



To Spin a Yarn is to Pick up the Pieces: Art, Storytelling and Healing in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams

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Abstract: This paper explores how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's female protagonists undergo displacement, trauma and loss of identity in their survival. Here, storytelling acts as a part of therapeutic survival. Through the protagonist, Jaya, a dream teller and her daughter, Rakhi, a painter, this novel demonstrates that "to spin a yarn" - to narrate the dream and "to pick up the pieces" - pain of migration, loss of identity and historical violence 9/11. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni always uses her intricate way of writing, which shows the immigrants spinning a yarn and how they pick their pieces to know their identity for their origin, purpose, self-satisfaction and healing. Using the themes of art, storytelling and healing, this paper explores the importance of finding one's identity as an immigrant to survive in foreign countries. This research explains how Jaya and Rakhi bridge their identity gap between Kolkata and Berkeley through their way of finding. Healing which acts as a mechanism of recovery to survive and self-reinvention.

Keywords: Art, Storytelling, Healing, Survival, Identity, Alienation.

Introduction

Literature is the art of speaking and writing in a language to express ideas, emotions, and experiences about and around us. It is valued for its purity and interpretation in language. Literature can be used in the form of poetry, lyrics, essays, paragraphs, symbolism, novels, articles, narrative, etc. It reflects our thoughts, beliefs, imagination, and anxiety about particular things. Many people claim to be living in a diaspora, to be part of a minority, or to have ancestors from a different ethnic group from that of the majority. They attach a positive value to this, viewing it as adding a premium of identity rather than a negative stigmatisation. Individuals of the present day can keep in touch with relatives and maintain contacts abroad and at home, as well as remain connected to cultural, cognitive, and symbolic values of remote places. Information and communication technologies have obviously facilitated this new proximity, but host countries' evolution from a homogeneous conception of citizenship toward more pluralistic, multiethnic approaches has also been crucial.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-born American author who is an award-winning writer, activist, professor, speaker and the author of 21 books. Her work has been published in over 100 magazines and anthologies, including *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Best American Short Stories* and the *O. Henry Prize Stories* and translated into 30 languages. Her work has been made into films, plays, dance dramas and performed as operas. Her awards include an American Book Award, a PEN Josephine Miles Award, a Premio Scanno and a Light of India Award. She has been an activist in the fields of education and domestic violence. It is necessary to mention that her work has become the subject of women's experience, immigration, history, magical realism, mythology and the challenges of living in a multicultural world. She has won several outstanding awards. Her stories have engaged several realities. She demonstrates her concern for dependent women and their mental stability. Nevertheless, her novels cannot be fixed within these labels, because she is an elusive writer with diverse interests. She is primarily the voice of the women whose studies were buried deep.



Research Questions

1. How does Jaya use dream interpretation and storytelling to communicate with Rakhi across distance and after death?
2. What connections does the novel draw between telling stories and recovering from loss or displacement?
3. How does Rakhi use painting to process her grief over her mother's death and the events of 9/11?
4. In what ways does Rakhi's art change before and after major traumatic events in the novel *Queen of Dreams*?
5. How does the act of writing, telling, or painting help characters in the novel make sense of their experiences in two cultures?

Review Of Literature

The recent study by S.L. Sathia Sali's and D. L. Jaisy's paper talks about how the Protagonist wants to spare her daughter Rakhi from the tales of her strange and painful past, in spite of her innate bonding with Indian life, Indian scenery and Indian culture. She is married to Sonny, another Indianized American, but fails to find the contentment she desires in her marriage; however, her six-year-old daughter Jona remains a link between them. Besides her fascination with painting, Rakhi, in association with her father, runs a Chaishop, which becomes the meeting point for all distinguished immigrants. It provides a natural feeling of fraternity for the immigrants. After the death of her mother in a car accident, her father tries to provide financial support to save 'Chaishop' from being closed. Her father also supports Rakhi in translating her mother's dream journals from Bengali to English to reconstruct the mystery of the life of her mother. The novel is structured as a postmodern narrative, and the narrator moves between past and present.

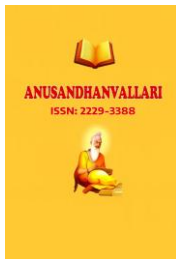
Karthikadevi, C. G., C. Jothi, and B. R. Aravind's work discusses the psychological sufferings of the first and second generation are going to be dealt with in this paper. The longing and nostalgic memories affect their present life as well as their career. One should maintain equanimity and mental balance to take great effort to achieve success in one's own life. One way or the other, people try to chase their dreams and to attain wish fulfilment. The dream is driven by unconscious wish fulfilment.

Bhardwaj, Richa's work talks about the attempts to show that these two aspects do not meld or cohere. The second and subsidiary story evoking the picture of an exotic India not only does nothing to advance the cause of women diaspora but also exposes the author to the charge of false projection of India to capture the attention of the western reader and the diaspora community, of indulging in re-orientalism to perpetuate myths about the east and to evade real issues.

My research focuses on unique findings of arts, storytelling and healing through their pain. How Jaya and Rakhi show their way of power through storytelling and painting on canvas to express grief. Healing acts as a soothing agent after finding their identity and history, where art and storytelling help them to heal from the sad part of their life or the pain they underwent.

