

## **Women Beyond Traditions – A Critical Study in the Novel Oleander Girl by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**

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### **Abstract**

Now a days women can make own choices. They are independent, having their identities. But years before the women were trapped in old traditions and culture. Due to the lack of confidence, education, they were unable to take decisions. Even for their own children or get stuck in the societal norms and live life in pressure. Now also this happens that women get suppressed but now we see a major shift in their behaviour due to the confidence on themselves. One such story is 'Oleander Girl'. The story of a young girl Korobi Roy, the protagonist, a beautiful yet powerful girl heading towards finding her identity and going abroad alone. As after years she gets to know that her father is alive, who was declared dead by her grandfather. Her relation with fiancé Rajat, where he fully supports Korobi emotionally, socially and financially to find her father in USA. The story intermingled with many other women of her life. Her grandmother Mrs. Sarojini Roy, who never dared to go beyond her husband's will. Her mother Anu Roy, the women from where the story starts. Her mother in law Mrs. Jayashree Bose, who is constantly under societal status. Her sister in law Pia Bose, an open minded modern girl. With all the twist and turns featuring the story in India as well as in USA Korobi finally meets her father (basically her true recognition). In the end as she returns back to India she solves everyone's misunderstandings and get all the answers of her identity which she always wanted for herself.

**Key Words:** Lost Voices, Social Status, Breaking of Traditions, Making Choices, Female Independence

## **I.INTRODUCTION**

When it comes to womanhood there was always inequality. Women were always the one who had to do more sacrifices. Initially the tradition and culture were shackles on their feet. Restricted to societal norms of family and household. Her primary duties were to look after house, take care of children. She was never given a chance to take her own decisions. Her resources of opportunity, education, and employment were very limited.

But later movement of feminism took place. Where women were started to get aware of her identity. She became more confident. She started to go out to educate herself and earn. From feeling inferior she wanted equality, her freedom, her dignity. Over the time started not to wait for any permission or life decision. She has become her own rescue. She has started to raise her voice for her opportunity was she is not judge on social expectations.

Now the scenario of the women is very different. Now women excel in all diverse area like being a doctor, educator, business women, armed force and many more. Breaking all the stereotype barriers, making the journey more exciting.

From then to now a lot of things have changed and is still a continuous process. Still the important matter of equality and independence remains the same. But now the scenario is way more liberal than before. The women now a days do enjoy their rights and recognition.

Similar to the condition of the old and the new generation the story of 'Oleander Girl' make its way. The story is set in Kolkata and party in USA. The story is about a young beautiful Bengali girl who is desperate to know about her true identity as she gets to know that her father is still alive. Now her grandparents only told her that, her parents are no more as she was born. Years after her grandfather before dying only apologized. But he could not tell her anything. Later her grandmother reveals the truth to her which was shocking to her.

Here the author tells that how the protagonist by leaving all old traditions behind wanted to know about her dad. She was a new age girl that's why she took this bold step by not settling with her unknown past. She pushed herself to further continue her journey alone. As it was purely her own journey to address her identity. She was engaged to Rajat. She was very fortunate that her fiancé was also very supportive in finding her father. With her determination and confidence, she bravely handles the traditional challenges of gender, caste, class, race and cultural disparities.

### **Women Beyond Traditions- The Oleander Girl**

The story introduces the Korobi Roy who was raised by her grandparents Mr. Bimal Roy and Sarojini Roy. In her ancestral home, she always knew that her parents were dead, which was partially true. She was going to get engaged to Rajat. Rajat's family was from upper class business family. Initially Rajat's mother Mrs. Jayashree Bose was a bit skeptical with the status. As she was deeply into social acceptance. For her social assimilation and position was important. But she sees Rajat is deeply in love with Korobi so she agrees to the union.

That particular night after engagement, the Bose family gave a party. In that party Korobi got to know that her grandfather's health is deteriorating. She rushes to the hospital, where her grandfather's last words for her was that he is apologetic of keeping the secret. But did not disclose the secret.

