

Placid Peripheralization in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*

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Abstract

The ideology traced in this article is to examine the Peripheralization in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, which focus on the issue resulting from patriarchal society. The article depicts the intraregional difference of women characters and their rigid boundaries of daily life and crises. The objective of the article is to look at minor characters through the eyes of the protagonist Sita. The paper aims at tracing the identity of the suppressed women who are trapped within their ethical boundaries and struggle to voice out their views in this male-oriented nation. Lastly, this paper explains how women strongly voice out their views in the society. The voices of major and minor characters are revealed in a subtle manner. Through prolonged exposure, the shattered lives of women are disclosed.

Keywords: Divakaruni, *The Forest of Enchantments*, Peripheralization, patriarchal, intraregional, ethical boundaries, struggle.

Introduction

The article traces the idea of peripheralization of women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, retelling of the Tamil classical epic *Ramayana*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an American-Indian poet, novelist, essayist, short story writer and activist born in Kolkata (Calcutta), India. Divakaruni is now the McDavid Professor of creative writing at the University of Houston, creative writing program. She is the former president of Maitri, a helpline for *South Asian Women* dealing with domestic violence. Her debut novel *Arranged Marriage* won three prestigious awards which eventually took her to reach heights. Her works have been included in the Best American short stories, The O'Henry prize stories, and Pushcart prize anthologies. Her writings are so intricate and hold immense beauty where she worked on quality rather than quantity.

After the retelling of great epic *Mahabharata* through her novel *The Palace of Illusion*, she brings out yet another epic *Ramayana* and re-examines through Sita's perspective. *The Forest of Enchantments* is her latest novel published on 7 Jan 2019. It brings out a new dimension in Hindu epic and attempts to question the patriarchal community about women's place in the society. She voices out her view through the eyes of the protagonist, Sita.

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This novel also brings out the struggles of minor characters and outlines the standard on the conduct of women. As a woman writer, Divakaruni consciously places women at the centre and promulgates their challenges and their endurance.

Discussion

We live in a society where women are tagged with the notion of being dependent upon men. Women are always viewed as parasitic in nature, where they are never given a chance to voice out their rights and opinion. The quality of being feminine is constructed by the society (i.e., patriarchal society) and gender roles which are considered to be an inherent quality. It can be considered that in a sociocultural scenario, the term peripheralization paves a new vision on the role of women. The term peripheralization refers to the act of Intra-Regional difference. Apart from Marginalization peripheralization constitutes the importance of minor characters located in an outer boundary. The term Peripheralization refers to the Social relations which have spatial implications. This may include political, social, economical or communicative process. This shows that peripheralization is a multidimensional process.

In this novel *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita questions the boundary line between the good and bad as each individual has their own way of Dharma and Rights. The book told through the voice of Sita as she brings out the darker aspects of womanhood and her sufferings. It not only talks about Sita but also the other minor characters that are given equal importance. Sita voices out for women as it is necessary to protest rather than to accept their fate in their society. Divakaruni begins with Sita's days in Ashram where she writes her Sitayan. When sage visions the story of *Ramayana* and Pours out in words, Sita questions her role in the epic.

'I wrote what the divine vision showed me,' he said.

'It must have been a god that brought it to you, the, and not a goddess,' I said drily. 'For you haven't understood a woman's life, the heartbreak at the core of her joys, her unexpected alliances and desires, her negotiations where, in the hope of keeping one treasure safe, she must give up another.' (FOE 2)

Sita sets to write out her days alone in darkness both in the forest and Ayodhya. Sita, the daughter of Earth and king Janak's adopted daughter was known for her dynamic strength in martial arts and healing power. Her life in Mithila was so deep with nature and peaceful until she met Lord Ram, who won the hands of Sita. Their beautiful years of marriage came to struggle when she was taken by Ravan who imprisoned her for a year until her husband Ram rescues her. Her life was put into dark twist and turns in the name of ethical ways. Ram, who was deeply loved, abducts her to do Agnipariksha. Love for Ram made her accept for the first time. When this was repeated for the second time during Lord Ram's coronation, she stood for herself and for other women to voice out her opinion. Divakaruni reshapes the context by giving an immense

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power to voice out her opinion. Sita's voice protest for her opinions to be heard but it is kept in the internal form. Even her anger is deprived before her husband. "I wanted to ask, what about the women?" (FOE 96).

Sita is not the only woman who is pushed into corners but also Urmila, Kaushalya, Ahalya, Mandodri and even Surpanakha, Kaikeyi, Manthara were also pushed to the bars. More than Sita, her sister Urmila was more excited about her marriage. Even before the marriage, she says, "I want to marry Lakshman. I'm willing to walk through innumerable koshas of thorns for him." (FOE 19). The power of love for her husband is revealed when she tries to take care of Lakshman during her days in the forest with her brother Ram. But to her disappointment, he refuses to take her and says, "Your duty is to obey me." (FOE 116). She was also not allowed to have a private space with Lakshman as his mother Sumitra was more possessive with Lakshman and controlled her. Urmila being the innocent of all the women, plays the tougher role to wait and worry. Even Sita was helpless to comfort her during her hard days. She prays and puts herself into sleep for fourteen years as her sadness is not revealed.

Kaushalya, queen of Ayodhya was obliged to give away her first daughter Shanta for the will of her husband King Dasharath. She accepted all that King brought in the kingdom and to his life. Kaushalya's delight was short-lived even after the birth of Ram. She thought, Ram, the eldest of all will bring her all the happiness she longed for, the love of her husband, the love of being a mother. She loved that the King cherished her son more than the other boys but the king doesn't allow her to be the part of the talk. Being a mother, her heart was always in hunger. Ram was put in private quarters and often taken to court listening to laws and debates. The longings of the mother grew stronger until Sita made sure king Dasharath makes time to look upon Kaushalya. Even Mandodari, queen of Ravan pleads him to emancipate Sita when he forcefully brings her to Lanka. Her voice was not regarded as he was strong in his own way. Sita was brought for the sake of Surpanakha as Ram and Lakshman chop off her nose and ears. Later Ravan decided to keep her for his own purpose. But Mandodari secretly looks after as she believed Sita to be her daughter whom she leaves for the welfare of her husband. When asura priest warns about the death of king Ravan in the hands of her daughter, the child was ordered to be killed. Being a mother she bribes the coffers to leave her far away safe. Women since time memorial, find themselves in the clutches of the man-made system, an oppression culture. Though life beats them down, they took it an opportunity to redefine their self and endure their power of love. Their voices are silenced by various taboos and negative stereotypes.

Surpanakha, Ravan's sister was also found pity when she was mocked by Ram and Lakshman when she offers herself to marry Lord Ram. The brothers sync together like a single soul in two bodies. Sita found the act to be cruel and injustice to be taunted but before she tries to stop, Surpanakha frowns in anger which eventually made the brothers to chop off her nose and

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ears. This leads Ravan to kidnap Sita to Lanka. Sita through her dynamic strength and endurance waits patiently for her husband to rescue. To her disappointment, she has to cross Agniparkisha and she is comelled to sacrifice her dignity for the law of court when there is no fault on her side. Her protest for the second agniparkisha is the time for them to build a queendom of their own rather being peripheralized within the region.

Summation

The chief focus of women writers is about self and womanhood that is viewed through socio-cultural and economic factors where the concentration is mostly on women who are torn between the forces of tradition. Only when push comes to shove, they let go of their old self, let go of the fear of being judged by society, which helps them to break the shackles. Thus, Divakaruni voices the rights and might of women through her characters with little deviation from the original story and giving a red carpet welcome to the women who want to have freedom for their bright future and to come out of the bars.

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