

A study of cultural alienation and identity crisis in the novel *One Amazing Thing*

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ABSTRACT

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the notable an Indian born American author poet, and the Betty and Gene Mc David Professor of writing at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. She is the author of 19 books including her award winning famous book on Arranged Marriage: Stories, Mistress of Spices. Her two novels were released as movies and one adapted to play. Her works are translated into 29 Languages. She probes various themes like women's issues, immigration and the journeys of people, history, myth, magic, religion, celebration of diversity, loss, betrayal, and redemption *One Amazing Thing* paves the spectrum of life experiences to her characters. All of them carry different shades of pathos. Diaspora is the replica of the new literature of the immigrants which dives through the experiences of the host country. One kind of bottled up emotions is witnessed with guilt and regret while experiencing with host country. Diaspora literature presents the immigrant compositions of mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the disconnected people from their homeland. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni interprets her diaspora experiences through her writings. The present paper focuses on the struggles and the repercussions experienced by the dislocated people.

Key Words: Diaspora, cultural alienation, identity crisis, history, religion, diversity.

INTRODUCTION

The influence of Diaspora theory upon the compositions of vocabularies around the world is visible. The authors settled out of the native country has written many literary works which is known as Diasporic literature. It is commonly associated with native culture and background. Diasporic literature is born out of alienation, dislocation, rootlessness, in search of identity, and existence. We witness the traumatic experience grows out of migrated population to the immigrant settlements. Diasporic literature constitutes the inner suppressed feelings of the immigrants. They are with the dilemma how to handle with the troubles and rebuilding. They are usually stuck between the homeland and hostland as they are always in the mode of longingness. The emigrant writer is at the point of dual writing as they constantly judge two worlds.

Diasporic Writing in Indian Writing: From the book Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora by Sandhya Rao Mehta has stated the Diaspora Definition:

“Diaspora as an evolving... return to the homeland.”(Mehta 2)

The birth of Indian Diaspora is due to individuals specifically in pursuit or for the economic benefit moved towards Western countries specifically U.S.A. Diaspora is a term which is exclaimed with the dispersion of certain group of people moved from their homeland and dispersed to other parts of the world, consequently they are formulated into community which maintains its connectivity with the native place.

“Axel specifically refers to Operation Blue Star... many of whom were women and children.”(Mehta 37)

The breakthrough of Indian Army into the Golden Temple, Amritsar in search of terrorist has resulted massive chaos with the killing of several women and children, these unforgettable incidents drives many of the people to feel alienated in their own country where they became victims of alienation, racist remarks and loss of self-identity with reference to religious minorities has experienced the diaspora.

Literature of old generation of diasporic Indian writers: The creative writings of former age of exodus Indian novelists like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Dhalchandra Rajan, Nirad Chaudhari, Ved Metha even we

have characters of Mohun Biswas which is depicted by V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, there is also another illustration of emigrant that is Ganesh who is ages away from their native land Bharat but their legacy consciousness reminds them their dead and buried. Very keen lyshowcased exodus Indian characters in *Bye Bye Blackbird* narrated by Anita Desai and *The Nowhere Man* written through the lens of Kamala Markandaya as well as we also get the opportunity to visualize in the tale of *Wife* and *Jasmine* detailed through Bharati Mukherjee's work that represents how Indian emigrants are treated in the Land of Liberty. Such stories disclose the projection of cultural detriment towards Amerindians in the United Kingdom around 1960's. The depiction of *The Shadow Lines* through the vision of Amitav Ghosh's expansion of alienation encountered through the characters upbringing on the transpacific land. As well we have Amit Chaudhari's *Afternoon Raag* which showcases the existence of Indian graduate in oxford. These eminent writers even depict the constructive characteristics of deracination.

Literature of contemporary diasporic Indian writers:

"Immigrants ... tales have become part of diasporic writing." (Mehta69)

Contemporary exploration defined diaspora which captures circumstance on the global discussion which involves migration, exile, adaptation, borders, unlawful immigration, reconstruction and multiculturalism. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee, Kiran Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa are all the renowned diasporic writers who has filled the literary panoramic view through their vast knowledge. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni *Mistress of spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams* clearly portrays the immigrant feminine experience. Kiran Desai's first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) and *Inheritance of Loss* she showcases all the diasporic segments like marginalization, cultural insularity, nostalgia, alienation, quest for identity and assimilation in her work. In Bapsi Sidhwa's novel's the concept of large scale exodus due to separation has been witnessed and in *The Ice-Candy Man* showcases her section who travelled to India in terror of enforced Islamicization. From the tale *the Crow Eaters* the prime character, Fareedoon Junglewalla travels to Punjab deserting his familial residence in medial India, creates the protagonist further energetic.

