

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*

Dr. V. Srividhya

Assistant Professor (SS)

P.G. and Research Department of English

National College (Autonomous)

Tiruchirappalli.

Srisekar2005@gmail.com

and

K. Renuka

Assistant Professor, Department of English

University College of Engineering

Tiruchirappalli -620024

renukak28@yahoo.com

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 'Sister of My Heart' is about two girls; Anjali and Basudha. They are the daughters of the illustrious Chatterjees. Their house is situated at Baliganj. They have been brought up by three widows and they have stated as mothers. These girls whenever they go, they are surrounded with the world of women even in home, schools, and functions except Singhji, their chauffeur. Like, in the world of men, how we the women are considered as other in the Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, for Anju and Sudha, the world of men is called the other world, which means they did not have any connection with that world.

From the Childhood days onwards, these girls use to listen to stories of life, old tales, fairy tales, Bidhata Purush, the life of Chatterjees before they were born, the Queen of Swords, The Palace of Snakes, morals related to life, Real story of Gopal, The real story of the Adventure of Bijoy and Gopal, and the fabrication of it, comparison of cinema with Sudha's love story with Ashok. The story has been scripted by general morals related to life. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as though it happens in the 80s and the then culture. The author has been influenced by *A Room of One's Own* and has come to know about the bestsellers of 80s; Dickens, Hardy and E.M. Forster.

Her grandfather's narration of stories especially Mahabharatha, which belies the ramification in stories and ended up with what is worldly virtue said by our Lord Krishna through Bhagavat Geetha, the holy book of Hindus. In the same way, this story has been filled us with women's expectation of living their own life and should maintain status quo in respecting them as human beings.

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's
Sister of My Heart – October – December - 2018

Pishi's story has to be placed first since she is the most highly respected woman and senior to every woman in that particular household. She is the one under whose care the girls have been brought up. She used to tell stories to them to regulate and wants them to grow like god-fearing persons. When Pishi was eighteen itself, she became a widow, she was not supposed to wear good saris, wedding jewelry, should eat only one meal a day, and definitely no non-vegetarians which would galvanize them into sexual activities.

The same situation occurs in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel 'The Low Land' when the husband is dead; Gauri has stopped eating non-vegetarian, when her husband's brother Subhash asks her, "Is it because of my parents that you're not eating fish?" (94) Then Subhash's mother has asked him not to befriend and talk to her, he immediately retorted that why have not they talked and shared to her anything, then he enquired about why have they taken away her colored saris and non-vegetarians from her food, as Subhash's mother and Subhash in an argument regarding Gauri, the widow of his brother who is dead because of the riot:

"You've taken away her coloured clothes, the fish and meat from her plate.

These are our customs, his mother said" (114).

It was told that the husbands' death is caused by wives' bad luck. On the contrary, when the wife dies, no stopping is done to any of husbands' activities. "..... the unlucky man's cow dies, the lucky man's wife dies!" (248). After three years of being a widow, Pishi could not even continue her studies to occupy her and should not even consider to kill themselves as the priest says that they would end up in hell. Though she was under the care of Bijoy and Gouri, Pishi's younger brother and his wife, it was considered as charity.

When similar but difference in situation arises in Sudha's life that due to sudha carries a female baby in her pregnancy, she was compelled by her mother-in-law to abort the baby. As a mother she could not do it, and to rescue her baby she stepped out of the house and reach her mother's home and then the condition came from her mother-in-law either to abort or to sign in the divorce papers to be sent in the following week and the reason provided for divorce is due to desertion.

Originally the female baby in the womb has been deserted by the whole family except her mother. In the 1980s permission was there to Government doctors to expose the sex with the inclusion of abortion. Later in the years, it was found that the phallus and sperm was and has been considered as stronger, has the decisive part in the reproduction whether it is a male or female baby. Pishi's part as Sudha's protector is very important when she asked Sudha "... "go take a nice bath and shampoo the last of that red from your forehead" (249). Moreover, Pishi has

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

Sister of My Heart – October – December - 2018

encouraged Basudha that “You’ve got a whole life in front of you, and it’s going to be such a dazzling success that it’ll leave them gaping” ” (249).

Since Pishi is said to be the upholder of tradition, she deconstructed it because of the religious, culture, custom, and rituals have really made her to suffer and did not allow her to develop herself and made her to be dependent of others. That’s how she has had to have this stunted growth and could not help even to her brother’s family during their hardest times. Still, she feels that she is the burden to the family whom has supported her in her deserted condition. Being a very good person, Pishi is ready to break the tradition only to safeguard the children’s future that she considered herself as surrogate mother equivalent to the real mothers.

