



UNVEILING THE ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *OLEANDER GIRL*

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Abstract: Archetype (derived from Latin *Archetypum* and Greek *Archetypon* means *arche* + *typos*= root / origin +model or pattern) are the original objects, images or even characters, events, or situations from which other similar things are patterned or copied in various forms of art and literature. Archetypes often represent fundamental aspects of the human psyche and provide insight into the narrative's deeper meanings. In the present paper therefore, an attempt has been made to examine how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni evokes the journey Archetype in her novel *Oleander Girl* by showcasing the evolution of her main protagonist Karobi. The emphasis in the study undertaken will primarily be on the exploration of the inner journey of the protagonist towards the completeness, wholeness and selfhood. With the inner journey the focus will also be laid on the outward physical journey which parallels the journey inward. Through the lens of archetypal criticism the paper will also examines recurring symbols, motifs, and character types that tap into universal human experiences and collective unconsciousness. Joseph Campbell's concept of journey contained in *The Hero with Thousand Faces*, Carl Jung's concept of 'individuation' and Carol S. Pearson ideas about the archetypes or 'inner guides' will form the theoretical framework.

Index Terms - Archetypes, Journey, Evolution, Wholeness, Selfhood,

I. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl*'s explores the themes related to women's experiences, cultural identity, and personal growth. The study of journey archetype at an outset is imperative as Divakaruni in an interview given to Metka Zupancic, herself states that her characters are "typical of our global world and are engaged in a journey between cultures, between belief systems" She further explicates that even though the story in *Oleander Girl* is contemporary, but "it is really about the child in search of the father, which is the quest for the self and ultimately a spiritual quest" In *Oleander Girl*, Divakaruni delves into the journey of the protagonist, Korobi Roy, as she navigates through her past and present, unveiling family secrets and discovering her own identity. In the processes of journey the first significant archetype that is visibly operational in the life of Karobi is what Pearson terms as 'Innocent'. About the stage of the 'Innocent' Pearson writes:

The Journey of the innocent, in all its versions, begins in a kind of utopia, a safe, secure, peaceful, loving environment. Suddenly, we are thrown from that environment and enter a world where we are judged, where unfair discriminations are made, where conflict and violence are rampant and illusions are shattered. (73)

Kabori, the protagonist of the novel *Oleander Girl*, embarks upon the journey as an 'innocent' and steps out of her safe and secure dwelling to travel across the seas to U S A. As Campbell, describes seventeen (17) stages or steps along this journey which could be studied under three major headings formulae as *separation-initiation-return*, so, she begins her journey by separating from her home territory to move out into the unknown to find the answers to questions of her parentage. Karobi has a realization that she will remain incomplete unless she gains an insight into her roots and gets connected to it, and thus the journey has to be undertaken. In this context, Carol S. Pearson, a post-Jungian theorist, in her seminal work *Awakening the Heroes Within*, postulates:

“For the hero’s journey is first about taking a journey to find the treasure of your true self,...- and, in the process your own life. The quest itself is replete with dangers and pitfalls, but it offers great rewards: the capacity to be successful in the world, knowledge of the mysteries of the human soul, the opportunity to find and express your unique gifts in the world, and to live in loving community with other people”(1)

In U S, the beginning is quite intimidating for Karobi, as she has to stay away from her homeland in an extremely hostile environment, and even without financial stability. She remembers the moment of separation as one of sheer absolute terror as if it has hurled her away into the space that is uncharted and directionless. In Person’s terminology, this amounts to the fall from the paradise and, therefore, the archetype of ‘orphan’ takes over the role, leading to that of ‘rebel’ subsequently. This feeling of the betrayal and being abandoned brings the fear and sense of isolation in Karobi. Amid the financial crisis, in United States, she has to face many odd and challenging situations in the newfound world. About this processes of archetypal journey, Joseph Campbell believes that there is a kind of excitement at the beginning, heart wrenching upheavals along the way and finally the sense of satisfaction at the end. He summaries the hero’s journey as follows:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (23)

Karobi, landed into a threatening spot which can be defined, what Campbell has said, ‘Road of Trails’. She is in fact ‘initiated’ and put to series of tests to prove her heroic character. At this situation one could find the operation of ‘Warrior’ archetype in Karobi. As a ‘warrior’ Karobi has set her goal and refuses to budge from her decision. She garners courage and the ability to proceed with her pursuit. In doing so, she ignores the consequences of her action “deserve to be proud” (205) of herself.

