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A New Self-Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart

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Abstract: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni narrates to all new shades of a new identity crisis such as alienation, marginalization, despair, readjustment and assimilation. Her writings are autobiographical. She includes the Indian-American experience of grabbing with two identities. The postcolonial literature investigates the dislocation of an individual or a group of people and consequent alienation among them. The situation of alienation leads to a sense of loss and based on the rediscovery of their self. Divakaruni's novel Sister of My Heart (1998) is selected for this research article. From the very beginning, Divakaruni has used the complex web of family differences as her theme. Her themes are alienation, psychological and physical trauma of woman's new identity. The novel question and challenge women's place in traditional discourse and suggest a rejection of such discourse. Divakaruni's women moving away from the submissive role to invent a new identity of their won, who rejects her own traditional values as culture instead of encouraging her, encumbers her. Finally she desires to adapt the values of the country in where she is to get settled. Sociological empowerment is to enable a group or groups of people in the society to arrive at their own decisions. "Female Character" raises the consciousness among woman that even though the male world tends to allow woman no other place except that of an object, woman can aspire to the subject positions provided.

Key words: new self identity, alienation, marginalization, discourse, culture,

Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's literary career treats all new shades of identity crisis such as alienation, marginalization, despair, readjustment, assimilation, nostalgia, and adaption. As a woman writer her writings are autobiographical. She portrays a kind of cultural in between. Such 'marginal' people are found in ever communal group, where a cross fertilization of culture takes place. The United States of America, a land of opportunities and a culturally pluralistic society, is no exception to it. She portrays the lives and perceptions of first generation immigrants and about their children born and raised in a foreign land. She includes the Indian-American experience of grabbing with two identities.

One's new identity depends a lot on the emotional, cultural and social stability of the individual. Stability is the ultimate stage of this quest. Exploring different aspects of one's self in the different areas of life, including one's work, within the family and in romantic relationships that help to strengthen the self-identity. A new Identity diffusion the culture with which a person does not share common ways of life or beliefs. It causes a feeling of confusion and disorientation. The postcolonial literature focuses on the dislocation and consequent alienation. It leads to a sense of loss and rediscovery of self. A sense of self that might have seemed round and settled in the old country suddenly appears as one among countless possibilities in the new, something episodic and adaptable to drastically different surroundings.

Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart (1998) is selected for this research article. She is used the delicate and complex web of family variance as her greatest theme. Divakaruni favorite theme is alienation, both psychological and physical and woman's invention of a new identity for her. The novel Sister of My Heart is written in the realist mode and describes the complex relationships of a family in Bengal. Sudha and Anju are distant cousins and are

brought up together. They are closer than sisters, share their clothes, worries and dreams. The Chatterjee family fortunes are at low ebb. There are only widows at home such as the girls, their mothers and their aunt. The entire forty-two chapters of the novel comprise a sort of extended dialogue of multitudes. The chapters are alternately titled "Anju" and "Sudha" and utilize techniques that are epistolary in plot and exclamatory in cultural settings. The young women Anju and Sudha now live far from Calcutta and living separate lives and rekindle their friendship in the United States. Divakaruni deals with a different face of immigrant experience in the stance of alienation.

This article entitled "A New Self Identity" presents the female quest for identity with reference to profession, marriage and motherhood in the society. Her novel depicts men's imposition on women and how they disable them intellectually, emotionally and morally. The novel question and challenge women's place in traditional discourse and suggest a rejection of such discourse. Divakaruni's women moving away from the submissive role to invent a new identity of their won, who rejects her own traditional values as culture instead of encouraging her, encumbers her. Finally she desires to adapt the values of the country in where she is to get settled. Sociological empowerment is to enable a group or groups of people in the society to arrive at their own decisions. "Female Character" raises the consciousness among woman that even though the male world tends to allow woman no other place except that of an object, woman can aspire to the subject positions provided. They can learn to rely on their own powers. It raises the self consciousness among man that woman are not just commodities to be possessed. Thus, there is a need to keep woman alive, physically as well as psychologically.

