



VICTORY SONG: STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND VICTORY OF WOMEN- A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Victory song is the novel which does not deal with the theme of immigrant experience of South Asian Women like Chitra Divakaruni most of the novels but about the independence struggle of India before 1940s. Even though it deals with the independence struggle, it can be focused as a feminist novel too since Divakaruni gives importance to the suppression of Indian women by means of family and culture. This novel displays the predicament of Indian women.

INTRODUCTION

Victory song is the novel which does not deal with the theme of immigrant experience of South Asian Women like Chitra Divakaruni most of the novels but about the independence struggle of India before 1940s. Even though it deals with the independence struggle, it can be focused as a feminist novel too since Divakaruni gives importance to the suppression of Indian women by means of family and culture. This novel displays the predicament of Indian women. Julia Hoydis in her article ascribes that,

“Traditionally, Indian society is firmly patriarchal-oriented with an establishment segregation of the sexes and the family of crucial importance. Consequently, these issues and suppression of women are current topics in Indian writing and especially in Divakaruni’s fiction.”(A Palace of Her Own, 2)

The title of the novel ‘Victory Song’ is an allusion that the novel furtively supports the freedom of women from all the suppression in the name of culture and tradition.

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1P a g e



Neela, a twelve-year-old girl with the self-determined thinking occupies the entire novel as a protagonist with her mischievous activities. Divakaruni portrays Neela as a true feminist who doesn't want to be a house wife in some small village and want to grow up as an activist. In her author's note Divakaruni says that, "I chose the name 'Neela' because in Bengali, it means 'blue' a colour that symbolizes Infinite possibilities both for Neela herself and for India".

Struggle for Freedom

The novel located in the little village of Shona Gram in Bengal. The first chapter opens with the arrangements of a wedding ceremony of Neela's sister and it totally encounters about the dowry system of Indian tradition. Dowry is like selling a girl by giving so much money in the market. Elaine Showalter in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" expresses that "patriarchal societies do not really sell their sons, but their daughters are all for sale sooner or later" (94). It reveals the truth that how the male dominant society made-up Indian women's mind that they should do only the household works and they are not supposed to do other activities like studying, reading novels, playing and so on. Those activities are only meant for men. Neela's mother says that, "'I can barely read, but I've done just fine, haven't I? Usha can sew and embroider. She knows how to make mango pickles and sweet rasagollas. That's what prospective in-laws look for in girls.'" (6)

"...one of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited role women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but what men have thought women should be." (Showalter, 94)

But Neela doesn't accept all these traditional myths and she has other ideas and wants to achieve something big in her life.

Neela's mother wants the wedding ceremony to be so luxurious like the marriage of Ram Prasad Chowdary's son, who is the Zamindar of the village. She represents every other mother of the Indian family who wants their daughter's wedding to be so grand so the people who come to the wedding would wish them, however it is not only about the wishing but about the status of the family. Neela is really upset about the dowry system as her parents struggles to arrange this marriage. "It's unfair that the girl's parents should have to pay much, Neela thought once again. After all, aren't Usha's in-laws gaining a new and valuable family member, someone to help them at home, for free, for the rest of her life?"(21). Even Neela's father doesn't want to make it as a big affair since the independence struggle is going on.



Before the wedding ceremony Neela happened to be with her elder sister Usha, and Usha discloses her mindset about the marriage that she is so scary about the approach of their husband's family. Neela got disappointed about this usual myth and thinks that why are they restrict to speak with their future life partners even after their engagement.

“And yet—that’s how it always had been in the traditional Indian families like theirs.. And the thought of choosing one’s own husband was of course, out of a question. . . But why can’t a girl choose her own husband? she thought. What’s wrong with that?” (5)

She consoled her sister that surely they would like her since the whole family have chosen her and also she is sweet natured to get along with them easily. Bride's family should give all the things whichever they ask to the groom's family which is a part of the dowry.

Victory of Women

Whenever Neela comes into home with a scraped knee from climbing a tree or with her muddy dress from having given a bath to Budhi, her favorite cow, her mother would advice her to be like her elder sister to sit calmly at home with piece of embroidery and would accuse her husband that only because of him she got spoiled like this. But Neela's father Hari Charan would always support her that Neela has grown up as a smart girl and the pandit says that she reads better than any girl at her age even better than her sister. As a traditional Indian woman Neela's mother wouldn't appreciate her for reading better but would accuse that it would only fill her mind with the strange ideas. "Neela knew that what her mother said was true—that was what people wanted in a daughter-in-law. But weren't other things important, too? (6)". Once when she read some books while taking rest her great-aunt Mangala insisted her that, "Resting does not mean straining your eyes reading all that small print, young lady (12)".

