International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Humanities
Vol.11, No.1, 2024, pp.45-49.

ISSN 2454-2245

International Academic Journal of Humanities

www.iaiest.com

Gender Identity and Cultural Conflict in Chitra Banerjee's Select Novels

G. Navarasi [a]

[a] *Post Graduate Student, Department of English, Dr. MGR Educational and Research Institute, University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.*

Abstract

Indian-born author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has a postcolonial diasporic identity. It has been noted that she is an Asian American writer of exceptional talent. She employs a variety of storytelling techniques while writing with a deep human insight. Her personas are portrayed with such realism that they leave the reader with a lasting impression. This paper looks at how a well-known male characters who show gender role reversal are portrayed in a few of Divakaruni's novels. The pieces under consideration for the analysis are Sister of My Heart and The Vine of Desire. Identity cannot be separated from religious, public, ethnic, and social setting of the reality. The unpredictability of author's circumstances and assorted nature function in various places of the world. This causes the case of comprehensiveness of gender to an excess. Both the gender has wrestled with the subject of character, yet women's quest for acknowledgment as a distinct has been confounded, as she begins to understand her capacities and failures. Divakaruni's works are set in a setting that alternates between India and America, and her fearless female characters come from all walks of life. Indian women in Divakaruni, who were torn between the two nations, struggle to define who they are and are entrapped by societal shifts. The novels Sister of My Heart and The Vine of Desire both address identity crises.

Keywords: Ethnic, Comprehensiveness, Diasporic, Gender, Identity, Storytelling, Postcolonial.

DOI:10.9756/IAJH/V11I1/IAJH1107
Received: 24 April 2024/Revised: 09 May 2024/Accepted: 18 May 2024/Published: 23 May 2024

Introduction

It is an interesting undertaking to investigate feminine consciousness in literature. This feminine consciousness is compelled to reject and critically examine every belief it has been taught, experienced, or acquired as the cosmos abruptly reveals its meaninglessness. It then starts to question the purpose of its entire life. The idea of women identity serves as an example of how women's experience is transformed into her consciousness, usually in response to gender stereotypes held by men. It is a writing style and process. Women engage in the process of conflicting forces of modernism and convention debated between sentimental aspirations and the realities of life; personal gratification of wishes and dedication to family. This is because the feminine ego seeks to identify itself with the experience of creating art. Because of the Indian ladies.

The women are forced to choose between their whims and parental authority despite having received an education and being well aware of their future. Thus, a significant number of female writers have given women's issues related to change priority. The 20th century brought western education and ideals, which broadened the Indian woman's perspective beyond her family. The educated Indian woman is aware of the unfair and unjust social standards and laws that control her life as a woman because of the larger picture of existence. She questioning her socially assigned submissive status and feels stuck in her household duty. She hates going back to her old circumstances after being awakened to her potential.

This postmodern reworking of Mahabharata offers an obtrusive exposé to several female characters whose identity went veiled behind the hyper masculine characters. In the epilogue, Divakaruni clearly mentions:

I was left unsatisfied

by the portrayals of the women...they remain shadowy figures,

their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the

lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If I ever wrote a book ...I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men 's exploits." (Banerjee Divakaruni xiv-xv)

Originating from feminist movements, feminist theory looks at women's societal roles and lived experiences to try to explain the basis of gender inequality. Feminist theorists have developed theories in a variety of academic disciplines to address gender-related issues. Numerous feminist movements and ideologies representing a spectrum of political viewpoints and goals have evolved over time. Labor-based proletarian women's movements have been associated with first-wave liberal feminism since the 19th century. This movement sought to establish political and legal equality through liberal democratic reforms and eventually transformed into Marxist and socialist feminism, which was based on the theory of class conflict. Since the 1960s, both of these traditions have opposed the radical wings of second-wave feminism, which call for a major reconstruction of society to end patriarchy. Liberal, socialist, and radical feminism are commonly referred to as the "Big Three" schools of feminist thought. During the late 20th century, feminism has taken on a number of modern forms. Critics have pointed out that some feminism, such white feminism and gender-critical feminism, exclusively take into account the perspectives of heterosexual, white, middle-class, college-educated, heterosexual, or cisgender persons. Two examples of the culturally or ethnically specific feminism that has arisen as a result of these issues are black feminism and intersectional feminism. Radical feminists have come under fire for their assertions that feminism usually promotes misandry and increases women's status.

