

The Problems In Human Relations In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Sister Of Myheart

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the problems in human relations especially between the women characters of Anju and Sudha. In most of the situations women have the prime responsibilities to play responsible roles in the family. Women have been considered lower to men in general but Anju and Sudha play a major role in this novel maintaining the traditional values. *Sister of My Heart* deals with different types of their human experiences altogether and touches all aspect of their life. They begin to reject the rigid rules and regulations which are limited for women in the society after the bad experiences faced in their life. Paradoxically without any male interruption, the sisters are able to find out a position for themselves in the society. The protagonists, Anju and Sudha, are able to re-discover themselves.

Keywords: women, female, bonding, feminist, society, friendship, marriage and displacement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the role of women especially the bond of friendship between Sudha and Anju in *The Sister of My Heart* which was written in 1999 and well received by the literary lovers. With the beginning of feminism, women have struggled hard to achieve their identity and also emerged in their writings and entered into the mainstream: talking like males, challenging male dominance, discussing their life experiences, adjusting their personal and professional life in a far better way than their spouses. *The Sister of My Heart* is an evident which does not require a male chauvinistic figure. Anju and Sudha have been considered as heroes. The novel presents different sides of women life. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni contributes a number of books which are set in the background of both India and America. Her novels and short stories focus on the entire range of the theme of immigration such as human relations, ethnicity, racism, women rights and democracy. While conversing with Patricia Gras, Divakaruni confesses that, "Immigration is such a major fact of life here in the United States. You could come from different parts of the world but that whole experience of being in a whole different environment almost a new world where you have to learn the rules over again that is something a lot of people here share" ("Divakaruni"). She also shares how she became involved in the prevention of domestic violence: She could draw the contrast between the selflessness required of women in India and the freedom they got in their adopted land. One feels committed to the land where one is born and always in search of the opportunity to verbalize one's feelings and memories of the homeland.

Divakaruni's writings focus on the themes of alienation and self-transformation at various levels and try to raise many questions by exploring their roots, allegiance, family, origin, community and identity through her works. In her works, the women characters are separated from their homeland and they think more logically, but they mentally retain some of the traditional beliefs. Her *Sister of My Heart* brings out two cousins from birth to their wedding day. This novel runs around two cousins named Anju and Sudha who are born few hours difference from each other on the same day. From the young age, the girls Sudha and Anju become best friends, best sisters, and more than that they are great companion to each other. Anju and Sudha are devoted each other but different. Being calm and good looking, Sudha dreams of designing clothes and having a family. Anju longs for studying Literature in college. The girls get caught for skipping school and this event, along with a health scare in the family, suddenly changes the plans for college to plans of marriage. Book one ends with Anju and Sudha getting married on the same day. Sudha moves with her husband and in-laws who live in another part of India. Anju's husband works in the United States therefore, she plans to go there after completing a visa process. Marriage has separated Anju and Sudha and then Sudha has learned a secret about their family's past. This secret causes shame and guilt keeping Sudha to pull back from Anju. But her love and affection for her sister does not weaken, and she even refuses to elope due to fear thinking that it would damage Anju's reputation. On the night of their wedding, Anju is aware of her husband's desirability to Sudha. However, Anju does not find any guilt with Sudha, and then two young friends begin to live separate lives. Sudha quickly learns the ways of her demanding and controlling mother-in-law. After five years, she is delighted to know that she is pregnant. Meanwhile, Anju's life in the United States has not entirely turned out as she expected. Anju and Sudha

exchange regular communications, but their old friendship is missing. Initially, they both feel that they get pregnant at the same time. Sudha's mother-in-law comes to know that Sudha's child is a female baby. Therefore, she gets irritated and demands Sudha to go for aborting the baby expecting the first child would be a son. Sudha has nowhere to go and feels very bad that she wants to talk to her again as true sisters. Refusing to tie her life to another man and expecting to get help from her friend, Sudha decides to go to the United States. After many years, the sisters are reunited, but future barriers still continued. Through this novel, Chitra Banerjee explains the voices of women in different point of view. In Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, Sudha was struggling with her husband and mother-in-law to save her unborn baby. Even though her mother-in-law is a female she does not understand the feelings and love of a mother. This incident connects the issue of Marikolunthu in *Ladies Coupe* written by Anita Nair. After several years of her marriage with Ebenezer Paulraj, she gets pregnant. Feeling overwhelmed she wants to convey it to her mother first. When she tries to call her mother, her husband interrupts her asking to go for abortion. Finally, Sudha leaves her husband and joins with her cousin sister Anju in America. In America, she lives for a short span of time because Anju's husband spoiled her. Therefore, without informing Anju, she leaves her house and went somewhere.