New Self-Identity in the Novel Sister of My Heart

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart deals with innate quest for new identity and independence of the protagonist. The most important character Anju (Anju Chatterjee) and Sudha (Sudha Chatterjee) desired to be free and independent and worked hard to carve out their own identity out of their existence as immigrant women. They were brought up together and were married at the same day. The upbringing of two girls in a traditional manner and the way these girls protest sometimes gives the hint of their quest for identity and their spirit to achieve freedom and independence. For instance Anju's protest against the injustice has been done to her cousin and Sudha's refusal to accept any favour from Anju or Gouri Ma, her decision of not using her father's money for the marriage though they need it badly show the independent nature of these girls. It is really hard for an Indian immigrant woman to leave her husband, his name and the fine protection of family. Sudha comes to America in order to create her own new identity and to achieve freedom and independence. Sudha starts a fresh new life in America with her daughter for whose survival she walked out of the security of wifehood.

Anju has been living in America since the years it seems that she has just stepped into real America after Sudha's arrival. In the company of each other two cousins starts recreating their autonomous existence and independent identity. This has the long held ambition of the two. The thought of having something of her own and being financially free and independent gives an immense pleasure to Indian Immigrant woman. Though her husband's of these Indian immigrant women have provided comfort and luxury to them there is always a want to have more out of life. Not only the protagonists but the minor female characters of the novels also have the quest for freedom and independence and they are shown fighting for it. Nalini feels annoyed when her husband failed to earn money and they have to live on Bijoy's favours. Next, Ashok proposed Sudha several times however each time she turned him down though the reasons were different. Sudha refused because she wants to live as an individual and not as subordinate. She wants to be free and independent. She wants "…a future built by women out of their own wits, their own hands" (Sister of My Heart 230). Thus turning down Ashok's proposal, Sudha came to America to achieve freedom and independence. These proposals were able to set everything right in Sudha's life however she rejected because she did not want to depend on somebody's whims and expects more than just happiness and comfort and security of wifehood. Sudha declared that she wants to

fight and win the battle of life alone. She does not want to depend on somebody for her daughter's future. She says "… I'm not ready to give up either. I'm going to fight for my daughter" (Sister of My Heart 133).

Divkaruni metaphorically names one of the chapters of story one as 'The Princess in the Palace of Snakes, and the second story as 'The Queen of Swords' which represent Anju and Sudha respectively. They two are distant cousins and regard one another as the sister of their hearts. Since, they were born on the same day, were brought up in the same house, and are linked by an almost mystical bond of love. Pishi is the usual teller of tales. She asks her about the story she has told to Anju, "'I told her a story.' 'Ah, a story,' nods Pishi, more than any of us, she knows the power stories hold at their centre, like a mango holds its seed. It is a power that dissipates with questioning....'" (Sister of My Heart 289-290)

Sudha narrates the story on her attitude and her actions. Throughout their childhood, the girls used to act the fairy tales that Pishi had told them. Sudha played the princess in danger and Anju the prince who rescued her. Even while they were playing, Sudha would never reach out to the prince and help him help her. She always pointed out that it was the duty of the prince to do all the hard work and rescue her. Then, when she falls in love with Ashok and her mother decide to get married elsewhere, she waits for Ashok to make all the moves to rescue her from marriage. But after her marriage with Ramesh, she endures ill-treatment for a long time and still remain as the conventional princess of the fairytale. She waits for her husband or the prince to rescue her. She conceives and it is confirmed by tests that her baby is a girl. So, her mother-in-law forced her to abort the fetus. But now Sudha decides that she should do something to protect her baby. She leaves her husband's home and returns to her parental home in Calcutta. She transforms herself from the mute princess in the palace of snakes to the queen of swords in the society. She identifies her as a woman of action and she refuses to return to Ramesh. She turns down the conditional offers of Ashok to marry her. The rejection of male dictated stereotypical role is complete. Sudha's journey to America is really the beginning of her journey to a new world of women.