The second story is about Bidhata Purush, who is a God of fate appears on the sixth day of Child’s birth and decides the to-be fortune. Here, the fortune doesn’t have only good to be happened but also the consequences of the previous birth too. Sometimes people feel very happy about the writing of the head like Pishi, though she doesn’t have her own children, God has given two children Sudha and Anju in the household to be taken care of like the mother of them.

In spite of Anjali’s offer to Sudha to come to America to have her own survival and moreover there in America a lot of single parenting, especially mothers take care of. So sudha need not afraid of the difference to be noticed like India. There in America, every individual has their autonomy in leading and living their own life.

But, Sudha decided to be off in Calcutta in itself in sending her stitching stocks to Anarkali Boutique on the corner of Rashbehari junction to make her survival. For that, she had drawn a design that has been blown away and purposely done by Bidhata Purush to avoid her to live her own life by herself. The reason is that it is not designed by him in her fate.

Immediately after the design has been blown, she set out the new design and she set out the new design and has let her know that the new one is more modern and even more beautiful. Whenever, one comes out of one’s drawn circle around (fate), one will have a lot to learn and meet out the new opportunities that might develop one’s life in the newest possible ways.

The author purposely wanted the women characters in the world to be very brave in the domestic and official affairs. They must look forward in aiming their goals, should be independent, and maintain distance with the outside people, and warning them of beauty which is very dangerous. For the women, marriage is always the transformation and they cannot live their life and have to live for others in spite of it, she wish them to have the personal space without interference as it clearly expressed in *The Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf. As a woman, they should break the construction that women are known for scandal, happiness that were made

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's
Sister of My Heart – October – December - 2018

by them for themselves. They should give importance only to present tense and they should not expect in their life since expectation lead to disappointments all the time.

Among the fairy tales, The Palace of Snakes gives full life to this story as it takes about the known world of princess is the underwater world. Likewise, Anjali's and Basudha's known world is all, the house, the convent, the bookshop of them and almost everywhere they are surrounded by women. Through the retelling of this story, both Sudha and Anjali realizes that a man called Ashok has come in between them but the affection, they felt is different from their love for each other.

Until the arrival of prince in the princess' life, she doesn't have to worry about anything. In the same way, unless Ashok is there, there won't be any chance of knowing about the other side of the world. There would not be any other reason for them to realize their age, feelings, imagination for the age is concerned and they have come to know that apart from them, there is a world and a lot of possibilities and opportunities to grab their chance and make their survival.

Moreover, the fairy tales always plays the main part in kindling the imagination of the children. Unfortunately, these days children though they have grandparents alive with them the technology have hypnotize them in their world of serials, cartoons, and other animation programs.

In the 1980s as the story has been scripted, reading was given more importance and listening to stories from the mother or motherly figure will hone them to develop their reading habits through the comics of the then world. In addition to it, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has given subtle information regarding the bestsellers of the then period. They are Dickens, Hardy and E.M. Forster. The bestsellers of the period are revealed through the protagonist when she has more interest in Virginia Woolf and was inspired to read the novels of her, before anyone could purchase it from her mother's bookshop.

To feel the reality of everyday, day to day life one should talk about various matters like politics, the bestsellers, the talking of the serials, the office matters. The same real lifestyle has been captured when Anju starts telling of her favourite author Virginia Woolf and her style and her women characters with doomed artistic souls.

When Sudha is in her family way, she is asked to watch only comedies, or holy stories from the Ramayana. It is said to be a belief that whatever we see, hear, listen during pregnancy will have a direct impact on the child. On the contrary, Sudha has been made to watch the video of the Rani of Jhansi by mistake, which is filled with the widow-queen's rebellion against the British in the 1850s and died on the war front in the great way. That bravery has been inspired by Sudha and in depth in her body, and soul to have a courageous baby in her womb although her

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

Sister of My Heart – October – December - 2018

mother-in-law has been insisting to have male heir and that would be the good luck for the Sanyal's family and that's how it has been happening all the time until these days.

Suddenly, through Sudha's mother urged by Gouri Ma, to Mrs. Sanyal, Sudha's mother-in-law take the amniocentesis disease for Sudha also, the problem has been invited unintentionally only to save the child from the detection of the hereditary or brain defect diseases. That has been the root cause for the abortion of Sudha, when the test results produced not only about the negative results regarding the baby's diseases but also the sex of the baby is exposed.

As a mother Sudha has started herself bravely like the Rani of Jhansi to save her baby and in turn the baby also gives her the support insidiously and in the mute way. This type of courage can be brought inside anyone only through reading imperial stories or listening to fairy tales, myths, which always give the mental stability when the person is not in the right kind of mentality to take the decisions.

