

Survival and Self-Revelation in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing*

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American writer who is popular for her exquisite way of writing novels. She is the author of more than fifteen novels and short stories. Her works have been translated into eighteen languages and two of her novels have been made with films. Her works have been published in various publications including The Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker. The novel *One Amazing Thing* is one of her finest works. This paper analyses the significance of survival and revelation in Chitra's noteworthy work, *One Amazing Thing*. Survival is an act of living, the continuation of life or existence. The paper also analyses the struggles of the characters when they have become the victims of Nature.

Key Words: Circumstances, Victims, Earthquake, Recognize, Trapped, Survival.

The amazing experiences happen in the lives of nine victims form the main theme of the novel. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has written this novel based on experience from a hurricane hit against her house in 2005. In this story, Chitra focuses on the personal experiences of nine characters who are trapped in an earthquake. All these nine characters, share their sufferings and get mental solace when they are caught in the passport office. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni beautifully portrays the realistic experiences of day to day life by picturing the sufferings of these nine characters. Chitra says that nobody can survive without facing problems in their life. The mental agony can differ from person to person but they have to undergo sufferings in their life till they die. It is an unwritten law that everyone has to manage the sufferings and survive among the problems. In this story, all the nine characters share their terrible experiences in the visa office during the earthquake. Almost

they have lost their hope of landing in India when the massive earthquake hits. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni expresses the emotional and painful experiences of the victims in the novel, *One Amazing Thing*.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni treats all the characters equally in this story. All the victims are trapped in the damaged pieces of the visa office. The victims cannot get food, water, medicine or any basic needs. They cannot escape from physical and mental agony. In order to manage and survive among all these sufferings, Uma, one of the nine Indian travelers suggests the rest of others to share their unforgettable experiences in their life. "Everyone has a story, I don't believe anyone can go through life without encountering at least one amazing thing (OAT65)". She says, in that way they can overcome their sufferings and pains and that is a kind of technique which will help them to survive in that pathetic situation. The opinions and ideas of the victims strengthen each other and improve their confidence and they can also realize the reality of life.

The character who first narrates her amazing story in this novel is Jiang, an Indian born Chinese woman. She shares her experience with the other victims. Through she is a successful business woman, she suffers a lot in her personal life. The Chinese people who have settled in India engage themselves in tannery business. They work hard but they do not get any respect and recognition from the native Indians. They are considered as lower people in India and they spend most of their time in their camps only. Jiang has been looking after her father's shoe shop. She has a chance to meet a young man named Mohit Das. She has fallen in love with him. Mohit belongs to a reputed Bengali family and works as a manager in National and Grind Lays Bank. Mohit also loves her but he is a coward and cannot do anything against his conservative family. Jiang's journey of love has been disturbed by the war between India and China. This war makes many changes in the life of the immigrants from India to China. Mohit Das cannot help Jiang because of his cowardness. Thus their love marriage is interrupted by migration. This is a great loss to Jiang yet she survives but cannot forget her love on Mohit. Later she marries a middle aged American and leaves to America. Now her turmoil is worsened by the earthquake.

The character who reveals her unsatisfied survival next to Jiang is Malathi. She belongs to a conservative Brahmin family. Her parents want her to marry as early as possible but she

wants to continue her teaching profession after marriage itself. But her ambition is not fulfilled and she continues her profession as a beautician in a saloon and settles in America. She has a chance to meet a radical woman Mrs. Balan who did a great mistake to her maid, Nirmala. Knowing this, Malathi punishes her and understands that the tort performed on Nirmala is imposed over all female in our society. This incident has become unforgettable to her. Malathi is the mouthpiece of Chitra herself. Divakaruni explores the whole female's attributes through Malathi. Malathi survives among all the turmoils and reveals her mental agony to other victims.

Tariq is the next narrator who reveals his insecure life in America. After the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, the innocent Muslims are also projected as terrorists. Tariq's father has been arrested and his mother has become paralytic. The minority people are threatened and their survival becomes pathetic. The collapse of the Twin Towers and the ill treatment of the Americans irritate the immigrants in America. They experience loneliness, helplessness, extra ordinary physical and mental pains and their survival in the lost land becomes a big question mark. Tariq's family is forced to return to India. He wants to settle his parents and also wants to come back to America. But his lady love Farah compels him to stay with her in India. So, Tariq is in a chaotic mood. Through the character of Tariq, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tries to expose the struggles of the immigrants to survive in the host lands.