Jhumpa Lahiri's in *Interpreter of Maladies* she doesn't only enclose involvement of emigrants and replaced person but also talks about debarment, isolation and accomplishment. *Gold Diggers* by Sanjena Sathien *The Good Girls* by Sonia Faleiro *Whereabouts* by Jhumpa Lahiri *China Room* by Sunjeev Sahota *Dear Senthuran* by Akwaeke Emezi, *Radiant Fugitive* by Nawaaz Ahmed. Bharati Mukherjee in her autobiographical narration the key point is comprised around the society in her chronicle *Days and Nights in Calcutta* which is jointly written by her spouse and explores the cultural stress implied in her life as a privileged woman who returns to her homeland after being a Canadian citizen. Her work presents her nostalgia towards her hometown. There is another illustration of the operational historical account in *My Own Country* written by Abraham Verghese who projects how a person's offering as well as involvement can bring about drastic change within the circle and can formulate a place as a residence.

The Tiger's Daughter is another illustration of emigrants from Bharati Mukherjee's piece of work where an adolescent girl disturbingly returns back to native land Calcutta subsequently spending ages at overseas. Sushama Bedi's novel *The Fire Sacrifice* constitutes about the craze to achieve glamorous life in USA but Guddo's family witnesses next generation is drawn inevitably into rootless western ways which pours completely tragic results.

The Emigrant Indian novelists depicts the displaced personality that identifies intense importance even if it is standing opposite to topographical grounds of the huge Indian Peninsula. Due to hardship of such works, they are always appreciated on the global platform.

The Research objective:

1. To examine the abstraction of emigration and its related expressions such as alienation and loss of identity.
2. To identify the diasporic sensibility.
3. To study major themes of diasporic writings.
4. To explore message displayed by the novelist in the writings.
5. To direct significance of research paper.

Limitations of the study: The limitation of the paper is that it focuses only upon the novel *One Amazing thing*.

Theoretical Framework Research design:

In this paper, the use of Descriptive and Analytical Research Methodology is pursued. The paper consists of data collected from the novel *One Amazing Thing* and analysis of the acquired data in the perspective of diaspora. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the renowned an Indian born American author poet and the Betty and Gene Mc David Professor of writing at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. She is the author of 19 books. Her writings comprise of Indian adventure, present New World, Lassie, emigrants, chronicle, legend, and the delight and provocation faced in the cross-culturalism. Her works are notable around the world as we can witness her in

over 50 periodicals as well in 50 compilations. In 29 multiple languages her interpretations are presented. Her award winning famous book on Arranged Marriage: Stories, Mistress of Spices, Sister of My Heart, The Palace of My Heart, The Palace of Illusions, The Conch bearer, The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming, Independence. She has judged several prestigious awards, such as the National Book Award and the PEN Faulkner Award. *Arranged Marriage* is the book which was not only played and executed in U.S but also in Canada. Even her Opera *River of Light* was played and executed in Texas and California, as it's based about an Indian woman being multi-racial. To earn money for her education, she held many odd jobs, including babysitting, selling merchandise in an Indian boutique, slicing bread in a bakery, and washing instruments in a science lab. At Berkeley, she lived in the International House and worked in the dining hall. Maitri in the San Francisco Bay Area and Daya in Houston are the two Organizations she contributes in Advisory Board where several Amerind who come across with domiciliary assaults. She is also concerned with the education of city ghetto children specifically situated in India by being connected with the organization Pratham. Her two of the novels were released as movies *The Mistress of Spices* and another right's to a film adaption of *The Palace of Illusions* was secured. *Arranged Marriage* was adapted to play. She explores various themes like women's issues, immigration and the journeys of people, history, myth, magic, religion, celebration of diversity, loss, betrayal, and redemption.

In this paper I will be examining the cultural alienation and identity crisis in the novel *One Amazing Thing* the story is surrounded around the nine characters who come across with the massive earthquake and get trapped into the Indian Consulate. After the incident occurs several characters play crucial role in exchanging their past experiences and trauma.

