

The Breach of Sisterhood and Cultural Transformation in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire*

Parkavi V

Research Scholar/Ph.D (Part Time), Bharatiar University Coimbatore
bharkaviprema@gmail.com

Abstract-Love, Kindness faithfulness and tolerance are widely recognized traits of feminine sensibility. Women have multifaceted personalities. Many are able to tune themselves according to the ambience they live. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni throws light on immigrant women. She picturesquely portrays the South Asian women's plight, violence and individuality in a foreign land. The reader may never miss to notice the autobiographical elements in her works. She never misses to take us to her hometown Kolkata in her works. Women and particularly immigrant women are vibrant in her novels. She never portrays women as a weak sex. They strive to establish their identity at home, work place and in a foreign land. Divakaruni vividly portrays how women have to undergo a sea of pain to carve her own identity in the midst of gender and race dominated society. This paper ponders the introversion of immigrant women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Vine of Desire"

Keywords-Immigrant Women; identity; individuality

INTRODUCTION

"The Vine of Desire" is a sequel to 'Sister Of My Heart'. It continues the vivid story of Anju and Sudha, the two young women bonded as sisters at the centre of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel "Sister of My Heart". Both fight to overcome the predominance of male. Though the Chatterjee girls, Anju and Sudha were nurtured in the most orthodox Bengali way the impulse in the land of melting pot has widened their mental horizons. There is a transformation in their thoughts and actions. She makes the reader clear that individuality can be achieved only through sufferings and pain. The novel "Sister of My Heart" concludes with the expectation of a new life to Sudha and Anju. The "Vine of Desire" showcases the change of maturity level of both Anju and Sudha. There is a stream of transformation of women's psyche from the first chapter to the last one.

THE REUNION OF SISTERHOOD

Sudha, Dayita, Anju and Sunil lead a happy life. Dayita brings life to everyone. Dayita replaces Anju's unborn child 'Prem'. Sudha starts to execute her responsibilities after she reaches America. She pushes Anju to continue her studies. Sudha demands Anju to continue her studies. She is concerned of Anju because Anju is dominated by her thoughts of her unborn child. Anju backfires Sudha to join her college and start her studies. Sudha shows no interest towards Anju's wish. Sudha is comfortable in doing odd jobs at her cousin's home. Though she has come with a mountain dream she spends time in cleaning the house and nurturing her baby girl 'Dayita'. Anju continues her studies.

ANU'S TITILLATION AND ABJECTION

The reader could notice fine changes in the characterization of Anju. Anju always prefers to be bold and independent at her hometown whereas now she feels alone in passing the harsh tidal waves of her journey. She seems to be very nervous and excited on Sudha's arrival. Anju is not sure whether she did right by inviting Sudha to America or not. She is not sure of the consequences of her decision. She feels frustrated after her miscarriage. She still depends on Sunil. This makes Anju to feel the heaviness of her own life. She feels difficult to converse to her beloved ones.

Anju doesn't trust the runaway roller coaster of her own emotions either. The wild mood swings after the miscarriage that would leave her weeping or laughing hysterically. (p.no10)

Anju is a replica of the loneliness that many immigrant women endure in an alien land. Though they have people around they are busy in their own work. In one of her assignments Anju is asked to write about a person whom she knows closely but fails to understand. Strangely enough Anju writes about Sunil, her husband. She accepts that there is lack of mutual understanding between them, though they live under a same roof since many years. Anju and Sunil rarely share time together both seem to be busy in their own work. This gives vent for Anju to leave Sunil and live her life independently. Though she feels that Sunil had cheated her she doesn't want to bear his infidelity. Anju turns a deaf ear to her oriental values and leads a life of her own. She refuses to take Sunil's help at worst situation too.

THE RIFT IN THE SISTERHOOD

There is a drastic change in the sisterhood bond. Though they feel happy to be together, both maintain their secrets.

So much talk and tears. So much catching up with pain. So much still unsaid between Anju and me that would perhaps never be spoken. We were afraid to touch each other's pasts, the way one is with a cut that's just stopped bleeding. We read each other's eyes, the questions that couldn't be asked, couldn't be answered. (p.no:31)

Though Sunil initially opposes the idea of bringing Sudha to America he wants to extend her stay. A threat to Anju's marital bliss pushes her neither to nod her to stay nor to tell her to return India. Anju is pleased to hear the intimacy between Lalit and Sudha. It will take Sudha away from Sunil. Moreover if Sudha accepts the proposal it will make Sudha's life stable. The very next day after Sudha's date with Sunil knowing that Anju has gone for college Sunil proposes Sudha for marriage saying he would divorce Anju. Though Sudha longs to share her bed with Sunil she denies his proposal. She decides to walk away from Anju's apartment drafting a letter of thanks to Anju for being a savior in her life.

No I can't afford such easy sentimentality. I removed myself from my cousin's life the way a gardener uproots a choking weed. I must not return there even in thought. (p.no:247)

The Vine of desire on each other has breached the sisterhood bond. The cousins depart in different directions to live their life by their own.

