

Subjugation and Deprivation of Women in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

K N Uma Devi¹, Dr. M. Naga Lakshmi²

¹Assistant Professor, Vels University

²Associate Professor, Vels University

Abstract - Woman is a very strong character than a man as she not only take care of herself but whole family as a mother, wife, daughter-in-law, granddaughter, sister, sister-in-law, daughter, mother-in-law, grandmother, etc. Earlier women in India were facing many problems. New and modern-day challenges and tribulations have cropped up making life uneasy for women. Issues facing women still consume the attention of researchers in social sciences, governments, planning groups, social workers and reformers. Society lays down the patterns of life for a woman much before she takes birth by conceiving fixed identities for her. It confines her existence through binary divisions between the general conception of men and women defining her as feminine as opposite to the masculine, the characteristics marked in the formation of gender by society. The private sphere assigned to woman in the patriarchal system limits her role as daughter, sister, wife and mother and also facilitates the control of her body by the opposite sex. In this paper, I have to discuss about the women on one side are celebrated as mothers and on one side are harassed in the form of an object. Women are the best creation of God but here the reality is something different.

Index Terms - challenges, tribulations, feminine, masculine, gender.

The roots of the culture of any country are from the values inculcated into the people by different women in their lives. Women have the most celebrated presence in every aspect of our lives in the form of a daughter, a mother, a sister, or any such relation. Women were given the power to create life and as we know very well, it is not an easy feat. However, Women in India face a completely conflicting situation. On one hand, women are worshipped as goddesses, and on the other hand, they are shamed in multiple ways which a sensible person cannot even fathom.

Being a woman in India is not easy. They have to fight for their basic human rights which they do not receive

due to the orthodox mentality that has taken roots in the minds of the Indians. It is often said that the physical strength of men is great but the emotional strength that comes with the endurance in women, is a force to be reckoned with. The women in India fall in the same category. Where they have the strength to fight back, they keep on facing problems throughout different phases of their lives. Education is a power that should be available to all, but this is not the case in India. People believe that educating women is more than they deserve as they would be not eligible for marriage if they are more capable than men.

If the woman does get educated and is completely capable, gender inequality results in the struggle at her workplace where either she is not considered as eligible as males or is harassed by seniors with unfulfillable demands. Woman is a very strong character than a man as she not only takes care of herself but whole family as a mother, wife, daughter-in-law, granddaughter, sister, sister-in-law, daughter, mother-in-law, grandmother, etc. No mean task by any stretch of imagination. Add to this her role as an active member of the society as a working lady in different spheres of life. Earlier women in India were facing problems like sati pratha, child marriage, parda pratha, widow exploitation, restriction to widow remarriage, devadasi system, etc. However, almost all such old practices have almost vanished. But that doesn't mean an end to the challenges women face.

New and modern-day challenges and tribulations have cropped up making life uneasy for women. Issues facing women still consume the attention of researchers in social sciences, governments, planning groups, social workers and reformers. Society lays down the patterns of life for a woman much before she takes birth by conceiving fixed identities for her. It confines her existence through binary divisions between the general conception of men and women

defining her as feminine as opposite to the masculine, the characteristics marked in the formation of gender by society. Further, the association of negativity with the attributes which fall into the kitty of female, such as passivity, infantilism, emotionalism and irrationality as opposed to adventure, decisiveness and rationality in male, considered positive virtues, do great harm to her self assessment and individual progress. Moreover, the private sphere assigned to woman in the patriarchal system limits her role as daughter sister, wife and mother and also facilitates the control of her body by the opposite sex. In this paper, I have to discuss about the women on one side are celebrated as mothers and on one side are harassed in the form of an object.

Women are the best creation of god but here the reality is something different. One of the most prominent voices of Indian writing in English at present, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents the concept of ' New Woman' in its true colour. She depicts the unending struggle of Indian woman against patriarchy, society and her own family. Her female characters are strong and fearless. The present paper aims to focus at the optimist outlook of Indian woman in her search for self-realization with special reference to Arranged Marriage (1997). Rich or poor, educated or illiterate and married or unmarried, all the women characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in Arranged Marriage rebel against those who try to suppress their individuality.

Anju says her problem to Sunil where as Sunil has not given more importance to her, by saying that is not a big issue, it must be her's time of month. Anju replied with full of anger that she knows how important is that to not to bear a child now, because they have the commitments now. Anju has to complete her college and Sunil has to spend the huge money to his father every month. But the nausea won't go away; finally Anju's pregnancy is confirmed. Before getting this confirmation from a doctor, both were blamed each other. Anju asked herself that how will she take care of a baby? What will happen to all her plans for her future?