Gender Identity

The ultimate goal of self-actualization requires identity, which is the understanding and knowing of one's own self. Identity is linked to individualism, self-esteem, and self-regard, or one's mental representation of oneself. As a result, Weinreich defines an individual's identity as,

> The concept of "the totality of one's self-construal" refers to how one perceives themselves in the present as expressing the continuity between how they perceive themselves as they were in the past and how they perceive themselves as they aspire to be in the future. This definition allows for the definition of specific identity components, such as one's ethnic identity is defined as that portion of the totality of one's self-construal composed of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's present-day self-construal and one's future.

The identity crises and quest of women is the primary subject of exquisite Indo-American writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Because she is aware of her status as an expat, she frequently depicts feelings of alienation and rootlessness in her works, which are mostly pertinent to the Indian Diaspora. Her books offer a compelling portrayal of women formed by cultural fusion, which is a reflection of the author's own experiences and social standing. In the literature of the diaspora, these women exhibit an unstoppable self-awareness in relation to western ideals of uniqueness and independence, where they are frequently faced with the choice of accepting the new cultural disarticulation or giving up in despair.

When we talk about Banerjee's heroines, we find that they suffer in the "in-between" realm of dual individuality as a result of cultural clashes that lead to disillusioned identities. Upon transitioning from the stereotypical "Sita" image to a vaguely multicultural independence, these women experience an imbalanced personality crisis. Divakaruni depicts women in *The Vine of Desire* as faced with the multicultural aspects of gender politics and that they acquire their individuality after they separate from their male counterpart. Written in the form of epistolary novels, *The Vine of Desire* is a remarkable book with remarkable depth and sensitivity that is sometimes read as a follow-up to *Sister of My Heart*. Soul companions Sudha and Anju were brought up in a traditional home ruled by conservative ladies. Anju's free-spirited ideals center on the autonomous women she discovers in Virginia Woolf's writings, whereas Sudha is the stereotypical meek Bengali girl. Anju is attempting to get over the pain of her most recent miscarriage, while Sudha is going through a horrific divorce from Ramesh in India. Dayita, Sudha's daughter, and she chooses to travel to the US after seeing Anju needs her and refusing to give her life to another man. The sisters restore their connection, and their abiding love for one another gives them both the support they require. Anju becomes better mentally in Sudha's care while Dayita is around, and as Sudha takes care of the housework, the narrative of Anju's husband Anil's complicated background is revealed.

The sisters restore their connection, and their abiding love for one another gives them both the support they require. While Sudha takes care of the domestic chores, Anju recuperates from her mental state in Dayita's company. The story also reveals Anil, Anju's husband, and their long-standing love for each other. According to Sudha, America transforms into a liberal land of opportunity. "*Live for yourself" ... "I'm not sure what it means. I'm not sure I know how to do it and still be a good person. And I want to, you know. I still want to be a good person, even if I've failed at being a good wife…Yet I know I can't go back to the old way, living for others.*" Anju separates from her husband in an attempt to deny the reality that he is in love with Sudha. She finishes her schooling and, in the end, parches herself to metaphorically obtain freedom. By working as a nursemaid for an elderly man, Sudha forges her identity and secures a living, enabling her to return to India.

Cultural Conflict

Rudyard Kipling expresses it best about the cross-cultural meeting in *The Ballad of East and West,*: "East is east and West is west, and never twain shall meet." "Arranged Marriage" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores a variety of topics, including identity crisis, suffering, dilemma, cross-cultural psychology, claustrophobic psychology, and cultural contact. a range of immigrant experiences, including physical and psychological abuse, alienation, dislocation, love, and affairs. In her works, Divakaruni depicts the difficulties arising from cultural differences, generational disparities, and the metamorphosis of immigrant women's identities amid displacement. Her books demonstrate that Indians have made significant attempts to honor their customs in the America. She is cognizant of acculturation and dynamic. Assimilation theories have the ability to shed light on the complex and flexible relationships that occur between immigrants and the prevailing culture.

The South Asian Diaspora believes that Divakaruni's approach to cultural identification is responsible since it integrates Indian ancestry with the American experience. Her books illustrate the possibility of developing a bicultural identity. She makes an effort to combine the western mentality with the values of the east. She concentrates on characters who manage to live in both environments, especially the struggles faced by Indian women immigrants in America. Even though Divakaruni's female characters become entangled in their own psychological webs as a result of the pressures of a society that is ultimately both cosseted and patriarchal, they all manage to break free from these social constraints and find new paths. In her stories, nearly every main character tries to fit in with the newly discovered American society.

Nothing about gender equality is a "women's issue." Every aspect of our community is impacted by gender inequity. People of both genders are negatively impacted by gender stereotypes. In practically every way, women's circumstances are worse. The disparity in compensation, the amount of time spent doing Whether it's low

representation of women in leadership roles or public settings, high rates of violence based on gender, or unpaid care, the issue always boils down to one thing. disparities in gender.

