



Search for Inner Harmony in Divakaruni's Novels

Dr. Vaibhav Dutt Sharma, Assistant Professor of English
D.A.V. College, Pundri

Abstract:

The present paper is an attempt to study women's struggle to find inner harmony and love on the existence and shaping of the women personalities through the novels of Indian diasporic writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. She, like other feminist writers, has shown feminism through her works in literature as well as social work. The research paper essentially highlights how her female protagonists, not like stereotyped Indian women who are ready to suffer, have become independent and want to live life with dignity.

Keywords: - Harmony, relationship, love, feminism.

In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works, we can analyse female characters' empowerment through emotional hardships more particularly from the perspective of women characters. In her novels like *The Mistress of Spices*(1998), *Sister of my Heart*(1999), *Oleander Girl*(2012), she imbues her female protagonists with immense strength of character. They often make wrong decisions but face all the setbacks with courage and spirit which enables them to carry on and go ahead. Banerjee portrays her female characters as powerful and intelligent forces in the world. She beautifully presents these women with their flaws. Banerjee puts it, "This burden of perfection is but on women by patriarchy." (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/features/pio-author-my-female-characters-are-feisty-flawed/articleshow/85749612.cms>) In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni shows the relationship between Tilo and Raven with its implications of love and romantic attachment. Tilo and Raven's story is like the story of Rama and Sita. This is perhaps the ultimate Laksmana Rekha, the final limit that can be crossed by an Indian woman. Divakaruni describes the true love between Tilo and Raven. Tilo's life begins in a

small village in India where she is grown up. Her parents are unhappy with her birth because she is a third girl child. She is named Nayantara at the time of her birth which means a star of the eye. However, her parents are not happy because a girl child means dowry. Her parents seem to be against her first name 'Star of the eyes'. Divakaruni portrays Tilo as an extraordinary woman. She does not lead an ordinary woman's life. She wants to prove her relationship with Raven. The last time Tilo meets Raven before entering into Shampathi's fire. Raven is a lonely American and Tilo is attracted towards Raven. She falls in love with Raven. Tilo is older than Raven. She decides to give up herself to him in his apartment. The first time she uses the power of Spices for herself she uses Marakadwas spices for her extremely beautifully so that Raven to be attracted towards her. In this way, she becomes a young and beautiful woman but she breaks her oath by giving herself to Raven. Raven talks of his mother, Celestina, who is not a white, but she thinks about herself, about her respect and happiness. Raven does not like his mother because she hates her community. He decides to live alone and he starts earning money and sends some money to his mother but he does not reply to his mother's letters. He starts living his life without any objective and does not share his life with anyone. He thinks that his burden will be reduced. He thinks about Tilo's love, who is an Indian mistress of spices. She suggests him to take interest in his life. Tilo also falls in love with Raven. Now she is waiting in the spices store for him, she says.

For the first time, I admit I am giving myself to love not the worship I offered the old one, not the one I left for the spices...the anger of spices, their desertion. The true risk is that I will somehow lose the love. (MS: 219)

When Tilo decides to go to Raven, she is ready to accept the consequences. She is liable to her magical spices as well as Raven. That's why, her sin is forgiven. She runs her store with devotion and dedication. She knows everything about spices. She helps many with her talent. She decides to demolish the walls built around her by the mystical spices and decides to accept her love and she finds inner harmony

