

CULTURAL CONFLICT IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S THE WORD LOVE

Ms. H. SURYA PRABHA¹ & Dr. K.M. SUMATHI²

^{1&2}Assistant Professors of English

M.V. Muthiah Government Arts College for Women, Dindigul.

Email : suryasri1909@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most popular diasporic writers from India who settled in America. Divakaruni strongly believes that writers have a social responsibility and in her writings she focuses on the life of immigrants. She portrays the characters those are caught between the two worlds, i.e., the country of their birth and life. This paper aims at an analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short story, The Word Love so as to bring out her treatment of the dilemma faced by an immigrant young woman in the U.S.A., between the maternal love of her Indian mother and the infatuation for her American lover. In fact her mother's love towards her has over come her infatuation for the lover at the end. In this short story, the writer has employed the second person narration which is a rarity in the fiction world.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Calcutta on 29th July 1956. She studied at Loreto House, a convent school run by the nuns. In 1976 she earned her Bachelor's degree in English from Presidency College, University of Calcutta. At the age of 19, Divakaruni migrated to the United States. She received her master's degree from Wright state University, Dayton, Ohio and a PhD in English renaissance literature from the University of California at Berkeley, in 1984. Divakaruni's stories are set both in India and America. She gives innate insight in narrating story, plot and lyrical description to give readers a many-layered look at her characters and their respective worlds which are filled with fear, hope and discovery. Most of her works are partially autobiographical and based on the lives of Indian immigrants.

Divakaruni begins the story with the dilemma of a young Indian woman protagonist who tries to tell about her affair with an American to her loving mother in India. She feels afraid of her mother so she rehearses many times in front of the mirror about what and how she should begin the matter with her mother. She always remembers how her mother brought her up in India. This makes her ashamed of her for having committed the sin of physical relationship with a foreigner

before marriage. Indian Culture prescribes this as a sin. On Seeing the protagonist's love and affection towards her mother, her American lover Rex is irritated. Here Chitra clearly portrays the cultural difference and says, "So don't tell her, he said that you're living in sin.' With a foreigner, no less. Someone whose favourite food is sacred cow steak and Budweiser. Who pops a pill now and then when he gets depressed. The shock'll probably do her in "(59). The protagonist feels guilty of having physical relationship with her American lover and struggles to convey it to her mother.

The Culture of Inida is totally different from the Culture of America Being the daughter of a traditional Indian mother, the protagonist painfully thinks about her mother. Her mother met her husband that is her father, only at the time of her wedding. Before marriage the bride and the bridegroom could not meet in the past. Unfortunately her father died in his young age and her mother became widow. To describe the pathetic condition of her mother Divakaruni says:

"You tried to tell him about your mother, how she'd seen her husband's face for the first time at her wedding. How, when he died (you were two years old then), she had taken off her jewellery and put on widow's white and dedicated rest of her life to the business of bringing you up. We Only have each other, she often told you." (58).

The protagonist is closely attached with her mother. Whenever she feels guilty of her sin, She remembers the true love of her mother. Her mother shows all her love on her and she is her only comfort and consolation. Like all the Indian mothers, she takes a lot of care to bring up her fatherless daughter. She is a typical Indian mother and she does not allow the protagonist to go to movies which are frivolous and decadent. Once the protagonist went to watch a film with her friends without the knowledge of her mother. But her Mother sensed it. She did not allow her into her house and make her stand outside for a long time along with her clothes in s suitcase. She said, "Better no daughter than a disobedient one, a shame to the family"(62). This proves how the mother shows care and concern for the future of her daughter.

After long hours the mother allowed the protagonist to come in with a stern warning. Both the mother and daughter embraced and cried. The mother soaked the feet of the daughter in hot water with boric soda; she wiped them gently which had experienced numbness due to her standing outside the home for a long time. It shows the depth of her love and affection for her daughter.

