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## **Dissolving Boundaries of Societal Prejudice: A Centripetal Reference to Global Immigrants' in Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing***

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**Abstract** The two existential questions 'Who am I' and 'Where do I belong?' haunt every human being. The most reflective self-possessed word in these questions is 'I' the sole cause of egotism in each individual who thinks of oneself as the supreme being which leads to one's own destruction. However, the word 'I' need not always involve self-centeredness. Its connotations as believed by many philosophers change according to the individual's framework of reference. That is to say, if one longs to see the vibes of charity and human kind in oneself, the very notion of self-possessiveness will be dissolved. Imbibing similar ideologies of elevating oneself from self-destruction to self-construction on the lines of humanistic values, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a renowned and acclaimed writer of South Asian Diaspora, endeavors to motivate her readers on the parallel lines of self-awareness. The present paper entitled "Dissolving Boundaries of Societal Prejudice: A Centripetal Reference to Global Immigrants' in Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing*" makes an attempt to bind people from different communities and cultures by promoting love and wisdom to finally make an effective social order.

**Key Words:** Self-exploration, Johari Window, Humanistic Values, Immigrant's Discourse, Diasporic consciousness, Transcultural Aspects, Centripetal Space, Karmic Principles.



The foremost thing that is given prime importance in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works is dissolving boundaries between cultures and between people. Discussing about her blending of genres to diffuse the borders, she alleges, "I also think that if we don't dissolve boundaries, if we stick to boundaries, it is a very dangerous thing. It creates a lot of suspicion and hatred. It's important for me as an artist to not do that, to not allow that to happen through my work. I really want my work to be at once authentic and also humanizing" (Leenerts 88). In this context, *One Amazing Thing* is Divakaruni's exceptional piece wherein she brings people from different background, community, culture and ages under one roof and under one label that is 'immigrants'. Her exceptional piece is a modern *Canterbury Tales* of the group of immigrants who while struck under the rubble of Visa office decides to turn a page from each immigrant's life. That one page turns out to be an amazing thing in their lives which they themselves have not realized until the moment when they started sharing their reminiscences. The piece, thus, disclose how these immigrants by peeping into the lives of each other discover the way out not only from their own messy lives but from the rubble of Visa Office where they get stuck, no one knows, for how long. The novel, though, is written from a different perspective of initiating self-awareness by exploring the inner realm of its immigrant characters, it is observed that the syndrome of *Desh-Videsh* which is the most important constituent of diasporic writing is present in the lives of each and every character. The wrecks of Visa office stand as a resemblance for their hyphenated world from where there is no getaway. Their lives are the best paradigms of this syndrome. If observed from bird's eye view, these immigrants very well befit Homi K. Bhabha's justification of diasporas which states that they are,

Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment. Of other worlds



lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.  
(Bhaba 199)

During the course of time, diaspora has extended its periphery from the edges of hyphenated world to Homi K. Bhabha's 'Third Space' (53), which has its own unique phenomenon. With its advent, it draws attention towards its universal appeal of achieving virtue besides proving itself as a blessing in disguise for those living on the edges. It claims to attain a special stature for every immigrant who comes to its refuge, by transforming itself according to the spirit of place and the situation in which an immigrant is placed. That is to say, to stitch a quilt of comfort for these bewildered immigrants, this 'Third Space' acquires different forms in the need of hour, sometimes as reminiscences of past, sometimes as a room of cultural baggage, and in few other instances as a hyphenated existence or a dream home by transcending oneself beyond the margins of all the biases in the name of caste, creed and culture. Walking on the similar path of Bhabha's ideology, Divakaruni also interweaves her quilt of diasporic saga with distinct fabrics of immigrant's lives on it. *One Amazing Thing* is her masterpiece wherein she makes an exceptional effort to diffuse the boundaries among immigrants by discovering Bhabha's 'Third Space' in the form of story-telling. Through this story-telling, Divakaruni tries to bring vibration in the lives of these bemused immigrants by making them notice one amazing moment in their lives which has bound them to their dear ones until then. Simultaneously, while sharing a part of their lives with others, these immigrants also get a scope to peep into the lives of others and understand the agony through which they led their lives. If observed critically, it is worth pointing out that the novel is an excellent blending of four panes of Johari Window, a psychological tool created by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. A self-awareness tool, Johari Window explores four personas of an individual's self within a group, namely, open area, hidden area, blind area and unknown area with its prime focus on how to navigate the contours of the open area. It works on two factors: what you know about yourself and what others know about you. When an individual willingly shares something about oneself with others, it leads to the exploration of open area. By disclosing information about oneself, individuals can build trust among themselves and



