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Emergence of New Women in Chitra Banerjee's Sister of My Heart

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning author, poet and teacher. Most of her novels deals with women's liberation, immigration, the south Asian experience, history, myth, magical realism and diversity. In *Sister of my Heart*, two cousins one in America, the other in India, share details of their lives with each other and help each other to solve problems that threaten their marriages. In this novel a light has been thrown on how women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination first as daughter and later as wives and how they struggle to secure their self-respect and self-identity. Anju and Sudha come over the phase of innocence and are trapped in the darken zone of the world, bound to face the tragic betrayals and they move beyond to discover their new identity.

Full paper

Asian Americans have their own identity narratives, their own stories about becoming American. Asian Americans, due to living between two cultures, can be divided into two halves one Asian and one American. The art of fiction writing was one of the most remarkable one in English Literature. The genre of novel in Literature, was diplomatically used by women writers to explore and share their experiences. The progress of the South Asian Diasporic writers left an great impact on Literature.

Women are an integral part of human civilization. The place of women in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age, since ancient times women has been the victim of male domination and oppression and treated like a beast of burden and an object for pleasure. In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in the novels of Asian American Literature. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the outstanding voices of the immigrant writers. Her novels are frequently rooted in the complexities of the home. She dwells upon the subject of Immigrant experiences for her writing style both narrow in focus and broad in scope. Divakaruni has been known for retelling the dilemmas of immigration and portraying the diverse lives often marginalized by mainstream American society. Most of divakaruni's novels speaks for women of South Asian countries. She has been critically well received, especially in the United States. She has won many awards for her poetry and fiction. Most of her writings have evoked appreciative reviews for her skillful fiction of lyricism, realism, myth and powerful emotion. Like the old tales of India that are filled with emotional filigree and flowery prose, Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* is a masterful allegory of unfulfilled desire and sacrificial love. It is also an intricate modern drama in which generations and castes struggle over old and new ones.

The theme of identity is a very important theme in this novel. Many of the issues faced in the novel deal with one's search for or discovery of their identity. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* is a realistic portrayal of the relationship between two sisters Anju and Sudha. The novel deals with the difficulties faced by women and the manners in which they overcome their problems. The story picturises the love and friendship between sudha and Anju who were born on the same day, the day their fathers Gopal and Bijoy died on a Ruby hunting Expedition. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depicts the South Asian immigrant experience and possible appropriation by mainstream discourses has significant consequences. Divakaruni's protagonists aspire to adapt to their new found world. Though the female characters are firmly rooted in tradition, find it hard to break the bounds set by patriarchy, to experience what has so far been restricted in their life, and resolve the psychological conflict that is accompanied with the new situation. She presents very vividly the dilemmas of Indian women in traditional society. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's women characters represent the sentiments of women within traditional bounds and outside traditional bounds.

The novel *Sister of my heart* revolves around the lives of two women who are distant cousins biologically; but destined to be born in the same house on the same night, they grow up together as inseparable sisters. Anju is heir to the illustrious Chatterjee family, but Sudha's family lineage is shrouded in mystery. Long before the girls were born, sudha's father Gopal told Anju's father that he was the son of his uncle in East Bengal, after some years his father was dead and he lost his home due to the partition of India. After running away from his Home Town, he now seeks his cousin's help to build a life in Calcutta. Bijoy opens his heart and his home to his cousin and his newlywed wife. Bijoy's wife and widowed sister also embrace the couple. Some time they live harmoniously in the old ancestral Calcutta mansion. But Bijoy's family fortune is dwindling and Gopal presents a fantastic scheme of travelling to a cave of rubies in the dense Sundarban jungles, which will change their fortune. Leaving pregnant wives behind, Bijoy and Gopal go on this dangerous quest, but never return.

Sudha and Anju are born the night their family receives the news of their father's deaths. They are brought up by three mothers without any male guardian. The intimacies between the two sisters, both every day and profound: the old mythical stories their widowed aunt pishi tells, and Sudha retells, and Anju questions: their juvenile adventures; resistance to repressive traditions; Anju is the rebellion questioning one; Sudha is inclined towards goodness and is defined by her remarkable beauty.

