



## **Concerns Of Women, Motherhood, And Familial Love In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister Of My Heart And The Vine Of Desire**

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### **APA Citation:**

Akilandeswari, G., & Sundararajan, K. (2021). Concerns of Women, Motherhood, and Familial Love in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart and The Vine of Desire, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 1950-1953

Submission Date:08/10/2021

Acceptance Date:22/12/2021

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### **Abstract**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writing assures that diaspora is not merely a scattering or dispersion, but a collective experience and journeys. It determines through the traveling experience of the men and women, where, how and under what circumstances they are traveling. Divakaruni's protagonists attach to their newfound world. Even though the female characters are firmly developed in tradition, find it difficult to break the bounds set by patriarchy, they want to experience what is prohibited in their life, and resolve the psychological conflict that is accompanied with the new situation. She expressed very obviously the dilemmas of Indian women in conventional society. Her woman characters represent the sentiments of women and motherhood within traditional bounds and outside traditional bounds. This research paper exemplifies the concerns of women, motherhood, and their familial relationship in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels.

**Keywords:** *Woman, Motherhood, Familial Relationship, Diaspora Concerns, Conflict, Tradition, Modernity, Identity.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's plots, whether set in India or America, feature Indian-born women torn between old and new world values. She uses her laser-like insight and skilled use of strong, plot and lyrical description to give readers a look at her characters and their respective worlds, which are filled with hope, fear and discovery. Whether in California or in Calcutta, women learn to adapt to their new and changing culture and as a result discover their own sense of self amidst joy and heartbreaks. Indian immigrant women have mixed feelings, they brought back the colonial memories. The writers of Indian Diaspora always aimed to visualize various complications faced by these immigrants. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the Indian American writer, who migrated to America and established there as a professor of Creative Writing, concentrates various genres like magic realism, fantasy, etc. but basically writes on the backdrop of these diasporic tones. In all her novels one can find a curious, strange and an apprehended look on the foreign culture, on the other-hand it is identified that she looks back on her own country and culture in a way to investigate, penetrate, interpret and unravel some of its hidden or untouched corners of thought patterns. Her major works

include *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2003) and *The Palace of Illusions* (2009).

Women in the Diaspora suffer more than men. They fight to keep them linked with their home-land. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni disclosed how the diaspora women are facing problems in the adjustment between two different traditions and cultures. In Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, Anju and Sudha are not happy with their existence in the beginning, and so in the company of each other the two cousins start recreating their own existence, their own identity, the elite immigration in so far as individual identities, national identities, and cultural identities are concerned. The scale of large immigration in modern years has unprecedented anxieties for adjustment and a hypersensitive aspect, like individual identity, has come into conflict with the immigrant's adopted homelands. They are frequently attached for physical and emotional contact with the homeland.

The book focuses on the complex situation between the two sisters' relationship, Anjali and Sudha. The desires of the girls' mother, who embrace traditional Indian culture, even greater obstacles, penetrate the Chatterjee household. The household focus is a matriarchal one, with no men in it except the driver Singhji. The setting of the story is the world ruled by the three mothers who are caught between the modern and the traditional life.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depicts the story with the portrayal of both Indian society and the alien nation to show the struggles of the immigrants between both the cultures. Sudha, the docile, tractable, obedient daughter, and daughter-in-law, gives up everything she wants for the sake of her sister's happiness, completely at the home setting of the novel. She is prepared to sacrifice so much to make her mother happy, as her mother Gouri was very ill. Here, Divakaruni exhibits the Indian practice of dowry system in marriages and the mother daughter relationship and the sacrifice. Sudha's mother decided to sell the bookstore because of the two girls' wedding and their dowries. She needs to undergo bypass surgery, but she refuses that she could die from the infection afterward. She says, "She can't risk, not until Sudha and Anju are married." (SOMH ) Her tiredness forces her to stay in bed when there is so much to be done;

‘I was going to leave it to you - in your name, not your husband's - to run as happens.’ She paused for breath and then said, ‘But I will promise you this much, Anju Ma. I'll arrange your marriage with a man who lets you go to college, and lets you work, too, if you want it.’ (SOMH 109)

Indian parents are eager to get rid of their daughters in marriage, which gives them a sense of achievement. But there are objections to the choice of the daughters. Ashok, the choice of Sutha is rejected. Anju believes love and longing can make magic around her. But, aunt Nalini made up little rhymes with morals tagged onto them. ‘Good daughters are bright lamps, lighting their mother's name; wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching their family's fame.’ (SMOH 23).

Sudha is prepared to sacrifice so much to make her mother happy. Anju is also left in the same position. In Indian culture marriage is a religious sacrament, where the woman has to live along with the husband and has no other choice to leave or else die with him. In her new home Sudha is silenced, her emotion suppressed and ultimately her very personality is stifled. She has to bear the heavy burden and has to compromise at all levels.

Simone De Beauvoir in the '50s had said, marriage has always been a very different thing for men and women. For men, it is sexual pleasure, a means of comfort, women are recruited to their service. For women, it is associated with romantic love and self-sacrifice. The life of the women revolved around the axis of family and marriage. Women have to be dutiful to their parents, husbands and children, and other members of the family, and society. But they do not receive respect or consideration from them and nobody cares about their happiness. Women lacked the sense of self. Their identities merge into that of the husband and their families.