One of the most difficult and indecisive situation arises for Karobi when she has to decide to cut her hairs without seeking the approval from the family elders. following extract from the text describes her innerscape .

When that woman asked me to unbraid my hair, it fell past my waist in glossy curls. The glint of admiration in her eyes went through me like a knife. Grandmother loved my hair. She would massage coconut oil into it, wash it out with ritha pulp, and braid it into different designs. One of my happiest memories is the feel of her fingers on my scalp. I try not to think of what she’d say if she knew what I was doing.

Stay focussed on the moment, I order myself. On the necessity of now. The woman calls me into the back room. The cold of her scissors burns the nape of my neck. I keep my eyes turned away from the mirror. I feel light headed, untethered. But once the money is in my hand, I am somewhat consoled. I now have enough for California, and I’ve done it without having to beg anyone. (177)

The extract reflects the inner turmoil brimming inside Karobi. After being overwrought with emotions she averts the eyes from the mirror and thinks of her present situation, but after receiving the handsome amount for her hairs she derives an immense pleasure and sense of satisfaction which in turn goes a long way to empower her.

In the same series of events when Seema, with whom she stays at New York, chastises her for cutting her hairs without seeking any approval or confirmation from the elders and warns her that she would look like “improper bride”(177), She feels pain and displeasure for a while, but such challenging circumstances are shaping her up to face much more daunting realities that may come along the way. She rises up to the situation and retorts back at Seema as a typical ‘rebel’ that it was her hair and therefore, free to get it cut or styled as per her discretion. What Karobi feels at this moment is reflected through following lines, “Once I get over the shock, I decide that I, too, like the new me. A mass of curls, barely reaching my shoulders, have transformed me into a stranger, glamorous and a little dangerous.” (177).

Karobi, gains all the wisdom and returns to her homeland as a transformed and authenticated being. On her return to India, one could witness the significant changes in Karobi behavior, delineating her growth and evolution during her U.S sojourn. From an unseasoned, timid schoolgirl she started showing the sign of womanish maturity which Rajat could proclaims in the following lines: “The way you’ve grown up, orphaned at birth, hidden away in some mountain valley, and now guarded in that ancient, beautiful mansion by your ogre of a grandfather – why, just listening to you was like entering a fairy tale!”(17). Her decision of disengaging herself from Rajat without being overwhelmed by emotions and resuming her

studies and her conversation with the principal of college, with clarity and confidence, are all signs of her maturity and authenticity. Korobi develops a strong sense of self-worth and sees herself as an individual having her own ethics and values and she is not willing to compromise this original image of herself.

Thus Karobi's journey to America in search of clarity regarding her parentage helps transform the sweet, charming and innocent teenager into a strong and independent, firm and capable woman. After facing all the hardships and clearing the impediments along the way, her life comes full circle at the end of the journey, and she lives up to the title of the novel as well as the name Korobi, chosen for her by her unwed mother, which meant a 'beautiful but tough flower', Karobi completes the journey of her life from being an innocent to an authenticated being. In other words, Karobi's journey can be viewed as one from the state of innocence to that of experience that leads to final stage of self-realization or self-actualization. Her external experiences of life trigger a shift from one internal stage to another and vice-versa

On the other level the physical journey is connected to the journey inward and relates to the psychological processes that the character undergo to reach the final destination, which M.L.Von Franz terms as 'Individuation'. It is a term understood by Carl Gustav Jung and M.L von Franz as the process of becoming aware of oneself, of one's make-up, and the way to discover one's true inner self. Jung defines individuation as a process "by which a person becomes a psychological 'individual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unit or whole". He also views Individuation as the process of self realization, the discovery and experience of meaning and purpose in life; the means by which one finds oneself and becomes who one really is. karobi's wisdom could be summed up in the words of Wilfred L. Guerin in his book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*:

Individuation is a psychological growing up, the process of discovering those aspects of one's self that make one an individual different from other members of his species. It is essentially a process of recognition – that is, as he matures, the individual must consciously recognize the various aspects, unfavorable as well as favorable of his total self. This self recognition requires extraordinary courage and honesty, but is absolutely essential if one is to become a well balanced individual. (204-205)

Commenting on the transformative aspect of the journey, Divakaruni, in an interview conducted in Chicago, discloses: "So, the overarching moment of the novel is "You come from India, you come to America, things happen to you here, you go back, you're transformed, and the place you go back to is transformed because of that. But again, by going back to India, to your roots, you're transformed again."

