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## Woman's Perspectives in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*

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### **Abstract:**

My article focuses on the various themes like Women's issues, immigration, history, myth and the joys and challenges of living in a multicultural world with reference to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short story collection *Arranged Marriage*. The short stories chronicle the accommodation and the rebellion of the Indian born girls and women in America who strike a balance between old treasured beliefs of transformed lives- both liberated and trapped by cultural changes due to displacement. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American writer who emerged as the outstanding novelist in the genre of South Asian Diasporic literature. Divakaruni's plots feature women of Indian roots torn between old and new values. Her writings centre on the lives of immigrant women - women in love, women in difficulties, and women in relationships.

**Keywords : Racism, Interracial relationships, Economic disparity, Abortion and Divorce.**

The last few decades have witnessed a remarkable change in the perspective of women in Indian English fiction. Fiction by women writers constitute a major segment of the contemporary writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writers' eyes we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. In any appraisal of the Indian English Literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. The women fiction writers got the desired recognition and status with the arrival of writers like R.P.Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahyal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Meena Alexander, Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri. These writers are working on the cultural set-backs that determine the women's life. Dispersion, going away from the native location and departure of cultural context are the main thematic concerns of these writers. Their concerns are global concerns as today's world is afflicted with the problems of immigrants, refugees and all other exiles. Their works are replete with the diasporic consciousness, which strongly witness social realities, longings and feelings in addition to the creativity of the writers. They experience diasporic problems which portray different aspects of sensibilities and concerns, although these vary as per their generations,

perceptions, attitudes and specific identities. Many writers write in their mother tongue, producing literature primarily for the reading public in Middle East or diaspora community while others switch over themselves to write in the language of host country. In both the cases, the distance from the homeland often encourages these writers to tread new grounds, experimenting and exploring with new themes and forms, breaking taboos prevailing in their countries and developing new ideas. Their works analysed much on woman's alternative identities as wife, mother, daughter, beloved etc.

The expatriate writers or their writings have been able to transform the stereotypical sufferings of a woman to an aggressive or independent person trying to seek an identity of her own through her various relationships within the family and society. As a natural consequence their writings, reflect what we consider an expatriate sensibility generated due to cultural disparity and emotional disintegration. In this process it is the woman who suffers the most because of her multiple dislocations. She gets involved in an act of sustained self-removal from her native culture, balanced by a conscious resistance to total inclusion in the new host society. She carries the burden of cultural values of her native land with her to her new country, thus making it more difficult and problematic for her to adjust. She is caught between cultures and this feeling of in-betweenness or being juxtaposed poses before her the problem of trying to maintain a balance between her dual affiliations. Nevertheless, along with the trauma of displacement she is fired by the will to bound herself to a new community, to a new narrative of identity. The diasporic women writings represent the women who are forms of cultural hybridization that reflect the experience and social positioning of the authors themselves. These women in diasporic literature show an inexorable awakening of identity in relation to western values of individuality and independence. The women go on to asserting and exploring their own identity, even when it reverts back to traditional concept.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American writer who emerged as a outstanding novelist in the genre of South Asian Diasporic literature. She has written poetry, short stories and novels. Her works have been translated into eighteen languages and two of her novels have been made into films. Her writings have appeared in various publications including *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*. She was born on July 29, 1956 in Kolkata, India. She received her B.A in English in 1976 from Calcutta University. She moved to United States to continue her studies and got a Master's degree from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio and a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, both in English. She has taught creative writing and English Literature at Diablo Valley College, Foothill College and University for Houston, USA. She has co-founded MAITRI an organization that works with South Asian Women dealing with situation of domestic violence. She explores various themes like Women's issues, immigration, history, myth and the joys and challenges of living in a multicultural world.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the typical immigrant experience showing the mirror to Indian women wriggling out of stereotypes in American urban landscapes through her novels. Set in spaces-Physical as well as mindscape- divided by continents and cultures. Divakaruni's plots feature women of Indian roots torn between old and new values. Her

writings centre on the lives of immigrant women - women in love, women in difficulties, and women in relationships. Her interest in delving deeper into the amorphous and often paradoxical existence of women began soon after she left Indian shores and her subsequent documentation of cross-country immigrant experience. She always maintained that the stories for her novels are inspired by her imagination and the experiences of others which the Indian Diaspora abundantly offers. Her stories reflect loneliness and unsuccessful relationship as the part of immigrant women's life. These women though ready to play an active part in the new culture still peep alive their old tradition in their dressing of food habits or even home decor. Divakaruni's characters take their journey beyond threads of duality, more towards conditions inherently complex and multifarious. In a clear departure from double consciousness, her women characters exhibit multiple consciousnesses ending up in creating a self that is fragmented. Most of her characters are adventures and explorers rather than refugees and outcasts. She represents the women of her novels as a class who constantly struggle to achieve financial self sufficiency.

