



SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF SREEMOYEEPIU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SITA'S CURSE AND FARAWAY MUSIC

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Cite This Article: Jyoti, "Search for Identity in the Works of SreemoyeePiu with Special Reference to Sita's Curse and Faraway Music", International Journal of Computational Research and Development, Volume 8, Issue 1, Page Number 20-22, 2023.

Abstract:

Indian writing in English today has come to occupy a respectable position and the credit for it goes to a good number of women writers whose work has brought to light various aspects of their lived experience that were left untouched and ignored by their male counterparts. Women writers have laid bare the heart and soul of their women characters, each of whom feels a longing to claim her space, exercise subjectivity and express her sexuality by disallowing her body to be governed by others. The 21st century, therefore, has been about women who are trying hard to attain the subject-position thereby giving literary writers and critics the potential for re-theorizing subjectivity as voice, agency, and empowerment. This research paper is an attempt to the matize the position of women in society and, more importantly, her freedom and individuality. This research paper is an attempt to Search for identity in the works of SreemoyeePiu with special reference to Sita's Curse and Faraway Music.

Key Words: Empowerment, Freedom, Voice, Agency and Self-Identity

Traditionally, in India, men have enjoyed and exercised sexual dominion over the woman's body and the relationship is not based on mutual pleasure and reciprocity but as a one-sided activity in which men's self-centered pleasures are considered more important. Kate Millet in her groundbreaking work *Sexual Politics* (1970) elucidates, "Unequal sexual relations result in patriarchal power structures due to which men are attributed as dominant, assertive, aggressive and women as submissive, docile and sexually modest. The woman within this framework is seen as an object of man's needs and pleasure and is understood as an asexual and non-existent being. In contrast a sexually progressive woman in India is immediately tagged as a slut, home wrecker, of ill-character, ambitious and selfish". (Millet 3)

Since the last two centuries, the development of science and technology has changed the definition of life. Modern education and political consciousness among the women have created new trends due to various activities, social laws and current professional responsibilities for women. The conventional principles of marriage have been alternated with a new set in which matrimony is no longer a societal or a family concern. She feels it entirely a personal affair where a man and a woman seek social, psychological and economic joy having their own liberty.

Modern women are educated, career-oriented affluent who have resistance towards inevitable changes that occurs at regular intervals in every age. They have knowledge about cultural deficiencies to which they are subjected to in this patriarchal society. They revolt against their men in search of substantial identity and boundless freedom. They are caught in a clash between personal ambitions and social obligations. They do not accept to be branded as entity of pleasure. They rebel against their victimization and find a relief defining their own self as per the trends in the society. Their idea of freedom is adopted from the west because the urban woman in India nowadays is equal to the western woman in many ways. They reject to become a shadow behind the curtains under the supervision of men. They want to create a significant identity in the world where everybody should show attention towards them.

SreemoyeePiu Kundu is an acclaimed journalist and columnist on gender and sexuality and now full-time author and motivational speaker and coach. Sreemoyee debuted with *Faraway Music*, her critically lauded, first novel, in 2013, followed by her bestselling feminist erotica, *Sita's Curse*, which explored female desire through the eyes of a Gujarati housewife. She is a Ted sand Josh Talk speaker and is the face of many primetime debates on women and gender and is also the creator, curator and the host of *Salon With Shree* - a live chat show that she hosts on a monthly basis in association with VR Mall, Bengaluru that addresses aims to create communities stemming from conversations that are unhindered and explore taboo social topics. She is the recipient of the NDTV L'Oréal Women of worth award for Excellence in Literature and the United Nations Woman, Young Achiever for Literature.

Faraway Music is partially biographical. It is the tale of celebrated writer, Piya Choudhury who is loved and coddled by her mother and grandparents, but disturbed by the puzzling absence of her father. Piya grows up in Kolkata, an impulsive child who pursues her studies having the same zeal as she maintains her few early crushes, until a savage encounter makes her disgusted. Piya is a girl from kolkata who neglects the opportunity to study at Harvard in order to become a journalist in Mumbai.

