

Harmony in relationship expressed in *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

Shanthi Shenoy S
PhD Research Scholar
Asst Professor in English
Dr. G R Damodaran College of Science
Coimbatore - 641 048.

Abstract

The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming is the sequel to the *Conch Bearer* written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It is a wonderful concoction of mystery and fantasy along with humanity. Magic, reality and suspense are blended well resulting in excitement filled entertaining novel. Anand chose to stay in the Silver Valley at the Himalayas, is the Bearer of the Conch. After due training, he succeeds in becoming a Healer. He possesses the power to converse with supernatural elements like the Conch, the Pearl and the Mirror. This has transformed the protagonist from a timid boy into a person who readily dedicates his life to help the needy and support the vulnerable. This study is about integration of old and new, real and magical, humane and inhumane. There is evidence throughout to novel that the author is deeply influenced by the Indian epics, traditions, culture and myths. Narration also includes the lifestyle, language, dress and aroma of food which takes the readers back in time to an era in India when Kings ruled. The depth of understanding, trust and love for the people around is marvelously exhibited by the author forms the main theme of this paper.

Keywords

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, tolerance, mirror, dream, suspense and illusion.

Novels engross the readers in a complete set of emotional, intellectual and social deliberation. It also creates awareness of the cultural environment and its essence. The resilience and reasoning in narrations helps the readers to respond and think for themselves, with an approach that is appreciative, technical and historical than theoretical or critical. It influences the output of successive cultures and behaviours. Literature which is universal is important and most of the time it affects deeply the personal level. The fiction generally connects to the reality with large truths and ideas. It also plays predominant role in altering the social behaviours of a person by identifying the values.

In India from the ancient times the greatest oral narrative tradition is followed. It captures, entertains and enlightens every young and growing child. The folklores and tales apart from morals and values are rich in creativity and imagination too. It is the most appealing source not only for children but for all age group. *The Panchatantra* was written in Sanskrit in 200 BC. *Jataka Tales*, *The Puranas*, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are all popular Indian classical epics. Animal fables importantly remain as the society's traditional instructor of social and moral values especially in India. Stories of animal wisdom, their cunning and foolishness, are re-told in many languages and are prevalent in the country's multilingual literature. Indian folklore is a blend of tradition and fantasy.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni penned *The Brotherhood of Conch* Trilogy that depicts the grandeur and heroism in a special way. Divakaruni talks about the marginalized children who lived in the slums of Kolkata. She portrays Anand the protagonist as a boy of benevolence in the first book of *The Conch Bearer*. The second book *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* of the sequel is a wonderful blend of mystery, historical events, faithfulness and understanding. Magic with the facts of existence and suspense is amalgamated well in the novel which makes it more entertaining. The closely connected friendship among various characters which are portrayed edifies the value of faithfulness and understanding towards such relationship in the novel.

Anand, after his ordeal reached the Silver Valley with the Conch, was approved to stay there by the Brotherhood of Healers as he passed all the tests conducted by them. He was initiated as an apprentice and underwent training in various aspects which were required to qualify to be the member of the Brotherhood. In the Silver Valley Anand was the only person who had the powers to converse with the Conch and so he was adjudged to be the Keeper of the Conch. The Conch though it was a tiny shell, is a supernatural object holding immense power. Anand after due learning qualified to become a Healer. He struggled and sacrificed a lot to attain such position.

Once during his training session Anand heard the words "Evil Stirs" while reading the winds. When practicing the art of predicting he received a vision where a wise-woman was pleading for help. She unfolded to Anand the condition of the people in her village named Sona Dighi. The villagers were taken in groups by a person named Kasim for work. After a week they returned soulless and spiritless. They do not remember their whereabouts and hardly identified their own self. A wicked magician sucked their souls to become more powerful.

The master of the Brotherhood directed Abhaydatta and Raj Bhanu a senior apprentice to solve the problem of the villagers. Anand who was so confident that he would accompany his master was disappointed on the announcement. Before setting out for the adventure Abhaydatta, gave Anand a string of pearls and cautioned him if they grew dull or dark, the duo were in danger. Anand came to know that the pearl were missing. He had some disturbing vision, understood that his mentor and spiritual guide were in danger. He called his partner Nisha and informed about it. They two decided to move out and help their master

Anand persuaded the conch to help them. A portal was created to reach Abhyadatta. Unfortunately, all the three Anand, Nisha and the conch got separated. He traveled hundred years into the past, went to the Mughal times. He was thrown in to an ancient village of Nawab Nazib where HaiderAli was the Chief Minister. He learnt about evil jinn that planned to ruin the royal family and capture the empire with the help of Kasim. The sorcerer was in search of a magical object the mirror which will help him to rule the kingdom from where he was eliminated.

Anand was desperate in knowing what was happening so he set off to find Nisha and his master. The same time he worked to defeat the evil forces that dominated the village. This quest led him to the supernatural mirror. He was ahead of the sorcerer. He came to know his friend Nisha lost her memory and was the niece of the chief minister, Haider Ali. Abhyadatta was mahout Saleem and Raj Bhanu the assistant mahout in the Hathi-Khana of the palace. Unfortunately Abhaydatta lost all his powers.

Anand was relieved when he came to know the whereabouts of his friends. Togetherness is an important element in human life. It gives confidence, motivates and drives to accomplish any goal and even strengthens to overcome any adversities. Understanding, trust and togetherness are essential human traits that bring peace and harmony in the society. Anand sets to meet both Nisha and Abhaydatta.