can simultaneously learn about others. Any aspect of oneself that one is not aware of but others are, comes under blind area. If an individual is ready to receive feedback from others regarding one's positives and negatives by considering it an important part of exploring one's self, then a person's blind area will be reduced and open area will be expanded. The size of open area will be further expanded vertically towards hidden area if an individual discloses some personal information and issues to others in a group. However, care should be taken that certain aspects which are too personal should not be shared with all but trusted members in a group. Otherwise, it may lead to serious consequences compelling others to take the advantage of one's weaknesses. The fourth and last pane of Johari Window which is designated as 'unknown area' contains information which neither the individual nor the others in a group are aware of. It lies dormant somewhere in the subconscious mind and awakens when a person seeks to receive feedback from others at regular intervals. This process of Johari Window which leads to the expansion of open area is termed as self-disclosure which plays an important role in developing communication and bridging the gap between others in a group.

Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing* also seems to imbibe this psychological tool through its characters who make a remarkable effort to come out of the invincible web of their lives by hanging themselves to the only thread of life line, that is, story-telling. The author herself seems to have influenced by this psychological tool as she states:

...*One Amazing Thing* at least suggests to the reader that we may find a common space where we can respect each other's stories as we share them. In hearing a story or reading a story, or experiencing a story, the other really becomes ourselves, or is closer to us. That is happening in this novel, as people are listening to the stories that are being offered in a spirit of great trust. This is what we do when we are offering our stories as writers to readers. I mean, as a part of ourselves: something that comes from very deep within us and often has never been heard by anybody. The act of





speaking that creates vulnerability can also result in a great and powerful connection.

And that is my hope as a writer. (Zupančič)

As discussed earlier, the plot of the novel revolves around nine immigrants of different race, culture, religion and age who come to the visa office of the Indian embassy to get their visas and complete other formalities in order to pay a visit to India which they believe to be a mystic land that will relieve them from their karmic debts. The land of numinous, India, thus, becomes a sacred place for these immigrants who decide to undertake a pilgrimage to its heart of cognizance. However, destiny has some other plans for them. No sooner do they start going through the procedure of getting their visas, than the whole building rumbles down due to small tremors from an earthquake imprisoning them under the debris as if to claim that they are stuck there due to their karma. Karma, as specified in Buddhist teachings, is the result of cause and effect. To put forth Newton's third law of motion, 'for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction', it is assumed that reaction may not take place instantly but it will surely happen in near future. Oblivious to the truth behind their misfortune, the immigrants without their knowledge acquire the process of reforming themselves before visiting the magical land. The process of reformation begins when at the suggestion of Uma, an Indian-American girl, each one starts initiating a story from his/her life to avoid instigating any cold war. Sensing the power behind it, she compels them by stating that 'I don't believe anyone can go through life without encountering at least one amazing thing' (Divakaruni 65). Her insistence uplifts the spirit in each and every individual present there and compels them to share their part of tale. This process of story-telling further leads to the exploration of their hidden areas, one of the four panes coined by Joseph and Harry for their psychological tool Johari Window. To be exact, the account of their hyphenated lives, befriends them with their own weaknesses and strengths. The deeper they dwell into their lives through their own tales, the deeper they come upon sensitivity of their relations. The amazing fact about their tales is that while they are still in the process of narrating it, they stumble upon the loose threads that resulted in the indifferences with their dear ones. Here, it is worth mentioning that the whole process of sharing and receiving



endows these immigrants with a cascade of purification that purifies their soul. This process of purifying one's soul by erasing the indifferences that have developed both within and outside one's self is in itself an individual's pilgrimage. Beyond this there is no holy land as such that bestows one with the ultimate solace. To be precise, the cosmic reality for which an individual visits distant spiritual lands lies within oneself and if a person succeeds in grasping that truth, there is no need to search for that reality in outside world. Once a person unites with that cosmic reality, no matter wherever s/he visits, whether it is India or some other distant land, everywhere he would observe that cosmic union.

