



The Repression And Self-Determination Of The Female Characters In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Victory Song

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Introduction

Victory Song has been called "one of the most startlingly poetic voices writing on the lives of Indian women today" by Amitav Ghosh, a renowned Indian novelist. Calcutta in the 1930s is a pivotal time in the Indian Independence Movement, and the composer of "Victory Song" uses this historical period to great effect. The work bears the author's indelible interest in Mohandas Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose, two great men of their time whose marathan for liberation were similar but whose routes were so distinct. While Bose advocated violence, Gandhi favoured non-violence.

The author here vividly depicts Neela's existence in the 1930s, down to the clothes and food she eats. The author has painted an accurate portrait of modern-day girls and women through her portrayal of this character. Since they lack formal training, society expects them to tend to the home and raise the children. But she hopes to shed some light on Neela's personality in a different light. Neela means "blue" in Bengali, and that colour represents endless potential to her as an individual and to India as a whole, therefore she felt it was fitting to give herself that name.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "repression" as "the act of restraining or preventing an impulse from surfacing to the conscious mind." Definition: When an idea, action, or reaction is suppressed by a stronger force. Self-determination refers to a person's right to make decisions about their own life, including matters of health and happiness, without having to answer to anybody else. When the female protagonist is back home in her hamlet, she faces repression from the men there. After deciding to relocate from the hamlet to the city to safeguard her father, she demonstrates her independence by overcoming obstacles on her way to successfully rescuing him from the hands of the British.

Many writers and thinkers have shared their thoughts on the meaning of the word "repression." American author John Steinbeck put it this way: "And the small screaming fact that resonates through all history: repression serves only to strengthen and knit the oppressed." "Unfortunately, repressed emotions don't die, they quiet," Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist and pioneer of psychoanalysis,

once explained. However, their effects on the individual persist. To "self-determine" is to develop in one's own way. Chitra Banerjee, an Indian-American author, has painted a stark image for women and girls: "Girls have to be toughened so they can live in a world that presses harder on women."

Divakaruni's story focuses on the immigrant experience of South Asian women, even though it is set in Calcutta during the Indian Independence Struggle before the 1940s. When it comes to her female protagonists, Divakaruni focuses on their internal struggles with repression and independence. The protagonist of this work is the primary focus of this paper. She has overcome adversity in her life and emerged victorious thanks to her own strength of will.

Educator, novelist, short story writer, and poet Chitra Divakaruni has spent the better part of three decades in the United States. Even in the midst of mundane reality, her works elicit a sense of the mystical, an emotional wholeness, and a reconciliation of the many concerns that arise in the life of an immigrant.

The novel's title, "Victory Song," emphasises women's independence from a patriarchal culture. Neela, a little girl of twelve, is the main character, and she relies on her own initiative to achieve success. The author gives Neela more opportunities to demonstrate her feminist values in this work.

According to Shashi Deshpande, she would like to call herself a feminist, she says that,

Today, when I call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has. I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate to human beings, but one-half of the human race. I believe that women should not be straitjacketed into roles that warp their personalities, but should have options available to them. I believe that nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females, except for the simple purpose of procreation. I believe that motherhood doesn't bar everything else, but as a bonus, an extra that women are privileged to have' (WFTM, P.83).

The novel has started with the arrangements of a wedding ceremony in Shona Gram, Bengal. The main aim of this ceremony is based on the Dowry system of Indian tradition. It's Neela's older sister Usha's wedding. Neela has thought about her wedding and how a woman has been treated, so she says, 'But why can't a girl choose her husband? She thought. What's wrong with that?' (VS, P.5) . Shashi Deshpande would like to tell about how women should be,

When women can fulfill themselves, when they are not suppressed and don't have to sacrifice themselves, it will obviate the need to play power games within the home, to thrust ambitions on husbands and children, to work out frustrations on them (WFTM, P.84).

Shashi Deshpande would like to continue with the statement that, cage in the self is dangerous and shouldn't sacrifice more. But she wants to tell that they can sacrifice for a helpless, dependent infant. Again she would like to tell us about the family is created by all people's cooperation and compromises. She is stressing the importance of the loud cry of a new-born baby. 'The loud cry of the new-born is a triumphant assertion of being – I Am' (WFTM, P.84).

Even though she is living in a patriarchal society, she feels to change these ideas and she wants to the different and achieves something in her life. Neela's mother feels that her daughter's wedding should be very grand like how the rich people are arranging for their sons and daughters' marriage.

According to her, it's family status. But Neela has worried about how their parents are struggling to arrange this marriage. So Neela expresses, 'It's unfair that the girl's parents should have to pay so much, Neela thought once again. After all, 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' (VS, P.21)

When Neela decides to come in a dirty dress, her mother scolds her and her father is also there. But Haricharan has felt proud of her daughter and said, 'My Neela's a smart girl. Didn't you hear what the pandit said last week when he came over for the girl's lessons? She reads and writes better than any girl her age that he knows better than her sister, even;' (VS, P.6)

Neela has felt happy to hear this from her father. But her mother doesn't like that because she is comparing herself with her sister. Neela knows that what her mother said is true. Some days before, her aunt Mangala has come home, that time Neela is reading books. So she says, 'Resting doesn't mean straining your eyes reading all that small print, young lady' (VS, P.12). After aunt's words, Neela has talked within herself, 'Why does Great-aunt feel that she has the right to tell me what to do, just because she's older? It's not fair!' (VS, P.12).