There is a constant feel of nostalgia and reality in Divakaruni's novels. Her novels show a conflict between tradition and modernity. They struggle for maintaining the modern values and find out an identity of their own in the new and environment. Her protagonists seek to synthesize traditions with the modern values which are the needs of the hour. They know how difficult it is to bring in new ideas in this patriarchal set up where the authority originates from the eldest male in the family. So, they reconcile themselves to the rigidity of traditions but with hesitations find out their own identity as new women living with traditional values. Kabita Mondal in her article focuses that Divakaruni is an amazing story teller who leaves her readers in throes of surprise at unexpected turns. She makes an exploration into human psyche and delves deep into the relationship between man and women. She tries to bring out the clash between the old and new, capture the pace of the fast changing Indian society, gets a glimpse into the family secrets and divulge the meaning of love. [2]. Sudha and Anju's relation is wonderful relationship which is pure and radiant. They are not blood related but they are genuine sisters in all the ways. They fight, laugh, cried, and have done all the mischievous activities and always stand up for each other. Anju is from upper class and Sudha comes from the lower caste but class conflict never occurs between them. Both are gifted to each other, Anju the brainy and witty and Sudha the beauty and modest. Anju says that " I can tell Sudha everything. I feel and not have to explain any of it. She'll look at me with those big unblinking eyes and smile a tiny smile, and I'll know she understands me perfectly. Like no-one else in the entire world does. Like no-one else in the entire world will. (24)

From which it is evident that they have a heart to heart relationship. There is a perfect harmony with both of them. They never bother about the outside world. Their inseparable closeness is a main topic of criticism for their neighbors, friends and relatives in the society. Saritha Aunty prides herself for their frankness seeing them entering the house hand in hand. " .don't you girls ever do anything without each other? I swear, you're like those twins, what do they call them? Born stuck together." (28) India is still a conservative society and everybody minds everybody's business. They grow up in a very conservative upper middle class family consisting of women mothers, aunts and maid.

Anju and Sudha complement each other, both of their personalities joined together to classify ideal modern woman. They are the perfect example for friendship following all the traditional values. They are known for beauty, brain, witty, compassion, dutiful, knowledge of tradition and household chores, intellect, humble, enormous love for each other. Both girls have few of the similar qualities which stood as ideal example of modern Indian woman. Anju and Sudha trusted each other and were not bother about what the neighbor said about them. Anju resists the social norms and Sudha does not resist all the norms and tradition of the society but stood for each other and are dedicated to each other and their unspoken promise to continue as sisters of the heart, each finds comfort in the company of the other.

In terms of sacrifice, Sudha's stand not to reveal the family's dark secret and remain loyal to Anju. She silently suffers the guilty that her father is responsible to bring ruin to Anju's family. Sudha vows to make up the loss of her father and has married Ramesh instead of running away with Ashok, whom she loved. Anju after knowing that Sudha's mother-in-law and her husband are forcing her to abort the baby got agitated and she immediately plans to help her. Without her husband's knowledge she starts doing part time job in order to save money so that she can buy ticket for Sudha, which ultimately resulted in losing her own baby due to stress. Thus, both are ready to do anything for their friendship in any situation and love for each other that are worth admiring.

Raghavendra in his article points out that whatever may be the reason for migration; diaspora community faces the problem of dislocation, rootlessness, discrimination and marginalization in the foreign country. The women, who are migrated, feel the dislocation intensely more in comparison to men, but they use migration as a step towards their freedom and individuality. Though it is difficult for them to detach themselves from the native country and customs but still they adapt the new culture and try to create a harmony with the

new surroundings. America puts forward freedom but at the cost of losing a stable, perhaps privileged identity[3].