Naturally the next big crisis in their lives comes from romance. once Sudha went to watch cinema at that time she met Ashok and they both fall in love with each other, Later Nalini rejects him as he is from the lower caste. When they have the plan to elope, Sudha is forced to drop the idea, because of Anju's father –in-law who upholds the respect and prestige of them as more important than individual's likes and dislikes in the family. He told Gouramma that he would not expect any wrong opinion about Chatterjee family Girls. If it would happen in the future, Anju would be sent back to her mother's home. So, Sudha had left the plan of marrying Ashok. 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 .After some days Sudha and Anju got married on the same day. Sudha with her Husband Ramesh and in-laws lives in India and Anju with her Husband lives in the United States.

After the wedding the two sisters are separated. Sudha went to Mrs.Sanyal's family .Sudha's condition in Mrs.Sanyal's family is worse, the way she is treated by her mother-in-law is shameful and disgusting. She is forced to do all the domestic works. The groom Ramesh reacts, according to his mother's wish. Before Anju's America trip, she visits Mrs.Sanyal's home. After seeing the poor condition and status of her sister Sudha, she was shocked and half-heartedly she went to America. Anju's life in America started in an unexpected way. Sunil wanted to maintain a distance in the husband-wife relationship. He was addicted to American culture. When she came to know about Sunil's personal character, she wanted to come back to India. He came late in the night and was addicted to alcohol.It was a great cultural shock to her; it was not her imagined life in America. In their deep familial relationship, Sunil wanted to hide something from Anju. She had to be very careful in using words in front of Sunil, due to his criticism about the woman.

Being born in the patriarchal, male chauvinistic and male dominated society, Sunil also tries to show all the manners like the ordinary men. Mrs. Sudha is ill treated by her mother-in-law, for not giving birth to a baby. Mrs.Sanyal sends Sudha for the test. The test report explains Sudha is normal and she can give birth to many number of children and the problem lies only with her husband. After few months Sudha's pregnancy creates a big storm in her life. When it is identified as the female baby, she is forced to go for abortion by her mother-in-law. Ramesh is passive and not prepared to support his wife.

Sudha has to come to her mother's home to save her female child. Anju is deeply worried about Sudha who is also pregnant. The economic condition of family becomes worse. Anju has to work for sudha. She wishes to invite Sudha to America to fulfill Sudha's childhood dream. So, Anju earns money for Sudha. Without the knowledge of her husband Sunil she goes to work which leads to miscarriage and the baby is identified in her womb as breathless. Motherhood is the greatest pleasure to a woman in the world. Her health condition becomes bad, when she comes to know the death of her child and she becomes unconscious. Sudha is ready to go to America to take care of her beloved sister Anju. She explains all the childhood happenings and talks through phone to Anju. Ashok Ghosh again approaches Gouramma for the remarriage with Sudha on condition, that Sudha should leave her daughter with her mother. Her daughter would be permitted to his home during the time of holidays and festival time. Sudha does not accept the condition and she chooses to remain alone for the sake of her daughter.

Ashok demands only Sudha and her love,not her child. Sudha has sent the tickets and visas for Sudha and her daughter Dayita. She goes to America and the two beloved sisters are reunited again. Sudha arrives in America with her daughter to join Anju and together they decide to bring up the child. Coming together does not resolve their individual problems, but it helps in recharging their energy to face life a new. Through this novel, Chitra Banerjee brings out all the problems, faced by women generally in the society. Women have to support unite and co-ordinate each other to overcome these situations. If they were joined together, no external force would come and attack them.

The characters Anju and Sudha are bound together. They easily overcome all the critical and difficult circumstances, because they are in co-ordination, co-operation and mutual understanding. Sudha's role is expressed as the strong and stubborn woman. She has to face the problem with her husband, mother-in-law and lover Ashok. But finally ,she takes the correct decision of joining with Anju in America, by doing this, She rejuvenates and energises all the women in the world. She tries to be a role model to everyone in the society. By synthesizing these two contradictory yet complementary characters, Divakaruni succeeds in presenting the new identity of the immigrant who validates her cultural past to reconstruct a meaningful present in the new world.

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