



Effect of diaspora on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's character's identity in *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*

Poonam

Research scholar

Department of English and Modern European Languages

Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan

9928906778

Poonamdoot22@gmail.com

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Dr. Mandvi Singh

Associate Professor (supervisor)

Banasthali Vidyapith, Tonk

Abstract

In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work, we have women who either live abroad or happen to be visiting India. These women are no doubt conditioned by the Indian upbringing but have risen above the traditional constraints. They think more rationally, but they mentally retain some of the traditional beliefs. Chitra Banerjee focuses on the diasporic Indian women caught between two opposing worlds. In *Sister of my Heart*, Divakaruni, tells the moving story of two cousins, Anju and Sudha who grow up in a traditional Indian household in Calcutta. *The Vine of Desire* is sequel novel of *Sister of My Heart*. *The Vine of Desire* brings them together. In Banerjee's novel women face identity crisis, ethnicity problems and migration. In the novel *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*, the main protagonists face setbacks and struggle hard to survive on new land but the author has cleverly bought Sudha and Anju out of the failure and made them fly independently

Keywords: Self, identities, femininities, immigrants, ethnicity.

Introduction

With a number of well-known novels, short tales, and poetry, Indian immigrant Divakaruni has introduced fresh perspectives to current writing in the United States. She was born to a Bengali Hindu family on July 29, 1956, in Calcutta. She resided in a number of Indian cities. Loreto House, a convent school managed by Irish missionary nuns, and Presidency College in Calcutta are where she received her education. The Presidency College, University of Calcutta, awarded her a bachelor's degree in English. At the age of 19, she relocated to the United States. In 1985, she graduated with a Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley. Her thesis is about Christopher Marlowe. She is presently residing in Sunnyvale, California. She is conscious of cultural differences and uses writing as a tool to investigate them. Chitra Banerjee is a woman-oriented individual, and her involvement in actual women's issues reflects in her fondness for writing about women. Her other area of interest as a writer for the Indian diaspora is settler issues, or the concerns of individuals who immigrate to other countries and make their home there. The majority of her books and short story collections focus on the lives of women who have settled outside of India. She exemplifies exceptional creativity and originality in both subject and style. She dispels the misconception that female writers are primarily interested in describing their own personal experiences with femininity. As Sharma points out in this regard, "It is apparent that image of women in fiction has undergone a change. Women writers have moved away from traditional depictions of permanent self-sacrificing women toward struggling female characters in search of identity (2016)." In contrast to older works, more recent authors have used their female characters to portray the diversity of culture and upbringing as well as the desire to endure and carve out a niche for themselves in a contemporary, competitive, dynamic society. Chitra Banerjee depicts the female experiences of her immigrant characters against a background of problems including racism, terrorism, painting, dreams, and the difficulties of oppression. She approaches the challenging issues of male domination in society, more dynamic male-female relationships, and the intensity of immigration in her works from a prismatic, moving and quickly changing perspective with a profound appreciation for Indian nationality and spiritual life. Both *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* are distinctive works of feminism that aspire to be recognized. Anju and Sudha are described in the book *Sister of My Heart* as being extremely close because they were born as cousins. Since

Anju is only a few hours older than Sudha, Anju always tries to look out for Sudha and puts her happiness first. Despite the differences between the two women, they share a single soul. They never feel the need to rely on anyone else. Because they deliver the news of their father's passing together with their birth, their community views them as a bad omen. Because of that either they are left isolated or they are left in isolation to escape the reality of the outside world which calls them unlucky and orphans. Anju has a soul, and Sudha is beautiful. Both have big expectations for their separate futures. They continue in the hope that nothing will be able to separate them while being unaware of their potential fate. Both of them believe that they can support one another through the challenges of the other's life till their very last breath. Similar to the traditional misconception that a princess develops a sense of security and is dependent on her prince, Sudha is dependent on Anju. Even though Anju is courageous and independent, she still depends on Sudha to make her feel good. The author effectively captures Anju's love and connection for Sudha in these words: Anju's affection and affinity for Sudha are well illustrated by the author in these words: In *The Vine of Desire*, Anju calls Sudha to America, knowing that her husband is engaged to Sudha. She has more faith in their fraternal bonds than her husband: "The day Sudha stepped off an airplane from India in Anju's arms, leaving behind a ruined marriage, her life was changed forever. And not only did Sudha and Anju's life change, but Sunil's life also changed. And of Baby Dayta" Anju's husband, Sunil is closely associated with American free culture. "She is my second half. *Sister of my heart*. I can tell Sudha everything that I feel and there is no need to tell them anything about it. She would look at me without blinking and smile with a small smile, knowing she understood me. Like no one else in the whole world does. Like there will be no one else in the whole world Sudha and I when we are together. How we don't need anyone else our favourite game was acting on fairy tales, Pishi told us, where Sudha was always the princess and I was the prince who saved her". Divakaruni also seeks to shift its cultural place and identity mediated by significant cross-cultural influences.

