

CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S, "MRS.DUTTA WRITES A LETTER"

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Literature is an art and reading literature besides enjoyment and knowledge, they come to know about human life, ways of thinking, culture and custom of certain country. "Literature is the mirror of life", for many references are taken from every day's life. It helps to understand the world around. Mankind can reduce their stress, learn about history and can imagine the story from the narrator's perspective. It enriches the senses of humanity.

Diaspora is a form in literature. The word diaspora originates from the Greek word diaspora meaning- a dispersion. Diasporic literature could be examined using its key features. First, it is based on the ideas of a homeland; a place from where the displacement occurred. Secondly, it provides narratives about harsh journeys undertaken for various reasons. Thirdly, diaspora provides accounts of another "sense of place" away from homeland. Fourthly one could read how homeland made protagonists behave in a far off land either adopting or rejecting new cultural codes of their new sense of place. Diasporic literature deals with the concepts such as nostalgia, memory and even lamentation of losing one's native language, homeland and friends.

Among the many diasporic writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, born in Calcutta is a prominent writer. She is an award winning author and poet. Her works are widely known and she has published in over 50 magazines and her writing has been included in over 30 anthologies. She was born in 1956 and lived in India until 1976. At the age nineteen, she left Calcutta and went to United States to complete her master's degree and Ph.D in 1985. She served as president of 'MAITRI', a helpline for South Asian Women that helps victims of domestic violence and other related abuses. She also serves on the Houston board of 'Pratham', a non-profit organization working to bring literacy to less fortunate Indian children.

When she was a child, her grandfather told stories from ancient epics. The stories were based on warrior heroes and women who wished to follow their husband's footsteps. This made her to write about women in her works. Moved by the immigration conditions and to preserve nostalgic memories of homeland, she started her writing career to vent out her thoughts. Her works in poetry are *Black candle*, *Leaving Yuba City*. *Arranged marriage* is a collection of short stories. And her novels include *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of my heart* etc.

The Unknown Errors of Our Lives is a collection of stories telling about 'family culture and the seduction of memory'. "Mrs.Dutta Writes a Letter" is a story about a widow living with her

son California home who discovers that her old orthodox world ways causing embarrassment to her daughter-in-law. On the first morning she gets up early which distracts others' sleep. She is surprised when Shyamoli did not punish the children for being disrespectful to elders (Mrs.Dutta). When Mrs.Dutta prepared Indian meal Shyamoli initially enjoyed but later became worried about cholesterol in it. And she is terrified of the washing machine than washing on her own. She felt bad when her neighbor ignored her. She could not accept men (his son Sagar) working at home doing household chores. Throughout the story, she compares American behavior with Indian customs and belief.

The major theme portrayed is the difference between traditional Indians and migrated Indians living in America. The cultural conflict that is created in their lives is beautifully portrayed. Mrs.Dutta who has been raised to be a traditional Indian wife, was taught that her needs should be placed below the family's needs and is used to get up earlier in the morning than others. However in America, her early morning activities pose problems, because the noise wakes up Shyamoli. But the habit is taught to her by her mother-in-law when she was a bride of seventeen, "a good wife wakes before the rest of the household" is one she finds impossible to break.

Mrs.Dutta often couldn't help comparing Indian culture with American culture, when the children complain about her to Shyamoli, but she does not try to correct them. In India, children are taught to respect their elders and obey their words. The idea of honoring mothers for one day is shocking and she felt contempt for the Americans. She believes that it does not honor their mother's every day, as traditional in India. Her disapproval of mother's day is representative of the disapproval towards the Indian culture.

Further Mrs.Dutta has trouble adjusting to American's lifestyle in washing clothes. The narrator explains, "Washing clothes has been a problem for Mrs.Dutta ever since she arrived in California". In India, Mrs.Dutta used to wash in hand and hang them in sun for drying. She is not used to the electronic devices used in America. When Mrs. Dutta asked her son to demonstrate the machine, she found it difficult as narrated, "When she faced them alone, the machines with their cryptic symbols and rows of gleaming knob terrified her. What if she pressed the wrong button and flooded the entire floor with soap suds?" Her response shows that she is overwhelmed by a highly technologically advanced machine. Mrs.Dutta gets into another trouble while trying to talk to her neighbour who did not bother to respond. She compares her Indian friends who cared her when she was in India.

When she was alone in India for three years, even though she missed her family she did not feel alien to the land. She was the mistress of the house and did everything she wished. But when she was sick, she felt alone because she thought if everyone was present they would trouble her with some work but then no one was with her during the three years. She felt that she could not be cured of her sickness but when she saw the picture of their grandchildren she longed for their love and wanted to stay with them.

Mrs.Dutta could not accept the concept of men working at home while women rest. It baffled her for she was raised under Indian's culture, she refuses to allow her son to wash the

clothes, “no, no, no clothes and all is no work for the man of the house. I’ll do it”. Her daughter-in-law answers her saying. “That is why Indian men are so useless around the house. Here in America we don’t believe in men’s work and women’s work. Don’t I work outside day, just like Sagar? How’ll I manage if he does not help me?” Mrs.Dutta could not imagine men handling women’s clothing and bringing clothes to the living room shocked. As the narrator puts it, “Shyamoli pulled out Mrs.Dutta’s crumpled, baggy bras from the heap, she wished the ground would open up and swallows her, like the Sita of mythology” But accepting life, she tries to learn the new way of living as she writes to Mrs.Basu, “I’m fitting in so well here, you’d never guess I came only two months back I’ve found new ways of doing things, of solving problems creatively. You would be most proud if you saw me”.

Mrs.Dutta could not help comparing the events with that of Indian counterpart. She always wonders at the behavior of the people and at the end of her life she could not accept the change easily. She comes to the conclusion that widowhood in India to be a better state than living in America, in an alien land.