

**The Displacement and Alienation of Immigrants in Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni's *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives***

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Abstract:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most popular bestselling authors in India. She writes for children as well as adults. She has published multiple genres like novels, poetry, essays, reviews and short stories. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in most of her works, highlights the crisis faced by the South Asian immigrants in abroad. Her works are mostly set in India and United States of America. The present paper focuses on the harsh experiences of the immigrants due to the dislocation and loneliness. This collection of short stories also deals with the cultural conflicts. These people enters an alien country as a job seeker, family members of a green card holders, refugee etc. This paper depicts the problem of displacement and alienation faced by the people who are away from their native.

Keywords: Alienation, Displacement, Psychological trauma, Nostalgia, Immigration.

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has discussed the problems and experiences faced by the Indian immigrants in United States of America and other places. She is one of the significant contemporary novelist, poet, essayist and short story writer who got recognition around the world. The writer portrayed the rootlessness feeling in the immigrants and their effort to adapt the alien society. The psychological trauma and physical changes are the dominating impact of the immigration in the world of diaspora. Through various characters in multiple stories the writer had exclusively projected the immigrant experiences to the readers.

The first story "Mrs.Dutta Writes a Letter" is the psychological study of Mrs.Dutta a widow who migrated to her son's house in California. The story is written under the stream of consciousness technique. Through the protagonist the writer focuses on the challenges of the immigrant in American society. Here the writer highlights the displacement and dislocations causing alienation to the immigrant. Mrs. Dutta the protagonist of the story emigrates from her native land Calcutta to California and struggles to adapt the new society. She feels lonely when her grandchildren go to school and her son and daughter-in-law leaves for work. At nine in the morning, the house becomes very silent. Mrs.Dutta hums as she cooks in the kitchen, in order to tear out her alienation. "In India she would never have ventured to sing, but with everyone gone, the house is too quiet, all that silence pressing down on her like the heel of a giant hand, and the TV voices, with their unreal accents, are no help at all." (8) According to Mrs.Dutta, America is totally different from Calcutta when she unable to find

No vegetable vendors with wicker baskets balanced on their heads, no knife-sharpener calling scissors-knives-choppers, scissor-knives-choppers to bring the children running. No dehati women with tattoos on their arms to sell you cookware in exchange for your old silk saris... the goat who maneuvered its head through the garden grille hoping to get at her dahlias, cows who planted themselves majestically in the centre of the road, ignoring honking drivers. (20)

When she wanted to meet her neighbours and share some sweets, her daughter-in-law said, such things were not the custom in California. These things made her to feel the pain of displacement.

An International Refereed English e-Journal**Impact Factor: 2.24 (IIJIF)**

While reading Mrs. Basu's letter, Mrs. Dutta wanted to share all her ill experiences, instead she writes her back to rent a room for her. At the end, Mrs. Dutta becomes unbearable and decides to return to Calcutta.

The next story "The Intelligence of Wild Things" discusses about the characteristic changes in the hero. Tarun, the hero of the story is forced by his mother to immigrate to Vermont because of the fear of the Naxal movement in Calcutta. When Tarun refused to leave his mother, to send him, she assassinated her unconditional love by pretending in front of him and scolded him as a coward, ungrateful, fool and a big burden to her. This pain and anger made Tarun to settle in Vermont, USA. When he settled there, "He hated cooking for himself. Hated coming home in the evenings to an empty room. It was so cold in Vermont, he felt he was slowly freezing, one organ at a time." (44) After his immigration, the sense of alienation not only pricked Tarun but also the mother. When Tarun's sister went to their mother's home, she was disappointed to see her somber mother kept on saying "Seeing my children before I die. Seeing my children..." (52) it shows the fear of alienation. At Vermont, his sister shocked to see his peculiar behaviour. When she enquired about the photograph of a girl in the bedside of Tarun, he said, "My girlfriend's. He spoke in English. He'd been doing that ever since I got to Vermont. It was like a mismatched dance, my long Bengali sentences, his monosyllabic, foreign answers." (37) At the end, Tarun's sister tries to convince and bring back the lovable and affectionate Tarun to his mother.

