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**International Conference on
Revisioning and Rewriting Her Self: An Exploration
of Women's Writings.**

**Organised by
The Department of English, Loyola College.**

Conveners

Mrs. Pearline Paulraj
Dr. Annam Ragamalika

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Across Liminality to a Grand narrative- the Historic Expedition of Women with Regard to
Chithra Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*

Abstract

Chithra Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* essentially proposes the annihilation of the male-oriented social structure with its customary regulations, which places women on the periphery. The rugged individualism preserved by the protagonist Rakhi and her mother, together with a room of their own, introduces a potential schema, to be tried out by the females of the gender regulated society. Much as they do not take up a conspicuous feminist movement, they employ the strategic essentialism, which could effectuate their cause. Strategic essentialism, coined by Gayathry Chakravathy Spivak, theorises the assertion of the kernel part of collective or individual wishes, dreams, aspirations or ethos, concurrent with an expression of solidarity among the minority groups. The strategy involves essentializing the very being and projecting the group identity, eyeing at the group targets. The tactic is observable in the women characters of the novel, though they are put under a moderate frame. According to French ethnographer, Arnold Van Gennep, every process of transition is characterised by three stages: 1.isolation or separation; 2.marginality or liminality, and; 3.incorporation or reaggregation. Liminality defines the ambivalence or limbo preliminary to

the initiant's progress towards the reinvented social structure. The concepts explained here are perceptible in connection with the constructive battle fought by the women characters in the novel, against the male domination.

Key words: Strategic essentialism, Grand narrative, Essentialize, Patriarchy, Culturalities.

Interestingly, *Queen of Dreams* represents the in-depth and hugely nourishing portrayal of womanhood covering the enormous range of experiences from childhood to womanhood, from birth to death, from richness to poverty, and from marriage to divorce. For sure, it can be called as a novel with dual protagonists, as both Rakhi and mother are winning for the title. The novel brings forth a macrocosm, of intricacies as well as rectitude in the filial affection, of attraction as well as repulsion in man-woman relationship, of limits and the admissibility to be set for the male world; and so on and so forth. The characters in the novel are not reckless, silly persona but individuals who focalize sensitively on the life, its rhythm, and moreover, on the likes and dislikes of one's own self. The novel unbosoms a world of American immigrants from India who confront a sort of perplexity regarding the values to be embedded in their ethical system. Even their connectivity, standpoints, and interventions are affected as to the uneven borders of their ethical system.

Multiple configurations of feminine experiences can be explored in the inner workings and behavioural patterns of the characters. Both Rakhi and mother rework on their past experiences at the conscious and subconscious level, trying to effect changes in their orientation towards relationships and perceptions. Amidst searching for the pith of the female experience, Rakhi assumes roles as a daughter, mother, estranged wife and romantic anticipator of the white-clad visitor in the eucalyptus grove. Always, the lover in her dreams appears in white, signifying the abundance of his essence, rather than his external assemblage. The novel proposes to think of the premonitory experiences women possess ,outgrowing the

submissive female proportions they are assigned, within the different cultural ,political and religious spaces.Rakhi's mother is a 'dream teller', a calling which Rakhi had expected to descend on her fortuitously. Though it was not inherited in Rakhi's case, the skill was seemingly possessed by her daughter.

The phantasmagorical setting of the novel has been profoundly successful in putting across gender equity. The novel opens with Rakhi's mother striking a note on her sporadic dream of a radiant snake, which conceived absolutely much for her. She is rendered as an idiosyncratic figure who is almost preoccupied with her dreams, who bears the core of the Indian culture across the oceans, who cherishes her own signifying system, and who is a lease payer to her husband for sustaining her own private room and following her own dreams. Still, she holds up her essence, maintaining a physical and mental reservation up to some point, while administering her due services as a mother and a wife. She is an upholder of the very fundamental, of the crux; of the substantial structuralities and sensitive culturalities. The clairvoyance must surely be read as an unflinching attempt to keep intact the feminine spirit and the memory of the unique cultural occurrences. Though a far cry from instigating a registered warfare against the age-old schemes and impositions of the patriarchy, It is a through and through, persistent revolt. She has situated herself or the system itself has placed her as an unavoidable part of it; thus, equipping her for a steadfast declaration of her destiny, not let down by the patriarchal norms. As she puts out, "I do love you. I don't sleep with you or your father because my work is to dream. I can't do it if someone is in bed with me."(Divakaruni 7)

Rakhi would wait longingly for the white male who would appear in the bamboo grove. Fascination for this Indian-like felt male would pester her mind from time to time, as she felt like giving herself over to the richness of an idyllic love experience, which was scarce in her marriage. Till the end of the novel, the fusion does not occur, but the craving for this union with a perfect male takes over her mind, to which she reconciles herself as the paragon of potent

womanhood. Rakhi and her mother are hard-core revolutionaries who are on the go, against the oppression of feminine attributes, survival rights and opportunities. Through their strategic move against patriarchy, they make the resistance most fruitful, availing all the chances of life quite up to their own discretion. It was the mother who mobilized Rakhi into her start-up of Chai House and financed a large sum towards that; a telling mark of her quintessential and freestanding will. The togetherness which Rakhi and Belle relished in each other's presence since the time they met backed Rakhi to pull herself together in tough times.