Over the past fifty years ... accelerated most recently by the growth of the information technology and service industry related job sectors. (Hegde 271)

It's a great success after observing several advancements in economic trends, the call for skilled workers and numerous modifications in the emigrant's laws has brought tremendous change that many Indians migrated to western regions to place in new jobs in the sectors of information technology and business enterprises with the escalation in new postings.

The extra-marital affair between two visa officers Malathi and Mangalamon, Lily grand-daughter to Jiang a Chinese woman who is counting to her last days, an ex-soldier named Cameron, An Indian American Uma who is baffled by her parents decision who wants to return India after twenty years staying in US., annoyed with New America Tariq is a young Muslim, infuriated and dissatisfied elderly couple Mr. and Mrs. Pritchett. During this incident each and every person tries to divert and find solace in expressing their inner one amazing thing that occurred in their life which have been long bottled up into their hearts and didn't disclosed to anyone. They exchanged several experiences that they come across cultural alienation and identity such as

He told me to get out of Calcutta as soon as possible....Then he hung up.(Divakaruni6)
Under normal circumstances... without even asking her opinion.(6)

The Sino-Indian War of 1962 has brought a great impact upon Jiang and Mohit's love story as there were clashes were occurring due to one of the unit of the People's Liberation Army of China attacked an Indian patrol in the Aksai Chin region of the western Himalayas so it has created chaos at all the Calcutta and connected regions, Chinese were sent to refugees camp or either killed or asked to go under or were asked to leave the country. Due to this reason Mohit was totally devastated as his mother played the emotional card to stop looking to Jiang as she doesn't belong to their community so Mohit called up Jiang to consider this call as last call and save their lives as none of the Chinese would be spared to stay alive due to international clashes and even they are also to leave the place on immediate basis after spending so many years of life all of a sudden they are asked to be leave the country, this states the situation of alienation even we come across with the loss of identity when Jiang's marriage is being finalized without her knowledge with the middle aged stranger.

"For diasporas facing up to their own ghosts, their own traumas, their own memories is a necessary ethical condition."(Mishra 16)

The subconscious flow of thoughts is always hovering upon the minds of the diaspora people as they are always found under the stress to balancing between the dual cultures and most probably found torn while following the ethics of homeland.

Struggling with a series of ... the gendered oppression that works through their bodies. (Mehta 75)

It has been analyzed that very often women due to patriarchal oppression they are expected to undergo cultural collision and compromised to adjust. They even tend to happen that they are mishandled with multiple patriarchal authoritarian ship. Consequently, they land up to confused identity. They are expected to satisfy all the aspects of

being stereotypical women's expectations such as being obedient to the familial, social relationships, safeguarding of devout and ethnic heritage. Women usually anticipated to reproduce children and nurture with the family values within them.

The next narration is about Malati who undertook the job at Lola's Beauty Parlor as beautician but her journey wasn't that easy going as she expected. When she provides services to one of the treatment to the client Mrs. Balan she infuses wrong chemical for hair treatment and due to reason she becomes half bald. This situation worries Lola who is the owner of the Parlor that Malati would be costed high if she continues to stay here as Mrs. Balan can be a threat to her life as she can hire Goonda's to harm her in anyways so she needs to leave the place and go into underground to save her life.

"Grewal, Gopinath and Bhattacharjee talk of "added burdens"... alienation."(Mehta 38)

Grewal and Bhattacharjee they highlight that the women undergoes with dual displacement while migrating to other motherland in wake of settlement where she had already witnessed alienation through patriarchy upon them she senses both physical and metaphorical exile.

"I went around to the dingy back entrance of Lola's, which was used only by the sweepers. I had never been there before. It took me a while to find the unmarked door. The stinking garbage piled along the open drains was symbolic of the turn my life had taken. The girl who answered my knocks looked anxious when she saw me. I said I would wait outside. Would she ask Lola to see me for just a minute?" (9)

All of a sudden Malti sensed her loss of identity as she has to hide herself from the unexpected experience.

"I had to fire you, of course..." "Where will I go?"(9)

As Malti's background is economically weak so she had no choice left behind rather to accept Lola's offer to safeguard her-self from untoward situation which might also cost her life. During this situation all of a sudden Malti experienced a sense of alienation in her own place and loss of identity.