Some of the other most significant archetypal patterns in the novel are "wise old man", "Love", "Mother Archetypes", "Secrets and Shadows" and "Rebirth and Transformation". The archetype of 'wise old man' also lies embedded in the unconscious mind but in many cases it can also operate from outside which is a projection of the inner archetype. Carl Jung defines the 'Wise Old Man' archetype as follows:

The archetypal image of the wise man, the savior or redeemer, lies buried and dormant in man's unconscious since the dawn of culture; it is awakened whenever the times are out of joint and human society is committed to a serious error. When people go astray they feel the need for a guide or mentor or even the physician. (Lodge "*Psychology and Literature*" 187)

The figure of wise old man appears in many myths and classic texts in the form of helper, mentor, guide, healer, sage, and evangelist etc., who helps the hero in solving the quandaries of life as well as finding a way forward. The novel *Oleander Girl*, explores the theme of ancestral wisdom and the connection to one's heritage. The narratives often feature a wise mentor figure who guides the protagonist through their journey. Identifying and analyzing mentor characters such as Korobi's grandmother or other influential individuals can provide insights into their roles as agents of transformation and sources of wisdom. Korobi's grandmother embodies the archetype of wise old man' passing down knowledge and traditions to the younger generation. This archetype represents the collective wisdom of ancestors and the significance of understanding one's roots.

Next the archetypal pattern of "forbidden love" is present in the romantic relationships portrayed in the novel. Korobi and Rajat's love, complicated by family secrets and societal expectations, reflects the timeless theme of forbidden love that transcends cultures and resonates with readers. The novel also traces various stages in the trajectory of mother archetype in the novel. As propounded by Carl G Jung. Mother-child relationship remains the focus to understand the contours of parental as well as filial bonding in the archetypal sense. Carl Jung in an essay "The Archetypes of Literature" contained in, *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*, writes about the archetypes of 'Good Mother', 'Terrible Mother' and the 'Great Mother'. Jung defines the 'Good mother' as:

The one who has maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. (82)

In *Oleander Girl*, Korobi's biological mother represents the nurturing and sacrificial mother archetype, while Mrs. Bose, Rajat's mother, embodies the strict and traditional mother archetype. These archetypes tap into collective images and expectations associated with motherhood. Further, Korobi's self-discovery and the revelation of family secrets represent a transformative process, symbolizing the archetypal pattern of death and rebirth, where the protagonist undergoes a profound change and emerges anew.

Conclusion

On the basis of above study it can be reiterated that human behavior is guided by the archetypes that are imbedded in the collective unconscious of a particular tribe or people. These archetypes are 'primordial images' that get represented in art, culture and literature. Out of so many kinds of archetypes, one such archetype is the archetype of journey. The novel follows Korobi Roy's journey, which can be seen as an archetypal Heroine's Journey. This journey involves the protagonist leaving her familiar world, undergoing trials and self-discovery, and ultimately returning transformed. Korobi develops a strong sense of self-worth and sees herself as an individual having her own ethics and values and she is not willing to compromise this original image of herself. The exploration of family history and ancestral roots connects to the archetype of 'wise old man' and collective memory. Korobi's discoveries about her family's past and the secrets they hold can be examined in relation to the larger themes of identity, heritage, and the intergenerational transmission of wisdom. The archetype of mother, love, death and rebirth are also operative in the text. In short novel incorporates various archetypal patterns and designs that add depth and resonance to the story. By incorporating these archetypal patterns, novel taps into universal themes and resonates with readers on a deeper level. These patterns connect to collective symbols and experiences, enhancing the storytelling and offering insights into the human condition.

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