Banerjee's writing affirms that diaspora is not merely a scattering or dispersion but an experience made up of collectivities and multiple journeys. It's an experience that is determined by who travels, where, how and under what circumstances. Almost all the expatriates who emigrated from India to America face the clash of opposing cultures, a feeling of alienation which is followed by the attempts to adjust, to adopt and to accept. Only the degree of this adaptation differs according to the generations. Her works primarily deals with difficulties in adjustment, nostalgia for home, inability to 'connect' on return visits to India, schizophrenic sense of double Indian and western identities or a sense of belonging to nowhere, neither here or there, remain the dominant feelings of the Indian immigrant.

Women's life in diasporic situations can be doubly painful- struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work with the claims of old and new patriarchies. Consequently, the women in South Asian women's literature question their identity. Identity crisis or search of identity has received an impetus in the Post-Colonial literature. Man is known as a social animal which needs some home, love of parents and friends and relatives. But when he is unhoused, he loses the sense of belongingness and thus suffers from a sense of insecurity or identity crisis. This self evaluation is a preoccupation for diasporic women writers, but written in a different context rather different conclusions. There is constant interplay of nostalgia and reality in Divakaruni's novels. At a deeper level they show a conflict between tradition and modernity. The trials and tribulations and the struggle to maintain the modern values and to carve out an identity of their own in the new and ostensibly stifling environment of her protagonists makes them a feminist. Her protagonists seek to synthesize traditions with the modern values which are the needs of the hour. To an extent they reconcile themselves to the rigidity of traditions but with reservations and carve out their own identity as 'new women' living within the ambit of tradition.

Divakaruni's first collection of stories *Arranged Marriage*, won an American Book Award, a PEN Josephine Miles Award and a Bay Area Book Reviewers Award. The

underlying theme of her Short story collection *Arranged Marriage* is as the name suggests marital relationships as they are seen in South Asian Communities where by and large the practice is that parents arrange marriages of their children. It is a collection of 11 short stories. These stories about Indian immigrants to the U.S show how immigration and dislocations are making this tradition problematic. The short stories chronicle the accommodation and the rebellion of the Indian born girls and women in America who strike a balance between old treasured beliefs of transformed lives- both liberated and trapped by cultural changes due to displacement. Most of the stories are about characters from the author's native region of Bengal. The culturally displaced immigrants encounter discrimination and face rejection in the new world, and it forms the crux. Sandra Ponzanesi in her essay "In My Mother's House" states:

"As far as the condition of migration and diaspora is concerned, women are often called to preserve their nation through the restoration of a traditional home in the new country. The idea of home entails the preservation of traditions, heritage, and continuity; there is even an intense emotive politics of dress for some communities" (245)

The short stories follow the path of Indian marriages. Each story reflects the diasporic South Asian women's battle with cultural assimilation and identity formation. It focuses on women from India caught between two worlds. The hoary tradition of finding matches by matching the horoscopes of the boy and the girl sometimes miserably fails to assure domestic bliss to the beleaguered women, instead the domestic violence predominates. Each story has a freshness and unique twist on the culture clash between East and West. From the first story of this collection *Bats* to the last story *Meeting Mrinal* the women protagonists constantly try to strike a balance between the old conventional beliefs and their new life in America. For the women brought to life in these stories, the possibility of change, of starting anew, is at once terrifying and filled with promise, like the ocean that separates them from their homes in India. From the story of a young bride whose fairy-tale vision of California is shattered when her husband is murdered, forcing her to face the future on her own, to a proud middle-aged divorcee determined to succeed in San Francisco, Divakaruni's award-winning poetry fuses here with prose for the first time to create eleven unforgettable portraits of women on the verge of transformation. In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni focuses a variety of themes including racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion and divorce.

Divakaruni questions the basic man-woman relationship in Indian society, which is essentially a patriarchal society. Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* tells that marriage is the destiny tradition offered to women by society. Finding a suitable match for their daughter is the sole concern of many parents in our society. This task of finding a suitable match is so inherent in the Indian culture that it is believed that a girl's life begins and ends with marriage.

