

Reminiscence in The Unknown Errors of Our Lives

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Abstract:

Narrative technique distinguishes between story and discourse. Story is the sequence of events and discourse employs an order in presenting these events. A storyteller has plethora of choices to describe an event. He can sustain his narrative on provisionally and causality or he can narrate through focalization. Focalization changes the way of narrative as the reader receives the images of character through the intuition of the narrator. Flashback in literature is a narrative technique of expressing the chronological sequence of events of past. The earlier events often take the form of reminiscence. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most emerging writers of English literature. She writes a story from the women's point of views and penetrates the female psyche. This paper analyses flashback technique in the stories of *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* exhibits by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

Key Words: Narrative, Flashback, Reminiscence, Female Psyche.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Asian American with her native roots in Calcutta, India. She is a poet, short story writer, novelist, and teacher has been living in the United States for three decades. Her melodious language flows through every page of her books, her poetic gift, exploring minds, chasing the very heart of life. Fisher in **Ethnicity and Post- Modern Arts of Memory** writes, "Immigrant memory and history function as major narrative strategies and infuse genres as diverse as poetry, drama and fiction with an ethnographic discourse."

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with the gift of her writing skills highlights the crucial moments of life at the crossroad moments caught between past and present, pleasure for the West and the yearning for East, along with battle of custom and newness. The self-realization of her characters involves the constant flux of recalls between past and present. Short stories of Divakaruni are written in different modes of narration. Some of them recap the magic of her childhood while some present the graphic details of immigrants' lives in western country. Some stories are fine example of flashback device and present a moving spectrum of life. Her works written, and placed within the background of the United States, should be interpreted and discussed within the large area of world literature written in English in the second half of the twentieth century.

In her best-crafted works, Divakaruni's method of storytelling reminds the reader of writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, R.K. Narayan, and Santha Rama Rau. She uses the first-person narrative in many of the short stories. Her collections are excellent and admired among other contemporary short stories because of her different styles of narration. Her writing technique is classy in the well-conceived outline, well-knit suspense, intricate plot, letter writing, flashback and surprising ending. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with the strength of her narrative skill captures the critical moments of life at the crossroad moments-caught between past and present, enthusiasm for the West and the longing for East, along with the conflict of tradition and modernity. She experiments with her style in her short stories. Divakaruni in her collection of stories *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* (2001) vitalizes the apathy of the life of those who have to witness the crisis of 'homeland' and 'host land'.

The Unknown Errors of Our Lives demonstrates shift in Divakaruni's concerns. Though she still privileges the plight of immigrants' women, these stories widen her negotiation with cultural adjustment, towards more general human themes of memory, forgiveness and acceptance, the fear of wrong choices and regret, age and family. In this collection, Divakaruni problematizes the characteristics and consequences of Americanization. She deals with the frustrations of women in a witty way and does justice to their sensibility. Divakaruni's short stories examine the impossibility of total "Americanization," in opposition to the strong desire of protagonists to free themselves from the patriarchal and stifling Asian background. She introduces a complex group of South Asian with the situational dilemmas of surviving in rural and urban India and

simultaneously in suburb USA.

The title story “The Unknown Errors of Our Lives” is written by author’s point of view where narrator resorts to mythic painting of Indian legends inherited from her grandmother to pacify her disturbance by artistic expression. The story may be said to be story of the heroin's quest for understanding the meaning of errors in life. She has very well used the flash-back technique to unfold the character of Ruchira. While packing up her flat in preparation for her coming marriage ceremony, she discovers her childhood 'book of errors', a teenage notebook in which she had written down ways to improve her life, Divakaruni writes about the problem of life which she knows best. Her Bengali upbringing has contributed a lot to this knowledge. The significance of the title can be understood from how the past never leaves us alone.

The narrator in the oeuvre is lost in her memories-especially sad, traumatic memories. The story engages the process of accepting the errors of one’s past. Importantly, though Ruchira admits that she had come to terms with ‘misjudgments and slippages’, knowing they will always be a part of her life, her epiphany comes when she can accept an unknown error in her fiancé’s life. Ruchira resorts to mythic painting of Indian legends inherited from her grandmother in an effort to subdue her frustration through creative expression, “In Ruchira’s painting, Ravana, pasty faced and with a prominent overbite, was clearly British, and Jatayu had knocked off his bowler hats with one giant swipe of his claw” (UEOL 223).

