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A Study on Transformation of Feminism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Works

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Abstract: Society, as it stands today, is an organization of human beings where all are working towards the betterment of living beings, whether human or not. The life of human beings revolves around relationships in some form or other. This chapter attempts to analyse the nature of basic familial bonds - the bond that exists between a man and a woman. It analyses various problems and predicaments encountered by protagonists and how and why they become a victim in the tradition-bound society. It also exposes social practices and concepts like arranged marriage, love marriage and bondage of marriage. The man-woman relationship, going by the norms of society, is dictated by deceit and treachery. Human beings, more often than not prefer to go by the dictates of society rather than be truthful to themselves as individuals.

A comprehensive view of the institution of family and its impact on the individuals in particular, and society in general, as presented in the chosen fictional narratives is attempted, to understand and locate it in the rapidly changing social context. It further explores women's hardships in maintaining throughout the journey of their lives. The uniqueness of the Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni novels is the way in which the women have been shown to live in togetherness and fight the battles of life. Relationship among women has been looked through with a kaleidoscopic view.

Keywords: Script, Language, Civilization, India, Writing, Knowledge, Symbols.

I. INTRODUCTION

Strong women, when respected, make the society stronger. One must be careful with such rapid changes, though, and make an effort to preserve, at the same time, the positive traditions of Indian culture. - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni [1]

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian Women Writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart's. Proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes. Writer's works are often therefore, belong to high social strata and cut off from the reality of Indian life.

Divakaruni's writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women. She says, "Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them: women in love, in difficulty, women in relationships. I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to [be] prejudiced when they meet them in real life." Her interest in women began after she left India, at which point she came to reevaluate the treatment of women there. At Berkeley, she volunteered at a women's center and became interested in helping battered women.

Chitra Divakaruni's originality, literary value and her importance for posterity nevertheless rise above the mere connection to her heritage and to the issues pertaining to (South Asian) women living in a new environment. Divakaruni's literature represents a daring yet also smooth and spontaneous interaction between various worlds and ways of existence, those considered as "real" and those considered as "supernatural" or "imaginary." In this intersection of possible existences, of ways of being not to contradict one another but appear to be particularly complementary. Her intense, appealing style strongly supports the literary personae that fully lead their complex novelistic life. The coexistence of "magical fantasy" (as described in her various interviews) and the characteristics of hybrid, postcolonial or postmodern, novelistic devices in this prose have often lead the author to define her writing approach as magical making the commonplace wondrous and the real extra-ordinary" [2].

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's literature brings about a fine creation, a new version of how in the past decades, the (often stereotypical) representations of East (in Western culture) have been transformed and adapted to the needs of rapidly changing circumstances, both in literature and in everyday life. With a vision, inner self-confidence, and an open heart and mind, Divakaruni has secured herself a position in today's world literature as a woman who not only knows how to tell stories but also how to make us enter into them fully, inhabiting them together with her. In this regard, she is a magician who understands how to generate the innermost reaction in her readers, so that we become permeable to the new paradigms she is laying out for us. At the same time, Divakaruni's novels may also be seen as laboratories where new ways of human coexistence are being tested.[3]

II. TRANSCULTURE IN WRITING OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S

Her works focus on the experiences of South Asian immigrants to the U.S. and her predominant thematic concerns are pro-feminist, rebelling against the victimization suffered by Asian women. This concern is reflected in her real life role as an activist with several women's organizations and as the co-founder of Maitri (1991) a helpline for South Asian women dealing with domestic abuse. A list of her works would include—poetry collections such as *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991), *Leaving Yuba City* (1997), short-story collections and novels such as—*Arranged Marriage* (1995), *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Unknown Errors of our Lives* (2001), *Neela: Victory Song* (2002), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *The Conch Bearer* (2003), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* (2005), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), *Shadowland* (2009), *One Amazing Thing* (2010), *Oleander Girl* (2013), and several essays.

Divakaruni's works which chiefly deal with the existential quandaries of expatriates tackle two problematic areas of contemporary post-colonial theory 'diaspora' and 'feminism'. The Indian transnationalism community is one of the most heterogeneous especially with regard to race, religion, region and language. It is caught between a sense of homelessness on the one hand and a sense of networking and solidarity on the other hand, in a virtually endless attempt to bridge the gap between native and adopted cultures. "The word 'diaspora' is literally a scattering carrying within it the ambiguous status of being both an ambassador and a refugee.... While one requires the projection of one's culture and the ability to enhance its understanding, the other seeks refuge and protection and relates more positively to the host culture"[4].

Divakaruni literature work the struggle, rootlessness and anxiety as also the adaptation and assimilation of foreign cultures by the Indian migration. On the other hand, the Indian feminine, physically and mentally enslaved by traditions in her native country, often encounters overwhelming experiences in a foreign land. Divakaruni delicately portrays how expatriate women, naturally endowed with the feminine ability to relate simultaneously to two homes, employ wisdom and compassion to empathize with two different cultures Indian and American, and to heal the fractured selves (their own and those of fellow-beings) by synthesizing the moderate and the best in the two cultures. Thus, in addition to the mandatory 'double' vision that transnationalism writers possess, Divakaruni, inspired by both Indian and foreign feminist writers, projects a 'third feminine vision' one with far-reaching social implications especially in India where the attempt to assert feminine identity has met with brutal violence from the orthodoxy and patriarchy. Divakaruni's empathetic and genuine rendering of the lives of third world women may also serve as a corrective to the usual Eurocentric bias of Western feminist theories.[5]