Review of Literature

Zupancic (2013) studied "Ethics of wisdom and compassion" in novels by Chitra Banerjee. Banerjee draws on her Bengali roots in this article situated at the crossroads of diverse cultures to blend history, myth, and magic with a respect for variety that emphasizes ethics as the cornerstone of human connection. Mookherjee's (2017)

article on the novel *The Vine of Desire* examines the complex narrative strategies used by the author, which afterward develop into a prominent topic of study. Using a variety of voices, this piece enables us to comprehend both the characters' conscious and unconscious mental states. This article examines how well form and content are coordinated. It investigates how the conflicting voices of the different narrators give the characters' inner struggles a voice. Yadav's (2015) article on the novel *The Vine of Desire* spells out the intricacy and challenges of the immigrants in the new country. In this article, the two characters Anju and Sudha are depicted as having two contrasting mindsets, one of which adapts to a foreign culture happily and the other of which becomes dissatisfied with it. The impact of American culture on a person's personality is highlighted in this article. R. Rani Revathi (2019) Identity Politics and Diaspora in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire*, identity politics, and diaspora are examined against the backdrop of intercultural, interracial, multiethnic, and transnational communication and interaction. It is important to critically examine her concerns about identity creation and the identity crises that both her male and female characters experience. The movement, migration, and trip of an individual or community from one place to another are the fundamental causes of communication and interactions. Although the conventional understanding of identity is based on the idea of similarity and oneness in the context of diasporic identification, this idea of similarity has undergone significant stress. It is a well-accepted tenet of modern critical discourse that the changes and transformations occurring in one's social and personal life are significant components of one's identity. Additionally, the conflict and cultural differences create a crucial foundation for a critical review.

Analysis of the texts

Sister of my Heart and *The Vine of Desire* address the problems of diaspora, psychological and physical displacement, and hyphenated identity that immigrants frequently encounter in a foreign nation. The backdrop for the novel's presentation of the character's inner problems is Indian mysticism, imagination, and realism. Chitra Banerjee, who represents the second generation of Indian American authors, selects to study the world of middle-class women. The majority of the tales center on Indian immigrants from the author's native Bengal to the United States, and they are typically narrated by female narrators in the present tense and the first person singular.

The cultural “discourse” of the subject countries causes dislocation, fragmentation, marginalization, and discontinuity for the overseas diaspora and their descendants. Although diasporic works to some extent describe experiences of instability and relocation, the plurality of houses does not close the gap between the originating culture’s concept of “home” and the culture of embracing the “world.” Boundaries have a peculiar habit of continuing in a myriad of contradictory ways. As a result, she turns away from historicism and toward temporality, hybridity that defies categorization within binary or hierarchical structures.

Sister of My Heart, the follow-up to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Vine of Desire*, examines the emotional connection between two cousins, Anju and Sudha, who were born in the same city of Calcutta. Their two lives’ destructive desire vines are what binds them together.

As they pursue freedom, Sudha and Anju must personally deal with their internal suffering and the demands of frantic, impersonal urban life in America. They are plagued by guilt and vehement jealousy. *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes* is the first book in the novel *Sister of*

My Heart, which is divided into two parts. In this book, the protagonists try to conform to the traditional feminine roles imposed by a male-dominated society. It is a representation of the classic fairy tale in which the princess waits in the palace of the snakes for the prince to save her. *The Queen of Swords* is the name of the second novel.