In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni portrays another odd couple, Lalita and Ahuja. Lalita is a young girl and is married to Ahuja. He is an old man. She knew that her husband was a watchman in an alien land. She was not interested in this marriage, because she was happy with her sewing work. She only agreed to marry from her parents' perspective. She wants to obey her parents so she accepts Ahuja as her husband. Lalita's married life is

disturbed and she was not happy with her husband. Once Lalita came to Tilo's store and she was young and looked even younger. She used to come every week at Tilo's store to buy cheap rice, dals, a small bottle of oil, and some Atta for chapattis. Sometimes she bought a jar of mango achar or a packet of papads. Tilo wanted to call her Lalita, but she wants to be called as Ahuja's wife. Lalita used to say a few words like 'Namaste'. One day Lalita came to Tilo's store and told her about her marriage and her husband. She did not want to marry. Just before three days of the wedding, she came to know about her husband. He came from America. She did not like him but the wedding had been arranged. In America, her husband was watching her. Lalita wants to settle in India with her tailor shop but she could not complete this work. She followed her husband who is extremely pensive and used to harass her physically. Lalita says:

how much money my poor father had spent because I was his oldest. And if I said no, my sister would get a bad name too. Everyone would say, O those headstrong Chowdhury girls, better not to arrange a match with that family. I married him, but inside I was furious. Inside I was calling him all kinds of insults-liar cheater son-of-a-Pig. (MS: 105)

It becomes Mr. Ahuja's routine to insult and beat Lalita. Lalita understands slowly that "No man, husband or not, has the right to beat you(me), to force you(me)...I tell myself, I deserve dignity, I deserve happiness" (106) Tilo helps Mrs. Ahuja by overthrowing the tyrannical structures that have weighed her down. Lalita, like a strong woman, leaves her husband. Later, Tilo gets a letter from her in which she tells Tilo that an organization helped her to come out of her house. She tells Tilo that she has decided to manage her life to suit her heart and pursue happiness in her own way to live with dignity. In this way, through Lalita, the writer shows that today's woman can't suffer quietly like the woman of earlier decades. Lalita comes out as a strong woman, she does not repudiates all claims of the family and society like a rebel, but herself decides to fight and is ready for a transformation on her own. Lalita was conditioned by her Indian upbringing, but later she fights to find her inner harmony. She liberates herself from the taboos of society.

In *Sister of my Heart*, Divakaruni shows the joint family system through the women characters that play a very vital role in the Indian social system. A woman supports her family at every stage and in crisis time, and she depends on a man. Indian woman maintains her family relationships. *Sister of my heart* addresses women and the enduring capacity of

women as a mother. Divakaruni depicts the story of two distant cousins Anju and Sudha. They grow up together, and they share clothes, worries, and dreams. Anju and Sudha are devoted to each other.

All through childhood we bathed together and eat together, often from the same plate. Feeding each other our favorite items; the crunchy brown triangles of parathas, fried eggplant, spongy sweet rasogollah balls. Our My favorite game was acting out the fairy tales Pishi told us, Where Sudha was always the princess and I the prince who rescued her....and when we had nightmares, instead of going to our mother for, comfort, we going to our mother for comfort, we squeezed into one bed and held each other. (SMH: 12)

In the beginning, we can see that Anju and Sudha are growing up with three mothers as Nalini, Gauri Ma, and Pishi. These are unlucky because their mother dies before their birth. Anju and Sudha and the three mothers are the protagonists in the novel.

Yes, we have three mothers perhaps to make up for the fact that we have no father. there Anju's mother, whom I call Gauri Ma, her fine cheekbones and regal forehead hinting at generations of breeding for she comes from a family as old and respected as that of the Chatterjee's, which she married into (SMH: 16-17)

Perhaps, in Indian society, males dominate the society and woman's status has been very low as they are bound by customs and traditions which were set up by the patriarchal society. In society, a woman plays the role of daughter, wife, and mother. In the novel *Sister of my Heart*, three mothers are responsible for their own families. Gauri Ma is Anju's mother and she is elderly and the head of the Chatterjee household. Nalini is Sudha's mother who wants to spend a luxurious life after the death of Chatterjee, who is the head of the family. Pishi is the mother of both Anju and Sudha. She is their Aunt but she also plays the role of their mother-in-law, because a mother supports her child in all the ways of life.

