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## Selected Novels of Modern Indian English Women Novelists- A Reflection of Cultural Crisis

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### Abstract:

The research paper focuses on cultural crisis in the Selected Novels of Modern Indian English Women Novelists. Cultural crisis has remained one of the intense problems to the displaced community. In the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Indian diasporic novelists have exposed the issues of the diasporic community through their writings. They have depicted the lives of immigrants and their struggle in balancing the norms, concerns, tradition and custom of two different cultures. The selected Indian women novelists are not exception to this fact. They have explored the tragic lives of immigrants. Cultural crisis is the major theme of their novels. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 'The Vine of Desire' and Manju Kapur's 'The Immigrant' reflect immigrants' sufferings due to cultural differences which is the chief cause for cultural crisis. These Indian women novelists depict cultural crisis through the portrayals of their characters. Sudha, Anju, Sunil, the old man, etc in Divakaruni's 'The Vine of Desire', and Ananda, Nina and Mr. Sharma in Kapur's 'The Immigrant' are the victims of cultural crisis. When they move to a new land they firstly come across with cultural changes. They try to assimilate in a new environment, but they fall short to accept new culture. As a result, they feel dismemberment. Thus, most of the contemporary writers have taken this issue of immigrants as a subject matter to their writings.

**Key Words:** Cultural crisis, diaspora, dislocation, dismemberment, assimilation, loss of identity, zeal to return to their native land.

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### Introduction:

The diasporic writers consider a migration and its consequences as the prominent subject matter of the diasporic literature. The writers who write on the Indian diaspora are V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghose, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of them. They write about the issues of the diasporic community such as the identity crisis, racial and cultural conflicts, sense of belonging, loneliness, problem for assimilation, dismemberment, nostalgia, alienation, etc. of the immigrants in detail. In the last two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is observed the reflection of globalization and its huge impact on migration. In this era, cross-cultural migration has largely taken place due to the breakdown of costs of travelling charges and communication. A person finds it easier to create and sustain valuable links between the culture of his origin and adopted land. In this globalized world, new patterns of clashes suddenly have got developed, in which identity groups such as cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, etc. are at the centre of clashes.

In *The Vine of Desire* (1992), Divakaruni writes about the different cultures of both India and

America in her novel. The story of the novel continuously throws light on the trans-culturalism. The characters of the novel travel between two different worlds. Every immigrant in the novel gets failure in assimilating into the culture of adopted land. Consequently, they develop double consciousness. The immigrant at very beginning tries to settle down in the culture and society where he dislocates but as time passes he denies following the culture of the new land. In *The Vine of Desire*, the old man whom Sudha nurses is psychologically affected due to contrasting culture. He finds himself in a state of despair. Further it becomes a reason for severe problems for his health. Sudha experiences the dilemma of cultural clashes which she faces in America. The changing patterns of her life compel her for taking a decision of finding herself in a secure position. She does not reside at her employer's house with her daughter because she gets bad experience at Anju's home. She wants an independent life. She never seeks anybody's help. Sudha's life in America represents a tale of suffering of hundreds of immigrants.

The novel stands alone as a discovery of the contemporary immigrants' experience. The protagonist of the novel encounters all these challenges and variable cultural differences in

America. The characters of this novel reflect immigrants' first love to live like Americans, but later they lose their interest and thought of assimilation. In the same way, Triddep's father enjoys his life in the U.S.A. initially, later he insists his son to send him back to India. In the novel, it is observed that the old is victimized by the cultural crisis. Further, this leads to his mental ill health. He lacks the inner resources to cope with cultural clashes. He slowly falls down into psychotic-violence. In the course time, the old man stops talking to his son and his daughter-in-law, who do not want to send him back to India. He fails to understand the pains of his father.

Divakaruni's novel depicts cultural clashes between traditional old country India, which the old man desperately loves and the liberated new one, America, which Trideep and Myra like most. Though most of the Indians stay abroad for a long time for a variety of reasons, they dream to spend their rest of lives in their native land. In *The Vine of Desire*, the old man too is engaged in thinking about his own life in India. He starts planning about life in India when Sudha promises him of taking him back to India. He starts enjoying a traditional Indian tea, an old dish Bhatebhat, yogurt chicken, Basmati rice prepared by Sudha. Initially, he does not trust her though she assures him she would take him to India with her. He feels that he cannot go back and will die in America. He says, I'll never get back home, I know it. I'm going to die here (Divakaruni 319).

Divakaruni brings out the contrasting cultures of India and the America. Sudha makes a comparison between the social structure of India and America when she departs from the house of Anju. The immigrants adjust with American culture but at the same time, they do not follow it completely. They confound with social habits that are alien to them. Sudha's life in Trideep's family gives her a chance to think about the disparities between the two cultures. Whereas, Anju obtains a special space to settle down and grow in America. She understands cultural diversity to explore herself to discover her original talent. But she is not fully optimistic about America its cultural norms and concerns. She gradually changes her life there by accepting a more westernized way of thinking. Divakaruni's characters are confused because of different family structure of America. In the novel, Sudha gets confused in America due to family structure and remembers her Indian patriarchal culture. In India, men take all sorts of decisions. In Sudha's home, her father takes all decisions regarding family's welfare. Her father handles the cash to their servant-Manik as bazaar money and takes back the change, along with detailed accounts. Lalit's father also has a retained nature of Indian mentality of saving face. This reflects that head person of the family has a leading role in family.

Indian culture has a joint family structure where people live together. In this environment, only arranged marriages get socially approved. This situation may not be found in the U.S.A. Hence, the characters from this novel suffer from dualism.

