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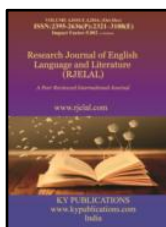
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HYPOCRITICAL MINDSET, ALIENATION AND DISTORTED RELATIONSHIPS IN A DIASPORIC ENVIRONMENT IN THE STORY 'THE DISAPPEARANCE' FROM THE SHORT STORY COLLECTION *ARRANGED MARRIAGE* WRITTEN BY CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

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ABSTRACT

Inspired from Claudine Ward's *Fugue* Divakaruni wrote this story about an immigrant arranged married Indian couple who had a small child. The story revolves around the disappearance of an exasperated wife and an orthodox husband searching frantically for her, but in vain. Devastated at last he recalled his married life with her, and evaluated his and his child's future. He decided to get remarried and discovered at last that his wife had actually eloped taking all her jewellery. Divakaruni through her characters impresses bilaterally the orthodox mindset of an Indian immigrant male which ascends towards the wife's exasperation and how her alienation destroyed their relationship and the family.

Keywords: Diaspora, Alienation, Hypocritical Mindset, Distorted Relationships, Orthodox

Introduction

Humanities have always collaborated closer to the word Mankind and its relationships and families can be depicted as a tool created to lift away the vacuum of loneliness, since; the biggest battle in a person's life is always personal. Realizing the same Divakaruni illuminates us with the Indian orthodox masculinity in the midst of Indian Bengali immigrant inhabitants settled in America for a better life. But the distance from their culture, tradition and country united with the ingrained orthodox personality of the husband and the in-laws create a mould which spreads through the relationship of the couple like fungus with symptoms of alienation felt on the part of the wife.

Discussion:

Divakaruni starts her story with the wife who has suddenly disappeared and the agonized husband recalls his usual married life. He was an affectionate husband and provided well for his wife,

but she always remained quiet and distant. An Indian immigrant woman who had accompanied her husband to America leaving her native country, but was most likely was distorted with her alienation and daily chores of the household and taking care of their son; and to escape her boredom she was in a habit to take walks all by herself in the evening., that's when she disappeared putting the husband in a situation where he morns about his predicament and the future of his son, and hardly could find words to solace the child.

She'd been out for her evening walk, she took one every day after he got back from the office. Yes, yes, always alone, she said that was her time for herself. (He didn't quite understand that, but he was happy to watch his little boy, play ball with him, perhaps, until she returned to serve them dinner.) And even now when the boy asked him where Mama was, he didn't say she

had gone on a trip.....I don't know, he said.... But he couldn't bring himself to say what the boy needed to hear, soon- soon.

- The Disappearance, *Arranged Marriage* (169-170)

Divakaruni depicts that the husband was orthodox not open-minded and believed more on the terms of hypocritical mindset where he preferred his spouse to be a recessive counterpart with no particular goals rather than taking care of his family.

If you can find me a quite, pretty girl, he wrote, not brash, like Calcutta girls are nowadays, not with too many western ideas. Someone who would be relieved to have her husband make the major decisions. But she had to be smart, at least a year of college, someone he could introduce to his friends with pride....He let her have her way, indulged her, even.... Once in a while, of course, he had to put his foot down, like when she wanted to get a job or go back to school or buy American clothes. But he always softened his no's with a remark like, What for, I'm here to take care of you, or, You look so much prettier in your Indian clothes, so much more feminine.

- The Disappearance, *Arranged Marriage* (171)

Divakaruni highlights the peculiarity in the couple's relationship diving into the husband's memory of his wife's unusual habits of continuing with her chores after night hours to keep distance from her husband. Divakaruni also depicts the insecurity and the dominating male-chauvinistic Indian mentality of the husband who cares more about fulfilling his own desires rather than his wife's feelings and seduces without her consent.

After dinner for instance she would start on the most elaborate household...Surely he couldn't be blamed for raising his voice...or for grabbing her by the elbow and pulling her to the bed, like he did that last night.... After some time, though, she would quit struggling and let him do what he wanted.

- The Disappearance, *Arranged Marriage* (172-173)

Furthermore, Divakaruni depicts the mentality of a typical orthodox Indian in-law mother whose mindset has been groomed in a male-dominant society and prefers it best to dominate her son's whole life. As unable to cope with the situation of the disappearance of his wife, the husband invites his mother: to take care of him, his house and his son; who later persuades him to remarry.

My poor boy, she cried left all alone (the word flickered unpleasantly across his brain, left, left), how can you possibly cope with the household and a child as well.... she had replied that of course she would come right away and stay as long as he needed her..... Within a week she had closed up the little flat she had lived in since her husband's death, got hold of a special family emergency visa, and was on her way.... She cooked all his favourite dishes,...and she took such good care of the little boy....

- The Disappearance, *Arranged Marriage* (173-175)

Like time heals all wounds, after a few years, the whole family was again on their feet, had been able to cope with the situation and eventually, the disappeared wife was forgotten. But suddenly, one of the husband's ventures to find more spices for his mother from the store-room gave a new shocking twist to his miserable past.

Then one night while cooking.... His mother ran out of hing....There were no extra spices, but he did find something he had forgotten about, an old tea tin in which he'd asked her to hide her jewellery in case the house ever got burgled... But when he picked up the tin it felt surprisingly light, and when he opened it, there were only empty pink nests of tissue inside.... The next day he took the afternoon off from work...He went to the bank...he opened his safety deposit box to find that all her jewellery was gone.

- The Disappearance, *Arranged Marriage* (176-177)

Thus, towards the end of the story, the husband discovered his wife's elopement and theft as she

had taken all her jewellery giving the shock of his marital history, putting doubts in his mind about getting married again with an educated woman, proceeding him to decide to marry a simple-minded, uneducated, poor girl who could be easily tamed by him, which depicts that the male-chauvinistic mindset of the husband who refuses to learn his past.

....Finished. Tomorrow he would contact a lawyer, find out the legal procedure for remarriage.... Only this time he didn't want a college-educated woman. Even good looks weren't that important. A simple girl, maybe from their ancestral village. Someone whose family wasn't well off, who would be suitably appreciative of the comforts he could provide...

- The Disappearance,
- *Arranged Marriage* (180)

Hence, it can be concluded that Divakaruni's story emphasizes upon the factors of male-chauvinistic and hypocritical mindset, and how it could elevate alienation in the lives of people, especially, when introduced to an unknown environment full of restriction towards freethinking and independent lifestyle, and would eventually, distort relationships.

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