The mothers seem to have shrugged off a great burden of tradition. Perhaps, ironically I helped it happen for now that I have come back neither wife nor widow, now that I have let go of all the society considers valuable, what is left for them to fear? Away from those ancient halls echoing with patriarchal voices which insisted that foremost of all they must be widows of the Chatterjee family, for the first time they can learn to live their lives with a girlish lightness. (274)

The mothers tell to lead a life with a social purpose. They listen to the music and goes to the place where they please. They never worry about the social disgrace attached to a divorce and keep Sudha with them. They take care of their daughter. The Chatterjee's family fortunes are at low ebb. Sudha's mother, Nalini, and Anju's mother, Gouri Ma, are widows who live together with the widowed Aunt Abha Pishi in a crumbling Calcutta mansion. The reason they were widowed carries the embryo of a Dark secret; Sudha's father successfully persuaded Anju's father to embark with him on a quest for a non-mythical cave of rubies that were supposed to restore the family honour, not to mention bank balance. They never returned. The sudden death of their father on a hunt for rubies sends Anju and Sudha's mothers into labour and the two girls were born twelve hours apart. The inquisitive Anju and the remarkable beauty Sudha are aware of the diminishing status of the Chatterjee's family, which is duly rubbed in by the 'Waistless Women' who make an art out of gossip. Naturally the next big crisis in their lives comes from romance. A fugitive and illicit trip to the cinema leads to a chance meeting between a hero called Ashok and the beauteous Sudha. They fall instantly and irrevocably in love, but one of the women is at hand to drag. Anju and Sudha back home for retribution. Nalini decides that nothing less than marriage can wash the stain off Sudha's reputation leaving her daughter to wait helplessly for her prince to come.

The story ends with Anju and Sudha getting married on the same day. Sudha with her husband and in-laws lives in India and Anju with her husband lives in the United States. Anju and Sudha have had a traditionally arranged marriage but fate has ordained Sudha to live with Ramesh who works in Indian Railways. "…that requires a great deal of travelling on his part" (101). Leaving Sudha, "…to stay at home with her and be the daughter she never had" (101). Though Anju gives her consent for the traditionally arranged marriage, she does not hesitate to express her severe and sharp disapproval to it before her marriage. She says, 'To think that I'll have to go and live with a stranger." (113) Anju's thoughts, brimmed with liberation and revolution, are exposed here. She cannot accept the concept of women always belonging to somebody else. Her thought indirectly reveals her craving for freedom and an identity for herself.

Sudha's happiness is short lived when her child she is carrying is a girl. She is not greeted by her in-laws. She is forced to kill her baby. She sobs her plight to Anju, "My mother-in-law wants me to have an abortion" (237). Again, the relentless tradition meddles in the life of an innocent woman with its unwanted and unhelpful moral standards. Hence a woman, during her first pregnancy period, has to carry along with the baby, the anxiety and excitement that the child should not be a female, if not for the welfare of her family, at least for her future betterment. When Anju asks about the cruel decision of aborting the child, Sudha replies, "She said it's not fitting, it'll bring the family shame and ill luck" (237-238). Being a woman, Sudha is helpless. The baby is in her womb. She is nothing for the baby. She has no right to claim the baby. She has no role on her part to save the baby from the clutches of the traditional belief. She identifies herself as the baby's mother by walking out of her in-law's house, what actually is considered as her lifelong protection.

In the same similar identity, Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock Character of Maya's quest for identity is a quest for meaning, value, freedom and truth in this world. It denotes a collective neurosis, which shatters the identity of woman in the male dominated patriarchal society where women longing for love and security are driven mad or forced into alienation; Maya's quest thus assumes a universal dimension. It is the alienated self-struggle for a socio-psychic release from the drab reality of existence. Thus one can say that Maya's struggle for a meaningful life is a part of sublimate drama in rare specimens of womankind enacted all over the world in one form or another.