The novel is significant for mapping out a maze of female instincts, inclinations and dreams. Deep down, is an entirety of rarefied expectations, privations, deprivations, grim realities, radical proposals, and prized experiences constricted to the female world. Expressly in the novel is the feminine jouissance, as a decidedly good focus on the celebratory aspect of female romance. The profile of Rakhi and other female characters are partially linked to a random romeo who fits in with the aspirations of a lady of perspective. She dreams grass, hill, and stranger whom she is desperately longing for. Belle's agony over the presumed marriage which would be arranged by her parents, where she would languish as the wife of an Indian farmer, forcibly dressed up in salwar and kameez; portrays a vulnerable Indian situation. Belle's discarding of the chances for such an eventuality, in fact calls into question, the problematic helplessness of women before the menacing of the patriarchy. She took on the mantle as the proprietor of the Chai House, the new café, thus casting aside the possibility of an unwanted marriage. Thus she kept a tight rein on the oppressive and imposing social structures by essentializing the feminine cultural and psychological matrix. The female characters in the play are presenters of an overarching female culture which can accommodate the male folk, simultaneously rejecting the patronizing nature of the patriarchy. It is a kind of oblique, but determined struggle based upon the outright rejection of exertions, male ego, sexist codes and double-standards and the ill-conceived findings of male superiority.

Art is deployed in the novel importantly, to break through the male suzerainty and the conveniently thrust feminine summissiveness. Mother is a dream teller and Rakhi is a painter. Rakhi takes a strong hold on the past knowingly, which serves to intensify her mutinous spirit. The divorce of Rakhi came as a concomitance of the restrictions set forth by the male agenda, and even at the point of divorce, Sonny, the husband cannot sack her out of his mind. He says, "In my heart, you and I will always have a relationship" (Divakaruni 30).

All the women characters in the novel; be it mother or Rakhi or Belle, pin their hopes on their primacy; thus placing their concerns far above that of the male representation. Rakhi's clammy palms and sloppy mouth; the responses symptomatic of the helplessness of a hapless and thinking woman, surge forth in the novel. But all those inadequacies are rightly redeemed by the intervention of her soul mate Belwant Kaur alias Belle. Mother is an unyielding combatant, till the matters objectively measure up to her expectations. With a principled stance, she is tactful to assert her interest and does not let even the husband tamper with it. She does not toe the line according to the precepts of patriarchy. In the novel, it is said "My mother, now: she is a fighter in the family. Once she decides on a goal, she never lets go" (Divakaruni 32). She had in her dreams and imagination, a pretty much liberal world irrespective of all the hide bound considerations. Her dreams are filled with strangers and she is not ready to disclose the secret of dream interpretation to any, unless they prioritize universal good above others.

It is not just a pointless equation of man-woman world that Rakhi's discourse is trying to bring about. They are trying to reason out the male-ordained senseless adaptations, which women are supposed to go through. Mother says, "The best way to love people is not to need them. That's the purest love" (Divakaruni 45). Her mother never denied Rakhi, any of her birth rights nor she cashed in on anything for her sole pleasure. She was also very much insistent in following her dreams. "I don't control my dreams, Balwant" (Divakaruni 48). She had a grounded perception which enshrines her generously above the restrictions of the average

humanity. ‘Do not despair. Reach into the well of yourself and draw up the necessary meaning, for the meanings of all dreams are ultimately inside you, and not in the words I speak’ (Divakaruni 78)

Rakhi’s essentialist ideological construct encompasses her eagerness to acclimatize herself with the Asian cultural context, especially in terms of spicy food, the table manners, Indian mythology and what not. Regardless of Java café became flashy and noticeably quiet in keeping with the sought after anonymity of the customers, Chai House did not depart from its homely treat. Putting on the looks comingling the East and the West is typical of Rakhi and Belle, where they are least bothered of the indoctrinations of any metanarrative. “Perfect, she’d crooned, arranging it around my shoulders. Just the right fusion of east and west”. (Divakaruni 93)

After her mother’s death, Rakhi’s father developed a strange disability of getting blank out occasionally. Rakhi’s inveterate grief at the sufferings of her mother got raked up and she made an indictment against her father, the obvious qualifier of the patriarchy. She had suspected her father with regard to her mother’s death and thus pointed his ailment to guilt. From the ‘Dream Journals’, Rakhi retrieves her mother’s open remarks on the disadvantaged wives. “What I had seen of wifhood made it seem a drudge’s life—all days at the beck and call of in-laws, husband, children. The invisible life of wives, the one carried out in darkness in closed bedrooms, I knew little about. From what the elders let fall from time to time, that was drudgery to.” (Divakaruni 146). Dream journal stuff remained badly obscure for father, since the alterity of women was his overriding dogma. Dream journal induced a changeover of subject positions which was hardly intelligible to the male chauvinist in the father. It is the fair-mindedness of the matriarchy at large, being pronounced in Rakhi and Belle accepting father, a one-time patriarchal conformist, as the past master for all the culinary performances in Chai House, and hence recuperating the project. The gender malaise is famously explained by the

flashback incident of the garment factory supervisor's machination on the mother. But she successfully counteracted it by exposing the dignity of her essence.

In 'From the Dream Journals', mother debunks the effectiveness of marriage for women. According to *Brihat Swapna Saritha*, a funeral ceremony is to be held for the woman who is going to marry. Marriage is worse than death. How suitably callous and passive and detached Rakhi is, when confronting Sonny her ex-husband, is what justifies her as an unarmed revolutionary who subdues her opponents. Rakhi, mother and Belle are trendsetters in the twenty first century Asian-American scenario, of expanding a female sub-culture to the status of a grand narrative. It is not the hue and cry of powerless victims nor the passionate and inconsistent outburst against misogyny, but a ceaseless fight in opposition to the incorrect notions of the male-domineering society. In fact, the fight rewards in achieving a dialectical change in the outlooks, and circumstances and therefore to concede the power and innate worth of women. As mother puts it, "I gathered all the power within me into a dream-seeking wish". (Divakaruni 262)

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