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TRANSFORMATION OF FEMINISM IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *OLEANDER GIRL*

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ABSTRACT

In the present scenario, the human civilization is changing due to the journey of people from one place to another to explore new scope and advantages. These travelling's affect the traditional life of human beings. The globalization has resulted in easy communication between different cultures. This communication between different culture affects the lifestyle and thought of people. Sometimes these effects are good while sometimes they turn into disaster. The contrastive of two cultures affects human psychology. In the twentieth century, where everything is changing rapidly, such as the economical, sociological, cultural and traditional, the equality of women in society is still far behind. These changes gradually have an impact on the women society. These transformations give rise to the theory of new women or new feminism. This theory focuses on women's liberation in every aspect. Women start thinking in different ways. It also changes their perspective towards life. They start finding their identity in family and society. In search of identity, sometimes they have to face harsh realities but these struggles make them strong to protect against their own exploitation. In their efforts of establishing their identity, they move to distant land in order to fulfill their dreams. In this research paper, the theory of new feminism presents both aspects of struggle faced by women, in their native land as well as distant land for their identity. Sometimes, it looks wonderful to women, going to distant places to accomplish their goals, but as they

reach near it they witness its dark face. Chitra Banerjee always projects her heroines who face the dark struggles in their life but still manage to reach their goal.

Key words: - Human relationship, search of identity, her own voice in society.

The theory of feminism comes to us in different shades and aspects. Every author has his own way of interpreting and presenting this theory in different modes. This paper discusses the transformation of thought in the feminist aspect through the novel *Oleander Girl* written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In this novel novelist present the Indian women immigrants ability to build a bridge between two cultures, adaptable to accommodate to husband's families and life style. She also present the second generation people are more adjustable and successfulls to make their space well in the alien country, Korobi is the fine example of second generation. Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" the Women's writing and women's language specifies some distinguished elements of their language used in literary art and textual theories according to their gender. So the debate is diverted to the area of the language in gynocriticism, In Elaine Showalter, Feminist Criticism in the wilderness, Nelly Furman explains, "It is through the medium of language that we define and categorize areas of difference and similarity, which in turn allow us to comprehend the world around us. Male-centered categorization predominated in American English and subtly shape our understanding and perception of reality; this is why attention is increasingly directed to the inherently oppressive aspect for women of a male-constructed languages system." (333). Chitra Banerjee is a diasphoric female author. Her writings deeply focus on the cultural identity, human relationships and redemption. Her novels present the Indian women and their fundamental values of society. Her writings present the dilemmas in the lives of Indian women and also the difficulties faced by the Indian immigrants in America. Her novels incorporate the themes of transformation of human relationship in modern times, subjects on the identity and place of women in society, the difference in the mindset of the first generation and the second generation. The novel *Oleander Girl* is a mysterious novel. This novel presents the clash between the Old and the New. A young girl, Korobi, is the protagonist in this novel who lost her mother at the time of her birth. This novel depicts the love story in the global world.

Human relationships have always taken a distinct place in the feminist novels. Human beings have social values. Human relationship is about interaction and development of bond between human beings. In literature, creative writers always analyze these human relationships in sociological context. In sociological aspect, the role of a husband and wife is an indispensable component for the family. In today's era, due to the enlightenment, it is the time for women to bring a change in the family system. Literature presents the glimpse of female psyche, the psyche of new woman who rejects to be a second fiddle for her husband. Korobi the female character exist this kind of quality in the novel.

Human relationship is the central point in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Her novels present the psychological change in the life of the new woman. These changes have an effect on the modern family relationships. The novel *Oleander Girl* questions the existence of Family, it questions on the identity of Korobi and also the perception of people about the material relationship. In the twentieth century, the mindset and thoughts about the human relationship have changed. Today in the global world, women are also able to pursue their studies in the foreign land. So, at times, the cross cultural relationship sometimes shatter the human relationships. The example of Anu is a vibrant example of this situation. When Korobi meets Rob Lacey in search of her identity, she is shocked to know that she is a bastard.