A similar kind of outlook develops in Divakaruni's immigrant characters from *One Amazing Thing* when they peep into the depths of their as well as other lives through the account of their past. Through this act of disclosing their selves, they realize that all of them are somehow related to one another in their miseries. They also comprehend the fact that while sharing their sorrows with others, they could not realize exactly when their spirits are uplifted from the burden of those sorrows. The group consists of nine immigrants- two visa officers, Mr. Mangalam and Malathi who are both attracted to each other but disconcerted with the very thought of it; Uma, an Indian-American girl bewildered by some of her parents hasty decisions; Jiang- a Chinese-Indian woman in her sixties who wishes to rejuvenate her old spirit by visiting the land of her childhood; her teenage granddaughter, Lily who is both happy as well as vexed with her gifted talent of being a guitarist; Cameron, an ex-soldier haunted by a guilt of killing his own child; Tariq, an American-Muslim, perplexed with this new avatar of America after 9/11 attack; Mr and Mrs. Pritchett, an elderly white couple whose relationship is on the verge of breaking.

Jiang, is the first to initiate the story. In her part of narration, the word love is the positive constituent which brings amazing rainbow colors in her life. But before she could find her true love, she undergoes a long journey of penance from India to the U.S. in search of it. A silent observer and the one hiding the secrets of her heart to herself for all these years, she never let the others in her family know that she could very much speak English. Besides, all these years she compels her family to speak Mandarin. Speaking English, she believes,



will reopen her wounds from her past life in Calcutta. However, on this day under the rubble of visa office, when no one is sure of their future ahead, she decides to unlock the door to her secret chamber. Despite the instructions of elders to stay away from Indians whom they referred as ghosts, Jiang is the first to break this taboo. Unlike all her classmates, who get married, she makes the way to her family business of footwear and is responsible to author the name FENG'S FINE FOOTWEAR for their business. It is here at this store that for the first time she comes across Mohit Das, a young manager at National and Grindlays Bank, with whom she starts weaving her dream world unknown to the fact that her dreams are woven with loose threads which will anyhow break with one lash of Sino-Indian war of 1962. Mohit deserts her for the sake of his family. Soon after, under the pressure of war, she gets married to Curtis Chan, a dentist in Calcutta and together with other Chinese families they undertake a voyage to the U.S.

Although dejected with the sudden turn of events, Jiang is still determined to prove herself. Even though she is in oblivion stage in regard to her relation with Mr Chan, she assists him in setting up a small grocery in a Chinatown when his Dentist degree proves to be worthless in the hullabaloo of American culture. She is so good at business that in a few years the store is transformed into supermarket shifting their children to private school and moving them to a lavish apartment in a gated building. Amidst this tumult of life though she moves ahead, she leaves behind her vigorous and hearty self who used to enjoy every second of life. Her past is still hankering somewhere deep within herself holding her from identifying the worth of true love. Despite this gap, it has been observed that although, she has not expressed her love for Mr. Chan in words but the connection to their heart is very much there from the very beginning of their marital life. Jiang realizes this only after four years of their married life when one night during winter, Mr. Chan fell sick. Suddenly when he goes stiff, she gets tensed and shouts "Don't die, don't die, I love you" (85). Later, when she thinks about those words, she is surprised. She realizes that she has not uttered those words out of fear that without him she could not look after the store and the children. But the truth is she really loves him and without him her life will be like an empty shell. To quote her, "When





had it happened? Looking back, I could not point to one special time and say, *There!* That's what is amazing. We can change completely and not recognized it. We think terrible events have turned us into stone. But love slips in like a chisel—and suddenly it is an axe, breaking us into pieces from inside” (86). Here it is worth mentioning that all these years the spirit of love has always maintained its presence between them but Jiang has not realized this until that night when she feels that she is going to miss him. Here, it is notable that for a quite long time Jiang vacillates between her past and present. Though she has full-fledgedly accepted her present, her inner self gets struck somewhere in between her past and present life. To set it free from that unseen string of past memories, she decides in her last years to revisit the city of her youth to finally feel the trance of her olden days. Nevertheless, while narrating that hidden part of her life, she unknowingly relieves herself from the burden of her past memories. She realizes that with the passage of time herself has acquired a transformation both within and outside as she succeeds in searching the true love in her soul mate who despite knowing that she had a boyfriend not only accepts her at the time of trouble but gives her own personal space to recover from that agony of losing him.

