Chapter II
The Paradoxical Existence of Women: A Perspective of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Arranged Marriage and Queen of Dreams

The experiences of immigrants, which involve issues of dislocation, alienation, assimilation and re-examination of the self have gained significance in diaspora writings. Immigrant journeys begin with a single, drastic step - the act of leaving one’s home and one’s set place in it, for the unknown lands. In these new worlds, the immigrants readjust and reinvent themselves, while struggling to find their place in an alien landscape. In the process, they secure some gains and also incur some deep emotional losses. In addition to the task of retaining their cultural values and ethnic identity, the Indian immigrants often face other difficulties of survival within a society that is markedly different from their own. While some build cocoons around themselves as a refuge from the hostility experienced in the host country, others try their best to forge a synthesis between their native culture and the host culture.

Divakaruni, herself an immigrant, has become a major voice of the Indian diaspora. The immigrants’ encounter with the new world forms the core of Divakaruni’s fiction, even as she chronicles their struggles, their losses, and their tales of reinvention. The concerns of migrant women dominate Divakaruni’s first collection of short stories Arranged Marriage. She depicts the harsh realities they face in leaving the “traditional” India for a supposedly better life in the “liberal” West. She questions the meaning of such notions as the “American Dream” “success” and “prosperity” for those whose Otherness excludes them from mainstream America. Many of the female protagonists are dependant female immigrants, and their arrival in the new country is a matter of family re-union, rather than individual determination to leave India.

All the texts focus on the struggles of South-Asian women as they establish their place as immigrants and locate their selves in the narratives of border crossing. A sense of disorientation and restless movement characterizes the lives of the protagonists in these works. These writers also invent strategies to resist, subvert, mock and undermine the oppressive patriarchal constructions and societal stereotypes. They oppose the process of imposing the role of cultural carriers because the female immigrants disproportionately bear the burden of negotiating the new world. Since female desires are subject to constant male surveillance, the diasporic community’s well-being is judged by women’s social behaviour.

Except for the opening story that is based in India, each story takes place in various parts of the United States. One common thread that runs through these stories is the dissonance that the female protagonists face: the conflict between the cultural values they are conditioned in and the ones they encounter in the host culture. What follows is a synergistic articulation or a migrant “hybridity” as valorized by Homi K. Bhabha. Here the conflict is resolved by a conscious or unconscious integration of the sensibility of