

The Impact Of Diaspora: Characters Analysis In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing*

C. G. Karthikadevi M.A. M.Ed. M.Phil.,

Part time Research Scholar,
Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education,
Krishnankovil-626127

Dr. R. Kannan M.A. M.Phil. Ph.d.

Professor and Research Supervisor,
Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education,
Krishnankovil-626127

Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the renowned writers of Indian Diaspora. In her works most of her characters come across struggles in their life especially they face physical and mental trauma in their new land. The immigrants suffer a lot because of the alienation, nostalgia, displacement, identity, cultural hybridity, assimilation etc. In her novel *One Amazing Thing*, nine people are trapped in the visa office. After a massive earthquake in an American city, each person has to tell one amazing thing that has happened in their life. They hope that they will get redeemed soon. They have experienced a lot of adversity in their life. The nine persons are from different religion, nationality, race and also gender. Even though, they maintain healthy and good relationship with each other. They all come under the umbrella of Indians. The group consists of a visa officer and his assistant, Jiang – a chinese-Indian woman and her grand-daughter Lily, an ex-soldier filled with guilt, an Indian-American girl Uma, Tariq, a young muslim and an old white couple, the Pritchetts. All are from different type of cultural backgrounds. Their stories expose painful memories of their life. In their stories, happiness, regrets, confessions, desires, love everything is filled. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has depicted her own real life experiences of escaping from a hurricane which hit against her house. She expresses the painful, emotional, mental agony and their experiences through this novel.

Key words: Alienation, Cultural Clash, Earthquake, Mental Trauma, Racial Discrimination, Gender Biased, One Amazing Thing.

I. INTRODUCTION

The nine persons are staying in an underground room in the basement of an Indian Consulate. Even though the building collapses around them, there are no rescue members there to protect them. They don't have enough water, food, medicine and to fulfill their basic requirements. There is no electricity and phone service. Even though they are facing such a tragedy in the name of earthquake, they all get ready to tell their own story. "Everyone has a story, I don't believe anyone can go through life without encountering at least one amazing thing" (OAT 65). By telling and hearing many stories of the persons will lessen their burden and pain in their life. They start to learn so many things from the stories of other persons. They are bold enough to face the reality of life.

II. CHARACTERS ANALYSIS

1. JIANG

Jiang is an Indian-born Chinese woman. She narrates an amazing story through her experience. She begins her story by breaking the custom of Chinese to keep family secrets safe. As a responsible daughter, she helps her father at their shoe-mart by opening the store in the morning and placing orders for different designs of shoes. She also checks the quality of product. She may be a successful business woman in her career. But she feels pathetic and sorrowful while living her own personal life. At that time, she falls in love with a young Bengali man. He is named as Mohit Das. He is a customer as well as a manager at National and Grind Lays Bank. He belongs to a wealthy and honorable family. He is attracted by her business knack such as bargaining and her sincerity and dedication towards her work. Her attitude towards the customers makes him to fall in love with her. Jiang's father disagrees with her opinion in love. "He told my marriage would fail, Jiang said. 'When I told him I loved Mohit, he said, Can fish love birds'. (OAT 73) Mohit doesn't have enough courage to meet out the needs of Jiang. He can't do anything against his society. The author has portrayed the Indo-Chinese war in a touching manner how the immigrants are protesting.

People stopped patronizing Chinese businesses. Stores were vandalized. A popular Chinese restaurant was set on fire because a group of customers got food poisoning and believed it was part of a deliberate plot to kill Indians...The government ordered individuals of Chinese origin to register themselves and present papers for identification. Jiang and her brother were lucky. They had been born in a hospital and had Indian birth certificates. (OAT 75)

The Indo-Chinese war makes huge exodus among the immigrants from India to China. Thus Jiang and Mohit get separated because of the war. He doesn't have enough courage to help her. He is such a coward. Thus they are separate because of the migration. He speaks his last words to her. "Forgive me, he said. I love you, but I can't fight a whole country. Then he hung up". (OAT 76) Then she married Mr.Chan, a middle aged man and leaving from her mother land and starting to live her new life in America. After four years, Chan falls sick and he is breathing his last. Jiang shouts, "Don't die, don't die, I shouted, I love you". (OAT 85) The author has portrayed the self-revelation of her narration of her pre-marital love affair and her adjustment with her husband after her marriage. Racism plays a predominant role in their life. She doesn't want to recollect the memories and mental turmoil in her life. Not only Jiang but also most of the immigrants live in their own nostalgic world. They cannot avoid their present life. At the same time they cannot forget their old memories.