Both *The Vine of Desire* and *Sister of My Heart* is a poignant and fulfilling works of Banerjee that stands alone as a book of great sensitivity and depth. Divakaruni illustrates the benefits and dangers of emancipating oneself from the past as well as the complex, frequently contradictory feelings that influence the journey toward independence through the perspective of those caught up in the collision of civilizations. The beloved characters from Sister of My Heart, the best-selling book by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, are back together in this moving story that tests the emotional friendship between two longtime friends when one's spouse develops a hazardous attraction to the other. Anju and Sudha, first cousins, had a remarkable, almost telepathic bond when they were young in India. Knowing that Sunil has long coveted her, Sudha foolishly accepts Anju's invitation to move in with her and her husband, Sunil, in California. Sudha is a single mother from Calcutta. The three of them must battle to understand the freedoms of America as well as the bonds that bind them to India and to each other as Sunil's attraction begins to surface.

Conclusion

After analyzing Banerji Sister of My Heart and Vine of Desire, is revealed that most of the characters from these novels are remarkable and outstanding. Sudha, who was shy and awkward at first, finally gets over her shyness and gains confidence because of her awareness, conviction, and experience. The importance of passionate love in their marriages is not something that Sudha and Anju emphasize much while talking about their marriages. Moreover, the remarks made by two distinct ladies regarding care reveal that they have taken in a wide range of conventional social viewpoints. People from different cultures have quite varied perspectives on gender disparities when it comes to concerns of love and compassion. The distinct situations of Sudha and Anju will assist us in demonstrating the diversity that exists even within a single nation.

While Sudha has picked up a gentler and milder set of standards, Anju takes great pride in her fierce, independent, and extremely combative attitude. Anju takes great pride in her fierce, self-reliant, and aggressive nature. Whether that person is a man or a woman, she thinks it's healthy to rely on someone stronger than herself for support. These differences may be at least partially explained by personal preferences, but they also highlight the impact of cultural norms.

Sister of My Heart is a passionate story about the unusual link between two women and the loves, jealousies, and family histories that threaten to break them apart. It is incredibly touching, dramatic, and brilliantly described. With hints of intrigue, suspense, and the paranormal, Divakaruni's sixth book is a delightful departure from the norm.

C.B. Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage is a collection of 11 short tales that contrasts the stories of women in India and overseas, showcasing the exceptional voice of immigrant writers. "Elegantly narrates tales about the immigrant brides who struggle to figure out an identity of their own," (Holf1).

Portrayal of women by Chitra Banerjee's stems her keen reflection of the patriarchal structure that limits women to deprivation, cramped quarters, and seclusion, providing no opportunities for self-expression. Writers such as Divakaruni, in this evolving context, give rise to women who, by occupying the void left by male subservience and dismantling superfluous traditions, become active agents of self-discovery. As a result, postmodern women like the heroines of Banerjee are prepared to change the established gender roles, pretence a serious and important trial to men at the whole to counter the reality of their wisdom might not be appt for all women. Divakaruni unveiled the subtle process of subjugation and gender bias at family as well as at work. One of the best ideologies of their up bringing the girls in the realm of societal community, defined roles as mother/ daughter/ wife etc. In future the women show great sensitivity and awareness in the portrayal of the means through which the upcoming generation can prepare themselves for better status in society.

References

Primary Source

Divakaruni, C.B. (2000). *Sister of My Heart*. New York: Anchor Books.
Divakaruni, C.B. (2002). *The Vine of Desire: A Novel.* Anchor.

Secondary Sources

Agnihotri, N. (2014). Diasporic Consciousness in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart. *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, *3*, 1-6.

Carts, A.B. *An Interview with Bharathi Mukherjee*. The Massachusettes review 26.
Bharathi, C., & Kalamani, S. (2017). The Depiction of New Identities in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart.
Lalitha, R. (2009). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: A Rising Star in the Diasporic Literature. *The Commonwealth Review: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies*, *17*, 21-26.
Sumathi, P.N. (2013). Diaspora and its Impact in the select novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. *Shanlax International Journal of English*, *1*(3), 47-54.
Divakaruni, C.B. (2019). Bio — Chitra Divakaruni. http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/about/bio/
Dadaji, S.P. (2019). *Immigrant feminine experience in the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni*. Hdl.Handle.Net, http://hdl.handle.net/10603/96676.
Mari, P.S. (2016). Sense of Uprootedness in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams. *Language in India*, *16*(12), 187-200.
Commonwealth Review: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies. (2009).
Divakaruni. (2013). Shanlax International Journal of English, *1*(3).
Divakaruni, C. (2017). *Sister of My Heart*. Random House.
http.//www.laurahird.com.