"Diasporas ... evolution of cultures."(Mishra20)

It's been stated that Diasporas regenerate cultures as they have keenly infused in adopted or the hostl and place so well that they directed new culture and they are doubtful sometime even to leave for their homeland.

"Wherever South Asians... social context."(Mehta 73)

The diaspora takes the privilege in prevailing the homeland culture, due to them several elements are brought under the lens of identity, relationship within the image, power, culture, politics and representation. It has been stated that any physical migration can lead to shift in identity in one's own individuality.

"Furthermore, police responses ... Canada and the United States."(Hegde 230)

After the occurrence of 9/11 massacre all the Muslim community members were under the police vigilance they were under the suspicious lenses, all their acts were accountable none of the domestic violence's went unnoticed, every move of theirs were observed, they were cross-questioned as many witnessed rise in the anti - Muslim's acts and illegal activities.

The uncles and aunts ... keeping me awake at night.(11)

After 9/11 incident the Janitorial Services business of Tariq's family was badly affected, his father was taken into police custody for investigation with regard to the incident but they couldn't find anything but it took toll upon father's health as he suffered paralytic attack at one part of the body and turned immovable even people in their neighborhood were staring them with those suspicious looks .The situation worsened when Tariq approached lawyer for such an devastated incident as he was pacified not to exaggerate the incident as it has nothing related to police investigation procedures with his father's health and rather provided with other option to quit America and move on to India for safer side as he can find more similar communities there comparative to America where the situation for the Muslim community has worsened. But he was totally in dilemma a sense of alienation born out of the situation and to lose upon his identity crisis as he was born in America. This situation has irked Tariq.

In Fiji ... 'Where are you staying?' (o vaka tikotiko mai vei).(Mishra 25-26)

Here Mishra what tends to apply that there is vast difference in way of enquiring the things as it is totally different way of interrogation prevails in India when one lands as they are asked introduction about their place and caste they belong to but in host land they interrogateonly about the place where they live in.

My parents thought... pleaser because of my older brother.(12)

The perception of Lily's parents with regard to her behavior is gifted by her American friends but it wasn't.

It was her flat... indications of good fortune. (13)

Due to poverty and unemployment Mangalam married Naina but stayed under the debt of his father-in-law who was his Godfather who launched him in a Government job and allowed to get married to his daughter but it took toll upon his marital life as he was always made felt to be suppressed under Naina's contribution for his career growth and not his personal efforts which totally devastated his self-esteem .He senses the deprivation of his identity and realizes alienated in his house as when Naina refuses to invite Mangalam's parents to his house because she was not interested to see them.

Mrs. Pritchett had been a meticulous housekeeper, priding herself on taking care of the big house by herself. (Divakaruni 4)

Mrs. Pritchett sacrificed her aspirations of being owning a successful confectioner but couldn't pursue it in order to get married to Mr. Pritchett she suppressed her emotions as she felt guilty of not producing children for Mr. Pritchett so she thought to move to India to bring about change in her life.

"In South ... a pay cheque."(Hegde 223)

In South Asian families there are rituals to be followed that the women of the house need to be more upon bringing up the children and taking care of them, imbibing their native language, practicing their religion and get socialized with the other cultured people. Even if they are working they are expected to do all the household chores, taking care of the family members and cooking was the primary task of the women even if she is working or not working.

CONCLUSION

The major finding of the paper is that the writer discloses the feelings of alienation and loss of identity is not traceable among emigrants as it was analyzed that the root cause of the problems of emigrants are cultural differences. Very keenly the diasporic sensibility has been presented by the writer from the narration *One Amazing thing*. She has justified the major themes while presenting the diasporic writing. She has communicated the objective of her writings to the society. With this we can state that this paper is pivotal in research paper.

"All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way."(Mishra 1)

Through the analysis we can conclude that all the characters are in the quest of self-identity and also faces alienation in the novel.This incident draws each and every person closer so to divert and find solace in expressing their inner one amazing thing that occurred in their life which have been long bottled up into their hearts and didn't disclosed to anyone. They exchanged several experiences that they come across with regard to cultural alienation and identity. The present paper genuinely evaluates Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work on each angle of diasporic sensibility.As it was witnessed that all the emigrants are generating various issues out of their diasporic experience when sensing the experiences of alienation and loss of identity.

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