Divakaruni explains clearly the position of Indian women. In certain situations, the women have been seen as a slave, to cook, to wash and clean the house, to earn to living and sometimes, to sleep with. The role of the mother plays a vital role in everyone's life. Mothering and motherhood are cultural phenomena in the Indian context. The relationship between mother and daughter, and mother and son cannot be separated. In India, all mothers and their halfsprings have a mutual lifetime bonding with each other. In Indian mythology mother is the mother – goddess who rules over the realm of wealth, knowledge, and property. This must be analyzed to have a proper understanding of the mothering of motherhood in the Indian context. Motherhood gives pleasure and restores dignity when Sudha chooses it, and so she is ready for pregnancy. She has to restore dignity and honor to her soul.

Divakaruni portrays women as mothers. The image of the mother as the embodiment of compassion is used a lot. They will do anything for their children. Divakaruni's *The Sister of My Heart* explores the scenes of motherhood responsibility. Sudha is very calm and she was controlled by her mothers. After marriage, when Sudha is controlled by her husband, she refuses her married life for her girl-child. Sudha, the span of five childless years is enough to cause troubles, as her mother-in-law is desirous to have the grandson as early as possible. Sudha's husband meets the soothsayer to find whether Sudha carries a male child or a female in her pregnancy. Motherhood is forced upon women as it is regarded as a woman's inevitable destiny which is the possible option that would give her happiness. Sudha has to give birth to a male child; otherwise, she has no place in the family. The test shows that it is a girl, and so the family decides to abort the baby without the concerns of Sudha. Ramesh refuses his commitment to Daiyta (The unborn girl child). When Sudha's husband and mother-in-law forces her to abort the girl-child, she makes a bold decision. She deserts her husband and wants to save her child.

Divakaruni's approaches prove her desire to portray the women as a mother and their determination for the sake of their children, Sudha is remarked one among. She does n't show chances to abort the child, instead decides to leave the Sanyal family and moves back to the Chatterjee family. Ramesh's mother convinced her son to divorce Sudha and to get a second marriage. Sudha's family also convinced her second marriage but she refused their decision of marriage. In this complex situation, Ashok Sudha's lover, he met Sudha at her home. Ashok asks her to marry him. His parents meet Sudha, and explain his complex life situation as he is being alone. Ashok promises her that he will allow her whenever she wants to meet her daughter. Finding this man's psyche, the patriarchy, Sudha refuses her second life. Sudha once again declines Ashok's proposal because she thinks that she would not be happy if she got man's whims again. She wants a world to be without a man. She finally prefers "A future built by women out of their own wits, their own hands." According to Divakaruni, in India women are treated nothing more than a baby machine;

"Here is the woman who cut through her mother-in-law's plots to control her womb. Who stepped from the security of wifhood onto the stony path of being a mother, alone, in a country where such things meant to shame. Who braved the new rules of a new continent because she wanted more in life than a man to take care of her." (VOD 129)

Considering the future of her girl-child, Sutha, the protagonist, decides to go to America. She moves along with Daiyta, her girl-child, to America where Anju suffers in miscarriage. Sudha's daughter Dayita makes Anju to forget the loss of her baby. Dayita's presence helps her to diminish the memories of her unborn child. Sudha decides to get a job, because she does not want to be a burden again to her mother. In search of their identity the two sisters start to search for ways of completing their dreams in America. The new arrangements create major cracks in the relationship between Anju and Sunil. Sudha couldn't speak between Sunil and Anju. Meanwhile Sudha herself fell in his relationship and Sunil expresses his passion for her since his marriage. Later, she managed to get rid of that relationship and find a new way for getting independence from Sunil. Sudha states her sympathetic presence as;

"So many violences done to me. My mother pounding my life into the

shape of her desires. My mother-in-law wanting to cut from it whatever she considered unseemly. My husband backing away, with his narrow, apologetic, shoulders. Sunil plunging into the center of my body, corrosive with need. Each time I made myself pliant. I gave a bearable name to what they did. Duty. Family honour, Filial Respect, Passion. But today... (TVOD 243)

Fortunately, a girl called Sara, whom she meets in a garden, tries to find a job for her. Sara was an Indian and she is a highly self-centred woman. Sudha is inspired by Sara, and refuses marriage, because she is not ready to drop her peace again. Sara inspires her by the words, "Here's some classified information for you. Not having a husband isn't always a problem." (TVOD 132).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni assures the symbol of endurance, strength, and fortitude through her characters. Sudha's impatience to be on her own for the first time gives way to her confidence. At the party of Mrs. Chopra, she throws off her inhibitions, mingles with the people, and enjoys in full swing with Lalit, a surgeon, who starts taking interest in her. This streak of change in her comes as a surprise but it is also a way for Sudha to break away from the 'expected behaviour'. At the party, she represents a woman from India. The image of the mother as the embodiment of compassion uses a lot and sacrifice a lot including their personal affairs. Finally, Sudha decides to return to India her homeland, especially on terms dictated by men. Immigrant women are caught between patriarchy's ambiguous pasts and futures.

## 2. Conclusion

Divakaruni includes Indian – American experience grappling with two identities. Her writing identification is a brave new world forging to life. Banerjee's finger was accurately on Diaspora pulse, fusing eastern values with western ethos. Divakaruni observes that the Indian social setup is not given much value in whatever decision has to be taken about women's life. She delivered the predicament, joys, sorrows, and compromising situations of women's life. In her novel, the women characters decide to move out of the four walls and go into the world with new confidence and determination. However, they had to face a lot of hurdles, created by men. They have a lot of actions and reactions to find with their own identity. Banerjee's Sudha from *Sister of My Heart* is a suitable example for multiple identities. Lovable Daughter of Nalini, Dear friend of Anju, beautiful wife of Ramesh, Dutiful mother of Daiyta. Sudha draws our attention to an interesting aspect as a diaspora woman, mother, and friend.

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