The novel begins with men characters like Sumaya Atif, a Pakastani journalist who accompanies her during her journey from New York to India, and to whom Piya narrates her story. Piya has started her journey

from the by-lanes of Kolkata, enjoying the beautiful rains of Mumbai, to the unkind winters of Delhi, and finally to the lush penthouses of New York.

Faraway Music is the story of an international bestselling author, Piya Choudhary. She has gone through the ups and downs of her life, searching for and losing love, family and friends. Piya takes the readers through an enchanting journey of her life while revealing it to a journalist on a flight from New York to Delhi. She shifts to Mumbai having a desire to become a journalist. Piya, creates a sensation as a young journalist at a newspaper when she continues an affair with an ascetic music director who was proposed for Grammy's.

On tasting success here, she moves to a good platform where she meets and associates with her editor. Abir, an important character, is her Editor with whom she falls in love with. But a controversial story obstructed her career. It is a news story on drugs compiled by Piya and her friend and another important character loitering in the book TT, which is objected by the boyfriend editor, Abir after he is influenced by the newspaper owners because it endangers his association with the famous advertisers. She is in confusion in giving priority whether to continue her love affair with the man and her individual talent. She leaves him and the industry and enters PR where she meets an artist and marries him.

After some years, she has gone to New York and settled there. Then, she is married to a wellknown Australian artist, David Cicconi who respects her creativity and her talent and encourages her to realize her 'self' when she writes short stories and then a novel which becomes a success. It is observed that human relations undergo fluctuation. When the relation between Piya and David begin to float, her mother advises to give their house to an NGO which helps Piya return to Kolkata after a long time. It seems that the story seems to be narrated in a realistic manner.

Faraway Music is the story which depicts her life while she is attempting to explore her 'self' amidst many challenges. The women characters in the novel do not want to conceal their original nature. Piya continues her journey undergoing many obstacles in her path in the process of realizing her identity in the ridiculous world. She frankly refuses the existing customs that have shackled her freedom. It is futile exercise for her to seek out a meaning in the outer world because she fail to identify their inner world of emotion. In this journey, she is frustrated with her existing life pattern when she urges to prove her individual talent. At this juncture, she searches for prospects that can make her life significant and meaningful.

Sexuality in India is a male preserve. As women supposedly do not own their bodies, they do not own their desires so, whenever one talks about a married woman the image that comes to mind is of an asexual being. From a very tender age, young girls are taught to guard their body against evil, maintain chastity and virginity before marriage, and so on. They are conditioned into believing that sex before marriage is sinful and even after marriage, the purpose of sex for women is only procreation and to give pleasure to the husband. The same taboo is stated in the novel Sita's Curse:

. . . their bodies... have merely one purpose, that which has been decreed since time immemorial, made all the more stringent since our Vedic ages, propelled by staunch Brahminical customs and timeless traditions. A nari'ssharir exists purely to give pleasure to a man... to hold his seed in her womb... suffer the pain of his penance... the agonizing trauma of childbirth. (Kundu 291)

Sita's Curse is a story of a 39-year- old Gujarati middle class housewife called Meera Patel. And it's all about her physical desires and all the men that make an impression on her. It's different because Meera is completely cued into her physical longings and desires, and she doesn't shy away from expressing them. Her journey is free from any feminist biases. In India, middle-class women are often painted as asexual, but Meera revolts against that. Her husband Mohan suffers from erectile dysfunction, and the book also talks about how he resorts to violence to 'satisfy her', and touches upon the concept of sodomy and pornography. But then she's introduced to a guruji, and she ends up falling in love with him. This is really relatable as it happens in a lot of Indian households.