Sudha due to cultural clashes comes to the conclusion that the life in America is very difficult. She changes her earlier opinion that the U.S.A. would give her a new path and a way of life. She makes an opinion that India would be the final destination to her life. Like old man, she also fails to understand the American way of life or Western attitudes. She falls short to follow some of the cultural and social patterns of America. She remembers her past memories to compare and contrast the cultures of two different countries i.e. India and America. As a result of this she develops double consciousness and feels alienated from her native culture. Sudha finally decides to return to her homeland with another immigrant. Even though she tries to acculturate into the culture of an adopted land, she does not accept it wholeheartedly. Therefore, the amalgamation with the culture of a new land remains a nightmare.

**In *The Immigrant* (2008) Manju Kapur** speaks about the helpless condition of immigrant due to their immediate transmutation in the foreign culture. Therefore, adjusting to a new environment becomes difficult for them. Ananda slowly and gradually, tries to accept Western culture for granted. He starts changing everything- food habits, dressing sense, lifestyle, relationships, family, etc. But the changes become impossible for him. He too acts like a Canadian. He presumes himself a Canadian, but whenever he finds something against his taste and interest, immediately his mind diverts towards his nation. As a result, Ananda feels the notion of double consciousness. His physical relationship with Sue, a foreign lady causes the feeling of bitterness, hatred and dislike in his heart for Western women. So, he gives up his dream to marry a Westerner and marries an Indian girl. He knows that Indian woman does not question the manhood of her husband. Due to this decision, further he could recreate the familiar surroundings in a new milieu.

Racial discrimination is one of the major issues that becomes as an obstacle to the immigrant community in the process of settlement in a new land. Even today, in the era of globalization and liberalism, Westerners partially ill-treat immigrants on the grounds of race and ethnicity. In *The Immigrant*, Kapur noticeably exposes incidents which make them restless. When Nina departs from India to Halifax after marrying Ananda, an inquiry takes place at the airport. A lady officer interrogates her about her belongings and location which mentally disturbs her. This incident compels her to ask herself, why were people so silent about the humiliations they faced in the West? (P-108) Kapur

reveals that by the time a person crosses the national boundaries to step into the new world, he or she is subjected to oppression and discrimination as John McLeod in his *Beginning Post-colonialism* (2000) writes: “Too often diaspora people have been ghettoized and excluded from feeling they belong to ‘new country’ and suffered their cultural practices to be mocked and discriminated against” (P-208).

Nina endeavors to learn the changing surroundings, new routine, new people. However, she cannot change herself completely because she is deeply rooted in Indian culture. She follows manners and etiquettes of the typical Indian wife. Actually, she tries to reconcile the new-fangled circumstances but she is mentally distracted by new surroundings. Day after day in Canada, her conflict with fresh difficulties enlarges her isolation. In the novel, Kapur advises immigrants to “forget the smells, sights and sounds you were used to, forget them or you will not survive. There is new stuff around, make it your own, you have to” (P-123). They hold to their original culture on the one hand and to acculturate themselves with the culture of new land to survive on the other. This creates their dualism for cultural stability.

Manju Kapur presents the life of Ananda in a foreign land just like a new birth of Ananda. He comes to a new place with great hope but, it is very hard for him to adjust to it. Ananda's freedom is bound by the rules of foreign lifestyle. Hence, he feels nervous in his uncle's family. His free nature is suppressed in the bond of foreign life. The novelist clearly portrays the relations in Canada, which are maintained only by profits. There is no warm feelings in relations and no sacrifices for each other among the family members. He finds that everything is artificial in Canada. Ananda's uncle also has practical views about the relationship. Even though Mr. Sharma is an Indian by birth, his emotions are dried up in the foreign land. He does not adjust himself to the practical world of his uncle, so he decides to shift in the house of his Canadian friend, Gary. Ananda shocks when he sees Westerners eating a meat of the cow. In India, the cow is sacred. The image of cow stands for sacred mother. This cultural change confuses Ananda at Gary's home. Ananda is a Brahmin boy, so he follows the social taboos of his community. This is expected in Brahmin community to follow the customs of their caste.

The novelist illustrates two different cultures on the basis of the man woman relationship and a free lifestyle. For instance, in Western countries, men and women meet freely, but in India free meetings are not allowed. Gupta shows two diverse cultures through the characters of Ananda and Nina. Sometimes, Ananda never accepts the traditional attitude of Nina. He says “you are a traditional backward Indian girl, like some of these

women you see at the Indian club can't even speak English properly” (P-147). Nina is confused due to the dress code of two different cultures. She faces a problem about the acceptance of dressing in the foreign land. Men's dress code has less international dissimilarity. The variations are not so drastic, but immigrant women find themselves in a dilemma when they reject to wear Western clothes. They sacrifice habit, style and self-perception for integration, convenience and conformity in West because the choice is hard. In Nina's case, it takes months to overcome her challenge. Nina is surprised by the marriage system of Canada as there are no restrictions and responsibilities. In Western culture, women live an independent life.

#### **Conclusion:**

Thus, the selected Indian women novelists present a mixed experience of the Indian immigrants. This experience acts as a gain that shatters the inhibitions and taboos, with whom immigrants have been attached from their birth and at other time, they experience the nothingness of a surface culture. It is crucial to understand that any migration, whether made out of personal choice or out of necessity, results in a displacement, which is always painful. It is the migrant's response and reaction to his migration that decides his/her life which Divakaruni exposes by portraying the characters of Sudha, Anju, the old man, Sunil, etc.

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