At the time of wedding a group of freedom fighters came and asked the crowd to help them to fight against the British by giving the money. Everyone had given something to help them out and Neela has given her gold chain which is the prime help for the freedom fighters. When her parents asked about that gold jewel she proudly and without fear said that,

“I’m very sorry that I’ve upset you both so much, Baba. I didn’t realize the gold chain was for my dowry—Ma gave it to me, so I thought it was mine. And . . . valuable to the freedom fighters. . . After all they’re risking their lives for our sake, to make us independent. . . But I am willing to accept any punishment you give me.” (34-35)



Neela worn sari for her sister's wedding and while talking about the bridegroom someone admired the beauty of Neela too. Some other person responded that Neela has grown up as a smart girl but it is really difficult to control her, even in her own wedding she would not sit silently. When Neela over heard this conversation she gets angry and thought that why does everyone wants to control girls even after their marriage. Why do they want women to sit quietly and silently, embroidering and making pickles, while men get to make all the important decisions and go to all the exciting places? Why can't girl be a freedom fighter? (30).

After Usha's departure to her husband's home Neela has caught up with the remembrance of her sister and got worried about the new ambiance. She rebelliously thought that, "why does a bride have to go to her husband's home after getting married? . . . Why does she have to make all the changes? (33)". As Elaine Showalter points out that, "...when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture". Neela's father had gone to Calcutta after the marriage ceremony to support freedom fighters by informing Neela but does not inform Neela's mother. Because her father considered her as a smart and bold girl who would support her family even if he is not there. She too promised her father that she would take care of her mother and her family.

As her father asked she helped her mother in everything. She took care of the cows and her favorite cow Budhi. It had been a long time after the departure of her father, so Neela got really worried. But her mother consoled her that he would arrive soon without knowing the seriousness of the situation. In that awful situation she had met a young a boy who was a freedom fighter too. She really got inspired about the sacrifice of that boy at this age. At the beginning she misunderstood him as a thief but he had explained everything about him to Neela. He has got jailed and escaped from there. He got wounded by the encounter with the police and seeks help from Neela to recover. But Neela could not inform about this to her mother since her mother doesn't have much sympathy for the freedom fighters. So she has decided to help him out till the recovery. So she kept him in the cattle without a second thought.

Humanism for Liberty

She cleaned his wound and had given him first aid. Fed him with the healthy food and gave him medicines. Panditji, who is the teacher of Neela helped her to nurse the boy well. Panditji has informed about this to Neela's mother and requested her to keep him safely. Since Panditji requested she accepted and ordered Neela not to spend much time with him as Neela had rebellious ideas in her head. The boy told about his group of freedom fighters. Neela asked everything about the freedom fighters and the greatest leaders like Subhash Chandra



Bose and Gandhiji. Samar said that he doesn't have parents but he has a cousin called Bimala who resides in Calcutta. She was the only girl who cares about Samar. He said about the struggles to become a freedom fighter. She was so curious about hearing the adventurous life of them. She has told him that even her father had gone to participate in the freedom fighting and she was so worried that he haven't return yet. He comforted her with his concerning words that don't worry until something to worry about. When police came in search of Samar, she has acted cleverly and made Samar to escape from them. Samar left a note on Buthi's neck for Neela to read. That was the address of Samar's cousin Bimala.

Neela's mother started worrying about her husband and arranged a prayer ceremony for his welfare. After the prayer she has reached home before her mother. On that time there was minstrel at the gate of her home and she has received him happily to know some news about her father. But even he doesn't know anything about her father. But he just told her that he wouldn't be in danger but he must be jailed. Neela asked him whether he could help her father. He has promised that he would enquire about her father's situation in Cacutta. She even informed about the note that Samar left for her. He said happily that it would be the great help for him to find her father. While leaving baoul taught her a song *Vande Mataram*,

*“You are the strength in our arms, Mother,
We worship you throughout the land!”*

This is the song about the mother India. Every man wants to liberate their motherland from the British. They struggle for the freedom of their motherland, but not for the freedom of their own mother at home. They worship their motherland but not their mother. They say that the motherland is their strength on their arms but they think that a woman know nothing and doesn't allow them to get the proper education. Those rebellious attitudes reflect in the character of Neela.

SUMMING UP

Neela takes the problem in her own hand to solve it. She decides to travel alone to Calcutta to find her father. At the same time her mother brought a marriage proposal for her and the engagement would be the next day. Neela has got fear about the engagement ceremony which really a serious affair. Neela thought, “Engaged girls are kept under strict supervision and expected to behave properly at all times. It would be the end of whatever little freedom I have!”(68). She wishes to have someone to talk about all her problems and when she opens the bundle to see what is inside she had found a minstrel’s outfit—a longish saffron robe and a turban cloth. So Neela wants to take the situation in her own hand. If she tells her mother about this decision she wouldn’t let her get away from her village. On the next morning she had dressed like a minstrel and left the home by leaving a note for her mother.



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