In Divakaruni's novels, there is a striving on the part of female protagonists towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. Through the different portraits of educated Indian women, mainly from the upper middle class, and examples of Indian marriages in her novels, Divakaruni has tried to focus on the subservient status assigned to women and the need for these women to fight against the traditional expectations of society to become independent.[6]

Divakaruni writes about women fighting endless battles to survive. She has endeavoured to draw a pen picture of the Indian women, who are independent in every way but still remains slaves of society, customs, parents, husbands and children. "Her both these novels deals with upper middle class women, stripping away the facade of chiffon sarees and delve into their lives, personalities and particular individual struggle. She frankly uncovered the world of women's instincts and natural yearnings for love and understanding. Her awareness of the need for women's emancipation is strongly demonstrated through her novels".[7]

In writing work of Divakaruni has also highlighted the real problems which women were facing in their life in male-dominated society. The problems are same for the women whether it is India or America. Researcher had tried to focus on Divakaruni's protagonists who are interacting with western culture and try to learn the western culture in her novels. "It can be said that they literally cross the ocean, physical and geographical boundaries and change their lives in all respect; though their Indian values do surface now and then. In the process of transformation, by their resilient nature, they emerge victorious, self-assertive and opposite of their previous selves. The portrayal of her unforgettable and realistic women characters and the feminist tone in her novels make her one of the most excellent feminist Indian novelist."[8]

III. TRANSCULTURE IN CHITRA BANEERJEE DIVAKARUNI WORK

This paper attempts to describe the Indian cultural aspects and feminine awareness in Divakaruni's novels. Being an Indian contemporary writer in order to highlight how the pulls and pressures of the past lives of women continue to influence their present. There is constant interplay of nostalgia and reality in Divakaruni's novels. At a deeper level she shows a conflict between tradition and modernity. The trials and tribulations and the struggle to maintain the modern values and to carve out an identity of their own in the new and ostensibly stifling environment of her protagonists makes her a feminist. Their protagonists seek to synthesize traditions with the modern values which are the needs of the hour. To an extent they reconcile themselves to the rigidity of traditions but with reservations and carve out their own identity and living within the ambit of tradition.

We find in Divakaruni's novels, "the main arena has been the study of the self. She try to locate meaning in the life around and then try to respond to the modern conditions of individual isolation and cultural fracture. She aspires to modernity; attempt to be universal; feel bound to the roots and as a result, find herself in an anomalous and jarring position. Striving

for identity in the postcolonial world, the protagonists of these novels present the dilemma of the modern day woman covering each and every aspect of her life.”[9] In fact, her works have mapped the social, political and cultural changes brought about by colonization, postcolonial consciousness and globalization. The manner of expression may be found i.e. a peaceful and progressive life beneficial for the woman community.

The novels outline the lives of women engaged in a quest for values and identity. This is evident in novels such as *Sister of my Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *The Pallace of Illusion* and *Queen of Dreams*, Independence by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. “The novels we have seen are the products of an intense intellectual engagement with the socio-economic realities of the writer's contemporary world. As such the novels fulfill the whole aim of life which is to develop a specific ideological stance to the political underpinnings of one's immediate society.”[10]

In this paper has attempted through a study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, the sensitive nature of the question of marginality of women and how as women writers belonging as they do to diverse socio-economic and geo-cultural realities, the novels record and reflect a very broad spectrum of the experiences of life. Thus, this book is an attempt to explore women's quest for identity and self-fulfilment by feminist study in modern Indian English novels with specific focus on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels.

IV. CONCLUSION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the prominent Indian American expatriate writers in the canon of Indian writing in English. Being a postcolonial writer, Divakaruni has fetched the different shades of identity intricacies challenged by the immigrant feminism in an ostentatious way through her literary creative. Having a distinguished place in the group of South Asian women writers, Divakaruni cultivates and nurtures a thoughtful concern for contemporary women and has attempted to bring to the limelight the significant issues related to the self-identities of her women characters. Divakaruni's writings vividly represents the bond of sisterhood, the relationship in the family and community and the immigrant women's experiences of being ‘in between’ and the ‘makeover’ with courage while the characters go through a period of metamorphosis. The writer believes that when women come in association with their fellow women in the community, it enables them with an inner strength of their own to surpass the male domination which eventually empowers them to unshackle the plight of isolation and subjugation. It substantiates women with the necessary incitement to begin a new dynamic life that is filled with the attainment of self and reaffirmation of their identity with a belief that they are the makers of their own destiny. The connecting bond between women provides a protection from persecution and harassment. This association of proximity among women stands as a challenge to defy the patriarchal ordeals and offers a universal understanding shared by feminism.

Divakaruni's realm of narration concentrates on women's identity and their struggles in the society dealing with both the traditional Indian culture as well as western ethnical background. In all her narratives, one finds the woman's individuality placed at the pivot around which the tales are knitted with a concrete elaboration of their trials and tribulations. Her portrayal of women's identity is realistic, tangible, substantial, and reliable. Her novels give a detailed analysis of the physical, social and emotional predicament to which the woman's self in general becomes victim. Divakaruni not only exposes the psychodynamics of the Indian women but also of the immigrant women in the foreign land.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's diaspora deals with migration, immigration, circulation, nation-state, nation boundary, expatriation, alienation, longing-ness, isolation, movement, ideology, consciousness, self, and other which are deeply associated with the phenomenon of identity formation. The reality of identity formation can be responded well with two major philosophical plenitudes; Structuralism and Post structuralism. The former explains Diaspora through the reality of self and the other, home and host, and melting pot theory where one is dominated by the hegemonic order of another which acts as host

whereas the latter holds that everything exists in continuum and in process therefore, all is a medley, pastiche, and parody and thus, the reality of hybridity may expound the complex reality of identity.

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