Anu had worked very hard to study in Berkely and also received the scholarship, but the freedom she got here could not make her balance the relationship with her father. She wants to marry Rob Lacey but her moral and cultural values forces her to seek permission from her father for this. Later she gets pregnant and loses her life leaving behind her, an illegitimate girl child. If we consider another character, Bimal Prasad Roy, he is the one who always try to control his wife, Sarojini and daughter, Anu. But when the daughter challenges his order, she loses her life. This is how this family is trailed. When Korobi, Anu's daughter, comes to know of her true parents, she is eager to meet her father, Rob Lacey. She also wants to know what exactly happened between her mother and father. Bimal Prasad Roy never wanted to display this fact in front of anyone. But Korobi does not feel scared from the reality. When Sarojini tells her the truth, Korobi immediately goes to her boyfriend or fiancé to tell him the truth about her parents. Though it could spoil her future, because any reputed family would never want to have any relationship with an illegitimate person. Further, Korobi takes the bold decision of searching her father and knowing the whole truth of her life. This decision was not welcomed by anyone whole heartedly. For korobi

it was her right to know the whole truth and for this without any delay, she departed to America. There she faces hard realities of life. In an alien country, where she didn't know anyone she tried to search her father through some help. In this journey, she is exploited and molested by a person who takes advantage of her loneliness. Finally, she achieves her goal but with pains in her heart. Still she keeps herself calm and focuses on the path where she has to walk. She returns to India and tries to keep her relationship with Rajat as has been in the past. She also convinces Rajat's mother to accept their relationship. This is not an easy journey for Korobi. She continuously struggles and comes out as a winner. Relationship never restrict her movement. She takes every responsibility of her life sincerely whether it is of Rajat or of her grandmother. She is very sensitive towards her grandmother. She understand her priority in life. This makes her to have a better position than her mother. Anu thinks emotionally and this emotion is the great cause of her downfall. She neither concentrates on her relationship with Rob Lacey, nor fully supports her father's rules. Her wrong decision becomes the cause of her death. Korobi is a woman of her own deeds.

India is a country that has rich culture, tradition and rituals. In this cultural land, sometimes there is a glimpse of conservative thought. In this novel Bimal Prasad Roy is the symbol of conservative approach who never allows Anu to have a standing of her own and develop her identity in the society. He never thinks of his wife as an equal partner in the house. Considering the Indian culture, its ancient history has always promoted the equality of women with men to run the family. Lord Shiva and Mata Parvati are the perfect example of Indian culture and its heritage. It is up to the perceptions and understanding of human beings how they adopt their Puranas and Vedas. Bimal Prasad Roy never discusses with his wife while taking any decision about his child, Anu. He wants to handle any kind of situation alone. But at last, Bimal Prasad Roy changes his good luck into bad luck. He always forces Anu to follow his decisions. Anu wants to make her own decisions and follow her own destination. Let us consider what Sarojini says about Anu, "But your mother must have been even smarter than we realized- or perhaps a bird of ill luck had flown over her head on the day she mailed the application. She received the scholarship, all expenses paid, to study international relationship at the University of California in Berkeley" (Page 57).

In the above mentioned lines, Sarojini calls Anu a bird of ill luck. Here the novelist uses hidden meanings to elaborate the sufferings of Anu, the heroine of the novel, in America that she fails to recognize. Anu had lots of dreams for America in her eyes. After settling in the university, Anu lives an adventurous life, as is stated. "She

would tell us in her letters about folk dance lessons and plays she had seen in San Francisco” (P. 57). So, here the novelist projects the thoughts of a young girl at an early stage of American dream. Anu had dreamt lot of things which she could not do in India. But all her dreams proved to be an illusion. Anu gets tangled in her dreams. She is misguided and gets diverted from her study and fell in love with an American young man, Rob Lacey. All the transformations take place in her life. Anu comes from India to change her life in a new way. But this new path transformed her life and led to her downfall. When her father came to know about her relationship, he ordered her to come back to Kolkata immediately, otherwise she will not be able to contact her parents. Anu chooses to stay back in her mother land and great misfortune takes place in her life. As it is presented in the novel, “About six months later... Anu had written that she was expecting a baby. The pregnancy was not going well” (P. 59). She got orders from her parents to stay with them. Anu was born in a traditional family of Kolkata where girls have to marry according to the wishes of their parents. But Anu tried to totally change this tradition. She loves a foreigner and wants to marry him. This was something new for the Roy family. Bimal Prasad Roy does not exist in this new culture of society. Anu, who was not interested in her family culture and thought, immediately adopted the new atmosphere of America and tried to get involved in that.