. The novel explores the limited options available to the wife either to remain within the boundaries of a respectable though soulless marriage or listen to the call of her desires and step out of the codes of a dutiful and faithful wife, leave her husband and take lovers. Meera challenged the patriarchal authority and the codes of dharma of the pativrata by going against the current and acknowledging her body, her feelings and her emotional self. Meera's sensitivity to her body and its needs compel her to seek physical pleasure outside marriage. Such a recognition of the desire and the paradoxes of love and pleasure; the need for both physical as well as emotional gratification take her away from her family. She began to look for love in cyber space, via cyber-sex chats.

Meera found fulfillment in her cyber lover who gave her time as well as space. Meera's lonely and sad life found an anchor in Yosuf whom she met in a cyber-sex chat room. He was Meera's lover, her emotional and physical mate. Only a few hours spent with Yosuf gave Meera a clearer perspective on finding the true meaning of life. She was trapped in the cage of endless expectations but was able to finally aspire to an independent sense of selfhood only when she was free of her terrible bondage as a wife. Her transformation was aided by Yosuf in whom she found an answer to the thirst that no one else could quench. She felt her desires ebbing, as she finally broke free to find liberation.

The novel also takes up the issue of violence within the confines of the home, in a marriage. Violence against women, especially in the form of marital rape, is seen as a gendered form of abuse, a way of terrorizing the woman and keeping her in subjection. The complexed Mohan sees Meera as so damn needy all the time as she grapples with living the lie that marriages are often built on. Mohan's insecurity over sexual rejection by Meera attacks his ego and deflates his sense of superiority, causing him to rape her brutally during her periods. The internal dilemma of Meera is also exposed when she had a choice to leave her marriage and escape with the dance teacher who loves her intensely and admires her. But she still remained tied to her marriage explaining herself that marriages are not just about romance and also about her upbringing where she is taught to worship husband as a God.

Meera can thus be seen as the typical Foucauldian subject, produced by the social structures that frame her life. Accustomed to her own repressive, submissive and meek role in a household dominated by her husband and her mother-in-law, she found in the young Chhotu a friend, a person with a mind cast different by. He fulfilled the need in her to discover herself beyond all the roles that she played. He was the one who taught her to operate the computer and which opened up a whole new world of experiences like never before. He also sought permission from Mohan for her to join spoken English classes. Meera thus began to break out of her cringed living space. She learned English at an institute, made new friends, enjoyed parties and movies with them, something which she always wished for. To relive her dream of dancing, she visited the dance academy in her colony, and freed herself by swaying, moving, dancing, whirling with the dance teacher.

So, we find Meera giving in to her bodily desires and expanding the notion of self and space. For the development of the self-in-the world or selfrealization/self-discovery, it is necessary to break the mould and reinvent ourselves. Meera's re-inventing the self can be construed as an assertion of freedom and an acknowledgment of responsibility. The novel thus narrates the awakening and self-discovery of the sensuous and sexually awakened Meera. Although her climactic moments of self-discovery and self-recognition occur in the space of a single day, her awakening is not a sudden, epiphanic event. The narrative tracks Meera's gradual evolution from a passive and naïve acceptance through the phases of disenchantment, desire for freedom, traumatic loss, followed by contestation and a final recognition of the responsibility for her own self.

Conclusion:

Thus, the embodiment of female sexuality is vital for the putrefaction of male dominance and the deconstruction of institutionalized male power. Every woman should celebrate desire, it is something she should own and not be ashamed of. A woman has every right to pursue her sexual destiny and to seek sexual gratification. Kundu has depicted today's woman an admixture of determination and individuality with feminine qualities who are integrating pleasure, career and marriage in their life. She does not want to undergo meaningless pain which is a barricade while they are defining the life. It is a matter of fact that women can manipulate the strong field of man showering her beautiful charm. In the wake of protecting her self-respect, she challenges male chauvinism prevalent since ages with her astute tactics. Her works represent a terrible beauty that is the foundation of a feminist artistic as well as a feminist politics of subjectivity that enables the readers to envisage a just and humanist prospect for all women.

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