

**NURTURING: A WAY OF LIFE - A STUDY ON CHITRA BANERJEE'S KOROBİ IN 'OLEANDER GIRL' AND NAMITA GOKHALE'S PAVATI IN 'A HIMALAYAN LOVE STORY'**

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*"Life's like a play: It's not the length but the excellence of the acting that matters."*

**- Lucius Annaeus Seneca**

The above words clearly depict what is life and the way of leading it to acquire excellence. Generally, it is said that life is from 'B' to 'D' i.e. from birth to death. In between 'B' and 'D' lies 'C', which refers to 'choices' and represents 'life with full of choices'. Hence it is our duty to choose the correct ones. Man comes to earth not as wise or fool; he is made as one. Choosing things depend on man's capacity. Chanakya Neeti affirms, "Everywhere a man is respected on account of his qualities. No respect accrues to a person of no qualities even if he has loads of money. A little bright moon of the second day of ascendance is worshipped more than the full moon." (155) So, a person is judged by his behaviors for his quality and not by his appearance. Behaviors are the integral part which are cultivated right from birth. A child inherits certain qualities from the parents where as certain are brought up by the parents. The way one is nurtured helps to choose the right things among several. George. A. Moore, the Irish novelist declares, "The difficulty in life is the choice." When nurturing is carried on with tradition and culture, the child has the ability, courage and knowledge to select the exact ways in the upcoming years.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with her hypnotic touch in her novel 'Oleander Girl' articulates Korobi as endearing, infuriating and brave girl, who succeeds in her life overcoming several hurdles. Namita Gokhale, who sees epic in ordinary life records Parvati as young, beautiful and doomed in her haunting novel ' A Himalayan Love Story'. These two novels bring out how nurturing plays predominant role in the lives of girls in choosing their path. A normal innate factor and a better family environment make a child develop smoothly and follow 'the path of righteousness'.

In Oleander Girl, Korobi Roy is strictly but lovingly brought up by her grandparents after the tragic loss of her parents at her birth. She is engaged to be married to a rich handsome young man and seems to follow a tradition-bound life. When her grandfather dies, everything changes. A dark secret is revealed and it sets Korobi on a mission to America, where she triggers new challenges and discovers truths about her parents and herself. Oleander Girl has mystery, romance, family, history, heritage, emotions, business, politics and scandal.

Raising a girl child is a very big responsibility of a family. Bimal Roy and Sarojini, the grandparents of Korobi take special care in nurturing her. Sarojini is 'no good at scolding' Korobi. Bimal always complains that Sarojini 'spoiled the girls'. Though we consider girls as good omen and a sign of entry of Goddess Laxmi, girls are given lower status as compared to boys. Banerjee remarks:

***Sarojini admits he has a point; girls have to be toughened so they can survive a world that presses harder on women, and surely Bimal does a good job of that.***

Bimal strongly believes that imparting knowledge fills in a sense of right and wrong along with strong determination. He never allowed Korobi to fall in the house hold works. He takes her out with him to apprehend the society and she always obliges him for the love he showers. Banerjee feels:

***It seemed that whenever she tried to teach Korobi how to make singaras stuffed with cauliflower or layer the woolen, with camphor balls to save them from moths, Bimal called the girl away to play chess or accompany him to the book fair. In between, armies of tutors invaded the house dining the next years' curriculum into Korobi so she could be the top student in her class. Korobi didn't complain; she adored her grandfather and wanted him to be proud of her.***

In nurturing, building a loving and caring relationship is not always easy. Bimal is cautious in fulfilling the demands of Korobi. He does not pamper the far fetched demands, which is far away from tradition. When Boses, the fiancée's father invites Korobi to spend the late night after the party with his family, Bimal 'scrunched up his face' and "started on how girls of the Roy family don't spend nights away from home"(14). Bimal expects Korobi to be very punctual in her endeavors. Sarojini urges her to temple and proclaims, "you know your grandfather, how he can get if people are late" (15). The love he has for Korobi makes her learn determination, confidence, security, empathy, curious and persistence. She utters:

***I run down the gravel path and catch up with Grandfather. I slip my hand into his as I've done ever since I was old enough to walk. I don't expect a response; he's never been demonstrative. But he surprises me today by squeezing my fingers. The frown on his face dissolves into a smile, and I feel a moment's pride knowing only I am capable of working this magic on him. He looks me up and down and gives a small, approving nod, and that means more to me that the most fulsome of compliments from someone else.***

Korobi is proud of her grandparents that she says to Rajat, her fiancée, "He and Grandmother brought me up so carefully that I never felt I was an orphan." (17). When Rajat approaches her for the first time, she informs, "Grandfather had informed me a long time back that the daughters of the Roy family did not have boy friends." (17,18). Korobi

values her grandfather and always wear saris as he wishes. But Mrs. Boses bought 'an off-the shoulder kurti with slim-fitting pants'. She is afraid to exhibit the dress to Bimal. She states:

***But once home, I lost my nerve and hid it in the almirah behind a stock of cotton saris. From time to time, I imagined - with a mix of horror and pride - what Grandfather's reaction would be when he saw me in it.***

Korobi is brought up with boldness by Bimal. When he fixes the marriage in a short span of time, she confronts him and argues, "How could you do this without checking me!" (23). But she accepts him and believes that he does everything for her welfare. Bimal heeds Korobi like his eyes. He gets irritated when he sees her in the suit, "the fury on his face floored her" (28). He comments her 'a call girl'. Korobi becomes furious and bursts her words in return. She admits, "we'd argued before, but never like this." (29). Sarojini interrupts and pushes her to the party. Hearing Bimal's heart attack, Korobi rushed to the hospital with 'a guilty look'. Before entering the room, she wears the jacket of Rajat over her kurti. When Bimal feels sorry and tries to say something, she melts:

***Oh, no, don't say that. I'm the one who's sorry. I upset you with my clothes. I'll never wear this outfit again. I promise. And I didn't mean what I***

After the death of Bimal, Korobi is frustrated. She becomes brave, smart and adventurous when she goes to America to know about her parents. At last she finds the truth and she is open in conveying the truth to her future family. Though Korobi encounters a number of misunderstandings with Rajat's family, she follows 'the path of righteousness'. He remembers her 'straightforward through and through'. When Korobi says to Rajat, "I'm Korobi, oleander, capable of surviving drought and frost and the loss of love" (274,275), the words of Sri Aurobindo in 'Savitri' flashes:

***The great are strongest when they stand alone,  
A God - given might of being is their force.***

A Himalayan Love Story is the story of two star-crossed lovers, Parvati and Mukul, who grew up in the Nainital hills. Namita Gokhale neatly narrates the fall of Parvati and the way she adopts her life. Orphaned Parvati is adopted by her scholarly uncle and is married to an ailing man whose homosexuality destroys her. She is neither properly nurtured in the right way by her mother nor emotionally taken care by her uncle.

Parvati is brought up as a lonely child like 'The Solitary Reaper' of William Wordsworth. Her mother does not concentrate on her much because she has to fight for their bread and butter. The only income of the family is the rent from the kirtana shop, which is given to them by Parvati's uncle. Parvati's mother tries to boast the family income by knitting sweaters which comes once in a blue moon. They have to eat corn everyday, since a part of the meager income is eaten by Parvati's education. The family background makes her think:

***All I ever felt was a constant festering sense of anger and unease. I felt***

***trapped inside my skin and bone and circumstance, and for this reason I began at a very early age to avoid people.***

A parent's love is the children's destiny. Child abuse has a detrimental impact on a child's self image, giving the feelings of low self esteem. Parvati is not encouraged by her mother instead abused. When she gathers a sack of pine cones for 'building a palace of pine cones', she regrets, "mother replied by way of a resounding slap." (14). Parvati is further dominated by a crazy woman who 'smelt of tobacco' and with 'a ran animal smell'. The mad lady frightened Parvati, "you're young and pretty just now, but remember soon, very soon, you'll become just like me!" (15). The minds of a young child is a 'blank slate'. What gets written on the slate is what it sees, hears, tastes, smells and feels. Parvati mind is filled with terror. She shivers:

***The terror of that afternoon has remained coiled in my heart, and through every action of every hour of my life, I have been aware of it. That was the day I realized I was doomed. I had nothing to gain in life; only to lose. I would become like her. My hair would fall off, and my teeth as well, for her madness had called out to mine.***

Children treat their parents as role models when they sprout. The nurture influence includes education, culture, tradition and environment a child lives in. Another attack awaits Parvati when she returns home. She hears a woman's laughter and spells out, " I heard the unmistakable sound of a woman's laughter. Because I had never before heard my mother laugh, I did not realize at that time it was her." (16). Parvati's world is 'shattered' to see her mother close with the shopkeeper, their tenant. She describes:

***I have never understood why, but I was not all surprised to see my mother in Shrikrishnji's arms. They seemed very happy and intimate together. There was a lot of ricking and giggling and laughter. The shopkeeper extracted a liquor bottle from his coat pocket and glugged a good part of it down. Then, only half - joking, he offered it to mother. To my absolute horror, she took it, and, giggling like a school girl, actually put it to her lips and drank.***

Children become more productive when they share things with their parents and learn constructive lessons. But Parvati and her mother built a bridge in between them. So she sees some 'daayan' inside her mother. When her mother is in her last breath, she has no love and alleges, "I knew that she was going to die and I was deeply shamed by my lack of sorrow. I was worried and watchful, but I had no grieving to offer." (21) She neglects the 'path of right' and longs for the worldly pleasure. She declares, "I knew that my life would change after she died. My uncle's house was a sahib's house with servant and sofas, and I looked forward to the day I would get to life there." (21)

Parents and children of the same gender more easily develop similar preferences and interests. Parvati reaches her adolescence as a young, charming girl. Her uncle believes her and lets her study with the young man Salman. There Parvati reflects her mother. She

suspects 'Salman of permanence' and knows well that he is 'only a shadow' but still she takes the other path:

***Salman did not put up any pretence of teaching me; he pulled into his arms and we tumbled into a long, passionate kiss. My whole body seemed to soar into a new, separate plane of being. The texture of Salman's mouth in mine, the thumping of our two hearts, united for those few minutes into a single simple beat - nothing in my life, no previous joy or pleasure, had prepared me for my first kiss.***

Tradition and culture civilizes man. Cultivated with out culture and tradition by her mother, in the hospital Parvati secretly gets united with Salman. She enjoys, 'As I succumbed to the rhythm of Salman's body with in mine I knew paradise.'" (28). When Salman deserts her, she accepts to marry Lalit, though she has a passion for Mukhul. After marriage, she again longs and spends several nights together with Lalit's brother in the kitchen.

Children are like seedlings. When nurtured in rich soil, they have more strength to deal with whatever comes their way later. Korobi in 'Oleander Girl' is nurtured well, so she sticks in the right way and leads a happy married life with Rajat. Whereas, Parvati in 'A Himalayan Love Story' chooses the different path and spoils her life herself. Her husband dies and she is left alone with no one ready to take care. Positive nurturing builds strong characters while the negative engulfs in victimization. With educations it is the task of one to adhere the words of Gautama Buddha, "No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path." The things that make life and universe possible are love, duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and 'right way of living'. It is a unique rule that born on earth everyone must face problems in the way because things do not go the way we hope. But with our intellect we could choose the right way as rightly brought up.

*Life is full of confusion. Confusion of love, passion and romance  
Confusion of family and friends. Confusion with life itself. What  
Path we take, what turns we make. How we roll our dice.*

- Mathew Underwoods

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