Through this novel, it is understood that the author is basically a voracious reader and she tries her best in giving indirect reference to some authors like Dickens, Hardy, E. M. Forster, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning including Virginia Woolf. Almost, it is the duty of the author to initiate and maintain the reading habits of the reader in order to attain the benefit financially as well as for the betterment of the readers in attaining the worldly knowledge and sophisticated knowledge.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is basically related to Bengal, that gets reflected always when she uses certain words like Natun Bau, Singaras (the sweets) etc. Though she gets settled in California as the creative writing professor, she could not uproot herself from her provenance. That is why, she unconsciously has drawn herself in and around the world of Calcutta, the morals, lifestyle etc. She uses the banyan tree as the reference which is the symbol of the root which is very strong though it has very many branches and the banyan tree is considered as the ancestors whom are treated with responsibility in guiding their progenies with history, which will guide them to have their new histories based on it.

In this novel, Pishi represents the symbol of Banyan tree which always extends its branches as far as the eye can see to give shade to its progeny. She lives to pass on the family history and prevent the hard times that had already befallen during her brother's lifetime. Since, Sudha comes to realize that whenever the situation arises to talk of their dead fathers, everyone including Nalini and Gouri Ma instruct Anjali and Basudha, not to talk of the ill day which has taken their fathers off during their birth; instead they could focus on the positive sides to develop themselves for the future life.

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's
Sister of My Heart – October – December - 2018

While watching Pishi is reluctant in giving information about their father, Sudha is persistent in getting their father's details, about their death and the history of the Chatterjees. More than that, she claims that it is her right to know about her father. The history started with his arrival in the hot month of Sraban in a parched year when the crops began to fail and there were more beggars than usual in front of their gate.

Her father introduced himself as the cousin, from Bijoy's uncle settled in Khulna, after a fierce quarrel with their grandfather. With him, her father brought rain to the parched land and along with his newly wedded wife. He was treated as a good omen and the monsoons too began and the crops too were saved. So, Bijoy has accepted her father wholeheartedly into his heart. Whatever is said by Sudha's father, has been accepted by Bijoy, her uncle including the adventure for the ruby caves even during the confinement of Bijoy's and Gopal's wife.

But the day before their adventure, it was found out that Bijoy's uncle did not have any male heir so, they came to know that Gopal is a cheat and Pishi asked Bijoy to hand him over to the Police but Bijoy did not defer to her sister's decision. What Bijoy said in deference of Gopal was that, Gopal could be a cheat but not that much had enough to kill him. Finally, Bijoy has accepted to take the expedition to the ruby caves along with whom he believes him to be his cousin, Gopal.

Through the information from the police, they would come to a final conclusion that both of them had been found dead. To everyone's shock, even the readers as well as Pishi that the day before Sudha's and Anjali's marriage, a lot of letters from their friends and relations came to them. Along with that a letter addressed to Sudha addressing her as beti and ends as her father, saved money all these years has been sent as trousseau for her future life.

Once Sudha has got this to show Pishi and entreated her to give it to the beggars in the Khalighat temple. Having got to know that her father is being alive, it paves the way for her imagination to flow in like more than a cheat, her father have become the murderer of his uncle Bijoy. So, she had decided to relinquish her love towards Ashok and decline the plan of elopement and has adjusted herself to do the expiations of her father's wrong doings for the whole family of Chatterjees.

A turning point in the story happens when Sudha has planned to leave for America to assist Anjali in her post-operative days after the baby Prem's death, at the airport, she has been sent off with various gifts for Dayita along with the letter addressed to beti from the same hand writing she could understand that the same person. From the physical identification given in the letter, it is found that chauffeur Singhji is her real father and came to know that her father is not

Stories Embedded as Duplication of Reality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

Sister of My Heart – October – December - 2018

the guilty, then came out her real self that if her father is not the cause for Anjali's father, why she has to give up and forego the things in correcting his father instead of living her life for her own happiness and satisfaction for her own self.

One thing is that Sudha loves Anjali for no reason as well as Anjali loves Sudha for no reason. Though jealousy has been aroused in certain places from Anjali on Sudha because of Sunil's behavior towards Sudha's beauty, their love for each other has been overwhelmed by every difficulty they face in their lives.

Through these embedded stories Chitra Banerjee has presented the feast for the reader's eye as well as for the mind. These stories really have stimulated the diasporic sensibility in every pores of the skin on every reader. One truth behind these embedded stories that have been called the grand or metanarrative is that it is all the depiction of the Indian epics especially the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

Works Cited

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Lowland*. Random House Publishers India Pvt. Ltd. 2013. pg.94. Print.

---. ---. ---. pg. 114. Print.

Banerjee Divakaruni, Chitra. *Sister of My Heart*. First Anchor Edition. Jan 2000. pg. 248. Print.

---. ---. ---. pg. 249. Print.

---. ---. ---. pg. 249. Print.