Next in the course of narration comes Mr. Pritchett who during his childhood to save himself from the adulterous and treacherous act of his mother and her boyfriend Marvin, seeks refuge in Maths. A fatherless child, the boy's only world is his mother who works at *Mickey's Diner and Take Out*. At other times when his mother is not around, he loves to travel in the world of Maths and feels pleasure in doing multiplications and divisions. Though living a pitiable life where they could only afford from hands to mouth, the boy never considered himself an unhappy child. Everything is running smooth in their peaceful lives with his mother bringing hot-dogs buns along with apples after every pay day and reading to him during weekends *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* but then things fall apart with the arrival of Marvin, his mother's new boyfriend. Marvin has now started living with them because he pays half of the rent and looks after the boy when his mother goes to work in the afternoon. Marvin is allergic to cats and this becomes a big issue at home because recently the boy has developed a fondness for a kitten which he has found at the empty fields



behind their apartment and now wishes to keep it along with them. However, both his mother and her boyfriend are quite against it which hurts him a lot. This slowly develops in him hatred against his mother and Marvin. It becomes worse when one day he comes across his kitten suffocated to death in the freezer which he surely assumes to be the work of Marvin. He could not bear the sight of her mother because according to him this would not have happened, if she had not welcomed Marvin in their lives. When the boy observes that his world of dreams in which he used to idealize his mother, has scattered now, he turns to Maths which he believes will never desert him like his mother. He finds them quite amazing. Long before one could decipher the answers from the back of the book, he has them ready with him.

So he does more and more of it., asking his teacher for extra worksheets that he brings home, fractions and decimals and word problems about Aunt Anna who's driving from Boston to Philadelphia at a certain speed, or a bathtub where the stopper doesn't quite fit, and how long would it take to fill. The words transform themselves into numbers that line up like acrobats, numbers that can be trusted to perform the way they're supposed to. He begins to understand their nature they are ancient and immortal, not frail and easily broken. As long as he offers them his full attention, they will never abandon him. They sing their answers to him, and the inside of his head fills with light as he writes them down. (99)

Although, the affection for Maths brings solace to Mr Pritchett's soul succeeding him as an efficient banker, his wounds are still believed to be unhealed. This had a long lasting impact even on his marital life. He could never come out of his depressive stage and thus fails to give his full attention to Mrs. Pritchett. However, the narration of his hurting and agonizing story does bring a sort of transformation in his relation with Mrs. Pritchett. Mrs. Pritchett, who believes her husband, from the beginning of their marital life, to be one pathetic fellow who has no interest in her, now fills with sorrow for the kind of boy he is during his childhood and the trauma he is made to undergo. Earlier on that day in the Visa office when Mr. Pritchett offers to pick up something for her to eat, she denies in a leave-me-alone tone. Now after listening to her husband's part of tale, she feels sorry for him. So, after her husband's account of tale when Cameron suggests the group to adjust themselves on the few



left over tables because the room is slowly filling with water, Mrs. Pritchett joins her husband. Mr. Prirchett's story, thus, by enlarging his blind area, develops an understanding between both Mr. and Mrs. Pritchett finally bringing them closer to each other.

After the vigorous and fruitful tale of Mr. Pritchett's, Malathi decides to give her story. With her part of tale, Malathi, unconsciously explores her hidden area. A girl from a middle-class Brahmin family, Malathi weaves the path of her future with the world of beauty salon. Unlike her two sisters who are married off, she decides to be a bride maker instead of becoming a bride. She starts working at Lovely Ladies under the supervision of Lola against the wishes of her parents. But as if destiny has some better plans for her, she ends up here in the U.S. in one of the Indian consulates as an employee. A happenstance with Mrs Vani Balan, a frequent visitor of Lola's and wife of an industrialist, brings hullabaloo in Malathi's life transporting her across the oceans. Mrs Balan explicitly asks for Malathi whenever she visits Lola's. However, Malathi is not her sole favourite, she has a maid by name Nirmala who always accompanies her to the Saloon and awaits her in the waiting room until she is done. The frequent visits of Mrs Balan develop a special bonding between Nirmala and Malathi encouraging Nirmala address Malathi as her elder sister. Malathi comes to know that Nirmala has developed an intimate relationship with Ravi, Mrs Balan's son. To curb this development furthermore, Mrs Balan executes a plan to get rid of Nirmala. She takes her to Chennai to attend the fiftieth birthday of Mr Gopalan, her cousin and an owner of a five-star hotel franchisee. Nobody knows what happened next and then just like that Nirmala becomes Mr Gopalan's new girl and is moved from servant quarters to a suite of her own in another wing of the house. When Malathi comes to know about this new development, she curses herself for ruining Nirmala's life. Since she is the one who worked magic on Nirmala's face before she left for Chennai wishing her good luck, she feels herself responsible for Nirmala's fate and thus decides to teach Mrs Balan a lesson for playing a foul game with Nirmala. Malathi, who is fully aware that Mrs Balan has taken special fondness for her, takes the advantage of it and deliberately blends the wrong proportion of chemicals and applies it on Mrs Balan's hair. As a result, Mrs Balan loses most of her hair. Though Malathi is happy