At the time of the wedding, freedom fighters have come and asked people's help to get freedom by giving money. That time, Neela has given her gold chain, so her parents have scolded her, but she is boldly accepted her mistake and explained it to them.

First, she wants to tell to her father,

I am very sorry that I've upset you both so much, Baba. I didn't realize the gold chain was for only dowry-Ma gave it to me, so I thought it was mine. And I don't think it was wrong of me to give something so valuable to the freedom fighters... After all, they're risking their lives for our sake to make us independent. Didn't you say so yourself? Didn't you tell me you admired them, too? (VS, P.34,35).

During the time of the wedding, Neela wears a sari; some of her friends and relatives appreciate her, but one among them talks ill about her, which makes her furious,

Why does everyone feel they have to control girls – even after they're married? Why are women expected 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 a girl be a freedom fighter? (VS, P.30).

When the time of Usha's departure, Neela worries and she has felt for her sister's survival in her in-law's home. Immediately, the rebellious thought has come to her mind, 'Why does a bride have to go to her husband's home after getting married? Neela thought rebelliously, why does, she have to make all the changes?' (VS, P.33). According to Shashi, Feminism means 'To me, it has meant an acceptance of my womanhood as a positive thing, not as a lack. An understanding that I am different, not inferior... a more meaningful and companionable relationship between men and women' (WFTM, P.84).

After Haricharan has gone to Calcutta to join with freedom fighters, Neela has taken care of her family with full responsibility. When Neela is feeding Budhi, she has thought of her father and is worried. She expresses her anxiety to Budhi,

I am so worried about Baba. It's already been a week since he left and we've heard nothing. Ma thinks I'm silly to worry. She thinks he's been delayed because so many rail lines have been destroyed recently by freedom fighters. She could be right - but I just have a bad feeling about it, and you're the only one I can tell (VS, P.41).

Then she has met Samar in her barn. She helps him to overcome the injury after she has talked with him, he too shared his experience as a freedom fighter. Immediately, without any thought she has informed about her father, 'My father has gone to Calcutta to help with the independence movement, too; Neela found herself saying, although she hadn't planned to. I'm worried because we haven't heard from him in quite a while' (VS, P.50). Samar has consoled her and said, 'But try not to worry until you

know for sure that there's something to worry about' (VS, P.50). She has felt comfortable with his words. Then after his recovery from illness, he has left that place, she has found one paper from Budhi's neck,

'I can't thank you enough, If you ever need help, go to Bimala at 99 Milford Lake, near Park Street. She'll know how to reach me (VS, P.54). She feels happier about that letter from Samar.

Neela's mother has arranged puja for her father should return from Calcutta soon. Before her mother, Neela returns home from the temple, that time Baoul has come to her home, so she has informed and worried about her father. He has consoled her and he promised to help her father to return home. When she thought Baoul's words she feels happy.

Neela felt good about that promise deep in her heart, she felt that there was more to the baoul than most people suspected. She wouldn't be surprised if he did bring her father back. She wouldn't be surprised at all! With a smile on her face, she dozed off (VS, P.66).

Unfortunately, he couldn't help her. But he has given instructions that what she should do. In the meantime, Neela's mother has arranged marriage for her, she worries about her father and her current situation. Neela's thoughts,

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! she wished she had someone to discuss her problems with someone like Samar. But now I'll never see Samar again. And what about Baba, spending his days in misery in some hateful British jail? Who will rescue him! these thoughts made her weep even more (VS, P.69).

Then she has opened the bundle Panditij has given to her. There she has found the outfit of him – a longish saffron robe and a turban cloth. Later she decides to handle this difficult situation of her own. So the next day, she has disguised herself as a minstrel and left her home but has written a letter to her mother. It's a good example of a girl's courage in a difficult situation. When Shashi Deshpande would like to tell that somehow everyone adapting to this changing world and practicing it. She said that she doesn't like to ask anyone about equality instead of that she asks, 'A world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women is a better world for all of us to live in. After all 'no man is an island...' (WFTM, P.85).

The majority of the novel's incidents are ones that many women of the era actually went through. In this book, the female characters' feelings are convincingly represented. When she is looking for her father to bring home, she musters up more bravery to tackle the frightening scenario. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has written a fantastic novel, which offers a fresh perspective on women's history and accomplishments.

Neela, our protagonist, is resourceful enough to figure things out for herself. She left her hometown of Calcutta to pursue revolutionary ideas there. She overcomes her anxiety to help save her dad. Now that she has this epiphany, she is ready to face the difficulties in her life. She's curious in the world outside of her hometown. When she has time, she will travel to Calcutta to find out what's going on and then see Baoul. In her view, women have the same value as men. That's why she has no qualms about picking up the forbidden tune. All the young girls in her village look up to her as an example. Neela's development as a character delves into her ability to take charge of her own life and achieve her objectives.

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