Anju is modern in her thinking and has a feel of sense of belonging and care attitude. She thinks that Sudha must maintain the same old intimacy like sisters throughout their life. However, Sudha after discovering the dark secret about her is completely tormented and is ready to get away from Anju. She is a dutiful daughter in her family. Sudha's physical beauty helps to find a suitable husband easily. Her dream for the future is to become a wife and mother. Anju does not wish to lead a mechanical life and thinks that marriage will liberate her. Her husband Sunil is an immigrant encourages Anju to feel comfortable in America. He teaches her to drive and introduces her to his colleagues at work. The American way of life is totally different and opposite to the Indian standards of living. The difference between America and India is that in America, life moves on without bothering about others' feeling and in India the feelings and emotions play a vital role in the day-to-day life. Now understands that "...Sunil is the original man –with a hundred faces" (207).

From the day they born, Sudha and Anju have been united in several ways that their mothers find very difficult to understand. After marriage, their life gets completely changed and takes sudden opposite turns that they manage effectively. Since the distance has grown up, they never permit to fade away the bond they maintain. There is a sharp contrast between the lives of Sudha and Anju. Sudha spends her complete time in doing household duties but Anju performs all outdoor works as per her wish studying her favorite subject in college. Sudha's pregnancy gives her a life learning experience. Her husband shows no reaction when her mother in law insists her to go for abortion. Therefore, she decides to have the child and travels to America. It is helped by Anju through her job that keeps her economic independency. But her physical and stress can be the prime reason for her miscarriage. The women in Divakaruni 's novels are trapped between the traditional customs of India and westernized culture of modern India. The individuality of these women is completely altered. They see themselves and change happens due to the uncertain nature of their environment. Divakaruni's characters move beyond individualistic approach to a better world of understanding.

Neeraj Agnihotri also says that having gone through the story of two sisters, it can be said that whatever may be the cause of immigration; diasporic community faces the problem of displacement, rootlessness, discrimination and marginalization in the migrated country. The women, who are migrated, feel the displacement intensely more in comparison to men, but also they use migration as a step towards their freedom and individuality [4]. Sudha understands that she cannot go back to her home which is completely restricted ways of Indian life. She somehow feels safe for the impersonal customs of America to start a new life. She thinks that if she stands at the corner of a road, the passerby stare at her strangely in India. The basic reason is that at least half of them would know her and also ask thousands of questions and be ready to offer help, give advice, may be even escort her back home. Not only Sudha but Anju and Sunil also trace new paths for them after planning for a divorce.

Anju starts herself to rediscover her journey maintaining very much distance with all her closed ones. However, She always wants Sudha to be very close to her to share and understand her feelings fully. Anju feels like itching with pins and needles when any of her American friends criticizes about the heritage which she loves a lot. Even their everyday talks are so different that she feels lonely among them. Sudha becomes a caretaker of an old Indian man who is living with his son and his American wife. He has been suffering a lot psychological tension than physical. Therefore, he feels to return to his home country that is India. The prime reason for his departure is that his health gets badly affected in America. Sudha understands his pain so she promises to take him to his home country. She cooks Indian food and calling him Baba. Finally, the immeasurable affection shown to the old man by sudha , improves his health. Raimule says that Divakaruni brings about the contrasting cultures of India's and the U.S. The novel constantly focuses on the trans-culture; the characters seem to shuttling between two worlds. Alienation, rootlessness and dislocation is experienced by every immigrant [5]. The two women personalities are skillfully designed by Divakaruni. But there are many individuals named Gauri Ma, Pishi, Nalini, Sudha, Anju, Sarita, Mrs. Sanyal and Mrs. Majumder who all together form the Chaterjee family. It is important to bring out the better side of each individual.

II. CONCLUSION

Sudha emerges as a woman of authority and determination. When the relationship between her and her daughter is challenged, she progresses from suppression to a empowered mother. Her mother Nalini is not satisfied with her daughter's arrival. Sudha gradually moves towards a courageous woman making her own decision in life. She decides to keep the baby and divorce her husband. It is Anju's love and support as a true sister who actually helps her out and encourages Sudha to raise her daughter as a single parent. Anju on the other hand starts going to college and acquires the knowledge that she longs for. Finally, she tries to assimilate herself the new culture and the American way of life. The amicable feeling and power of sisterhood is the tower of strength in their life.

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