Anju is not ready but scared for abortion whereas Sudha is longing for a baby. Then Sunil consoles Anju by saying that we would manage it and plan for having a baby. Finally, Anju's pregnancy is confirmed by a doctor. Anju never thought that Sunil is so excited for a baby. Anju even felt that these kinds of excitement

are only meant for women. But here Sunil has. There has been the dramatic change is Sunil's behavior.

Anju noticed that he comes home earlier, he brought a healthy eating books from a library, carefully gives the balanced diet for her; a drink of hot milk with crushed almonds so that it will increase the baby's brain power, he never find fault with silly things and not ready to fight with her because he has heard it might affect the baby's personality. He is too busy with compiling the names of baby because of that his computer's gathered an inch of dust. He particularly likes to talk about the things he wants to do with the baby.

Sunil accepts both gender babies, he never asks a male baby like the people who lives in Calcutta. By God's grace, they are now in America. That migration gives the positive note to Sunil and makes his mind to accept a boy baby or a girl baby. He plans to visits to the zoo and playing ball in the park if it's a boy and taking her to dance class if it's a girl. Anju comes to know about Sunil's longingness would be filed his own baby. Sunil wants to share this news to his mother-in-laws whereas Anju asks one more week time to share. She is thinking about Sudha, in what way she derives pleasures after hearing this good news, the same way she has to face the pressure from her in-law's family. But she is happy for me.

"She will hurry into speech then, speaking too quickly to show me she doesn't mind, that she's happy for me, and really, she will be. Because that's the thing about us human beings when we really love someone, we can be happy, even while our heart is breaking" (220).

Anju carefully rehearsed words so she won't be hurt. Finally Anju conveys the good news with crying voice and asked sorry too. Sudha recollected their childhood days and replied that she is going to be a mother too. After hearing this, Anju has a hundred questions milling around inside her head. Finally she expresses her love to Sudha by saying that 'Two babies, coming to us together!' (223).

Totally Sudha's mother-in-law change her attitudes because Sudha is fulfilled her desire and she never let Sudha to do any hard household works. She offers the steaming cup of ginger tea, which is particularly excellence for pregnant digestive systems. Because of this taking care more, she felt bored. That is also understand by Mrs. Stanley and she says Sudha to ask to Ramesh's brother to pick up a new video movie for her. One step ahead is nowadays, at mealtimes, Sudha is served first even before Ramesh.

Mrs. Stanley remarks one thing by saying that Ramesh work is done. Now, its my turn to take care of my Sudha during her pregnancy period. She even asked Pishi about my favorite dishes. She ever insists that “Remember, you’re eating for my grandson, too.” Even the fact that Ramesh back from a trip to Murshidabad, has brought me a whole boxful of the silk saris which the region is famous for, does not bother her. Perhaps she thinks they are keeping her grandson warm.”(225)

Mrs. Stanley even says to Sudha to watch comedies, or holy stories from the Ramayana so that her grandson would have a good personality. The very next day, she was died valiantly on the battle field. Mrs. Stanley said that was all right for queens but being a homely girl will be so pleasant and gentle natured. Sudha enjoys each and every moment of her pregnancy period but still she feels that something is missing. That is nothing but Anju. Sudha wants to get the clarify things from Anju that Mrs. Stanley nowadays giving first preference to Sudha and even Ramesh asks Sudha about the feeling of nauseas anymore, so that he would rub her back and if inn bed Ramesh slips a hand, very carefully and cupped, over Sudha’s belly. Sudha knows very well that she is hurting his feelings. But she wants to know that all these love and caring is for Sudha or for the new heir of the Sanyals family? Sudha feels that Anju is the only right person to give the answer for this question. She is the only person ever says that Sudha is always right.

Sudha’s inscrutable mother-in-law has kept Sudha’s pregnancy a secret. Except for the three mothers and Anju, no one to our relatives, our neighbours and not even to our household knows. Sudha asks Ramesh about this and asks him that his mother excepts only grandson but if it is not, then how would she react. Sudha stunned from the reply of Ramesh that his mom might be promised that to Goddess Shasthi if Sudha gave her a grandson. So he wants Sudha to prepare her mind for any blow from his mother.

Sudha receives an aerogram from Anju. Sudha can hear Anju’s voice in her letter. She tells that how she feels to be pregnant, and how she loves and hates at the same time. She scolds Sudha because Sudha has not sent her a photo of Sudha with swell on belly in return for the one Anju mailed Sudha last month. Sudha only knows that her mother-in-law never let her to take photos during pregnancy that brings bad luck.

When Anju says about the remarkable transformation of Sunil makes her very happy. But Sudha only knows that Anju only needs Sunil more than he needs Anju. When Anju shares the baby’s heartbeat and in what way she loves her baby whether it may be he or she. She could even die for him or her. After reading this Sudha feels so bad and thinks that Sudha too die for Anju. Here the author outcomes Sudha’s possessiveness. The next part of her letter is very hard to read; it’s full of over written and some kind of scribbling too. Finally she wrote her mothers scared about her baby’s growth in the last letter.