with this new development in her, she is frightened that now Mrs Balan is going to sue Lola. But to her surprise, Lola dismisses her fear by stating that Mrs Balan cannot do any harm to her since she has many influential clients visiting her. She further claims that she cannot hire Malathi back but has found a job opening for her with Indian consulate abroad. Malathi's craving for something different, thus, lands her in the world across the oceans. With this job abroad, she could now fulfill her desire to open a new beauty salon of her own and can remain independent without relying on others. The beauty salon of Lola's and an acquaintance with Mrs Balan, thus, prove to be one amazing thing in Malathi's life that has completely transformed her way of looking at the world. When asked by Uma why did she pick this story, Malathi responds that 'It was the only time in my life I did something brave, even though it was a big cost for me. I don't think I can do that again. I am too selfish. So it is special to me' (123).

Unlocking the unknown area of her deserted self Malathi's part of tale certainly stands apart from the others as it imparts Malathi with the knowledge that she has the flair for accomplishing courageous tasks. Although she feels she is selfish, her brave step of punishing Mrs Balan for her treacherous acts underscore the fact that even she has the benevolent heart whose beat goes uneven whenever it senses that some injustice is taking place.

To observe whether other characters of this amazing novel harbour such potentials or not, one has to analyze even their accounts on the parameters of self-exploration. Accordingly, amidst the eerie, freaky tension of winning or losing their lives, Tariq turns the pages of his inner as well as outer realm. Alike others, even he discovers the wonder of his life amidst the hassles of 9/11 attack. The hullabaloo of 9/11 is so loud that it shakes the entire existence of his and his family's. In view of 9/11 repercussions, Muslim community is targeted mostly. Government agents, mostly FBI picked the people in suspect, sometimes without any reason and released them after a few days of interrogation. For few, it took much longer and by the time they were released their whole existence seem to be in shambles with nowhere to turn around. Tariq's family also becomes the object of this obscene act, when



four men come to Jalal's Janitorial Services and take away his father and his father's assistant manager, Hanif. Though after three days, Tariq's father returns home; nothing remains the same here after. On one gloomy day, his father gets a stroke and after a lengthy and expensive hospital stay when he is brought home, he could not move his left arm and leg.

When they look for suggestions from their closed ones, most of Tariq's uncles and aunts admit that it would be better for their parents to retire in India. But, then the very thought of parting from his mother land compels him to think if it is worth to flee his land of birth just because a few diplomats have marked his family with a blotch of terrorism. Would he be really happy by reuniting with his love in India? And what about his parents? Is it reasonable to force them to retire among the people of some distant land who have very least knowledge about their entire existence? He then recalls that since he is born in the U.S, he could not fit anywhere in Indian life style with his American attitude. He is very much American no matter how much he and his family is despised in the name of community or religion. The very thought of carving a new identity for one's self by leaving behind one's past fills him with rage. It is at this juncture that Ali comes to his rescue suggesting that it would be a cowardly act to turn one's back to his/her motherland. Bad things happen to everyone around us but that does not mean that one should run away from there. After listening to soothing and guiding words of Ali, Tariq is very much certain that he is not leaving his mother land and no matter what comes in his pathway, he is once again going to carve his identity on this very soil. However, he is confused about where to begin and is still contemplating about his tangled situation and a way out of these difficulties when the earthquake takes place blocking him under the wreckage of Visa office along with others. Here one point is quite clear that despite facing enormous domestic upheaval, Tariq is determined to succeed. His firm decision to stay back in his mother land and face the challenges thrown by it underscores his hidden and unknown area which further gets strengthened by developing his acquaintance with the other people who get struck under the debris of the visa office.