Women of various races and religious faiths who share a similar feminine experience are the target audience for Divakaruni’s book. Her heroines should all stay within the restrictions of their respective cultures and religions. She claims:

“My characters struggle with the balance between family responsibilities and Individual happiness which is in a way, at the center of the conflict Between our Hindu culture, which always shows the mother as the giver, nurture, and sacrificing herself for the good of the family and The western concept of self-happiness. (The Sunday Statesman) (The Sunday Statesman. Interview.2 Feb.2003.Web.25.2018).”

Women who either reside outside of India or are traveling there are torn between the two competing worlds. They have more logical thinking, yet some of the old mental habits are still present. Diasporic spaces allow for

representations of people who belong to two or more different cultures, languages, and ethnic groups. They also offer a way to rethink post-colonialism as the obfuscation of national enclave boundaries. The concept of migrants, however, does not address gender disparities. It depicts the problem of sexual harassment and the relationships that immigrant women have with their husbands and other males in their new environment. Sexuality, according to Divakaruni, has never been a problem for her. They've developed the ability to either resist or adapt. In both India and the United States, Sudha's husband sexually attacked her when she was staying in their residence. Divakaruni creates a strong contrast between the selflessness demanded of women in India and the somewhat unusual freedoms granted in their adopted country through Anju and Sudha. When characters decide to shed the burden of their culture and forge a new identity, painful emotions follow. It is also obvious that a woman can break out from the cocoon of hardship and sacrifice with education and financial freedom. They have absorbed some aspects of American culture. Although they make an effort to fit in, they are emotionally tied to the traditions of their biological home. They adopt American culture on the outside, but within they don't change. Despite being displaced, they defend their cultures. Both Sudha and Anju respond to circumstances in their own unique ways and still leave their impact on the world. They become frozen, fail, but then they become melted, ascend, and become accepted and assimilated. Anju and Sudha are educated, self-sufficient women who are looking for their identity. The marriage might have only brought these cousins' lives to a tragic end. In the midst of happiness and sorrow, they are attempting to discover their own "selves." She was forced to give up her romantic preferences and move toward an arranged marriage, which kept the soul sisters apart, to conform to Indian living conventions. In a sense, Sudha separates all of her previous identities when she travels to America. She receives wings of freedom from America, "erasing old identities." She gradually embraces American freedom, something she was unable to accomplish in India. The essence of the diaspora is the yearning for one's native land. The effect of international immigration is the multicultural societies of today. Intractable problems and anxieties faced by immigrants are depicted in migrant literature. The resultant spatial displacement across geographic boundaries includes de- and re-regionalization. Experiences One represents "exile," while the other, "home."

Attached memories of home, family, and surroundings are apparent to them, whether they are conscious of them or not. Deportation, housing, and homelessness, among other things the discussion is a key component of ex-pat writing. Exile in fantasy novels depicts anguish and suffering that is made worse by experience. A sensation of unease, a longing for the immigrant, home, and homeland, nostalgia, and a struggle for memory and identity serve as examples of the trauma. It causes emotional turbulence and sorrow brought on by dislocation. Notable is the magnetism and influence of different cultures on immigrants, which causes them to be in flux. Characters express reluctance to embrace changes, moral quandaries, and confusing emotions. Women are successful in forging their identities while maintaining their cultural roots. It is necessary to consider the Subaltern's experience to understand how their identity is developing. It is fundamentally connected to their sense of community. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a modern author, is one of the Indian women writers who bravely campaigned for women's rights and made their mark in a culture dominated by conservative, reclusive, and aristocratic people. Sudha understands that the elderly man is not content since he feels dislocated in a different country. "To him, everything in this bed and home is foreign" (278) (vod). He understands he can find serenity in his native country. The elderly might also have identity crises. The old man's life transforms the instant he experiences insecurity, and as a result, he develops a new hope—hopes to be the very essence of existence. The old man's newfound optimism about returning to India and leading the beautiful life he longs for is present in this situation. She responds, "Going back with you would be a way to start again in a culture I understand the way I'll never understand America," when the elderly man asks her why she wants to go back to India and take care of him. I'm in a new region of India, unknown to anyone. Without the weight of the past, there would be no whispering that "we knew she'd fail, or that it was only fitting." (320-321 vod) Sudha writes to Anju: "I'm writing to you one last time to let you know that I'm heading to India," Sudha writes. Mr. Sen, the elderly guy for whom I was caring for her, will be looked after by me. He resides in Jalpaiguri, in Bengal's northern region. There, I believe we'll be content—or at the very least, calm, which is possibly better. He has offered to give me a sizable income and is quite fond of Dayita. (347 vod). Additionally, Sudha writes to Pishi: I'm returning to India, but not to Calcutta. Without the murmurs and memories, I must restart. And I'll be able to achieve it because of the work I have caring for elderly Mr. Sen, who is recovering