In "The Lives of Strangers" the writer focuses on the alienation which is leading the characters in an erroneous path. Leela, the heroine of the story returns to Calcutta, India. She is an Indian American and worked as a computer programmer in America. Her parents allowed her to grow up independently and did not stand against her decisions. They felt happy for Dexter, another programmer with whom Leela had fell in love. When Dexter left her, she was harassed by the feeling of alienation and attempted suicide by consuming more sleeping pills. Fortunately her attempt in killing herself ended up in failure. She preferred to move to India for a change. Her mother advised her to stay in with her Aunt. In India, she feels at home. She also accompanies her Aunt for a pilgrimage along with her aunt's friends. On the journey, Leela came in contact with Mrs. Das. Other pilgrims called her as a symbol of bad luck. These remarks alienated Mrs. Das from the other ladies who are all travelling together. The continuous blame of bad luck stimulated Mrs. Das to kill herself by falling from a pinnacle, but she was rescued by the tourist guides. Leela as a rationalist does not believe those warnings and tries to build up a friendship with Mr. Das. When the old lady falls sick and advised to stop the pilgrimage, Leela accompanied her back to the hotel. The fellow pilgrims humiliated her for her bad luck. When Leela tried to save Mrs. Das from the storm, a wood hit her head and laid her in hospital bed. The fortunate lady Mrs. Das who had escaped from the storm, when she came to meet Leela, she

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was abused by other ladies and Leela herself, for bringing bad luck for others. With the wound of alienation, Mrs.Das leaves the hospital, without even informing anything to anyone.

The next story “The Love of a Good Man” is about a young lady Monisha. The protagonist’s mother believed that “The Love of a Good Man can save your life” unfortunately Monisha’s father deserted them to work at America. Suddenly, her mother died, when Monisha’s father abandoned them. After her mother’s death, she regretted all the relatives who asked her to stay along with them. Everyone blamed her for being unmarried and staying alone. This pushed her in a pit called alienation. She does not want to lead her life under the sympathy.

After Mother died, anger was the drug that dulled the throbbing in my head long enough for me to tell solicitous relatives that, no, I wasn’t going to move in with any of them, and, no, I didn’t really care what people thought of an unmarried girl living alone. It steadied my hand when later I wrote in university application that I had no relatives in America and was therefore eligible for a student visa.(97)

Here, the displacement gives a peaceful environment to the protagonist rather than the native land. Before meeting Dilip, she was against the concept of marriage. Her stubbornness to remain unmarried was diminished by Dilip, whom Monisha felt the real love of a good man. Her alienation was completely washed out by the love of her husband Dilip. At the end, when she met her father on her son’s birthday, she gave up all her anger and remembered her blissful childhood days along with her father.

“The Blooming Season for Cacti” story discusses about the displacement and the alienation leads each other, one after the other. Mira, the protagonist of the story emigrates from her native land Bombay, when she lost her mother in a riot. In California, she stayed in her brother’s house where she realized the ultimate alienation and displacement because of her sister-in-law. “my sister-in-law, who was kind in the beginning. Come on, Mira, let’s take you to the mall.” (170) As days passed, she understood the bitter feeling of her sister-in-law about her. So she planned to move out of California. Her brother advised her to take up a job in his friend Malik’s restaurant in Sacramento. Before Mira leaves, her brother spoke about the past memories of their mother. It heightened up her anger and pain.

What right did he have to speak of my mother? He wasn’t the one who’d searched for her through streets filled with the stench of kerosene and burned flesh, calling her name. He wasn’t the one who had gone to one police station after another with her photo, to be told by exhausted officials that there were too many missing people for them to keep track. (176)

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At that time her sense of alienation pricked her heart. Mira worked as a cashier in Malik's restaurant and shared a room with Malik's second wife Radhika. When Radhika induced Mira to have an intimacy with her, she refused the offer and realized that she is not such kind of a lady. She went out for a date with her boyfriend. Radhika unable to bear the alienation gifted by Mira, so attempts suicide. At last, Malik chased her out of the room and the restaurant. Here, the writer had shown that Mira does not belong to anywhere. The alienation was faced by two different women in different ways.

In the next story, "The Forgotten Children" the writer depicts about the family which kept on migrating from one house to another house, as their father lost one job after another. In this story, the children were the protagonist. Due to the incessant migration and dislocation, they felt hard to concentrate on their studies and they always preferred last benches. They did not want to be noticed by others, so they alienated themselves from others. The alienation and the displacement blocked their happiness. They moved to Assam and there they lived in an old British bungalow, built at outskirts of the town. The house was inconvenient for their father, because it was very far away from the factory. Since the rent was cheap, the mother did not complained of the windows which does not shut, the roof leaked during rain and the insects everywhere. Finally, the kids lost their alienation and the feeling of displacement and dislocation in that bungalow.

Through these short stories the writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows the expectations and the compulsions of the emigrants in abroad. It also deals with the theme of characteristic transformation. These works discusses the displacement and the alienation faced by the Indians and Indian Americans in different places. The immigrants are isolated from their families, friends, communities, culture, homes and finding hard to sustain. Some may succeed in adapting the new society by accepting all the customs drawn by the alien countries. Some may be defeated by the impact of diaspora. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has exactly represented the reality of the diaspora in this work.

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