

The Processes of Transculturation, Literary Practices and Global Context

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Migration which is set in motion by modernization and the economic forces of globalisation has currently reached a new magnitude and intensity. The multi-directional migratory flows involve the processes of modification, adaption and constructions of hybrid identities. As a consequence of the displacement and dislocation the migrant writers negotiate, intervene and make attempts to assimilate in the adopted lands. Dwelling amidst the “here” and “there”, playing the roles of “insiders” “outsiders”, these writers give expression to the identity crisis, the sense of loss, personal dilemmas, and a perpetual nostalgia for the home land. These writers use their creative urges to resist as well as negotiate with the hegemonic forces in the process of transculturation. The meaning of language, home, memory, marginalisation take new connotations in the context of the interaction between two separate cultural systems and opposing social forces.

To migrate to a foreign land and to a different culture means a crossing of frontiers and borders which can be intimidating. But this occasion will also provide opportunities for personal and intellectual growth that shapes the character. It is a quest for freedom, a better life, leading to the realisation of a dream. Divakaruni Chitra Banerjee highlights the multiple issues of migration and exile through the female characters within the

diaspora. Divakaruni focuses on the politics of the diaspora, with reference to the positioning and identity crisis. It necessitates the crossing of the physical as well as metaphoric and the blurred line between the two worlds. Crossing frontiers involves many risks and an arduous transition, but the journey shapes the identity and leads to the realization of an individual’s strengths and weaknesses.

The Vine is a part of a trilogy, written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, which draws attention to the immigrants’ tribulation in an adopted land, and how the immigrant women respond to moments of crises. It also reflects their aspirations for modernity, feelings of restlessness, alienation and conflicting loyalties towards their native culture and country. These women find themselves in an anomalous and incompatible position.

In “Negotiation with the New Culture, A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s “The Mistress of Spices”, Dhanum writes:

“All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their cultures and religions.....And inevitably it includes the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities.....Her sensitivity to contemporary voices, today’s issues are threaded through with an ongoing search for identity beyond

anthropology beyond sociology and beyond academia.”

(Critical Essays on Diasporic Writings 62)

The Vine marks a shift in the meaning of hybridity and identity formation through self-discovery. Divakaruni reveals the rewards and perils of breaking free from the past and the complicated, contradictory emotions that shape the passage to independence. It tells about Sudha's journey to the U.S. as a journey from oppression and suffocation to freedom and the discovery of self in a foreign land. Sudha is invited to America by her cousin Anju, in spite of her husband's many warnings not to do so. In spite of a foreboding of an impending misfortune, both Sudha and Anju look forward to their meeting as a revival of their lost selves. They restore their old love and friendship. Sudha in her turn is happy to be free from the social constraints and stifling restrictions of the Indian society, from which she has sought an escape. The union of the Chatterjee girls in America is symbolic of an upward mobility. Divakaruni describes it as:

“The day Sudha stepped off the plane from India into Anju's arms leaving a ruined marriage behind; their lives changed forever. But not just Sudha's and Anju's. Sunil's life changed too. And baby Dayita's” (Vine 9)

The bond of sisterhood and friendship strengthens between the two women initially. Sudha begins to adjust in the American society. She continues to suffer the trauma of her abortion and broken marriage but is not nostalgic about her past in India. She has initiated the formation of a

diasporic hybrid identity. The displacement of an individual compels the imaginative occupation of culture and identity and generates vibrant and creative ways of cultural hybridity. Hall writes:

“The diaspora existence is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.”

(Cultural Identity and Diaspora.

235)

Anju and her husband Sunil, who really loved her cousin Sudha are on the fringes of a broken marriage. It is a triangular situation where each questions the central assumptions of life. Divakaruni makes a contrast between the homely spaces in India and America. On the insistence of Sudha, Anju joins College and realizes that she can write. This helps her to escape from a disintegrating marriage. Sudha assumes the role of a housekeeper and does all the household work. In a small two bedroom apartment, the lives of two women, intimately close to each other, a man and his secret longings and a child's ability to adapt to the new surroundings unfolds in a tale of sensitivity, passion yearning, love and traditions.