**BATS:** The first story in this collection of short stories is *Bats*. The protagonist in this short story is totally engulfed by the traditional ties and a victim of domestic violence. She is constantly beaten by her husband and desperately wants to escape. Her life with her husband had been a hell in her life. So, she escapes to her native village with her child. Here in the



village the atmosphere is reasonably good, the open sky, the river, and the trees - all that a child requires for a holistic development is present in the village. The child soon became grandpa uncle's best friend. The child says, "All day I follow him around as he went about his job which was taking care of the Zamindar's orchard. He taught me all the names of trees- mango, lichee, kul- and let me taste the first ripe fruits. He pointed out hares and squirrels and girgitis that hid in the grass, their shiny greenish bodies pulsing in the sun. On his off days he took me fishing and taught me how to hold the rod tight" (7) But these days of bliss was gone as it was only a temporary refuge for a child. The protagonist unable to bear "the stares and whispers of the women, down in the market place and the loneliness of being without him [husband]" (12) However, a letter from her husband and a small promise, a bit of gesture of love is enough for her. Consequently, she returns to her husband and this time she hopes that life will change. Nevertheless, she does not realize that by flying somewhere else she may be secure. However, we are acquainted with the fact that her miscalculations concerning her husband may lead her and her child's life into another hell-like situation.

This story portrays the pitiable plight of a woman who becomes a prisoner in an arranged marriage. Here, the protagonist is a typical Indian woman stuck up in the web of social stigma and prejudice that she finds it difficult to shed off the past and move towards a renewed life and vision away from the practical society. The child is caught between a cruel father and helpless mother. Divakaruni vividly portrays the child's incapacity to understand her mother's agony initially and why her mother had to share her narrow child's bed. The writer draws a parallel to the life of the wife and the bats. Both are hunted for being in the wrong places. Spinsters and divorced women are the most affected when they tend to walk their own paths. Just like the bats which simply do not decrease in number. Grandpa says, "I guess they just don't realize what's happening. They don't realize that by flying somewhere else they'll be safe. Or maybe, they do, but there's something that keeps putting them back here" (8)

**CLOTHES:** The second story, called Clothes is about the unfulfilled promise of a marriage- the wedding clothes still remaining in the suitcase in which the bride had packed them. Sumita, the central character moves from Calcutta to California, into a small apartment that she shares with her new husband and his parents. She describes the delineation between an Indian home and the American world outside and the contradictory feelings that emerge from the disconnection between the two spheres. She remains unmindful of the fact that the codes of marital life are drastically different in India and America. She follows the traditions (of covering her head with her sari, serving tea to her mother-in-law's friends, hiding overt sexual activity, and never addressing her husband by his first name) are all signs of respect in India and are strictly maintained in this home in California. Her husband Somesh, in spite of being Indian, modifies himself, according to the spirit of the American society. He tries to make Sumita aware of American living against the moral consciousness governing the life of Indian immigrants, "A lot of American's drink, you know. It's a part of their culture, not considered immoral, like it is here"(21). She develops different perceptions of herself in response to this emotional tension: while in the home, she sees herself as the traditional sari-clad Indian housewife- subservient, meek and modest, living life "the Indian way".

Divakaruni examines the complicated issue of sexuality in the story clothes in which sex is portrayed as the duty of a wife in her marriage, regardless of whether she desires to engage in it of her own volition. Finally Sumita's husband died and she is faced with the decision of staying America or going back to India to live with her in-laws. She calls widows as "doves with cut of wings" who are serving in laws in India. A distinct perception of self and society is contained in Indian notions of family and community. Whereas the 'self' in American society is an individualized unit that creates a new relationship when two such persons contract marriage, in India persons are embedded in social relationships and communal identities that exist both before and after marriage. As people behave according to their community affiliation, religion, caste, class and gender, it is more difficult to assign neat boundaries between self and others.

The image of the subservient Indian woman stems from Indian mythology and the manner in which Indian females are represented in it. The image of 'Sita' has a profound effect on the Indian psyche. Her chastity and loyalty to her husband represents the ideal path for an Indian wife. At the same time, another woman 'Kunti', in Indian mythology also represented as the "ideal wife"- patient, obedient and devoted to her husband in every situation, regardless of whether it brings her personal suffering. This ideology survives even among modern, upper-class Indian women who defer to their husbands in an almost instinctive way. Divakaruni, through her female protagonists, records how desperately they have craving for liberation against the bondages of patriarchy that ruins their human sensibility born out of gender prejudices.