Likewise, in the story “The Love of a Good Man” Banerjee underlines on the narration through the extensive dialogues and idioms which develops the story through the first-person narrative. Her writing exhibits extraordinary narrative techniques. Her technique of narration in the story is undoubtedly gripping and makes the reader absorbed in the events of the story. Her art of narration and narrative technique are supplemented by her rich knowledge of English language which is fluently and effectively used to depict the events or story or the objects. In this story she has adopted a controlled method of stream of consciousness, ‘internal narration’ a point of view within a character’s consciousness, manifesting her feeling about and evaluations of the events and her story. She has beautifully used idiomatic language that ornaments her literary landscape

shaping, designing and celebrating her vision of transcending borders and promoting understanding. The story begins in flashback- the narrator recollecting the memories of past: “When I was growing up in Calcutta, my mother had a saying she was fond of: the love of a good man can save your life” (UEOL 89).

The technique is association of idea for the condensation for details within a small space the story is a good example of flashback technique. Divakaruni reckons the medium of writing, the language, as of vital importance to the creative writer. As such she upholds the fundamental right of the writer to exercise a complete freedom in the choice of medium of expression for her work. As far the style of Divakaruni is concerned, she has adopted her own language style. She never presents her themes in a dry and monotonous way; she weaves her themes in the threads of poetic craftsmanship. Her works show a very fine unification of theme and style. She too makes frequent experiments taking liberty with English diction and syntax to give her language a local coloring. Through this line in text which is said by her mother, Bad luck follows glass breaking. The narrator remembers her mother:

My mother had been meticulous in her housekeeping. All the glasses in our house shone, even the ones we never used, like the lead crystal set Father brought back from a long-ago business trip to Europe. Once a month she would take them out and wash them in soda water.... I knew she would keep it safe, protected forever from falling. Like she kept me (UEOL 99).

Apart from the above, Divakaruni's narration of the bamboo forest in “The Names of Star in Bengali” makes us travel into nature that is the taste of her excellent narration. Her art of narration in perfect picture of bamboo forest creates visual photograph of nature, which come out in her writing. The story projects the narratives of the characters that travel to their native village. The central character is Kuku, who visits India as an American immigrant after a considerable pause of time.

Banerjee is a master craftsman for her narrative by using author's point of view technique in this story. The narrative is focused on the longing for the homeland, nostalgia for the glorious past

and the clash of motives in a state of cultural encounter. The narrator starts creeping into her own past. The story has a fine blending of growth in space and movement in time. The story grows out of a chronological sequence of time with synthesis of reality and value. It expresses creatively the stay of narrator's children who are fascinated by bamboo trees and chanting of old rhyme. The reconstruction of past induces a greater sense of loss and nothingness. The ease of life, the innate joy and the spontaneous laughter adds new dimension to their thought. It gives a new thrill of life, "I'll khuku your behinds if you don't show some respect right now. Then they had laugh again, they had not laughed so much in their entire lives, they had never thought India would be this much fun, they wished they could stay forever" (*UEOL* 239).

Divakaruni also notices the feeling of 'guilt' and 'shame' in the life of migrants. It is the guilt of destruction of traditions rooted in Indian life, the guilt of allurements of the west and finally the guilt of injustice with one's own soil and self. The narrator confesses, "She is afraid the boy is too weak to be dragged to any temple. She is not convinced that Indian antibiotics are better than American ones. Oh, she should never have brought them to India, just to assuage the guilt she felt at depriving her mother of her grandchildren" (*UEOL* 257).

Through the narrative structure, Divakaruni tries to analyze and evaluate events and characters from her own ideological, emotive, psychological, cognitive and perceptual position. However, her narrative often contains some non-narrative elements like description of scenes, place or character and discourses on philosophy and psychology. Her narratives are normally structured around an individual whose destiny is the hub of the story. Divakaruni's narration of human experience is an allegation of the bold attempt of her characters to examine the strategies of endurance out of the grain of opportunities strewn around them with a lot of intellectual and emotional maneuvering.

Divakaruni within the compact structure of these stories creates strong situations to deconstruct the sensibility of immigrants. With her subtle imagination, innate consideration for human relationship, intense consciousness for gender prejudices and man's innate bonding with national boundaries, she has invested a new era of diaspora literature. Haunting of past and present and

the crisis of identity are pervasive in the text of Divakaruni. Being an Indian diasporic writer, she wears many caps as an author of multiple genres. Her literary works have brought many laurels to her credit. She is a gifted postcolonial writer with great insight into human psychology. Most of works reflect her connect with Indian roots, culture and traditions which are portrayed in her books in an effective and a convincing manner. Her narrative techniques make her a distinguished story-teller. Readers all over the world have acknowledged her abilities as a powerful writer who enthralls the audience with varied themes, creativity and vivid imagery. She uses a combination of back story, analeptic reference or flash back, prolepsis or flash forward to set the plots.

References:

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