Anju tried to remember that one retarded boy locked up in the terrace room that scared them so much in their child hood days. Then none of their cousin is also having a baby with the same problem. So, Sudha finally comes to know that Gauri Ma knew Sudha’s baby is not under risk because Sudha is not from Chatterjee blood. Sudha thinks if not Chatterjee’s blood then her father’s murderous genes have planted in his grandchild. Sudha hugs her belly and thinks that she could burn away her past memories like Anju’s letter by saying that she doesn’t regret for what she couldn’t change.

Sudha should have got amniocentesis results yesterday itself, thinks Anju while she is waiting for a visit to doctor. Anju is waiting for the result where Sudha is also waiting for her result so that they both could get the tests result on the same day. Anju compares her with Sudha that like Sunil, Ramesh is also holding her hands till the results come. Even she knows that in India, Gentlemen never do such things and then like Sunil, Ramesh went with her to see the doctor, instead of her mother-in-law.

Anju is expecting from Sunil while they are waiting for a visit to doctor that he would say that nothing to worry, there is no such complication for her age during pregnancy. Because of Anju’s husband’s compulsion, the doctor insisted to do such tests. Instead of answering like this, Sunil is just avoiding to see her eyes. That leads Anju to overactive imagination like incase doctor would say Anju has to face such complication in her life, and then what would be the next step of them. Her mind freezes on that thought. But the doctor says that all is well, nothing to worry about her boy baby.

Anju is eagerly rehearing to say these things to Sudha, the same way from hers. So now, Sunil and Anju is in the celebrating mood, they ordered the food items in

American style in the Golden Dragon Restaurant. Though they know that the Indian food is only good for the pregnancy period, they will never give importance to it. Anju eats like a man which means equal to a man. She is stopping and giving alert by Sunil. Anju replies to Sunil that “Happiness is the best digestive tonic in the world.” Where as in India, Sudha’s mother-in-law gives her, hot ginger tea for better digestive system. Here, I have come to know the life style of food habit differs a lot in foreign world.

Sunil’s love makes her to deep sleep, after midnight, she glare at Sunil and called him as a seducer because she has forgotten to call Sudha. Sudha picked her call and Anju heard the dead monotone of Sudha. Sudha asks about her baby, Anju replies that he is well. While Anju asks the same to her, Sudha replies that she is well too. So, we have come to conclude that Anju will have boy baby and Sudha will have girl baby. Anju is getting afraid of Sudha’s sadden tone. She couldn’t predict what is the problem to her? But she hardly tries to find out. Because of female baby, Sudha’s husband or her mother-in law would make her break down like this, some other reasons behind that. That thought hold Anju tight and rock back and forth. Finally, she is waiting for her call.

Anju requests her Gauri Ma, to call Sudha and try to find out any hard things to be faced by Sudha in her in-law’s house, but no response from her mother till evening. Sunil gets angry of seeing Anju’s obsessive behaviour and he is very particular about not to hurt his son any more. Here, the author makes Anju is compared with Sudha’s feeling that Sunil is saying that his son. But Anju thought her baby is only for her not for anyone else. Sunil is giving more caring for her and for his son too nowadays. The big question is nagging Anju’s mind like Sudha that this caring is for her with real love from her husband or this care is only for bearing a child of his own.

Anju is having a nightmare, in that she lost her son. Suddenly she wakes up from her bed. Meanwhile the phone bell rings and Sudha is in opposite. Anju questioned her that her voice is so noisy. Sudha replied that now she is in head post office not in her mother-in-law’s place. They want her to have an abortion because of girl baby, they even can call her baby as a bastard one. Ramesh is not at all even try to help her and not even try to stand behind her. Ramesh makes himself to dump into a library room by saying that listen to his mother’s words. His mother is expecting

that a boy baby would be the first child of Mrs.Sanyal’s family for the past five years. Moreover, she is very ashamed of having a girl grandchild.

Now, the call is going to be an end.

Anju enquires about the money which Sudha has. Anju even suggested to pick up the howrah rail to reach their mothers place. Sudha replies that her own mother Nalini Ma orders her that not to leave from her mother-in-law’s place without getting permission from her and from her mother-in-law. Then they will never let her into the sanyals family again. No girl should have a such courage to do from Chatterjee’s family. But Sudha is so firm not to take an abortion. Anju requested her to move to their mothers place. That is refused by Sunil. He gives the reason that he is refusing that Sudha’s sudden decision like this is the great advantage of her mother-in-law to console her own son Ramesh to get divorce from Sudha and even getting him second marriage for boy baby. What Sunil says is absolutely right , there Sudha understands about a man’s easy going mentality. Then Anju stopped arguing with Sunil and going to lie on the sofa by thinking about the beginning of Sudha’s hard journey from Sanyals place to their mothers place.

