



THE MELODY OF SISTERHOOD IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S
SISTER OF MY HEART

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ABSTRACT

The bond of sisterhood sings a melodious lullaby to sail in the storm Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a multifarious writer, a poet, novelist and a story teller. Her writings weave around the world of feminism. Divakaruni's creations are directed mainly towards women of all cadres who share a common experience. This paper ponders the eternal bond between the protagonists in *Sister of My Heart*. As a Diasporic writer Chitra Banerjee has caught the ground breaking idea in the bonds between the sisters. The author has beautifully thrown light on the lives of two women, Anju and Sudha .Anju is the daughter of the traditional Bengal household and Sudha is the daughter of the black sheep of that same family. Suda is docile and startlingly beautiful whereas Anju is not. Despite these differences –Sudha and Anju have been Sisters of the heart bonded in ways even their mothers cannot comprehend. They grow into womanhood as if their fates and their hearts are blended. When a storm arises in their lives in the name of marriage they turn to each other once again and hold hands to continue their journey in the midst of the storm.

Key Words Anju , Diaspora, Feminism, Sisterhood, Sudha

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INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the primo voices of the diasporic writers. She has a pinch of autobiography in all her novels. Her novels are frequently rooted in the complexities of the home. Divakaruni feels that the sisterhood relationship is an eternal bond in women's life. She fits in all the qualities that a narratologist should possess. She "looks at individual narratives seeking out the recurrent structures which are found within all narratives" (ref.1) She conveys through her protagonists that it is not only the bond by blood but by heart. Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* is an

expansion and a variation on the short story, *The Ultra Sound* in one of her reputed collection of short stories -*Arranged Marriage*. Divakaruni focuses on the sisterhood relationship in a traditional Bengali household. The story revolves around the lives of two Indian girls Anjali and Basudha as Anju and Sudha. They use their own voice to narrate the story of their lives. In alternate chapters the protagonists take the reader to different phases of their life. Sudha and Anju had different deeds and thoughts. Sudha wants to design clothes and have family of her own, but Anju plans to study literature in college and stock the best in

their book store. Sudha has a way of telling things making them magical and novel but Anju has a keen analytical mind. In the midst of their divergent thoughts they are bonded to each other. Both love the other than themselves. The novel is divided in two parts. *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes* and *The Queen of Swords*. The former part follows two cousins from birth until their wedding day and the latter looms the trials and traumas that both undergo and how they are in the hands of one another to continue their journey of life. In many situations they both come together and understand each other's problems and dilemmas better than their mothers can. In all aspects their sisterhood was entangled since childhood to adulthood.

THE INTIMATE BOND OF SISTERHOOD

Divakaruni has fervidly woven the thread of sisterhood throughout the novel. When Pikshi the girls' aunt tells about Bidhata Purush- one who visits the new born and predicts the future, Sudha instantaneously thinks of Anju before thinking of herself

"I think I know what he writes for Anju. You will be brave and clever, you will fight injustice, you will not give in. You will marry the fine man and travel the world and have many sons. You will be happy". (p.21)

But when thinking about herself, it is the other way round. Anju on the other hand competes her love towards Sudha. She loves Sudha more than her father.

"I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half. The sister of my heart." (p.24)

After knowing the black secret of her father Sudha acts differently she feels shattered. Sudha denies Anju's offer to wear her gifted ear ring. Sudha outbursts. Anju is taken back. She retorts but by all means she needs her Sudha back. Anju breaks out emotionally saying,

"I would love you, I say, no matter who you were. I would love you because you love me. I would love you because no-one else knows us like we know each other." (p.61)

Anju loves Sudha because it was she who called Sudha into the world. They are back to their confined relationship, walking hand in hand thinking

of how to spend their birthday money given by Anju's mother Gowri Ma. The sisters get introduced to the western culture in the form of modern apparels and cosmetics. When Sudha's mother Nalini blames Sudha for her way of life, Anju retorts immediately favouring Sudha. She always takes care of Sudha as a mother takes care of a child in her womb. When Sudha falls in trap with Ashok Ghosh in theatre, Anju pulls her off from her dreams and warns her for her diversion. The girls get caught for skipping school and this event, along with a health scare in the family force the mothers to plan for marriage. Anju rationally poses a volley of questions to Sudha when she reveals the plan to elope with Ashok. Sudha who loved Ashok whole heartedly steps back and refuses him fearing that her decision will damage Anju's future life with Sunil. Bound by honor and duty to the sister of her heart Sudha takes the decision to face the arranged marriage with Ramesh Sanyal. Sudha believes in falling stars and prays for a wish that has dwindled their bond.