Thematic Framework

This paper works on three thematic practices: Art, storytelling and healing of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Characters to reassemble their life in a new place. Rakhi uses art to express her grief over her father's death after the attack of 9/11. Here she finds a way to live with loss and grief. Jaya makes her living interesting by telling their dreams into private stories. After Jaya's death, Rakhi starts to find her identity and the history of her mother's storytelling power, which gave her a shape to find further. Healing comes with serving the things that we like or satisfying things where our souls can calm and start a new beginning.



Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative and text-centred research methodology, which shows that art and storytelling act as a way of healing the soul. The research focuses on the two protagonists, Jaya and Rakhi, through the theme of art, storytelling and healing. The aim is to explore how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni spin the yarn and how their character collect the pieces for survival.

Literary Analysis

In this novel, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni follows Jaya and Rakhi's way of expressing and healing. Jaya has the power of knowing dreams, and she lets her power as storytelling to the people, and it even connects with the world and her surroundings. If she had a dream about water its a warning about change, and if she had a dream about fire, its about the warning about the earth. This is her way of understanding the world. But Jaya doesn't want her daughter Rakhi to know about her dream power and storytelling history while she was alive. For Jaya, storytelling is a way of survival and healing in her life. Whereas Rakhi is an artist in Berkeley, she uses art as a way of survival after the death of her father. She finds peace and healing after she started to express her grief in art. Both Jaya and Rakhi want to find their identity, even though Jaya lived in Kolkata and moved to Berkeley after marriage, and Rakhi was born and brought up in America. They are not sure about their identity, even when they lived in Berkeley. They had a quest to find their identity.

Spinning A Yarn: Storytelling As Holding And Letting Out

Jaya did storytelling as a job in Kolkata. As she moved to Kolkata after marriage, she worried that she would lose her identity. As she couldn't continue her storytelling in Berkeley, Jaya wants her identity alive again, but without knowing her daughter. She doesn't want her daughter to know her real self and history, as she brought her up as an American. She knows that she won't live longer, as she is a dream viewer. But she wants her daughter to know about her only after her death. She started writing letters, recording tapes and did her dream journal for her daughter Rakhi.

"I wrote to her because I was afraid I would run out of time"(210)

This line was written by Jaya before her death, that she couldn't face her daughter as she hides her storytelling power and history because she doesn't want her daughter to feel the alienation feel as she felt. According to Jaya, Stories are how we hold each other when we cannot touch. Jaya brought up Rakhi as native American, as she was born in Berkeley. But she didn't open up her past storytelling or her native roots from Kolkata. She believed that her daughter would be in touch through her writing. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows that Jaya's storytelling carries people across generations even after her death. Rakhi spins the yarn to give shape to her mother's identity.

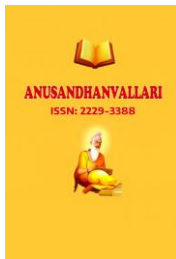
Picking Up The Pieces: Art As A Mode Of Voice

Jaya uses storytelling as her way of voicing to the world; Rakhi uses art as a mode of voice to express her ideas and pain to cope with the world. Jaya, who is the owner of the Kurma house, runs her store well when she is alive. Especially Indians wearing Kurta, Kurtis can give them a hint of their identity.

'Looked in a mirror lately?

"You ain't no American! It's fuckers like you who planned this attack on the innocent people of this country. Time someone taught you faggots a lesson'.(267)

After Jaya's death, Rakhi took over her mom's shop, where she faced a big disaster of the 9/11 incident done by the native Americans. Rakhi watched the towers fall on TV. They caused a huge disaster for the Indian shops, prompting them to move out of their country as if they never belonged there. They want the immigrants to move to their own countries. But here, Rakhi herself was a native American, as she was born and brought up in America.



She realises that she is an American but couldn't find their identity even in her birthplace. Rakhi thought about how immigrants feel the pain of finding their identity. As a way of expressing her pain and grief, she started painting on her canvas. She took her mother's old silk from her shop and sews them in her canvas.

'To think that it was there all the time, my whisper voice says, only you'd never noticed'.(289)

This line is about being delayed, spoken by the inner voice of Rakhi. As Rakhi was busy and angry for years, she doesn't know anything about her mother or her identity. But Rakhi doesn't know that her roots are from India, and she had a huge interest in Indian culture, temples, and she paints everything Indian based. After her mother's death, she is going through all of her mother's journals, letters and tapes, which Jaya recorded for her daughter to know about her after her death. Rakhi sees this as her mother's love, where she is answering her from heaven. She even tried her mother's storytelling art, but she couldn't do it as well as her mother. But fortunately, Jaya's granddaughter inherited her storytelling power. Both Jaya and Rakhi heal in their own way; for Jaya, storytelling is an identity, and she spins the yarn. For Rakhi, collecting the pieces explains her canvas as emotion, which acts as a way of healing for her.

Conclusion

Queen of Dreams explores the art of storytelling and art as their comforts. Jaya spun yarns to keep her daughter closer even after her death. Rakhi picks the pieces to overcome her grief and pain. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows that people survive in displacement by making meaning even after they lose their identity through her female characters. Jaya and Rakhi show how they spun the yarn and took the pieces as a beginning of new things and an ending of their sorrow. In the diaspora, healing means going back to their native instead, they adapt culture and habits from both their countries, which hold their lives.

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