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CONSTRUAL OF FEMINISTIC OUTLOOK AND ILLUSTRATION OF CULTURE IN CHITRA BANERJEE'S NOVELS, 'THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS, QUEEN OF DREAMS AND THE MISTRESS OF SPICES'

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Abstract

The current research article scrutinizes the perception of feminism and illustration of culture in the select novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The writer restructures the story of Draupadi and she deliberates the themes like, love, marriage, revenge and death. Banerjee has retold the study of feminism in her writings and according to her feminism is an emotional isolation of women which paves way to the development of a female world. Banerjee portrays the Indian woman's position after marriage and she indicate that woman is not a toy in the hands of a male to be used according to their convenience. The novel, *The Palace of Illusions* is written in the first-person narrative, giving Draupadi's own thoughts and ideas in her own life. Draupadi is a fiery female redefining for us a world of warriors, gods and the ever-manipulating hands of fate. The novel, *Queen of Dreams* exemplifies the struggling of Indian Americans upholding two identities of cultures. She shows the bridge of gap between a daughter born in united states and her immigrant Indian mother. Chitra Banerjee's novels often reveals the lives of women seeking ideals. The diverse experiences of female characters, as well as their use of conscience, highlight the obstacles that women face. In the novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, Banerjee offers a more complex portrayal of diasporic identity. The unique disclosure of characters inner thoughts and feelings improves a significant emotional dimension to this novel. In all her works, Chitra Banerjee establishes women as a warrior and she discussed many problems faced by women in their life. She expects that readers would view the female characters in these novels from the feminist point of view after reading these novels.

Key Words: Feminism, Culture, Identity, Tradition, Customs, Patriarchal system Society

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indo-American author and worked as a professor of English in the university of Houston. She is also an

award-winning writer in Diasporic literature. She has written number of poems, short stories and novels. Her significant novels are, *The Mistress of Spices*

(1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *The Conch Bearer* (2003), *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* (2005), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), *One Amazing Thing* (2010) and *Oleander Girl* (2013). She is an expatriate writer and she always portrays the Indian womanhood and how they are treated by men in the society. Divakaruni's novel mainly addresses the cultural issues and feministic aspects from the point of view of the female characters in her novels. Now a days many modern writers have started to focus on the position of women as a responsible person in a family and mention the social restrictions which are imposed upon them. On the other side, the author highlighted that how they are religiously manipulated by their own family itself. Actually, they try to break all the barriers in the name of customs, tradition and culture.

Banerjee has created a different world of feminine consciousness in the background of cultural displacement and she portrays the issue of national consciousness also. Many Indian Women writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have examined the identity crisis of women and their struggle to get their identity in the society. In the ancient days, woman was not allowed to go outside and not to get education. They were supposed to do all the domestic works and she had to sacrifice herself for her parents, husband and children. Even she had no equal rights with men. As a human being, she too endowed with feelings like, joy, sorrow, passions and ambition.

Here, in the novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, the author reconstructs the story of Draupadi and she discusses the themes like, love, marriage, revenge and death. The author has retold the study of feminism in her writings. According to the author, feminism is an emotional segregation of women which paves way to the development of a female world. Banerjee brings out the different aspect of feminism. Women wishes and desires are never get completed and they are in the state to adjust with the situation. Even many times her inner feelings and thoughts suppressed by herself. It highly reveals the position of an Indian woman. This kind of concept is highlighted through the character,

'Draupadi' in the novel, *The Palace of Illusions*. Banerjee mentions about the quality of virtuous women through the following statement,

Virtuous women were sent directly into their next birth, where if they were lucky, they reincarnated as men. But I thought that it Lokas existed at all good women would surely go to one where men were not allowed so that they could be finally free of male demands (PI, 155)

Chauhan states about women in 'Lengthening Shadows',

The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femineity; they are beginning to affirm their dependence in correct ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting upon still solid economic and social foundations. Simon De Beauvoir (203).

Generally, women are treated like a slave in the society. Banerjee portrays the Indian woman's position after marriage and she mentions that woman is not a toy in the hands of a male to be used according to their convenience. Women are usually sufferers in the male dominated society. From her childhood Draupadi was under the patriarchal system. Even during their disguise also, Draupadi worked as a maid to queen Sudheshna in the palace of King Virat. Queen Sudheshna's brother Keechack, always teases her and she feels irritated about his action. She informs his action to Yudhishthir and she suffered by the behavior of Keechack.