"If only Anju and I, like the wives of the heroes in the old tales, could marry the same man, our Arjun, our Krishna, who would love and treasure us both, and keep us both together." (p.131)

Sudha wouldn't take her wish back as she was called by her aunt Pishi

THE NUPTIAL KNOT - UNKNOTS THE BOND OF SISTERHOOD

Sudha's wish starts to reflect in their bond. May be the God has heard her wish partially. The nuptial knot of the sisters unknits their bond and drives a wedge between the two. They were not only born on the same day but also wedded on the same day. Sudha moves with her husband and in-laws who live in another part of India, Anju plans to join with her husband in United States after getting the visa. Marriage has driven Anju and Sudha apart. On the night of their wedding Anju becomes aware of her husband's attraction to Sudha. Even at this situation Anju doesn't blame Sudha. The two young women intertwined together from the birth are separated physically and mentally. A huge barrier is lifted between them in the name of marriage. Their uncommon bond faces its hardest

cost. Sudha recaps Ashok's curse which has seen the light of the day.

"Your curse has come true already, for isn't the hatred in the eyes of my dearest cousin for whom I gave up the worst of betrayals?" (p.176)

Anju leads a happy life but whereas Sudha is not able to cope up with Ramesh.

"I will never love Ramesh-only towards one man can I feel that wrenching whirlwind emotion, soaring to heaven, flung down to hell, both at once. But our little conspiracy makes me feel we can be friends." (p.178)

THE REUNION OF THE BOND

Anju loves her new life and her mother in law she leads a carefree life when compared to Sudha. Sudha leads a responsible life taking care of her in-laws whole heartedly. Anju and Sudha exchange regular letters and phone calls but their old intimacy is missing. The sisters are elated to discover that they are pregnant at the same time after a span of five years of marriage. Though Sudha gets into the good books of her mother in law at first later darkness spreads into her life when they diagnose the child to be a girl. She demands Sudha to abort the baby believing that the first descendant of the Sanyal should be a son. Anju gets to know about Sudha's crucial phase of decision through Gowri Ma. Anju decides to tie their relationship by inviting Sudha to United States. Anju's life in the United States has not entirely turned out as she expected. To bring Sudha to United States she takes a part time job in the library without her husband's knowledge. This action takes her life of the baby at risk. Due to her mental stress her baby is aborted suddenly. She feels like a shag on a rock after the loss of her beloved baby Prem. On the other hand Sudha has none to turn than to her sister Anju. She waits for Anju's phone call in her hometown. Sudha comes to know about the real fact through Sunil. When the tragedy has struck their lives they decide it is the time for them to be reunited. Sudha thinks of a clothes boutique which was planned by Anju to win her bread. Even though Ashok Ghosh returns back to her and proposes to accept her daughter and marry Sudha she denies it half-heartedly. Again she is reminded of her duty towards Anju. She

refuses to tie her life to another man and realising that Anju needs her, she decides to go to United States with her daughter Dayitha. Finally Sudha and her daughter Dayita translocate to United States. She is received by her sister Anju and Sunil at the airport. After many years the sisters are reunited.

"Two women, their arms intertwined like lotus stalks, smiling down at the baby between them. Two women who have travelled the valley of sorrow, and the baby who will save them, who has saved them already. Madonnas with child." (p.347)

CONCLUSION

The sister-knot remains to be the crux of the novel as their bond towards each other shapes the course of their lives. At times circumstances pushed them to tear apart but they are back together when they needed each other's support. Though this exchange of support is common between siblings who live far away as well as those who live next door to each other, we feel happy to see them enjoy the bliss of sisterhood relationship.

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