THE THEME OF DIASPORIC ROLE OF WOMEN IN CHITRA BANERJEE’S SISTER OF MY HEART

1 N.Divya
2 M.A English,
3 Department of English,
1 Sri Balamurugan Arts & Science College, Salem, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract: This paper is about the study of the novel Sister of My Heart (1999) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in the context of diasporic consciousness. This paper looks into the experience of the Diasporas. In particular it is necessary to understand the term “diaspora” and the received notions of Diasporic characteristics and their modes of existence. It mainly focuses on themes like discrimination, cultural shock, problems in adjustment and assimilation, identity crisis, disintegration, marginalization and discontinuity in the cultural dialogue. Sister of My Heart traces the many years and zigzags between India and America as the protagonist cousins, Anju and Sudha first grow apart and the eventually reunite. This novel shows that the immigrant experience encompasses a wide variety of challenges, some of which are handled more successfully than others by the female diaspora.

IndexTerms – Diaspora, adjustment, assimilation, disintegration

Realism meets fantasy and social commentary meets idealistic dreaming in the wide net of Chitra Divakaruni’s novels and poems. Divakaruni is a teacher, poet and social activist her works of magical forces and everyday lives translate into eleven languages and have won accolades all over the world. Chithra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in 1957 in Calcutta, India. Her books, which are set in both India and America, feature Indian-born women torn between old and new world values. With her laser like insight and a skilled use of story, plot and lyrical description, she gives readers a many-layered look at her characters and their respective worlds, which are filled with fear, hope, and discovery. Chitra Banerjee is the one who makes repeated references to the cultural tradition of Calcutta. Her cherished moments of nostalgia or moments of bewilderment in encounters with real Calcutta are portrayed in her novels.

Divakaruni also tries to relocate her cultural space and identity mediated by significant cross-cultural influences. Representing second generation of Indian American writers, Chithra Banerjee Divakaruni chooses to examine the world of middle class women. Most of the stories are about Indian immigrants to the United States from the author’s native land of Bengal and are told by female narrators in the first person singular point of view, often in the present tense imparting a voice of intimacy and cinematic credibility. There are several immigrants who are struggling to carve out an identity of their own. A Diasporic community is varied and complex and hence all attempts at homogenization are likely to lead to oversimplifications. Diasporas thus live in one country as community but look across time and space to another. The migrant Diasporas and their descendents experience displacement, fragmentation, marginalization and discontinuity in the cultural ‘discourse’ of the subject countries. Diasporic writing unfolds the experiences of unsettlement and dislocation, at some or the other level, yet this multiplicity of homes does not bridge the gap between “home” in the culture of origin; and ‘world’ the culture of adoption. The boundaries get an uncanny habit of persisting in a thousand different ways, and are often conflictual. Thus he shifts the focus from historicity to temporality, a hybridity, which cannot be contained either in hierarchical or binary structures. The novel’s forty-two chapters are set as a sort of extended dialogue that is multi-tiered and overlayered. The chapters themselves are alternatively titled. The first half is titled The Princess in the Palace of Snakes and the second half titled The Queen of Swords. The techniques are epistolary and explanatory, topography that is transcultural, tone that is adjectival and highly lyrical, and a style that is italicized and romantic. The epigram to Sister of My Heart, invokes African author Chinua Achebe writing in Anhills of the Savannah: “It is only the story that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spokes of the cactus fence”. The anchor to Sister of My Heart is the belief that storytelling not only lights the path for succeeding generations, but also possesses shamanistic power. Both teller and listener may be healed or transformed, cursed or freed. For the Chatterjees, an upper-caste Calcutta family, falls on hard times but tenaciously remaining in their decaying mansion of mystery and fades glory. For her passionate characters, they shape lives for good or for sorrow with the razor edge of experience. Perhaps no character is as susceptible to a story’s spell as Sudha Chatterjee, an uncommonly beautiful girl with a dreaming, ancient-seeming soul. Readers like the novel’s simplicity as it does not try to do too many things at once. The plot focuses on the relationship between the two young girls, from the shared experiences of their youth to the varied experiences of their married lives.

The scenes of forbidden love, demanding parental expectations and difficult-inlaws are, predictable. Her poetic language, elaborate descriptions, and symbolism are really at a higher level. Divakaruni does a good job of creating suspense and can draw the reader through the novel simply by its suspense. We find at the end of the novel, from his letter, that he is the father of Sudha and he is not the murderer of Anju’s father and what Pishi says is not true. Some critics are also disappointed that Divakaruni stretches things a bit when she created the basis of the story, concerning the death of Anju and Sudha’s fathers. In the second half of the novel titled The Queen of Swords Sudha quickly learns the ways of her demanding and controlling mother-in-law. Meanwhile Anju’s life in the United States has not entirely turned out as she expected. Anju and Sudha exchange letters and short phone calls, but their old intimacy is missing. The friends discover they are pregnant at the same time and both seem finally happy. Sudha’s mother-in-law insists to abort her baby because she comes to know that it is a girl baby. She believes that the first child must be a son. Sudha is not able to turn; leaving her husband must be grounds to talk to each other again as true sisters.

Refusing to tie her life to another man and realizing Anju needs her; Sudha and her daughter decide to go to the United States. After many years, the sisters are reunited, but future obstacles still loom. Whether set in America, or India, the plot features Indian-born women torn between old and new values. They provide the readers a many layered look at the characters and their respective world. The characters in the novel are filled with dreams, desires, pain, struggle to lead with hope and discovery. Whether in California or Calcutta, women learn to adapt to their new and changing culture and as a result, discover their own sense of self admits joy and heartbeat. She

© 2019 IJRAR May 2019, Volume 6, Issue 2 www.ijrar.org (E-ISSN 2348-1269, P-ISSN 2349-5138)
simply develops the story between the two sisters without trying to create grandeur where it was not needed. Regardless, this is a highly emotional and beautiful written novel. Through the eyes of people caught in the clash of cultures, and by constantly juxtaposing Calcutta with a California city, Divakaruni reveals the rewards and the perils of breaking free from the past and the complicated, often contradictory emotions that shape the passage to independence.

Divakaruni’s journey from a young graduate student in Calcutta to a mature writer of repute in the United States seems to have come a full circle. Whatever may be the reason for migration diaspora community faces the problems of dislocation, footlessness; her degree of this adaption differs according to the generations. Thus each house is encased in different sets of vividly evoked specification-the verandahs, the terraces, the courtyards-all essentially female spaces in the Indian culture that contribute to the upbringing of the characters inhabiting them. Most of her stories are about Indian immigrants to the United States from her native region of Bengal and are told by female narrators in the first person singular point of view, often in the present tense. There are several immigrant brides who are both liberated and trapped by cultural changes and imparting a voice of intimacy and cinematic credibility, who are struggling to carve out an identity of their own. Divakaruni says the stories themselves which deal with issues including domestic violence, crime, racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion and divorce are inspired by her imagination and the experiences of others. Divakaruni in Sister of My Heart portray women of all ages, clothed in many different personalities but always as a person coming to terms with some aspect of her life. The styles vary as much as the points of view. Sometimes make the ugliness that is there unbearable to behold, only because it can become a powerful incentive for change.

WORKS CITED