**SILVER PAVEMENTS AND GOLDEN ROOFS:** The third story Silver Pavements and Golden Roofs is a new perspective on marriages of long-standing. The differences that can develop in such marriages when the couples live abroad cut off from family and culture. Jayanti, an immigrant girl migrates to Chicago, to join her uncle and aunt, before beginning her graduate studies at an American University, who were living there for many years. They left India just a week after her aunt Pratima's marriage with Bikram. Lastly She saw her aunt on the occasion of her arranged marriage in Calcutta with an Indian emigrant Bikram who as assured by the matchmaker was the owner of an automobile empire in America. Jayanti dreamt of going to a foreign country since she was a child. She had fantasy for the life of America, and was obsessed to visit that place. Contrast to Jayanti's assumption that her uncle and aunt were living a well-off life, she finds his uncle runs a small auto repair garage and they lived in a dingy apartment, not a lovable place to live. Their house is no different from the India that Jayanti left. Jayanti within the confines of home feels disoriented because it appears that time and space has not changed for her as she expected from her immigration. Rather, she is in the same world, where the Indian tradition remains the norm, and assimilation is but a distant glance out a window. Jayanti appears totally isolated and "protected from American culture but she soon realizes that the "little India" that has been created is merely an illusion of security" (35-36). As Jayanti and her aunt walk around their neighborhood, they are approached by a group of young boys who attack them with racist slurs. Jayanti does not understand how circumstances can shift so dramatically once she leaves her home. Her entire perception of her own race is thrown into question upon

leaving the house. Jayanti who was proud to be an upper class Indian, questions her relation to American race categorization. The harsh words of the young boys have affected her to the point where she cannot help but perceive herself differently. Jayanti soaks in the American culture, questions social norms, and comes face to face with ignorance and prejudice. Coming from a culture of arranged marriages, Jayanti surely wants to find her prince, not be subjected to a misleading arranged marriage like that of her Aunt Pratima (76). She also details a fantasy with her college professor which pushes against the stereotype of the submissive Asian woman. However, her tradition of subservience comes into play; while imagining herself intimate with her college professor, Jayanti proclaims, "But here my imagination, conditioned by a lifetime of maternal censorship, shuts itself down." (76). While she pushes against tradition, She surely holds on to the values and norms of her culture. Ultimately, She saw who she could become in witnessing her aunt's hardships and unhappiness; however, Jayanti appears to be determined to assimilate and become "American." The conclusion of *Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs* acts as foreshadowing; Jayanti will become "American." As the frigid, numbing snow lands on her dark skin, she announces, "beauty and the pain should be part of each other." (83). She must experience and learn from the injustices against her, both from her tradition and as an Indian immigrant in the United States. Like her Aunt Pratima and other immigrants, Jayanti must "learn" to become part of her new culture, thus defying tradition. Fortunately for Jayanti, she could take advantage of her situation and assimilate if she chose. After all, she chose education over an arranged marriage. Divakaruni explores the failure, futility, isolation, dispossession, and rootlessness of the culturally displaced immigrants.

**THE WORD LOVE:** The fourth story "The Word Love" is not about marriage but about 'living in sin': a new vista that opens to young Indian immigrants when they go to study in America. Cut off from their family, contactable only in phone. This story explores the heartache and guilt of 'living in sin'. In this story, the heroine starts living with a man. Love is a magical word and it is difficult to define it easily. She accepted westernization in totality that she started to live with her boy friend outside the institution of marriage. But here past (her culture) thwarts her. She recollects how her mother had taken pains to bring her up after her father's death. Mother-daughter relationship is quite different in Indian culture. She regrets for hiding the relationship with her mother, however she finally faces the wrath of losing her mother on confessing the truth. Her boyfriend on knowing her relationship says "it was never me, was it, never love. It was always you and her, her and you"(70). Thus parental love makes her to take a decision to live alone. The writer here poignantly present the realism in Indian culture where the society is a closed one and it is very different to accept relationship outside the institution of marriage. This relationship, often result in conventional violence, social exclusions from the society and even abandonment from parents and relatives.