After the death of her grandfather she was wondering about the truth. Here her grandmother (Mrs. Sarojini Roy) steps in. the grandmother knew about truth. Korobi's grandfather had taken a swear from her grandmother never telling the truth to Korobi. He was very strict also. Korobi's grandmother didn't dare to keep her choices in front of her husband. Dealing with patriarchy her grandmother was always a passive member at home. But after his death she took a bold decision and spilled all the beans to Korobi. That her mother (Anu Roy) was pregnant with Korobi when she came back to India. Anu wanted her father to accept her relationship and the child. During the act of plea to her father Anu fell from the stairs, was rushed to the hospital. Anu gave birth to baby Korobi but could not survive. She also disclosed that her father is still alive. The grandmother only had one photo of her daughter Anu. The other photos were destroyed by her grandfather so that Korobi never ask any question about her parents. In that picture Anu was with girl who was her friend from her university.

As she gets to know about her father being alive. She wanted to find him. She wanted to go near her roots and meet her father. Here with gathering lots of courage, Korobi made a major move of going to USA in search of her father. Rajat facing all odds from his family still helped Korobi emotionally and financially for going to USA. His support touched Korobi's heart, she again felt in love with Rajat and was happy to make him the man of her life.

In USA she lived with a family Mitra and Seema. Mitra was the care taker of the Art gallery owned by Rajat's mother in USA. Rajat gave all the expense to Mitra so that Korobi have a comfortable stay in USA. Mitra was con man. He was looting Mrs. Bose by telling her that the art gallery was loss but actually he was taking all money to himself. He was did not like Korobi, as she was a burden to him. But Korobi sensed something wrong so she bravely informed Rajat about the situation she saw. Due to which Rajat's father plans to fly to USA.

On the other hand Korobi started all efforts to find her father. The main issue for her was she didn't have any photograph of her father. She did not even know his name so finding him without any information was becoming very difficult. She gets help from Mr. Desai and his nephew Vic. The nephew was very helpful that he used to take Korobi everywhere in search of her father. Rajat knew about the nephew as Korobi mentioned his extended help to him.

She started searching for her father through the university her mother studied. After several attempts at the university she still could not find any clue of her father. After making desperate efforts, she was left with no clue. Then Mr. Desai comes with an idea of printing the picture of Korobi's mother and her friend in the newspaper. This turned into a miracle. The lady reacted to the photograph and agreed to speak to Korobi.

As Korobi and her mother's friend speak, she told everything to Korobi that her father was not in their university. Anu and Rob meet at university carnival. Rob Lacey was an African American. In the university fest they became friends. Their budding love bloomed so much that they start living together. She arranges Rob's number for Korobi.

When she got her father's number she called him. Initially Rob did not entertain Korobi. He thought it was a spam call. He was given information that Anu died and his child was also born dead. Hearing this Korobi was very sad that her father did not believe her. But somewhere deep down was happy to know her roots. Finding of her father was successful. She thought of going back to India. Unexpectedly she received a call from Rob that he wanted to meet her in person. Her happiness was beyond words.

The day came when the daughter and father will unite. They both met in private. They both talked about Anu. How they met. How she fell in love. How they lived together. Most shockingly her father told that when they got to know that Anu was expecting he wanted to marry Anu. But Anu refused as she was in a promise with her father Mr. Roy that she will marry only to the boy her father will choose. Anu asked time from Rob, to go back to India convinces her father for marrying Rob. She was sure that her father will understand her and agree to marry Rob as she was pregnant. She asked Rob to wait, once she came back from India after getting permission they will marry. But when Rob received news of Anu's death Rob came to India to find Anu. That's when Mr. Roy gave the death certificate of Anu and daughter. Korobi was very stunned to know her truth that she was an illegitimate child. She asked her father why he agreed to meet her afterwards. To that he replied that he remembered that Anu wanted to keep her daughter's name Korobi which means Oleander flower. This flower is highly beautiful but is a very tough flower no one can mess with it due to its toxic properties. Anu knew that she was not a tough girl,

she couldn't take her stand but her daughter will. With this she gathered all her life time memories of her parents.

In other part Mitra was very annoyed with Korobi that she exposed him in front of Bose Family. Even Mitra's wife Seema elopes to India for her delivery of child. Mitra suspected Korobi to help Seema with the plan. So he wanted to hurt Korobi. Mitra stole Korobi's documents file from Desai's office. Finds out that Korobi was illegitimate child, which he tells to Mrs. Bose.

