



ANCIENT MYTHS AND SUPERSTITIONS IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S SISTER OF MY HEART

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Abstract

An attempt has been made in this paper to justify the fact that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as a South Asian diasporic writer has tried to present her own country, legends, folk tale and traditions through the novel *Sister of My Heart*.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart is an illustration of a novel wherein description is used as an element of recollecting one's own tradition and society and thereby recreating a culture which has got separated physically but remains at the psychological level as a reminder of one's identity. The novel delves into relationships giving a peck into the mythical urban India and at the same time leading towards a creation of new woman who are ready to challenge the age-old practices.

Keywords: *Myth, superstitions, Indian's, society.*

Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is considered as one of the most prolific Indian English fiction writers. Before she began her career in writing fiction, Divakaruni was an acclaimed poet. Through her writings, Divakaruni aims to destroy myths and stereotypes. She hopes through her writing to dissolve boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages and even different different worlds.

Chitra Banerjee's *Sister of My Heart*, centers around two Indian girls, Anju and Sudha who are brought up by three widowed women: Aunt Pishi, Gouri and Nalini and the way their life changes with marriage and a secret of the past. The novel is set in Calcutta in the 1980s in the last quarter of the twentieth century which still defines specific and strong cultural heritage.

Ancient Myths and Superstitions

Myths, Mythology and folk tales are a part of Indian culture. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has divided the novel into two books. One is – *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes* and the another book is *The Queen of Swords*.

The novel has been presented in such a way that a young girl is reared on myths of Savitri and Sita and Sudha's mother makes her stitch proverbs such as *Pati Param Guru*. The novel also shows Sudha refusing to abort her unborn girl child and making the move. Pishi, by supporting her, enables Sudha to challenge tradition. She supports and rebukes the mothers and the society.

Why should she care anymore whwt people say? What good has it done her? What good has it done to any of us, a whole lifetime of being afraid of what society might think? I spit on this society which says it's fine to kill a baby girl in her mother's womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child. I refuse to have our Sudha live like that. (247-248).

Thus Divakaruni has voiced her inherent feeling and the need for a change seeping like slow water inside in the urban India. She has also brought out the importance of stars for good fortune which is associated with good luck in Indian tradition. Observing her aunt's obsession with all astrological matters, Anju ironically comments: Our stars must be really well aligned this month, Aunt Nalini keeps saying. First Sudha's marriage is all set, then I get proposal, and now someone wants to buy the bookstore (124).

However Pishi has her own superstitious beliefs and she is enwrapped in the consciousness of the past. Her belief reflects ironic contradictions inherent within the Hindu socio-cultural situation. She was the one who had enforced caste rules and taboos strictly. Within youthful Sudha's mind for even such simple tasks as handling mangoes to be pickled. The young Sudha comments:

..... Drying mangoes is an important job, not something she can trust to a maid servant, for everyone knows that if the slices are touched by a woman who hasn't bathed, or has lain with a man that day, or is menstruating, they will turn furry with fungus (21-22).



Myths associated with child-rearing have also been presented in this novel. These myths incorporate the rituals and vice-versa and it also reinforces the concreteness of the Hindu social structure. Divakaruni, for instance, has described the ritual of Shasti Puja and the wait for the Bidhata Purush, a ritual which seems to have evolved from Old Puranic myths, they say in the old tales that the first night after a child is born, the Bidhata Purush comes down to earth himself to decide what its fortune is to be. That is why they bathe babies in sandalwood water and wrap them in soft red malmal, colour of luck. That is why they leave sweetmeats by the cradle.... If the child is especially lucky, in the morning it will all be gone (3).

Conclusion

Through Anju and Sudha, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has tried to project the trapped mindset of girls inside a palace but to bring in a change someone will have to pick up the sword. So reference to mythology has been used as a means to regenerate the ideas of modernity. Conforming to myths is one aspect but fighting the superstitions and age-old views is another. Both viewpoints have been delineated by the novelist to examine and find out the validity of the norms and customs.

Works Cited

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