The incident of a physical proximity between Sunil and Sudha, the cousin, triggers a guilt complex in the two. There

grows a gradual awareness of a distancing and independence in both the sisters. Sudha begins to appreciate the anonymity and indifference of American culture. She is also attracted by the boldness and spirit of adventure of the American women. The author writes about Sudha:

“Here is the woman who cut through her mother-in-law’s plots to control her womb; who stepped from the security of wifehood onto the stony path of being a mother, alone, in a country where such things meant shame; who braved the new rules of a new continent because she wanted more in life than a man to take care of her.” (Vine 129-130)

Sudha is constantly in a state of flux as her migration from India to America was a means of erasing the dimensions of her old self but she had to struggle to cope with it. As Pieterse remarks:

“Something deeply unsettling resides with the presentation of the new human existence in our contemporary world; the fluidity and ease of various cultural fusions seem to erase the contradictory dimensions of hybridity in a world where boundaries and boundary policing continue to have deep consequences” (Hybridity; So What? 221)

In The Vine, Divakaruni portrays the way each character wrestles with the cultural dislocation and in the friction of changing gender roles. Sudha undertakes to venture out on her own, find a job and bring up her

daughter singlehandedly. Anju’s realization of her husband’s passion for Sudha shatters her illusions and cause a rift between the two sisters. Each tries to grapple with the inner pain and the outside pressures of life in America. Sudha’s employment as the caretaker of an old man, becomes Sudha’s “third space” as Bhabha mentions..... “this hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity or fixity.” (The Location of Culture. 176)

Sudha feels that she has never really had a home, only delusions of a belonging. She begins to doubt her own celebration of freedom as she realized that her need for roots is essential to her. The sense of loss or alienation caused by displacement or dislocations creates a position of “live-in-between.” Or “living-with-the-borders,” which Bhabha discusses in “The Location of Culture.” The displacement also gives rise to the concepts of double consciousness and unhomeliness which make the diasporic identity.

Sudha’s stay in America has given her new insights into different life-styles so that she returns to India as a reinforced person. Anju adopts a hybridized way of thinking, college creative writing assignments and activities, she steps forward to a new life with her to an ultimate self-determination.

The idea of nationhood and belonging, in a diasporic situation is therefore, always in a state of flux and mediated by personal and collective memories and desires. Fractured memories and a desire to fulfil dreams of success become mutually interchangeable and result in a restless “self” in search of a

fixity Sunil returns back to India for his father's last rites and is shocked by the dirt and squator prevalent everywhere. Identity and home are two intertwined issues emphasised in the fluidity of culture and social constructions of the narrative.

Diasporic identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses and the location of belonging gets governed by these varying identities. Divakaruni blends the lives of Indian Americans with the myths of a distant homeland. She effectively takes the reader into an immigrant culture and also shows the common ground that lies in a world that some would experience and feel as foreign.

The story ends with Anju's metaphorical declaration, "I've learned to fly" and with Sudha's decision to return back to her home in Calcutta. The two women have broken free of the past and shaped their own passage to independence. The themes of alienation, self-transformation and an exploration of the immigrants' roots, allegiance, family, community and identity.

Uma Parmeshwaran's "Mangoes on the Maple Tree" explores the struggle of acculturation of two families in Canada over a span of twenty days and sets the action against the 1997 floods in Winnipeg. The issue of "multiplicity of homes" forms the central motif in the novel, where the two families shift between their native homeland and the adopted home. She represents the state of displacement, marginalization and struggle for belongingness experienced by

the immigrants. The Bhaves and Moghe families embark upon a negotiation between different cultural values.

Salman Rusdie has written how the immigrant goes through a hostile and defensive phase in an alien atmosphere:

"The migrant severed from his roots, often transplanted into a new language, always obliged to learn the ways of a new community, is forced to confront the great question of change and adaptation; but many migrants faced with the sheer existential difficulty of making such changes and also often with the sheer alienness and defensive hostility of the peoples among whom they found themselves, retreat from such questions behind the walls of old culture they have both brought along and left behind."

(Step Across This Line 356)

Parmeswaran shows the ambivalent stands of different characters and foregrounds that home is not a fixed site but a transitional and ambivalent location where the characters relate differently. She affirms the potentiality of a transplanted life while allowing scope to cultural hybridity and diasporic consciousness.

The global scenario with its increasing mobility, migration and capitalism has resulted in the instability of identities. Multiple hyphenated identities are increasing days by day due to globalisation. Radhakrishnan in his book "Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location" writes: "The diasporic location is the space

of the hyphen that tries to co-ordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one's place of origin with that of one's present home.....(13)

towards the processes of hybridisation. An encounter between psychological, cultural, geographical boundaries helps us to draw the line between language, cultures, peoples and identities.

Identity takes into account cultural amalgamation that shapes our outlook

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