AN EMBRYONIC CHANGE WITHIN SUDHA

Sudha reads Anju's eyes and comes to know about her plight. She thinks of Anju's predicament and decides to earn a living of her own. Sudha wants to enter the American life of being independent in terms of monetary and mental aspects and plans to execute it with the help of Lupe and Sara. Though Sudha recollects her life with Ramesh now and then Sudha feels difficult to overcome her oriental values. Sudha in her oriental values. Everybody, including Anju wonder why Sudha turns why she turns Ashok's and Lalit's proposal. Sudha has her own theory of life. She has her own reasons for the refusal to Ashok:

I turned him down because I didn't want him to have to take care of me," Sudha said "I wanted to be independent. And it seemed like America was the best place for that. (pp 92-93)

Sudha goes to America as a woman without man. She enters into a foreign land to shed away her bitter past. Sudha has come with a mountain dream but she is comfortable in doing odd jobs at her cousin's home. Her

pains would have vanished Lalit's proposal. Sudha firmly steps forward to lead an autonomous life. Jobs are rare for Sudha because, she is not professionally skilled, and she has a baby with her. Finally with the help of Lupe, She gets a job as a care taker in Trideep and Myra's house. Sudha's turning down Ashok's proposal second time is a step ahead on the part of an Indian immigrant woman towards empowerment of woman. Sudha is infatuated by the freedom and independence. Sudha fights, though she knows she could lose anything in the battle.

DIVAKARUNI'S PULSATING CHARACTERISATION

Divakaruni has served in Maitri, a helpline for South Asian women dealing with domestic abuse she beautifully portrays the psyche of immigrant women. Through her women characters she throws light on the psyche of immigrant women and how they create a niche for themselves. Though Anju didn't undergo any domestic abuse she is not able to withstand Sunil's attraction towards her cousin Sudha. Anju's frank acceptance of her loneliness suggests the paucity of communication between husband and wife in America. Anju bluntly reveals her grief, her realization that her fickle husband is drifting away from her. At this critical juncture Anju realizes the momentousness of Indian culture, which can bound the family close together, in a way she wants. But being an immigrant woman she wants to live her life on her own. Though she is from an orthodox family, she takes a bold decision of leaving her husband and moving to her new life than blindly being a prey to her cheated husband. Anju steps into real America after some years of stay. She manages to survive and plans meticulously for future. Anju's early survival is an outcome of an American influence over her. Though she is criticized by her own people she continues to carve her identity. She wants to live her life without manly support. She is different from many Indian women who built a wall of patriarchal society. Many immigrant women are contented to live their life under the shade of a man.

Sudha also faces the terrible loneliness in America. She knows in her loneliness she could be dangerous So, to avoid the loneliness Sudha often talks to Dayita and involves herself into her all the time. Sudha often works at home to keep herself busy. Sudha bluntly accepts that it is her loneliness that creates a space for another man in her life. She says: "He had cupped his hands for me, so I could pour all my loneliness into them." (p.228). She does not feel good when her desires yield to Sunil. She bangs the beauty lotion saying: "Let the skin crack and peel. That will be your penance for opening yourself to desire." (p.229). It is her loneliness that forces her to give in to the desires. Nalini, Gowri Ma and Pishi Ma reflect oriental values. However Nalini's character swings as she is caught in the rich and the downtrodden world in India. Divakaruni also takes care in portraying the women characters in South Asia.

Anju and Sudha face the loneliness. Both of them have shown intense desire to be autonomous human beings by rejecting the help from others. Generally Indian women would have given up in the situation like this. She shows the courage which is rare among Indian women. Being aware of women's rights and their autonomous status in America, Anju expects the same for Sudha. She says:

You did right thing. That's all that matters. A lot of women in your position would have given in. You left. You did not care that you had to give up everything.... (p.43)

Indian woman generally continues to be submissive wife even against their own interests. It is common tendency of obeying rather than defying among Indian women. To be a dutiful daughter, sister, wife, or daughter-in-law is the hallmark of virtue for them. Submissiveness becomes their habit, a way of life for them. Changing name is one of the aspects of cultural transformation of Immigrants. Sara is the shorter version of the Indian name Saraswathi, Sarayu, or Sarojini. Sara's views about India and Indians are critical. She thinks relationship brings with responsibilities which she is not for. She loves freedom though it seems to be risky. Indian women are a prey for emotions but whereas Americans are not emotionally clinged. Lupe resembles American thoughts.

Don't get attached," Lupe said, that's the recipe for trouble. Remember it's just a job.

Sometimes Indian immigrant women try to imitate western lifestyle though their traditional looks represent their ethnicity. However though immigration cannot solve the problems of immigrants it can help them to establish their identity.

CONCLUSION

In each character Divakaruni portrays that America is not responsible for immigrants' troubles but the dilemma in their thoughts and actions in a foreign land. They are comfortable in calling themselves as Indo Americans but they are neither Indians in following their conservative culture nor Americans in establishing their own identity. They are trapped in between.

Geographical locations help a lot to change anyone's life. Though Women groan in darkness alone they cannot live their life independently in their home town. Anju cannot shed her wife's responsibility and lead a independent life. Though she feels cheated she may be forced to be a docile wife in her home town. In the case of Sudha she may not be allowed to earn her own living and lead an independent life with her baby. As in the case of Sara, she will not be appreciated if she prefers to shed her responsibilities as a woman. Divakaruni gives a lively picture of immigrant women through her vibrant characters.

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