Divakaruni describes to say that if the Indian Women is to be relevant in the United States, she must ground her struggles in the heart of whiteness, rather than graft on cultural components which make no sense in the New world. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a woman with immense care on Indianans in her novel depicts the Indian mysticism, fantasy and realism in her bestselling novel Sister of My Heart where she visualizes on Quest for Identity, Womanhood and Immigrant experience through the lives of Anju and Sudha of Calcutta. An intensely rich and complex novel, Sister of My Heart is a virtual tapestry of plots.

The underlying tension between the desires of the mothers, who embraces traditional Indian culture and Indianans and those of the cousins, who are more enticed by western philosophies are under the scrutiny. This western philosophy is the central evaluation of the work. The disturbing truth about the circumstances under which Sudha and Anju were born secretly tortures Sudha and weaves a menacing thread through the friendship. And, when the cousins fall in love and are physically separated by arranged marriages, their uncommon bond faces its hardest test.

In the novel evolves we follow the women through their lives, experiencing their joy, sorrow, jealousy, loss, depression, surprise and prolonged separation and find that these battles and triumphs hold a universal thread with which women of many cultures can easily be identified in the end, the strength of their friendship and the novel culminates in an emotional reunion, one filled not only with intense joy but also with lingering uncertainty as the Indians is dealt with feminist approach to the novel. Divakaruni focuses on his work, "We the Indian

Women in America" "…the particular nature of women's friendships, what makes them special and different" (268). It is very much in the tradition of pre-feminists Bengali woman's fiction.

Another issue in Mukherjee's novel Jasmine is emigration and assimilation both on the physical and psychological levels. She fictionalizes the process of Americanization by tracing a young Indian woman's experience of trauma in her attempt to forge a new identity. Jasmine moves from one family to another, builds other relationships, acquires other names, finds a shared bond with a Vietnamese refugee and finally leaves the man whose child. She is carrying, to go with the man she loves choosing between the "Indian" duty and the "Western" pursuit of happiness. It reveals the female experience of women who are self-actualising. The definition of self and search for identity is one of the main features of Indian immigrant women who are caught in the flux of tradition and modernity.

Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart is in Indian contextual Anju and Sudha are cousins belonging to the same patriarchal family and would obviously be called "Sisters", not friends. Divakaruni has clearly addressed her novel to western audience for whom this kind of bonding would be as foreign as this kind of family structure. The novel exhibits, infect, many of the features of novels dealing with the bonds between sisters, such as Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility, and Shoba De's Sisters. Women's friendships in western fiction have undoubtedly suffered when women have weighed them against feminine duties and responsibilities towards parents, lovers, and husbands and children. Women friendship is the main theme in Sister of My heart.

Divakaruni narrates on self-centered attitudes which are nevertheless be crossed the limitations, where no one can feel absolute freedom, for which they feel and act-no woman is desired to love and get married, as if it is a great deal of breaking religious and traditional bonds in Indian phenomenon. Even Sudha has to escape from such deal and getting 'Arranged marriage' with Ramesh. Divakaruni gives relevant issues which are of Indian mindset. She gives references in her novel on myths i.e., The princess in the palace of snakes. Once there was a princess, who lived in an underwater palace filled with snakes. The snakes were beautiful green and yellow and gold and gentle. They feel her and played with her and sang her to sleep. The above resemblance of the myth is to show, how Anju loves Sudha very much, as Sudha is a princess and Anju herself a snake, to take care of Sudha.