Tariq's rejuvenation doubles when Lily, expresses her feelings of considering him as her older brother and suggests that he could stay with them whenever he wishes to come back from India. By considering Tariq as her older brother, Lily opens her account of tale. In her part of tale, Lily has her older brother by name Mark who is child prodigy. In ninth grade itself, he has written a research paper on cancer that has bagged national science award. Even in behavioural aspects, he is the apple of his parents' eye. This over concern for her brother by her parents starts pinching Lily. Though she thinks that it will slowly develop hatred in her against her brother, she could not do that. To grab her parents' attention, she, thus, decides to be rebellious and performs a series of action one after another against her parents' wishes. Soon she succeeds in getting plenty of attention for herself from all. Her parents start yelling at her, grandmother talks about evil spirits but all this is not sufficient for her so she starts dressing in black, skips school and gets her eyebrow pierced. It is at this time that Mark comes to her rescue and instead of lecturing her, presents her his old flute. When for the first time Lily puts her lips against embouchure, she feels a strange sensation and just like that her brother's gift becomes her passion. Soon she starts attending music classes and enters local contest. After that there is no looking back and slowly she becomes the talk of the town. At home too, she becomes the topic of discussion. Doubly blessed with their gifted progeny, there is no limit to her parents' happiness. In the whole process, the only good thing that happens to her is that she discovers a great change in her. To quote her, "My parent yelled at me for coming home so late. And I still wore black. But inside, something had changed. I no longer wanted to waste my energy on being bad" (141). Here, it is noteworthy that in general, it would be difficult for anyone at Lily's home to bring a desired change in her, if they have counselled her. But the option chosen by Mark to guide his sister to correct her path is simply amazing in its own way. It brings out not only her hidden talent exploring her unknown area but also refines her way of thinking. She no longer desires to be stubborn or disobedient. She,



in fact, comprehends the real worth of family and how difficult it is to maintain the serenity within. Once implanted, she finds it difficult to root out these human values.

The sagas of self-exploration drawn out by a few members seem to have brought out a small transformation in other members who are still left with their accounts of life. When the nine survivors have the last of their food, it is observed that they are more snacks than originally counted earlier. To quote Uma, “People must have taken things out of their secret stashes and put them in the pile when no one was watching” (147), a fact to prove Uma’s belief that story-telling will bring people closer to one another making their bonds even stronger- a bond which Uma, Cameron, Mangalam and Mrs. Pritchett have hankered for throughout their lives but could not get it.

In case of Mangalam, he wishes to develop that bond between him and his parents by showing his gratitude towards them. Since they are the ones who despite having poor financial support provides him with all the privileges of life, Mangalam decides to repay their love and concern in the form of gratitude. Akin to other duty bound sons, even he has desires of marrying her sisters with a handsome dowry, renovate his old house and present his mother with a pair of golds bangles. To fulfil their needs and to become the saviour of the family, if he had relied on his own wealth of intellectuality, he would certainly have a bright future. But his eagerness to reach heights deprives him of all the chances of showering that warmth and affection on them. His zeal and passion to settle once and for all in heights compel him to commit a bigger mistake of his life. In his madness to secure a place amidst sophisticated people, he joins Film Club where children of rich discuss foreign movies. On one of his visits to the Film club, he comes across Naina, the only daughter of a high-level government official. Carving a secured place for himself in her heart, finally one day, he proposes to her. After initial hiccups, Naina’s father agrees to the proposal. The only thing he expects of Mangalam is that he should keep his daughter happy. Failure to do this would be dangerous for Mangalam’s health. Mangalam does not take this serious but slowly realizes that Naina’s demands are more luxurious than his salary could afford and if he asks her about that, she reminds him that she is paying her bills out of her allowance. Managalam overlooks



