

‘IMAGINARY HOMELAND’ AS EXPATRIATES DELUSION IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI’S ARRANGED MARRIAGE

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Salman Rushdie’s insight into the predicament of diasporic writers reveals that the emigrant writers are always haunted by some sense of loss because of their physical alienation from their own country. They use their writings as powerful medium to give vent to their urge to reclaim their nationality. But as the consequence of their tireless efforts, what they create is not the actual nation but a fictitious one. The corner stone of this paper is based on the problem of ‘Imaginary Homeland’ which according to Rushdie reflects India’s of the mind;

Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands India’s of the mind (*Imaginary Homelands* 10).

Chitra Banerjee as the Indian based writer has experienced the nature, culture, taste and patriotism of India in the American field and systematically understood and expressed the Indian sensibility through her deep study into the diasporic lives of the Indians and produced her ideas in her short stories *Arranged Marriage*. She also portrays that the root that has been left in India itself by the these immigrants through their identity crisis such as culture, language, gender, politics and tradition is revealed in the form of writings of the authors. This paper aims at the investigation into nationalism which is somehow lost in the lives of the Expatriates and this nationalism aims to build and maintain a single national identity. Nationalism, therefore, seeks to preserve and foster a nation’s traditional culture. To establish this identity, the immigrants struggle a lot and this effort results in a great loss. The immigrants face this loss due to their wavering mind-set because of which there arises a query ‘whether they belong to the home land or the host land’ within them.

The immigrants hope that the foreign land gives them comfort, happiness and high standard life that are not felt in the home land. The Indians crossing the borders of the other countries have their own ideas, desires, imagination, dreams and hopes to be built there. No one knows whether all their aspirations may come true or not.

The cross culture predominantly affects the very essence of lives of these people. Renee Green, reflects on the need to understand cultural difference as the production of minority identities that ‘split’ – are estranged unto themselves (*The Location of Culture* 4). The mixture of the two cultures lead to many problems such as family split, fear over the future, social stigma, status problem, conflict with language, conflict with the unknown, conflict with fear, conflict with everyday life, conflict with loneliness, conflict with weather, conflict with politics, conflict with loss, conflict of identity crisis and so on. This mixture doesn’t go hand in hand with each other and they are in two different extremes. What is considered bad in India is considered good in America. This idea is portrayed in “Clothes”, as it goes, “A lot of Americans drink, you know. It’s a part of their culture, not considered immoral, like it is here. And really, there’s nothing wrong with it” (*Arranged Marriage* 21).

There is always the situation of conflict with the unknown which all of a sudden happens to someone who is new and it may be normal to the one who is residing in the same soil. Here, in the short story, “Clothes”, Divakaruni deals with the concept of marriage life with the unknown person. Mita says, “I’d be going halfway around the world to live with a man I hadn’t even met. Would I ever see my parents again? Don’t send me so far away” (*Arranged Marriage* 18). And this is accepted by her later as it is her fate when she says, “Besides, wasn’t it every woman’s destiny, as Mother was always telling me, to leave the known for the

unknown?”(*Arranged Marriage* 18). Even the Indians are afraid of the unknown insects that may be the part of the destructive forces in the lives of the Indians. Due to this, “Into each fold my mother has tucked a small sachet of sandalwood powder to protect the saris from the unknown insects of America” (*Arranged Marriage* 24).

Very often, the conflict with fear enters into the hearts of the immigrants. Fearing outsiders is one of our oldest, instinct and built-in psychological tendencies. It is also true that fear of the refugees and the immigrants is emotional. That's what makes it so powerful. Mita exposes the conflict of fear in the foreign country in this way; “I lie mostly awake those nights, picturing masked intruders crouching in the shadowed back of the store” (*Arranged Marriage* 28). Fearing others changes the way we perceive and understand them. This simple reason for this fear is the foreign and unknown land where the immigrants enter in.

The conflict with everyday life for the immigrants is a never solved issue in the borrowed land. Homi K. Bhabha portrays ‘that under every dark skin there was a jungle’ was a belief that grew, spread, and touched every perpetrator of the racist myth (*The Location of Culture* 23).

All the writers who leave their mother lands and settle in the foreign land feel so much about their loss and Salman Rushdie isn't too exceptional. As he points out, “A few years ago I revisited Bombay, which is my lost city, after an absence of something like half my life” (*Imaginary Homelands* 9).