**PERFECT LIFE:** The fifth story 'Perfect Life' which explores the psyche behind why individual wants to become parents. Meera, the protagonist in the short story feels that she leads a good life – an interesting job and a supportive boyfriend Richard. She says that she has space in her relationship with Richard. She appreciates and loves her independence



but she also feels the curse of solitude. She is miserable many times as she misses the tenderness that comes from living in a family especially Indian family. Conversely, the scene changes as the child Krishna enters her life. She is psychologically attached to Krishna and wants to adopt him. However, this is not possible due to certain rules and regulations of adoption in America. Her life completely changes. “Mother love, that tidal wave swept everything else away. Friendship romantic fulfillment evens the need for sex” (98-99) The disappearance of the child from the adoption centre actually jeopardizes her life. The once appeared “civilized, as much in control as perfect.”(77). Life crumbles down. It takes great toil on her, however with the passage of time she comes out of her depression. The mask that she is supposed to wear – the mask of education, the mask of social pressures, the mask of controlled behavior and her own limitations, she does not allow her to be the victim of the circumstances. She feels the void in her life, but she is ready to compromise. Again, her concept of a perfect life with Richard or Krishna may just be a fantasy. She marries Richard on the condition that she is never burden with biological maternity and also to get herself back.

**THE MAID SERVANT’S STORY:** The sixth one ‘The Maid Servant’s Story’ is the longest story in Arranged Marriage. This story focus on morality and the responsibilities of educated and privileged women have in protecting less when they compared to fortunate women, a maid in this case. It was an amalgamation of varied moods, settings and emotions. The story begins with an awkward relation between a strict mother and her educated daughter in America. It is interwoven a long forgotten story about a maid servant, Sarla who is exploited by her greedy mother and genteel employers. Divakaruni reveals the complexity of twin-culture mingled with the complexity of man and woman relationship which becomes the main issue in this story. The plot is organized in two cultural backgrounds: the traditional society of Calcutta and the progressive society of California. This short story deals with human relationship at various phases of life. It shows the relationship between Manish and Bijoy, Deepa mashi and Manish, Manish and her mother, and relation between Manish’s mother and father. However, it is Sarla’s story – Sarla the maidservant. In this story, the writer introduces us to women from different generations and economical groups in our society. Manish belongs to a traditional Bengali family. However, after her immigration to America, she undergoes a transformation. In her ideas about relationship, she is entirely westernized. She wants a liberated relationship with no strings attached. She is more close to Deepa mashi when compared to her own mother. As a child, she had always yearned for parental love, which she never got. She never got the praise she craved - that squeezed – breathless, delirious with joy, hug that other mothers gave their daughters. She is emotionally starved and accordingly in all her relationship she does not feel the complete contentment that a perfect relationship should give. Her relation with Bijoy also does not make her happy. She persistently feels the feeling of guilt that tradition many times imposes us. She also, indirectly blames her mother for her current juxtaposition. Sarla, the maidservant in this short story is a person dedicated to her work. However, when the mistress of the house is ill, the husband behaves in a typical manner. Emotion of guilt is not to be seen as he goes towards Sarla’s room, with mal intentions in his mind. He tells the servant not to act so virtuous - once a whore, always a whore. Nevertheless, when he sees that his plans have failed he threatens the

maidservant he calls her a Bitch. Now because he is a man and morals in our society are only for women, he does not feel the guilt that is felt by Manish. The writer shows us the double standard of our society and also tries to establish the geographical distances are bound to yield to the complexity of personal relationship. In this story, the heroine is about to get married. Her aunt tells her a warning story in which a married woman could not save her maid servant from becoming a prostitute. Things are not so easy, when we try to do something good. Many intricacies are involved in almost everything that appears to be easy. Marital limitations are some of those.

**THE DISAPPEARANCE:** The seventh story is 'The disappearance' which explore the Cross-cultural experiences of a woman in this story. The writer portrays the woman's oppression within the arranged marriage in which the wife is not allowed to pursue her financial independence, rather she is subject to marital rape. The protagonist is a man, who married to a quite, pretty Indian girl. It is an arranged-marriage. But one day his wife suddenly disappears. He searches almost everywhere, but in vain. He recalls his marriage with her. He loved her. They had small differences, which is usual in all marriages. When she disappears suddenly, he didn't know how to handle it. He didn't know how to tell her parents in India. Now he is a lost man, without knowing why and how about the person he has married. His concept of realism is traumatized. The protagonist who is quite busy with his own world and views does not notice the anxiety felt by the wife. There is no understanding and equality in this marriage. However, the act of disappearance itself suggests that the wife has escaped from the cage. It is the only story which is written with the perspective of male protagonist.