Simultaneously in India Bose family and Sarojini Roy were going through rough financial conditions. Mrs. Roy was unable to meet ends after Mr. Roy death. She decided to sell her inherited home to a buyer with a promise not to destroy Kali Maa's Mandir. Here Dr.Subhash Chandra Bose came to seek blessing before going to Japan, making the Mandir more special.

Due to Mitra's betrayal Bose family was also unstable with the income source. Disturbed Rajat could not deal with the Hindu Muslim fights at his art ware house proceeding to strike at his ware house.

Mr. Bhattacharyya extended his help to both the families financially due to Korobi's grandmother. As she allowed him to spend time at the famous Mandir. There was an instant connection between them as Mr. Bhattacharya told Maa to Mrs. Roy. Mrs. Roy plead to Mr. Bhattacharya to help Bose Family first as they were much in need of financial help.

Due to all this chaos Bose family doubted Asif Alam, their old driver because he was Muslim. Asif was very dear to Pia, Rajat's sister. Pia 12 year old, bold and open minded girl, even Asif sees Pia as his younger sister. Asif was terminated for the job of the shofar. Asif started to work for Sheikh. One day Asif sees somebody in car was following Rajat and Pia's car. He could sense something was wrong. He saw Sonia, Rajat's ex-girlfriend involved in this. Sonia wanted to marry Rajat, but Rajat refused her proposal. He chased the car and all the 3 cars collided. Leaving Rajat and Asif in wounds. Pia would visit both of them in hospital daily.

One day Pia heard Asif's boss misbehaved with him at the hospital. Pia expressed her opinion that the person is being very rude to his friend, when he can see his condition. She was very loud and clear that she will ask her parents to pay Asif's hospital bill and even to revert him back to job, which they made him leave due to misunderstanding which is eventually resolve.

However knowing Rajat's condition Korobi firstly wanted to tell Rajat that she was illegitimate child, but wanted to tell in person in India. Before going to India Korobi pays deep gratitude to Mr. Desai and his nephew for helping her out. Mr. Desai shares the information that Mitra has stolen her documents and will tell Bose family about the truth. He advised Korobi to inform Rajat over the phone to which she denied. She wants to see Rajat reaction with this she left for India.

Mitra did tell the hidden truth of Korobi to the Bose family. Mrs. Bose became very judgmental. She wanted Rajat to call off the engagement. Even Rajat was very upset as Korobi did not tell him first.

As Korobi landed she went to confess Rajat that she wanted to tell him face to face. Mrs. Bose wanted proof that she thought like that. Rajat also agreed to his mom for getting the proof. Korobi was devastated with Rajat's behaviour. She asked to speak Mr. Desai for the verification. Rajat was apologetic to Korobi after learning the truth, later they both got married. Mitra blackmailed Rajat and Korobi to disclose the truth. Rajat handled very smoothly by mocking him. Rajat was clear that when he doesn't have any problem with Korobi's past no one can harm her. He is there to protect her always.

## **II.CONCLUSION**

This story is more than a tale of secrets or self-discoveries. Here the author narrates the story of women of all generations. Mrs. Sarojini Roy dedicated her whole life in guidance of her husband but when she got free from all the restrictions she breaks all past promises and helped Korobi in all ways, she also sympathized with Bose family in their curtail times. Her true identity came out after she blazed a new trail. Anu Roy made bold choice of live in relationship with an African American Rob but when it came to take major decision of marrying him she returned to her vows she had taken in front of the Goddess. Jayashree Bose who was modern but in social limitation. Seema she clearly knew what she wanted from life, with determination she pursued it. The new age Pia who is outspoken and can speak up leaving all judgement of society behind. Men like Rajat, Rob, Vic, and Asif who are the change of society and respected womanhood. Korobi the main protagonist denied to collide with traditional expectation of continuing to find the truth of her parents, her root. She boldly traveled to abroad to explore her past keeping her marriage waiting. As she uncovered the reality of being illegitimate child, she accepted her fate. She did not doubt her mother Anu's decision of not marrying. The author celebrates womanhood and the progressive change with determination and fortitude, where women have a right to explicate her boldly and beautifully.

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