The conflict of Identity is the common tool for all those crossed the border. This identity created in the foreign land is not real, of course. Their identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel between two stools (*Imaginary Homelands* 15). There is a possibility that individuals may belong simultaneously to multiple social groups and the group norms are specified in terms of actions across multiple dimensions. In this situation, the identity of each individual varies and is seen as something different. There are tensions that may arise from trying to maintain multiple identities. Due to this identity crisis, there are many problems surrounding the immigrants as it is shown by Meera when Mayhew explains this; “You could get into the lot of trouble with the law. They could bring all kinds of charges against you – kidnapping, child abuse...(*Arranged Marriage* 86). This happens due the different and foreign identity.

In the global context the expatriates rethink their belonging and rights of their homeland which are at times imaginary though for some of them the culture, the tradition and the belief of their origin are not at all primary. At this critical situation, Indian Diaspora particularly wants to create its homeland in the other soil that is purely imaginary because they can't claim their own rights in another land. In the failure of their attempt, there is no other go but to build the imaginary homeland in the foreign country. After coming to the foreign country, they imitate the Indian aspects in many ways. One of them is the worship of Indian gods which is also very well portrayed by Divakaruni as it goes; All the stores I knew were piously named after gods and goddesses – Ganesh Sweet House, Lakshmi Vastralaya for Fine Saris- to bring the owners luck (*Arranged Marriage* 21).

Though the expatriates realize the importance of the homeland, they are not able to come out of the foreign set up. They stand between both cultures and they ultimately realize that it is not that much easy to create their own pure and original lives in the other country and finally it leads to a conceptualization of creating and living in the empirical place. In a way, they are leading the lives of duplication consisting of fear, conflicts, panicky and instability. Even Rushdie only feels that his life so far in the foreign soil had been only illusionary but in reality what he means is that his thought at present in India is illusionary. In his words, this is true, as he writes, “I felt as if I were being claimed or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality” (*Imaginary Homelands* 9). This diasporic imaginary is not at all good on the part of the expatriates but they are to live with it because they are in search of other facilities and scope.

When we go back to the life of Rushdie, it is very clear that like him so many immigrants led the life of imaginary homelands. He attended school in England, where he experienced racism first hand. He also felt the pull of living between nations and the identity crisis that resulted from that pull. He really felt torn between India and England, where he was making a new home as one finds in the work of Divakaruni -“I decide, of joy, of my new American life”(*Imaginary Homelands* 25). As a bilingual person, Rushdie was torn also between two languages of English and his native one. He writes about when returning to one's home country, the immigrants no longer feel at home, because they have been inundated with ideologies from another world. In a way, Rushdie makes it clear that “imaginary homelands” are essentially the fictional creations of migrants, who seek an understanding of the places they live now and the places they come from. They recreate these places on their own in order to satisfy or manage their loss in their real, physical lives and Rushdie approves that he did himself, writing on India, Pakistan, and London.

Rushdie writes about loss of his faith in God, and how faith in God is replaced by faith in radicalism. Instead of finding his faith in God, he creatively focuses on socialism and modernist art, both of which he saw as the most radical politics of his time. Salman Rushdie is a British Indian novelist and essayist with a focus on the connection and “disruptions” between the Eastern and Western worlds. He writes very specially about the Indian subcontinent, with a focus on historical fiction and magical realist fiction, which combine real historical events with fantastical or magical elements.

Even though it is a product of imagination or ‘unreal’ it is loaded with the pain and dream and desire of expatriate writers. The expatriates urge to reclaim their lost relationship with the mother land. The fact is that the immigrants have been uprooted from their original land but at the same time they want to have their connection in some way or the other by dealing in their writing about the culture, history, language, politics, mythology and tradition of the mother land. In order to get one thing one must lose other thing but Indian Diaspora has lost many things. In a way, they are to lead the lives of adjustment.

The rights-oriented advocates hold the universal human dignity and equal protections for migrant workers and residents that are not easily welcomed by the host land leaders. For most of the good hearted people, there should be a stable and unity based community irrespective of caste, colour, creed and race. For the people invested in community life ways, changes brought by immigrants can be unwanted and threatening. Reformers who want to protect immigrant rights would do well to find ways to respect, and work with, traditional community values. The right and responsible path to reform values established values, while extending opportunities and rights to newcomers. In this way, the people of the home land also contribute something for the welfare of the immigrants who are already suppressed and oppressed under the umbrella of imaginary homeland.

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