Sister of My Heart, the novel portrays the tradition, all Indian Hindu life, through the lives, of Anju and Sudha, living in India and America; the cultural intermingling of their lives extracts foreign as well as Indian feelings and emotions. The Indian Society is class of patriarchal and matriarchal grounds, but always male dominated society is revealed in Indian context. Sunil and Ramesh, who are dominated over their wives, are of Indian male egoism. On the other hand, Divakaruni speaks of Dayita, daughter of Sudha, who has lost the relationship of her father shows the new will womanhood, fighting for the right cause to hold on matriarchal grounds. Sudha is praised for breaking traditional bonds, by taking care of her own child on her shoulders. Here, Sudha, who is so far depicted as a charming, beautiful, timid, typical Indian woman, has identified her strength as a mother. She walks out of her family, and attains her independence. She tries to identify herself after severing her marital relationship with Ramesh.

The novel, Sister of My heart is an emotional journey of love, jealousy, frustration, fear and angriness of Anju and Sudha the family sentiments, reputation, clash of superiority and inferiority of all which faces by Indian girls, Anju and Sudha. Divakaruni expertly juxtaposes the challenges, freedoms and crossness of modern-day America with the issues, both personal and cultural, each woman faces Indo-American relationships. The immigrant experience between both shows the love and jealous, on foreign grounds where each one escaping from their bond of friendship and sisterhood and seeks for their own identity.

In Similarly Margaret Laurence's in the novel, A Just of God, searches her identity in the roles played by her in her life. Her search for identity shatters as a daughter to her mother, as a friend to Calla, as a surrogate mother to James and as a ladylove to Nick. When her final and assuring hope of her pregnancy as a mother turns out to be a tumors Rachel learns to free her. She emerges as an authentic individual trying to create her own identity. She becomes matured enough to accept the care of her mother with consciousness of the limits of her powers and responsibilities. Rachel agrees to shoulder her own inevitable accumulation of experience. At the end of the novel Laurence tells the protagonist trying to carve an identity for her. Divakaruni's Sudha and Anju as Rachel try to identify themselves in the alien land. Being non-native, Divakaruni's protagonists achieve their goal; though fail in their family life.

Conclusion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart is somewhat different, where its narrative technique is of the first person narrative long narrative dialogues. The dual novels deals, compares, and contrasts the Indian mindset, where Indianans is a fragrance in Indo-American literature. At the heart of the novel is in Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart. Story telling is a lifetime cast from aunt to niece, mother to daughter, cousin to cousin, past to present, and the life of Self-discovery. Divakaruni's novels Sister of My Heart is the magical prose. The story within story, with their sights and smells and enchanted imagery transport the reader to India. This research paper 'A New Self Identity' deals with women having the thought of something of their own and to be free and independent. Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart spins around two cousins Anju and Sudha Chatterjee who are born few hours apart from each other on the same day. Sudha, the beautiful girl dreams of a romantic marriage and motherhood based on Hindu fables and legends. On the other hand, Anju is somewhat physically unattractive, a book worm and a rebel who dreams of higher education. Sudha renounces herself to an arranged marriage with a weak willed man, who is dominated by his widow mother. Anju gets married to a computer scientist Sunil who is working in America.

The string of the bond of both the sisters is somewhat stretched when Anju finds that Sunil feels attracted towards the beautiful Sudha. There is a sharp contrast between the lives of both the cousins. Life brings them to the same stage of life when they both become pregnant. Sudha's mother-in-law forces her to abort the female child foetus and no reaction of her husband against it, shatters her. She decides to keep the child and moves to America, since the life as a single mother and a divorce would be easier for her in California. Anju and Sudha desire to be free and independent and work hard to carve out their own identity out of their existence as immigrant women. The upbringing of two girls in a traditional manner and the way these girls protest sometimes gives the hint of their quest for identity and their spirit to achieve freedom and independence. During Sudha's first pregnancy period, she has to carry along with the baby, the anxiety and excitement that the child should not be female, if not for the welfare of her family, at least for her future betterment. Being a woman, Sudha is helpless. Though the baby is in her womb, she is nothing for the baby. She has no right to claim the baby. She has no role on her part to save the baby from the clutches of the traditional belief. She identifies herself as the baby's mother by walking out of her in-law's house, what actually is considered as her lifelong protection.

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