription of this borderline existence among them inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive 'image' at the crossroads of history, bridging the home and the world. It provides a strange stillness in the novel. The real world appears in the image as it were between parentheses. The novel effects an externality of the inward. In this novel is a cultural politics of diaspora and paranoia, of migration and discrimination, of anxiety and appropriation. The anxiety is provoked by hybridizing of language. It is activated in the anguish, associated with vacillating boundaries are psychic, cultural, territorial. It results in the emergence of cultural difference or the diversity of cultures.

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