The protagonists can differentiate the love of her mother with the love of her American lover. She is very much attracted towards the physical beauty of her lover especially towards the violet colour of his eyes. She enjoys his company at Grizzly Peak and Bay area. She is moved when narrates his childhood experiences. He shares all his childhood experiences with her particularly how he was shunted between his divorced parents till he was old enough to move out. She accepts

to share the bed with him and they have started living together for the past three months. Her American lovers cannot digest the Closeness of the protagonist with her mother. He feels jealousy on the special bond between the mother and the daughter.

Every week her mother calls her on Saturdays. The protagonist tries her best in convey her affair with an American to her mother. But she is not courageous enough to tell this secret to her mother. As expected, one Saturday, she receives a call from her mother. In the telephonic conversation, the mother informs her that her cousin, Leela's marriage has been fixed and her aunt Arati expects her Presence at the marriage. She also urges her to complete her PhD and return to India soon. Now the protagonist is caught between the maternal love of her mother and the physical attraction of her lover.

Now the protagonist is in a dilemma that is whether to continue her affair with her lover or to return to her mother. She clearly knows that the bond of love between her mother and her self is stronger than her bond of love with her American lover. She remembers her mother's happiness in sitting in the front row at her high school graduation, bathing together at the gates of the holy river Ganges and eating the curried potatoes wrapped in hot puris. She fondly recollects her mother's teaching of how to write and hold the chalk. When she thinks of her loving mother on the bed, she feels the warmth of her lover: "And suddenly his arm feels terribly heavy. You are suffocating beneath its weight, its muscular, hairy maleness"(63) She enjoys the company of her lovers and at the same time considers her acts as a sin.

The protagonist's cousin Leela is going to marry a good Brahmin boy who is an executive in an accounting concern. The mother expects the arrival of her daughter for the marriage but the daughter is reluctant to attend the marriage. This makes her furious and she cannot digest her daughter's negative response to her invitation. After this the mother never calls the daughter. She even has changed the telephone number to avoid talking to her daughter. This disturbs the daughter and she cannot show interest in her studies.

Her lack of concentration in the relationship with her lover creates new avenues for him. He advises her to come out of the state of guilty consciousness. She becomes unhappy when he asks her to cut the relationship of her mother. Now she can realise the shallow love of her lover towards his family especially towards his mother. She says: "What did he know, you thought, about families, about (yes) love. He'd left home the day he turned eighteen. He calls his mother only on Mother's Day and if he remembered, her birthday" (68).

She writes a letter to her mother about her coming back to India. But the letter is returned to her with a note of decline: "Not accepted. Return to sender" (69). Her lover slowly moves away

from her and it is understood from his conduct that he has developed a new affair with a red-haired waitress at the Mexican Restaurant. Her infatuation towards him slowly vanishes. Her partner is completely dissatisfied with her. He is no longer interested in her deep attachment towards her mother and the native culture. At last without waiting for her answer, he leaves her. Now the protagonist realizes the insignificance of the physical love for her lover and the worth of her mother's love and the value of the native culture.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni skillfully portrays the change that takes place in the heart of protagonist by the image of rain:

“And a work comes to you out of the opening sky. The word love. You see that you had never understood it before. It is like rain, and when you lift your face to it like rain it washes away inessentials, learning you hollow, clean, ready to begin”(71). This shows her realization that mother's love is greater than any forms of love. The love for native culture is stronger than any other cultures. The protagonist at last decides to begin a new life and wants to come to India and is ready to marry anyone who is the choice of her mother.

From the analysis of the short Story ‘The word Love’, it is understood that mother's love is always superior to the physical love. Divakaruni highlights the cultural conflict of the protagonist excellently and the greatness of the love of an Indian mother earnestly. Infact, the maternal love of the Indian mother succeeds the physical love of the American lover. Divakaruni's treatment of the issues related to the life of the immigrants such as the cultural conflict has made her an exceptional diasporic writer in the arena of Indian Writing in English.

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