Next to Tariq the readers meet Mr. Mangalam who always feels an emptiness in his life. His joy lies in playing flute and he thinks that music can only swipe away his emptiness in life. He says, "I played the melody for a long time, discovering something new (OAT 146)". The next narrator, Mr. Pritchett hails from a south Indian family. His struggles for survival is narrated by the author in a different way. As a young boy he longs for the love and affection of his mother. But unfortunately he cannot get the attachment from his mother because she has an affair with a man called Marvin. In order to avoid loneliness, he brings up a kitten but that also has died due to suffocation. After reaching young age, he falls in love with Naina, the only daughter of a well – settled family. But they do not have mutual understanding. He longs for love and affection from his wife but he does not get it. A woman named Lathika comes across his life and he starts loving her. This leads to a great misunderstanding between his wife and him and his wife tries to commit suicide.

Understanding the unhappy survival in the host land they decide to have a trip to India. But when they reveal their inner feelings and expectations with other victims they have a chance to realize their mistakes. Here the survival and revelation of the characters figures out their mental turmoils.

The next narrator who reveals the sufferings of the survival is Lilly, the granddaughter of Jiang. She is an over protected child of her family. Through she is grown up. She is treated as a child by her parents. Her brother is given more importance so Lilly feels jealous of him. But Mark, her brother finds her brilliance in playing flute and channelize her talents in a new way. Meanwhile her brother's grades decrease in the University. In this narration also Divakaruni exemplifies the domestic turmoils and the survival of human beings among those turmoils. Through Lilly's story Chitra Banerjee exposes that every child needs its freedom, self-identity and individualism.

The next one to narrate the story is Cameron, the veteran African – American soldier. Divakaruni depicts the evils of racism through the character of Cameron. At first he is so sensitive to fight against racism. He was a talented student in his school and wanted to become a doctor. But his lover Imani compelled him to marry her showing her pregnancy. He strongly refuses and advises her to abort the baby. But later he feels sorry for his action and approaches a priest and is advised to adopt a child. In order to meet his adopted child he has made a plan to go to India. But fate stops him to meet his child. From the story of Cameron Chitra tries to say that every human being is caught in the web knitted by fate.

The character who begins the story in the novel is Uma, a university student. She is the one who encourages others to share their unforgettable experience and ends by narrating her own turmoil and struggle to survive in her life. She enjoys her life until her father announces his idea to divorce his wife. But later he changes his opinion and tries to hide this from his wife. This sudden change in life disturbs Uma and she has lost her interest in studies. She decides to return to India after twenty years. In this story, Uma's survival also is not happy. She is the one who changes the dangerous situation into a comfortable one. All the nine characters reveal their unhappy experience that makes their survival also, unhappy.

Self – actualization is a concept regarding the process by which an individual reaches his or her full potential. It was first introduced by Kurt Goldstein, a psychiatrist in the early period of the 20th century. Self – actualization is the final stage in the linear growth of an individual. This theory recommends an individual person’s acceptance of who is he or she and his or her realistic and accurate perception of the work around him or her. In this story the reader meets a gallery of characters who reveal their unforgettable experience of turmoil and their realization. Jiang in this novel is disappointed in her love on Mohit but immediately she realizes the actual situation and finds solution to her problem by marrying another man and leaves to America. Self – actualization individuals are not completely focused on internal gain but they appreciate the benefits of solving problems that affect others so as to improve the external world. The character Malathi in this novel takes revenge on Mrs. Balan who commits a great mistake to her maid Nirmala. Spontaneity is another characteristic feature of Self – actualization theory. In the novel *One Amazing Thing*, Cameron first refuses to marry his ladylove and compels her to abort his baby. But immediately he realizes his mistake and decides to adopt a baby. He spontaneously takes decisions in this novel. Self – actualization theory also includes some psychological experiences such as joy, wonder, awe and ecstasy. These peak experiences are thought to produce invigorating feelings like inspiration, physical and mental vitality and a renewed sense of perspective. Uma inspires everyone of the novel *One Amazing Thing* who feel sorry for being victimized in the earthquake. She only takes steps to console them and motivate them to share their experience so that they feel comfort even in that unwanted and unhappy situation. Thus the theory of Self – actualization can be compared to analyze all the nine characters with this theory’s point of view. *One Amazing Thing* is an open ended novel.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni leaves the end of the novel in the hands of readers. The victims hear the sound of the rescue team at the end of the novel and believe that they will rescue them and their turmoil will come to end. In this novel Chitra Banerjee pictures varieties of characters who reveal their sufferings, dreams, longings in their life. Through these characters and their sufferings the reader is given a message that nobody can escape from the sufferings in his or her life.

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