In the earlier times, women are treated as powerful intoxicating drugs in the male dominated world. Woman plays many roles in their life as a friend, wife, daughter, sister is examined in this novel. The novel, *The Palace of Illusions* is written in the first-person narrative, giving Draupadi's own thoughts and ideas in her own life. Draupadi is a fiery female redefining for us a world of warriors, gods

and the ever-manipulating hands of fate. Draupadi is swept into their sides through years of exile and a terrible civil war involving all the important kings of India. In modern times, women are recognized as an equal to men. Especially, Draupadi is very rebellious, furious and modern women with different ideas and innovative thoughts and courage, finally she finds success in her life.

The novel, *Queen of Dreams* illustrates the struggling of Indian Americans maintaining two identities of cultures. She shows the bridge of gap between a daughter born in united states and her immigrant Indian mother. In this novel, Mrs.Gupta is the first Indian immigrant to the United States. Mrs.Gupta tries to retains a substantial amount of her Indian heritage. Actually, she had no wishes to get married. Only she married Mr.Gupta, for the scak of society and it is a belief that she could not survive without a man in this world. In order to allow her dreams to intrude, even she stops herself from enjoying the bodily pleasure with her husband. Her daughter, Rakhi always has a sense of loss and she faces identity crisis. Mrs.Gupta had a believe that concealing their Indian heritage from her daughter Rakhi, can prevent her feelings of alienation and assimilation between two cultures and identities. She says,

I didn't want to be like those mothers, splitting you between here and there, between your life right now and that which can never be. But by not telling you about India as it really were, I made it into something far bigger. It crowded other things out of your mind. It pressed upon your brain like a tumor (QD 89)

After 11th September 2001, terrorist incident, American native people started condemning and abusing the immigrants whose offense was their skin color and also their dressing sense. Sometimes she feels uprooted and alienated and suddenly her appearance seems to be foreign. Mrs.Gupta sustain herself as an Indian on American soil. She used to maintain her identity by being a dream interpreter and she avoids all of the important roles in her life, especially being a wonderful mother and wife. Comparing with Mrs.Gupta, Rakhi could easily adopt

American culture as a second-generation immigrant, but her assimilation into American culture is very challenging and adventure to her. Then Rakhi develops a sense of many and multiple identities by avoiding the notion of unique identity. Shalini Gupta in her work states that, 'she writes on good elements, such as strong family bonds and the courage of those who find themselves in a new world following immigration. In a world, she presents Indians as eating a nutritious diet' (Gupta). Women find a microcosm of their bad position in their homeland's patriarchal society here as well, due to economic inequalities.

Chitra Banerjee's novels often reveals the lives of women seeking ideals. The diverse experiences of female characters, as well as their use of conscience, highlight the obstacles that women face. In the novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, Banerjee offers a more complex portrayal of diasporic identity. The unique revelation of characters inner thoughts and feelings adds an important emotional dimension to this novel. It is an emancipating novel, which talks about women who are actually easy to agree the difficult dimensions that life has forced upon each and every character. The story brings out a wild twist as the people became entangled with one another. Nayan Tara, the protagonist of the novel, was born in the small village and she named as Tilo. She confesses that, 'they named me Nayan Tara, the star of the Eye; my parents' cheeks were heavy with fallen hope at another girl – child, and this one colored like mud' (MS, 42). Bhagyavati is the name which was given to her by the pirates who kidnapped her and then the snakes renamed her Sarpakanya when she determines to visit the island.

Tilo is a matured women who is playing the role of spice mistress. She is to heal the problems of other people but she is not to become emotionally engaged in their pain. Throughout the novel, the immigrant characters like, Haroun, Geeta, Jagjit and Lalita are overcoming their physical, emotional and psychological problems. Tilo's previous existence explicates that how the old one taught her the magic and how she groomed her and ordained her as a mistress of spices. As a mistress of spices at a spice store on the crooked corner where Oakland buses stop, Tilo spend her most of the time in the store

only. The feministic aspect has an impact on the minor characters like, Lalita, Geeta and Hameeda. Lalita is Ahuja's wife and in spite of her good looks and charisma, she struggles a lot from being bound to her village by an arranged marriage to a male dominated person. On looking all these things, Tilo offers turmeric to her, because Turmeric may avoid her loneliness, sorrows.

Next Geeta, the American born daughter of exiled Indians is scolded by her own grandpa for her loose conduct with men. The tale of Geeta and her grandfather illustrates the Indian-American cultural bond. Because of her grandfather she faces many problems and after Tilo offers the Indian spices, she reunited with her family. Next character, Hameeda too suffers in the hands of her husband, but paradoxically begins life fresh and new with the help of his brother. She even attempts to learn English so that, she and her daughter can sustain themselves in America. Immigrant people suffered a lot in their migrated country because of the tradition, dressing and culture. In all her works, Chitra Banerjee demonstrates women as a warrior and she discussed many problems faced by women in their life. She hopes that readers would view the female characters in these novels from the feminist point of view after reading these novels.

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