This journey brought destruction in Anu’s life. She again entered into the same previous marginalized society. Anu’s father did not want her to give birth to her baby in America. But this time she was not successful in her aim. Suddenly, an intense fight with her father changed everything in her life. During the fight, she pushed him and fell down herself. This changed the whole situation and she had to immediately admit to the hospital for surgery. Unfortunately, before Anu could see her child, she dies. The journey of Anu came to an end. During the last phase of her, life she struggled for her own identity as a mother and wife. Apart from Anu, Sarojini never want to keep herself in unsaved situation. She has fear of collapsing her identity due to the absence of her husband. The leading character Korobi, also suffers from identity crisis. She is really shocked to know the truth revealed by her father. This was really hard time for Korobi. The journey that she had taken for her father’s search moves to nothingness. Further, her father told her that he begged her mother to marry him and especially during the time of her pregnancy. He confesses that both of them had never planned for this situation. But whatever he asked for, her mother got upset. She reminds him that she had promised her father to marry with his approval only. That

was the biggest reason she returned to India. But all these things totally disturb Korobi including the shameful revelation about her identity.

Talking about Sarojini, she always keeps her mouth shut in front of her husband. She could never gather courage to disclose the secret of Korobi's truth in front of her husband. After her husband's death, she discloses every secret that brings cyclone in Korobi's life. In case of Anu Sarojini was totally passive. After the news of pregnancy Bimal Prasad Roy was hyper he didn't order Anju to return India. Sarojini has keen desire to meet her daughter but her voice remained silent. Once Sarojini shares her experience related to Anu's birth. Sarojini becomes weak after three miscarriages. But Sarojini could never stop the exploitation her body was suffering as is mentioned in the novel, "Your mother came late to your grandfather and me, after three miscarriages. The doctor had warned us not to try again, but your grandfather couldn't bear the thought of the family name dying with him" (P.56). Sarojini symbolizes the old thought and projects the old feminism. She is always in control of her husband. Bimal Prasad knows her wife, her conservative mind never allow her to take any strong step against her husband. For Bimal Prasad this is Sarojini responsibility to always take care of her husband feeling. In this line the Bimal Prasad impose his thought on her wife Sarojini."I will have nothing to do with a wife who does not stand beside me in a crisis,' he said" (P- 59). Sarojini has only a daughter Anu but she could not stand for her to save her future and life. Her fear never made realized her responsibility to him. In Helene Cixous paper, 'Sorties', "In philosophy, woman is always on the side of passivity. Every time the question comes up; when we examine kinship structures; whenever a family model is brought into play; in fact as soon as the ontological question is raised; as soon as you ask yourself what is meant by the question 'what is it?'; as soon as there is a will to say something" (P. 283) . Chitra Banerjee portrays the women characters who suffer from existential issues and passions. Women in her novels are hypersensitive and helpless and the dominated patriarchal world always suppress and isolate their existence. Their lives are set according to the pattern of their families and society. Chitra Banerjee's works delineates the modern Indian woman's liberation from the male eccentric society. Her feminist approach enlightens and promotes the growth of woman. Korobi has advanced from the other characters of the novel. She symbolizes the independent woman not by her birth but by her deeds. The gap between culture and modernity results into very painful experiences. Anu and Korobi, both were innocent in their journey, but Anu could not liberate from the tangles of life whereas Korobi's journey made her mature. The important characters of the novel

portray the family traditions and individual liberty. Chitra Banerjee's novels project the domestic sphere where she naturally presents the Indian women characters.

Generation gap is the most eminent problems in her novel. The disconnection between first generation and second generation cause dramatic changes in the lives of Chitra Banerjee's heroine. The relationship of Bimal Prasad Roy and Sarojini denotes first generation and Korobi and Rajat denotes the second generation relationship. Anu, who is the symbol of first generation, could not stand against her father for her future's sake. She is not able to convince her father for her love towards Rob Lacey whereas, Korobi does think about the society for her journey. Rajat was unable to stop her journey. Love was not the weak point for Korobi. She gave priority to solve her own fickle mindedness before thinking about anyone.

The female characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are not basically rebellious in nature but the circumstances, the conditions, they face disturbs them. These sufferings make them rebellious to overcome all the difficulties of their lives. The struggles make them strong to lead their own life, to identify their individual existence as a woman. Sometimes they have to go against the society, culture and tradition either in America or in India. These struggles make them new women who are self- dependent and have different aspects and perspectives to visualize their life. Her heroines are the representative of new transformation in women's life. They are like rivers that find its path in crevices and holes.

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