these small issues thinking that with the passage of time, Naina will slowly settle in domesticity. Everything is running smooth with Mangalam sending most of his pay cheques to his parents. But mere sending the cheque is not enough. There is the bond which he always craved to develop. Henceforth, an irreparable rift occurs between Mangalam and Naina when Mangalam realizes that Naina is not at all interested in welcoming his parents to their fancy new flat gifted by her father, nor does she show any concern to visit her in-laws. However, she is ready to pay for their bills if he makes some arrangements for them in a hotel. Realizing how insulting that would be to his parents, Mangalam loses interest in his marital life and develops an intimacy with his department accountant, Latika. Slowly, that intimacy blossoms into love and they, oblivious to the danger lying ahead, decide to get married and move to a smaller branch in the south of the country where Mangalam seeks a transfer. No sooner does Mangalam announces his intentions to Naina, than he discovers that his whole world has shattered into pieces. The very next morning Latika is charged with stealing a large sum of money that went missing from accounts and his transfer approval gets cancelled. He realizes then how morally is he degraded by his wife and her father. Finding his world of dreams shattered into pieces, Mangalam then decides to teach a lesson to Naina and her father by initiating to flirt with her closest friends whom she could neither ignore nor harm. Consequently, Naina and her father become the laughing stock of the high society. As a result, as expected to save their face among the people, Naina's father, using his influence, transfers Mangalam across the oceans to the U.S embassy. This unexpected transfer, however, becomes a pathway to explore his unknown area. It is only after moving to the U.S embassy that he realizes for the first time that the game which he has begun to punish his wife and father-in-law for their deceitful act has now become a practice for him. He cannot stop himself flirting with the women and Malathi becomes his new bait in this.

Mrs. Pritchett (Vivienne) who has been silent all the while now volunteers to share her part of the tale. Alike others in a group who express in their part of tales a close bonding or connection to their dear ones, even she wishes to have that attachment towards her husband. Oblivious to the fact that it is this bond of association that has tied her to her



husband over a span of sixty years, she gets distracted by the sight of an old man, whom she does not know, helping his wife take off her coat. The gesture of the old couple leads her to believe that her husband does not love her in the way she expects him to. To quote her:

I remembered the old man tilting his head attentively, listening to his wife making her menu choice. Her eyes had shone through her thick glasses as she watched him cut up their desserts for sharing. 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. With the 'one' of love in front of them, they could have been worth millions, but as of now, I was bankrupt, and it was too late to start over. (170)

Owing to this new sadness that completely engulfs her world of existence she goes into a depressive stage and decides to end her life. Soon after when she is hospitalized, she is visited by a guiding spirit in the form of a nurse, who leads her to the path of karmic principles. The visit of the nurse proves to be one amazing thing in Mrs. Pritchett's life as she suggests her that if she kills herself, she has to go through everything she tried to escape. So if she really wants to come out of all her agonies, she has to stop blaming her husband and herself and walk in the path of forgiveness and accept. The suggestion of the nurse, although, does not make any instant impact on Mrs. Pritchett, it leaves an indefinite mark in her mind which starts working gradually. At the moment, inspired by the nurse's earlier words of desiring 'a new life' instigates Vivienne to discover a new life for her by moving away from her husband. She blames none but herself for marrying Mr Pritchett against the wishes of her friends and family. Though she no longer decides to commit suicide, she continues carrying the pain of her old self. So when Mr Pritchett shows her the picture of an Indian palace, she, at once, realizes that it is this place where she is going to discover a new life for her. However, it is only when Mrs. Pritchett along with her husband gets struck under the rubble of Visa office does she understand the real worth of incarnating a new self. She understands the real cause behind her husband's indifference after listening to his part of tale and as guided by the nurse, decides to forgive all her husband's trespasses. Once again, the tools of



Johari window play their charm on Divakaruni's characters by immersing them in its give and take process enabling them build trust among themselves.

Drifting to another place as well as time while others are engaged in connecting their life line to the only thread of story-telling, Cameron, too, contemplates about the portal of bonding that connects people by means of love and affection. In his case, however, he himself has discarded that bond of love. And now, after years of penance though he hankers for that bond, it refuses to come to his assistance.

A black by birth, Cameron always desires to have a life altogether different from his community people where most of the young men are enlisted in the army or are engaged in some menial jobs. Cameron wants to become a doctor and have already sent numerous applications to different universities. But his love for Imani becomes a biggest stumbling rock in his path of success. He meets her for the first time at a party during his high school. The meeting slowly blossoms into love and by the time Cameron gets offer letter from one of the prestigious institutes, Imani is pregnant with his child. Though he is concerned for Imani, he is not ready to take the responsibility of a child and, thus, suggests her to abort their child. Hearing this, Imani grows quiet and leaves the place by uttering the words "No matter where you run, you be ending with ashes in your mouth" (183).