2. MALATHI

Malathi is the second narrator in this novel. She belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family. Her parents decide to marry her as early as possible to a well settled family. But she is continuing her own teaching profession. She also continues her beautician profession and settled in America. Malathi narrates the story of Ravi and Nirmala. Ravi is the son of Mrs. Balan. She is a hair stylist of Lola's parlour where Malathi joins as a beautician. Ravi falls in love with Nirmala who is a servant maid. One day Mrs. Balan loses her hair when Malathi conditions her hair. Mrs. Balan tries to attack her with acid. Then she enters into the new job at Indian Consulate in Mangalam's office. Before her arrival to America, she has gone for English training class. She feels her English is poor. She requests Mr. Mangalam to translate her stories from Tamil to English. He tells her about his alienation. He pulls her into his arms and kisses her. It surprises her. She faces a lot of cultural diversities. But the earthquake that she faces is beyond her imagination. "No one, however had thought to caution her about earthquakes where she came from, when people said America, many images flashed in their heads. But an earthquake was not one of them". (OAT 15)

3. TARIQ

Tariq reveals his own condition while living in America. He narrates his amazing love story with Farah. She is the daughter of his mother's best friend from childhood. She came to America for her studies from University of Delhi. Her mother is a widow. Farah will mingle with only other Indian Muslims. She used to visit the mosque often. She doesn't have interest on music, movies and magazines. He stops shaving his hair when she touches and loves it.

Once when he was recovering from the flu, she had come into his room with a glass of barley water Ammi had boiled for him. She felt his forehead to check his temperature, and then touched the two-day growth of beard. 'Looks good', she said". (OAT 31)

After the collapse of the Twin towers of the world trade center in USA, the innocent Muslims also considered as Terrorists. Tariq's father and Hanif are arrested after the incidents. His family has undergone many painful and pitiable conditions. This status affects the peacefulness and prosperity of many immigrants. They feel alienation, abandoned state and mental agony. His experiences force him to return to his native land with his family. His lover Farah asks him to stay in India with her. He is in a dilemma whether to stay in India or America. The author focuses about the internal agony of the immigrants.

4. MR. MANGALAM

Mr. Mangalam remembers his own nostalgic feeling. He is floating over the memories of his childhood experience. He feels satisfied when he plays the flute. It gives him consolation and also freedom. He enjoys his life. "I played the melody for a long time, discovering something new with each pass-through and then it was time for us to go home". (OAT 146) He is brought up in a poor family background. He receives scholarship to continue his studies in Delhi. He feels worried of seeing his two unmarried sisters. "Two of my sisters were still unmarried, and with every passing year their chances of finding a husband shrank—unless we could dangle a substantial dowry as bait" (OAT 154). He saves money and sends it to his family in South India. Once he gets a chance to meet Naina, daughter of a rich politician. They fall in love with each other. Then they get married. Often clashes come between them. As a result, Mr. Mangalam develops an illegal affair with a lady assistant in his office and he gets ready to divorce his wife. When he goes to America, he cannot stop flirting with other women like Malathi.

Mangalam turned towards Malathi and spoke as though they were alone. ‘I think we might die here—perhaps in the next few hours, if more of the building comes down or the air deteriorates further....I don’t want to die without telling you that I’m sorry for my behavior’. (OAT 165)

Mr. Mangalam develops his flirting with Latika also. They both dream of their future. If Naina wa a flash disco light, Latika was the moon in a misty sky. Behind her glasses, her eyes were understanding and I felt that she was the meaning of struggle. The hand kerchief she gave me was frayed at the edges, and I was impressed that she hadn’t minded sharing it with me even though I would see this. (OAT 158)

5. MR. PRITCHETT

Mr. Pritchett was born in South Indian family. He doesn’t get enough love and affection from his mother. To get relieve from his tension and loneliness, he brings up a kitten in his home. When it dies, he feels so disappointed. Then he concentrates fully in his subject Mathematics. He is longing for true love and affection.