Anju and Sudha, both are not happy in their married lives. Anju's husband Sunil likes Sudha, but Anju tries to adjust to life. She goes into labour, but the baby doesn't survive. On the other side Sudha flees to her mother's house because her in-laws want her to abort the baby as it is a girl child. When Anju comes to know this, she decides to get a job to

pay for Sudha to come to America. Sudha's lover Ashok comes back to her to marry her. She could marry him to live a comfortable life as Ashok promises to love and care for her and her daughter, Dayita. But Sudha decides to go to America to fulfill the promise she made to Anju. In this way, Sudha and Anju find their inner harmony in each other's company.

Oleander Girl is another famous novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In this novel, Korobi and her mother Anu are the protagonists. Korobi is the name given to her by her mother because Rose or Jasmine or Lily are more common. Korobi Roy is a seventeen-year-old girl. She is an orphan because her mother died when she was only seven. Now she was living with her grandparents, Bimal Roy and Sarojini. Her grandparents belong to a highly reputed rich and social family. Anu plays a very important role as a mother. She was extremely intelligent and talented, but she lost her love, her life because she crossed her limits. When she completed college, her grandfather and her father searched for a match for her. It was easy to find a good match for her as she was beautiful, impressive and sweet natured. Many people wanted to have relationship with her family because of her grandfather, Bimal Roy. Korobi settled abroad and found her real and free self. She was independent in doing things of her choice. To enjoy her life, she had taken control of her life in her hands. "A many-faceted story of discovery *Oleander Girls* is part mystery, part search, but mostly the story of a young girl finding herself and deciding where she belongs." (OG: Praise for Oleander Girls)

The protagonist Karobi of *Oleander Girls*, a 17 years old girl, discovers inner harmony. She is an orphan, who is sheltered and over protected by her grandparents. She does not know anything about her parents and is haunted by the silence that surrounds her parents' death. "I'm so confused. All the things I was so proud of my family, my heritage – they are only halftime. The other half of me – I don't know anything about it. Except that all this time my father was alive, and in America." (66) Korobi wanted to leave her home and Indian traditional family system as it considers women as inferior to men and does not give any freedom to women. Condition of women in Indian traditional family system is very pathetic and she has to adjust in her marital home in order to survive. Dasgupta and Lal write about the condition of a woman in an Indian family in the introduction of their book as:

Woman within a family has been regarded as the outsider who is expected to confirm to the regulations of the marital home, with very low or non-existent agency. (18)

She takes a bold decision to travel to America to know the truth but she is not favoured by anybody, not even by her fiancée, Rajat. His mother, Mrs. Bose, suggests Karobi that the marriage should be conducted at the earliest. But Karobi is not ready to give up her decision. Mrs. Bose explains the negative consequence of Karobi's searching for her father and if people come to know of her mixed heritage, it will spoil their family reputation. All her life will be at stake but she confirms her visiting America as her identity is more important for her than to be the daughter-in-law of Bose family. In America also Karobi faces all the odds with courage and conviction.

In America, she grew adventurous. She would tell us in her letter about folk dance lessons and plays she had seen in San Francisco. She visited the giant redwoods and saw migrating whales. (OG: 57)

She is a girl who takes decisions based on the needs and requirements of her life in America. Her autonomy influences Seema also. She acts bravely and is firm to discover her alterity and not to settle there. Karobi, true to her name, proves to be an oleander girl who is tough as well as beautiful. Through her tough nature, she faces all the consequences and beautifully gets inner harmony.

To conclude, various women characters of different shades are portrayed in Divakaruni's novel to depict the struggle of women in Indian patriarchal society. In Indian families, only women are considered responsible for their families. A true woman has to be ready to sacrifice for the name of family. A woman needs family's support even if she is intelligent. She is bound not to go beyond the wishes of her family, and if she breaks the family law, she is bound to suffer. Hence, we realize that Chitra's female characters are strong and independent who are true and want to live life on their own. They are firm to have harmony, to accept themselves as who they are. They accept their past as well as what they will have to confront in the future.

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