Anand acquires a new name Abbas in the kingdom of Nawab Nazib and worked as a punkah-puller in the Nawab's chamber. One day he got an opportunity to serve at the chief minister Haider Ali's residence for a special occasion. He happened to see Nisha named as Paribhanu. He tried to talk to her and recalled the experiences at the Silver Valley but she never minded him. Anand overheard the conversation between Kasim and Haider Ali. It was a plot by Kasim to trick over Haider Ali to move against the Nawab. Kasim directed Haider Ali to present him before the royal court for the moon festival and satisfy the condition for causing retaliation on the Nawab and his family.

Anand confronted the powerful sorcerer and jinn capable of unspeakable magic. He also met the Shahzada who was haughty and arrogant. With his special power to converse with the objects of power- conch, pearls and mirror Anand manages to meet Abhaydatta in the Hathi-khana and win back their normal relationship. There Anand's connection with the elephant Matangi comes as surprising and gentle relationship. From there Anand moves to Haider Ali's royal residence. He was desperate in meeting Nisha and wanted to make her regain her lost memory. He created an environment where he was able to converse with Paribhanu and make her realise that she was Nisha. Paribhanu too agreed to help Anand in recovering the conch.

Anand's attitude of not giving up helped him in connecting him with his companions in the unknown historical land. Trust and understanding are important aspects to succeed in having friends. It is not enough that one has to be powerful and wealthy to earn trust. It does not have a definition but one will not know when it's lost. Its presence definitely creates a secured and peaceful environment, whether it is personal, professional or

social life. Anand managed to converse with the conch and was able to figure out its location. He convinced Nisha to go along with him to the palace of Shahzada in order to retrieve the conch which was in the treasure vault of the palace.

Nisha was in disguise, she entered into the palace as a messenger from the chief minister. She met the prince Mahabet and narrated the happenings. The prince was so excited to meet Anand. He came to know about the supernatural power of the mirror which Anand had. The prince agreed to help, in turn he requested Anand to let the mirror be with him. Anand too accepted and accentuated the prince to handle it with lots of care. The conch was locked inside the vault in the Nawab's treasury. With the help of Mahabet, the crown prince Anand and Nisha go to the treasury. The mirror helped them to get inside all the doors effortlessly and fetch the conch.

Anand transformed from a timid boy who felt sorry for himself into someone who was ready to dedicate his life to help others. The novel is all about commingling of old and new, real and magical. The use of Bengali terms in the description of food or showering words of affection and love while depicting the terraces and courtyards show the richness and the deep-rooted Indian culture. There is evidence throughout to show that the author is deeply influenced by the Indian epics and Puranas and other myths.

The era of the Muslim Nawabs in Bengal with the lush beauty and grandeur of that world is beautifully exhibited. The description food, its aroma takes the readers back in time to an era when Kings ruled in India. The servants in turbans and the dress worn by the people portrayed in detail pictures the lifestyle during that time. There is a wider depiction tradition by the author. The portrayal of the durbar with its rich architecture, pillars of coloured stones, gold and silver throne, the seat covered with thick silk quilts, marble and granite walls, Persian carpet in jewel colours covering the dais shows the richness of the empire. It also expresses the narrative skills of the author.

In this novel the mirror acts as a key link between past and present. A gradual self-realization of Anand is also evidently seen with a depth in that character. In order to find the missing conch and rescue the court from vengeful magician he has to sharpen his ability until they are sharper than the sharpest machete resulting in his growth both mentally and physically. He learns the treason of the evil jinn. Anand utilized every second to save Nawab from Kasim's conspiracy. He needs the help of Nisha. So he reveals the truth to Nisha and makes her remember her real identity. Then they both search for the conch based on the conch's direction. It shows the trust and understanding of true friendship.

During the proceedings of the festivities to have a clear view Anand climbed on a tree. He saw Kasim being introduced to the Nawab by Haider Ali. His guilty feel and gestures to stop all the evil plans were evidently seen. But Kasim had already started his evil activities. He made a lightning to strike the throne that resulted in fire on the stage. It was the beginning of conflict between good and evil. To save the Nawab, Anand

was ready to sacrifice his own life. He gained more strength granted by the conch while blowing it. It started to work against the jinn who was the evil spirit that helped Kasim from the beginning.

The clash of good and evil was eminent. The rivalry was more vigorous and vibrant as the conch exerted all its powers to defeat the evil jinn and Kasim. The arrogant prince Mahabet changed to be a responsible person but his care and passionate feel for Nisha was true and touching. While trying to attack Mahabet, Kasim and the jinn enter into the unknown world and went missing. Anand, Nisha, Abhaydatta, and Raj-Bhanu entered in to the present world. As spoken they left the mirror with Mahabet who promised to take utmost care of it. The mirror too promised it would come to Anand whenever he faced adversities or wanted help from the mirror.

“Yes, O wizard, I will keep him company. Over the years, as grows in wisdom, I will teach him how I may be used to help his people. But this much you can tell him now: if he ever needs you, he may do so by concentrating on your image and looking into me. And if you should ever need him, think of me, the mirror of fire and dreaming, and he will see your reflection here.”(MFD 206)

The magician Anand, his bold partner Nisha and beloved master Abhaydatta reunite with the conch. The journey from the crowded Indian city through rural villages and mountains with valley and unique creatures having a magical background exploring traditional Indian villages and food which is rich, enticing and savory shows the excellence of the author’s creativity and imagination. Above all the expression of humanity towards mankind at large is exhibited in a very simple and straight forward manner by the narrations and the characters in the novel by the author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

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