

Emotional and Cultural Struggles in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart

¹Sunil R, ²Dr. J.G. Duresh,

¹Research scholar, Department of English, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Tirunelveli.

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Tirunelveli.

Abstract

This research paper examines the emotional and cultural struggles depicted in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart*. Focusing on the lives of cousins Anju and Sudha Chatterjee, the paper explores how their deep bond endures despite the geographical separation and the challenges of migration. The narrative reveals the intense emotional toll of displacement, as both women grapple with feelings of alienation, longing for their homeland, and the fading memories of their cultural roots. The paper highlights how their journey in America exposes them to discrimination and marginalization, further complicating their efforts to adapt and find a sense of belonging. Special attention is given to the unique struggles faced by diasporic women, who often bear the brunt of cultural dislocation and emotional turmoil. Through an analysis of Anju and Sudha's evolving identities and relationships, this paper portrays the resilience and adaptability required to navigate the complex terrain of a new cultural landscape. By situating the novel within the broader framework of diasporic literature, the paper aims to illuminate the transformative journey of self-discovery and the quest for identity amidst cultural disparity and emotional disintegration.

Keywords: Diaspora, Cultural Identity, Displacement, Emotional Struggles, Self-Discovery

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the broader issues faced by the diasporic community, particularly women, who must balance their cultural heritage with the demands of a new society, ultimately seeking a transformed identity amidst cultural and emotional upheaval. In Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* the cousins Anju and Sudha Chatterjee struggles with the geographical separation caused by migration. From the very beginning, their bond is depicted as transcending physical distance and cultural barriers, "Since the day they were born, Sudha and Anju have been bonded in ways even their mothers cannot comprehend" (*Sister of My Heart* 6). The emotional toll of displacement in Anju and Sudha causes feelings of alienation and longing for their homeland. As Ajaz defines "Diaspora as a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with the land of its origin" (*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* 45). Sudha's realization that her memories of India are fading suggests a sense of loss and disconnection, "Her shrinking memories of India make Sudha realize that even their memories are marooned on separate islands" (12). Throughout their journey, Anju and Sudha confront the harsh realities of discrimination and

marginalization in their adopted homeland. The challenges they face serve as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices and struggles endured by immigrants in search of a better life.

The deep seated love of both the cousins develops a rift now, perhaps because of the one year of separation in separate lands or because of one man between them. Anju feels insecure with Sudha's presence in her house and Sudha hides dislike for the purposeless hours she spends working in Anju's house. The trio suffers a disastrous situation when Sudha abandons Anju's house after hours of physical intimacy with Sunil. Her guilt compels her to move out of her friend's married life. Sudha now realizes that she cannot go back to the old restricted ways of Indian life. She somehow feels secure for the impersonal customs of America to start a new life. She thinks standing at the corner of a road, "I must be emanating some type of distress signal, because passerby stares at me strangely. If this were India, at least half of them would know me. They'd ask me a thousand questions, offer to help, give advice, may be even escort me back home" (124). Not only Sudha but Anju and Sunil also trace new paths for them after deciding for a divorce.

Anju begins her self-searching journey keeping distance with all closed ones. She shares room with one of her friends from writer's club but their belonging to different lands could not make a comfortable companionship between them. She always wants Sudha close to her to share and understand her fully. Anju feels like tingles in fingertips like pins and needles when any of her American friends criticizes about the heritage which she loves a lot. Even their everyday talks are so different that she feels lonely among them. She understands that, "...large chunks of herself will always be unintelligible to them: the joint family she grew up in, her arranged marriage, the way she fell in love with her husband, the tension in her household, that ménage a trios Indian style" (130). Sudha becomes a caretaker of an old Indian man who is living with his son and his American wife. He suffers more from mental sickness than physical. He wants to return to his own land (India).

The foreign land has badly affected his health. Sudha understands his pain and promise him to take him to India. She cooks Indian dishes for him, calls him Baba and leaves Dayita to play with him. Subsequently this improves the old man's health. She is excited with her own bank account but leaving the old relations is the only regret. Sudha's clear refusal to Ashoke, friendship with Lalit, leaving Sunil and decision of returning India with the old and with a deal of serving him in turn for a good school for her daughter are surely the characteristics of the changed 'self' in America, a place where "in a minute you might be pulled up into it, released of gravity. One can take a new body here, shrug off old identities" (134). Having gone through the story of two sisters it can be said that whatever may be the cause of immigration; diasporic community faces the problem of displacement, rootlessness, discrimination and marginalization in the migrated country. The women, who are migrated, feel the displacement intensely more in comparison to men.

The diasporic women writers have been able to transform the stereotypical sufferings of a woman to an aggressive or independent person trying to seek an identity of her own through their various relationships within the family and society. As a natural consequence their writings, reflect what we consider an expatriate sensibility generated due to cultural disparity

and emotional disintegration. In this process it is the woman who suffers the most because of her multiple dislocations. She gets involved in an act of sustained self-removal from her native culture, balanced by a conscious resistance to total inclusion in the new host society. She carries the burden of cultural values of her native land with her to her new country, thus making it more difficult and problematic for her to adjust. She is caught between cultures and this feeling of in-betweenness or being juxtaposed poses before her the problem of trying to maintain a balance between her dual affiliations. Nevertheless, along with the trauma of displacement she is fired by the will to bound herself to a new community, to a new narrative of identity.

References

- Ajaz, Leela Gandhi. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Sister of My Heart*. Anchor Books, 1999.