**DOORS:** The eighth story 'Doors' which depicts the clash and confrontation between two cultures- East and West. In this story, Preeti is depicted as a person who loves western idea of privacy and always closes the doors behind her. She is not only found closing the doors of the room but also closing the doors of her heart against the marital relationship with her husband Deepak. Deepak who is from India marries Preeti who is settled in America. Preeti's mother warns her to be careful with Deepak because she personifies herself as an immigrant wife who endures in transforming her life. She feels cynical about whether her daughter can adjust to the traditional married Indian life. Even Deepak's friends tease him during his marriage with Preeti- an American Indian women. This gives a perplexed feeling of Indian men about American Indian women. Indian men wish to marry Indian women who are more submissive than American Indian women. Preeti and Deepak's marital life runs smoothly with mutual love and respect thus shattering the old dogmas. But the arrival of Raj from India ruins their relationship. Preeti is more of a private person and finds it hard to adjust when Deepak's younger sibling comes to stay to do his higher education in America. But hospitality is entirely different in both societies which results in a great clash between the couple. Deepak's traditional self emerges strongly much to the chagrin of his wife and he begins to enlighten his wife about the virtues of the traditional Indian wife "to be obedient and adjusting and forgiving" (184). But Preeti always like her doors to be closed and needs a private space which she is not ready to share even with her husband. As the wife is an independent America born and bred woman and has never lived in a joint family, she

struggles to accept her Indian husband's tolerance for nosy friends. Indians are usually brought up in large joint families and there is not so much as called private and personal space unlike the west with its individual culture where there is a distinct space between private and public life.

**ULTRASOUND:** The ninth story 'Ultrasound' was another great story of two friends, who get pregnant at the same time, yet owing to different cultural settings. It is the story of Anju and Runu who share identical experiences of childhood. Anju lives with her husband in America whereas Runu lives with her husband in India who came from a rich traditional Brahmin family. Both the women are pregnant who share their experience of the progress of their pregnancy. Anju enjoys greater freedom when compared to Runu who bears the burden of conventionality. It tells whether the baby in the womb is a boy or a girl. This story tells about the acceptance of the baby being a girl in India in contrast to that in America. It also portrays the treatment which an expecting mother meets after knowing about the arrival of a girl child. Runu is castigated for not giving birth to a male child. Runu's friend, Anju invites her to America in order to give her ill-fated life. The patriarchal society's injustice meted out to women and girl children is poignantly pointed out by the writer.

**AFFAIRS:** The tenth story is 'Affairs' which deals with the dissatisfaction in marriage that leads to an extra-marital relationship. It unfurls the different perspectives of the people involved. In this story, the central character Meena reconsiders her identity as that of the dutiful wife after suspecting her husband's infidelity. "Had I ever really been myself? I didn't think so. All my energy had been taken up in being a good daughter. And of course a good wife."(269). The inordinate amount of emphasis placed on Indian women to be "domestic goddesses" results in constructing the home as a place where time and space cease to function according to normal patterns and become frozen in the practices of ancient Indian mythology and culture.

**MEETING MRINAL:** The last story "Meeting Mrinal" shows the predicament of Asha, a woman who grew up in India, had an arranged marriage according to Indian tradition, and then had to adapt to a new lifestyle and culture as a divorced woman. The protagonist of this story is Asha, an Indian-born woman who immigrates to the United States to join her Indian husband (acquired through an arranged marriage). In her new home, she leads the life expected of a traditional Indian wife until an event occurs that forces her to move beyond her accustomed role. Her husband leaves her for a younger white woman. The story opens at this point, recounting Asha's attempts to come to terms with her feelings of failure and her need to carve out an independent life in an alien culture. This process reaches a crisis during a meeting with Mrinal, a childhood friend from India who is now a successful business woman. Divakaruni explores the immigrant search for identity and coherence in the adopted culture, in which the traditional assumptions do not work and the new ways require unexpected and sometimes painful growth.

**Arranged Marriage** is a collection of eleven stories, covering almost all the aspects of marriage, be it first love, demanding kids or the unsatisfied couple quitting their

relationship to search for newer pastures. The stories are diverse in theme, characters and narration, and yet bound together by the common thread of marriage. Some of these stories talk about the steady love that glues a couple together while others expose the misplaced trust a woman places in her violent husband. Most of the stories in the collection examine the experiences and perspectives of Indian women who have immigrated to the United States, often through a traditional arranged marriage. The stories show women who find themselves caught between two cultures, the restricted but comforting Indian culture of their birth and the freer but ruthless Western culture.

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