Howrah station environment makes Sudha even more sicken. Sudha have never traveled anywhere alone. Men’s cheap behavior and how Sudha overcome the fear. That was the bitter experience of Sudha in Howrah station. For a moment, she is tempted to climb back on the train and return to the seeming-safety of the big brick house in Bardhaman. Finally, Sudha struggled to catch the taxi. She compares her with Jhansi Rani, how the Rani of Jhansi felt the first time she went to war. Sudha’s confident shows its only because of her daughter.

Nalini Ma, as usual her hand flies to her mouth. But pishi scolds Nalini Sanyals house. But Gauri Ma supports Sudha by saying that

“ Enough now, Nalini,” says Gouri Ma. Her breath comes unevenly and I feel wretched for having added to her troubles. “Sudha’s old enough to make her own decision, and I can see why she’s made it. It’s up to support her--”(245)

Nalini blames Gauri Ma for encouraging Sudha to be head strong. Sudha sit awkwardly on the edge of the sofa in the living room, feeling like a stranger in the house where Sudha was born. There have been some changes in the house. Then the Indian meal has served to Sudha by pishi Ma. Then only she comes to know

the mother's financial status. Gauri Ma smiles and says to Sudha that they are all very glad of her arrival and Sudha asks sorry to Gauri Ma for putting her in trouble.

Gauri Ma says to her that she is her daughter and tied to her not only by blood but by all the years of Sudha's life. Then only Sudha comes to know why Gauri Ma hasn't discussed about her about the amniocentesis tests and lately Sudha understands from the words of Gauri Ma

'No matter who your father was, you are you, and you belong here.

As will your daughter. Because ultimately blood is not as important as love.'(246)

The very next day, Nalini Ma insists Gauri Ma to please Mrs. Sanyal that Sudha could keep the girl baby. Gauri Ma tries to compromise but Mrs. Sanyal has no concerning thought of Sudha.

Sudha even more knows about Ramesh and his attitudes. The way ramesh mouth wavered into weakness when his mother raised her voice. The way Ramesh held his hands over his ears and begged Sudha not to do anything his mother and not to compel him to do anything against his mother's words. At last, the very next week, a peon delivers divorce papers to Chatterjee's new place. So, Sudha took off her wedding bracelets and wipe off the sindur powder. Nalini Ma started to shout Sudha and about her final decision that how can a pregnant woman without sindur on her forehead and the society named some shameful names of her girl baby. Pishi comes to rescue Sudha from her own mother Nalini.

"Why should she care anymore what people say? What good has it done her? What good has done it 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."

Pishi Ma even says about her own past how she came back to her parents' home as a widow, how many of society's tyrannical rules she followed! How old was she then? No more than eighteen. She packed away all her good saris, her wedding jewellery, ate only one meal a day, no fish or meat, fasted and prayed. Every night she soaked her pillow with guilty tears because this society was told it was her bad luck which caused her husband's death. From Pishi's words Sudha learn about the irresponsible society and its venomous words.

I realized from Pishi that men whose wives died could marry as soon as a year had passed. They did not stop their work or their schooling. No one talked about their bad luck.

CONCLUSION

We must all come together as one to fight these issues faced by women in India. Every citizen and government must try to make it a safe place for women to be in. They must make more stringent laws against people who commit crimes against women. They must also be implemented properly to ensure everyone takes them seriously. Furthermore, opportunities must be provided equally for men and women. In every field, we must encourage women to give their best. It does not matter whether it is the medical field or sports field, opportunities must be equal. Moreover, education must be stressed upon gravely. It must be made a compulsion to educate every girl and woman for a better future. We must join hands to protect and safeguard our women in India. It will help us thrive as a country and make the world a better place. Therefore, each one of us must be ready to treat women as equal counterparts. We must help them at every stage and more than that empower them to make their own decisions. After that, these issues can be eliminated so women need not face discrimination in the name of gender.

REFERENCE

Primary Texts

- [1] Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Sister of My Heart*. London: Transworld Publishers, 1999. Print

Secondary Texts

- [1] Passage from India by Sandip Roy, California Magazine July-August 2006 [https:// alumni.berkeley.edu](https://alumni.berkeley.edu)
- [2] Desires and Conflicts in Female Bonding in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni Novels: *Sister of My Heart* and *Vine of Desire*, search.ebscohost.com Negotiating with the past and contemporary life of Indian woman: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in
- [3] Almerico, Gina M. "Food and Identity: Food Studies, Cultural, and Personal Identity." *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies*, vol. 8, Summer 2014, pp. 1-7.

- [4] Butler, Kim D. "Defining diaspora, refining a discourse." *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 189-219.
- [5] Carby, Hazel. "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of sisterhood". *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. Centre for contemporary cultured studies. London: Hutchinson, 1982. Print.