6. MRS. PRITCHETT

Mrs. Pritchett lives a cozy and comfortable life. She doesn’t give due respect to her husband and his family members. She expresses her dissatisfaction in her marital life. He provides her everything she needs. But she doesn’t get enough love from her husband. He makes her to feel boring by telling about his own achievements, new companies, clients, financial disasters etc. They also enjoy many things in their life. They live in an expensive house, going out for dinner, sharing their dinners, going to theatres, restaurants, movies and they are going for tour to Canada, Europe and New Zealand. When she gets a chance to meet a couple in the café, she feels wondered on seeing how they share their innermost feelings with each other. Mrs. Pritchett starts to compare her life with them. She feels jealousy of seeing the couple. Her life with Mr. Pritchett is more painful and gives mental agony.

There was nothing like that tenderness in my life, And without it, what use were the things I’d built my days around? My garden, my home, my activities and friendships, even the time Mr. Pritchett and I spent together—they were all so many zeroes. (OAT 170)

7. LILY

Jiang’s grand-daughter Lily is treated in a protected manner by her family members. She faces gender discrimination in her family. Her brother Mark is always praised by his family members for his achievement. Her parents give much attention to her brother Mark. It makes her to refuse to go to Chinese language class, missing school bus, coming late to the dinner, dresses herself in black and drinking cough syrup. Her parents think that she is influenced and practiced American culture. She likes to play flute and receives many awards. Through the character Lily, the author reveals every child is undergoing its own mental turmoil and agony based on its own age and experience.

I wanted to be just sufficiently disobedient to force my parents to notice me. I started with little rebellions—not making my bed, refusing to go to Chinese language class, coming down late for dinner so the family would have to wait for me... (OAT 139)

8. CAMERON

Cameron is an African-American soldier. Through this character, the author explains about racism in the society. His dream to become a doctor is shattered. His lover Imani forces him to marry by showing her pregnancy. He refuses and asks her to abort the child. Imani has cursed him, “No matter where you run, you be ending with ashes in your mouth”. (OAT 183) She asks him, “you want to kill our baby? And It so important for you to get away from you people”. (OAT 183) Throughout his life, he suffers from breathing problem. He thinks that these are all the consequences of wrong doing for Imani. He feels guilty. He feels disappointed. He doesn't go and ask her forgiveness. He hopes her to get married with someone. Because his reappearance will do more harm to her. He also confesses his sin to a holy man, Jeff. Then he gets advice from him. He decides to go to India. He helps an orphan girl who lives in Kashmir.

9. UMA

Uma is a young college student. She travels to India to see her parents. She falls in love with a man named Ramon who is a scientist. When the earthquake strikes, her arm is wounded. She waits to get her visa. She is very much interested in reading Chaucer's Canterbury tales. She is the one who narrates the last story. She raises a question whether her boyfriend Ramon loves her more than her. The question troubles her several weeks. Their family came to U.S twenty years back as professionals. They love their job very much. Her mother decides to retire voluntarily earlier from her service. Her father also quits his job as a senior administrator. Then he joins as a consultant in India. They rent a house in Kolkata. Uma's parents get shocked when they come to know their daughter has fallen in love with Ramon. At the end of the novel, she realizes that there is bitterness among the relationship of her father and mother. She realizes her mother is weeping whenever she picks up a call. One day her father makes her phone and informs that he plans to divorce his wife.

My father had never wasted time in small talk. ‘Now that you’ve settled down in college and done so well in your first midterms, he said’, I can tell you this. I’m planning to get a divorce. Your mother and I no longer have anything in common except you—and we’ve launched you successfully into the world. He paused for a moment, and I wondered what he was feeling, if he was nervous. (OAT 196-197)

Uma tries to find out the reason for his decision. She also analyses if there is any woman come across in the life of her father. Then what will be the condition of her mother likewise she starts to think. After a long time, her father makes a call to her and tells that there is no plan to divorce his wife. This incident is an amazing thing in her life.

III. CONCLUSION

Divakaruni portrays how the nine members understand each other because of the disaster earthquake. Though they are from different natives, religions, customs, habits. They are adjustable. Their hope is that they will be rescued soon from the redeem teams. They are helping each other. Their stories give hope and courage to understand each other in a better manner. It paves way to manage all situations in their life. They understand that life is a mixture of pain and joy. The earthquake does not see partiality. It is common to everyone in the world like the impact of Corona. Everyone stand in the world with their own ideologies. But in fact everyone is facing their own karma by crossing such pandemic situation. The novel is an open ended novel. The author does not want to see her readers to feel the mental

turmoil by closing the novel with the end of destruction by earthquake. At the same time they could only hear the voice of the rescuing team. The novel explains about the role of the characters and how they undergo emotional turmoil and struggle in their life. They start to convince among themselves by sharing their stories.

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