The words of Imani continue to haunt Cameron, due to which no matter wherever he goes, he fails to concentrate on anything. At the university he develops asthma owing to which he could not perform well in his studies. The other reasons are, his being black makes him feel dull among his fellow beings and the language of the textbooks also seems to be foreign to him. Soon, he loses interest and drops out of the university. After that, he tries his luck in various fields and at last ends up in the army. He believes all this to be the consequences of Imani's curse, but in truth, he is engulfed by his own guilt of losing his child. Henceforth, wherever he goes he could not deny the fact that he is solely responsible for the death of his baby and for the broken heart of Imani. Consequently, he fails to fit himself in any work undertaken by him. It is at this juncture that Jeff, a Buddhist monk comes to his rescue and suggests him to sponsor a boy in an orphanage situated in the hills of





India. Sponsoring a child, Jeff believes will relieve Cameron to some extent of his thirty years old grief and guilt of killing his own baby. To quote him, “Perhaps when Cameron saw this child in person, when he caught hold of his hand and felt the metta that upholds the universe flowing between them, he would be healed” (188). Besides, this sponsoring will also rejuvenate the lost bonding which Cameron mostly longed for throughout these years. Buoyed with a hope when Cameron contacts the orphanage, he, however, receives sponsorship of a girl by name Seva. But the officials at the orphanage people do not want to rush the things and suggest Cameron to write letters in the beginning and if things work out between them, they will soon arrange for a meeting. It is almost one year now, since he starts writing letters to Seva exchanging their codes of joy and sorrows. This new acquaintance between Cameron and Seva, in actual terms, accentuates the rebirth of his lost child in the form of Seva for whom Cameron undergoes a penance of almost thirty years- a point to underscore the karmic principles or cyclic nature of karma which actually works in each and every person’s life. To be precise, one gets back what one actually releases into the world. If one releases positive vibes, s/he will get the same and vice-versa. To aptly mark simple wisdom of Buddha by Dr. Rajan Pandey, “To make room for the positive energy available in this moment, you’ll need to release negative energy you’re holding onto from the past—be it distant or recent” (9). Cameron’s account of life seems to be swinging between these positive and negative vibes. He holds an inevitable pain and guilt within him which follows him like a shadow throughout his life. But when he decides to sponsor Seva, he could feel the mood of delight and pleasure that surrounds him as well as the environment in which he is placed.

Alike Cameron who revives his life after getting acquainted with Seva, Uma, the ninth survivor of the earthquake, is also at the heights of ecstasy during her graduation where there is no scope of negativity and only positive vibes matter. But, somehow, these positive vibes get surpassed by a small drift in her family. Her parents whom she believes to be the happiest couple on earth- her mother, a charming and devoted wife and her father, an adorable husband, seem to have developed serious differences. Uma is pursuing her graduation in one of the prestigious colleges of Texas, a place far away from home. She is



slowly getting acquainted with the lushness of the campus with its tropical foliage and old Southern elegance, when one evening, she gets a call from her father shattering her complete existence; he pronounces that he is planning to get a divorce because he no longer feels anything common between him and his wife except Uma. The shocking news of divorce is so hard-hitting that Uma loses interest in academics. She starts skipping her classes. The only class she now attends is kick-boxing where she feels at ease in the company of Jeri who regularly visits these classes. To beat the pain of her inner self Uma along with Jeri plans to travel to New York leaving behind all her agonies. It is during this adventurous journey that she comes across an amazing spectrum of aurora borealis in the sky. The sight of aurora is so soothing and pacifying that Uma spends the whole night under that startling garland of galaxy. When she wakes up after some time, the aurora is gone but its vibes are so strong that she could feel a kind of transformation in her. To quote her, “Something had happened as I lay in the field, watching the sky, an understanding that I couldn’t control the lives of others—but neither could they control mine” (Divakaruni 204). Although after a while, the news in a radio that a major explosion has taken place in the chemical factories to the east of the city, swipes away all the possibilities of any presence of aurora, Uma is very much certain about one thing that “...no matter what its source, the dance of lights over the night field had given me something facts couldn’t take away” (205). With this realization, she swings back to her college life.

Dexterously premised, the novel gives an exhilarating and invigorating panorama about a group of nine immigrants who get stuck somewhere in-between their past and present. To pull out these immigrants from the web of their past and to entwine them with the seal of their karmic nature; Divakaruni, with precision, adopts the method of story-telling, an incredible sample of Johari window. This technique of story-telling is in actual terms, a symbolic pilgrimage to one’s inner selves before an individual visits to the holy land, which heals the body both within and outside and purifies the soul.



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