from a stroke. Do you believe that returning is a mistake on my part? But consider this: I'll have my bank account for the first time in my life. It finally makes me feel like a grown-up! (349-350 vod) Sudha decided to go back to India. Thus, it is clear that Sudha is adamant about her choice and provides support for it. Women's works frequently address the struggle for identity and freedom. It educates women about the numerous issues they confront while researching those issues. In many spheres, women are fighting for social liberation and civil rights.

"They filled me with dissatisfaction with my own life, and longing for places. I believed that, if I could only get out of Calcutta to one of those exotic countries I read about, it would transform me. But transformation isn't easy?" (14 vod)

Divakaruni has mingled the famous parts of America as well as the Indian popularities like Kanchipuram silk, All India Radio, Akasbani Kalilata, and Tanjore paintings where Anju proudly exhibits "there's nothing like our Indian fabrics" (114 vod)

She is exposed to cultural shifts, which Sudha helped her embrace, during Mr. Chopra's party, where she dabs wine. However, when one of the friends starts "fucking Indian showing off" and spits on the side, it causes situations that destroy the party. Sunil, Anju's husband, quickly turns the attendants behind his back after hearing this. He says, "The next time you want to talk about Indians, remember this" (138 vod), demonstrating his admiration and loyalty to his country despite living in the United States.

In the book *Sister of My Heart*, the main character Sudha musters up her confidence, assimilates, and ultimately decides to move to America, a country that at the very least would provide her the chance to be independent and anonymous because no one will inquire about her history or her Dayita. Due to her conventional upbringing, Sudha unintentionally or intentionally models the perfect woman. She has a favorable outlook on America, saying, "America may have its issues, but at least I'd have the benefit of anonymity." "Neither the fact that I was a daughter of the Chatterjee's or that I was divorced would matter to anyone in America. I could create a life, support myself, and provide Dayita with all she requires. The best part was that nobody would judge her

because, like me, many mothers in America had decided that living alone was preferable to living with the wrong man (294 vod).

Hall (1990) states that diasporic identities “are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference”. (p. 236)

Janelle L. Wilson (2014) states, “Nostalgia means ‘homesickness’” (p. 21). They have trouble following the culture, customs, and traditions in a new land. Moreover, they cannot follow their language, culture, and rituals, either. As a result, they “desire for home” (Leela, 2012, p.30). As a result, they suffer from ‘nostalgia’ of nears and dears in the homeland as an “emotional attachment to place” (Dora, 2006, p.211). They become a diaspora and have a diasporic experience. There is a link between “diaspora” and “nostalgia.” But our hearts will always remain unbreakable no matter how far apart we are from one another (196somh). Anju serves as a constant reminder of her time in India, where people shared both joyous and tragic life moments. She worries about her mother’s health, Pishi’s life, Aunt Nalini’s, and her family in India constantly. She also considers her invisible father.

The story of Divakaruni examines how women seek their identity apart from their customary duties as mothers, wives, or daughters. Even if this feminine liberation is attained without suffering from trauma or pain, Anju and Sudha show how it might be attained. Anju and Sudha muster the courage to not only deal with the circumstances but also to recognize their true wants and goals. While Sudha discovers what it’s like to build her path for the first time, Anju finds comfort in her Berkeley classmates. The idea of Anju and Sudha being independent and financially independent makes them happy.

Conclusion

The two sisters who are the book’s protagonists endure complicated lives as members of the diaspora in the United States. The foundation of their amazing love and friendship for Sudha is shaken by American society, which offers both chances and hardships. Every time she tries to move and reengage with life’s peculiarities, she frequently dislocates her joints, and the pain intensifies. As they make their way to liberation, Sudha and

Anju struggle with both their suffering and the pressure from the outside world. Divakaruni contends that women can make

their individuality known. Divakaruni exhorts women to bravely pursue their goals. Heroines take a position for themselves and learn to assert their social status. They are caught between happiness and heartache.

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