

**Feminist Emancipation and Generational Resistance in
*Before We Visit the Goddess***

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Abstract:

Before We Visit the Goddess by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores feminist emancipation through the lives of three generations of women—Sabitri, Bela, and Tara. Set in Bengal, Kolkata, and the United States, the novel examines patriarchy, poverty, migration, motherhood, and identity. Divakaruni portrays liberation as a gradual process shaped by buoyancy, self-recognition, and everyday resistance rather than open rebellion. Sabitri's pursuit of education and financial autonomy, Bela's struggle against emotional oppression, and Tara's search for identity reflect growing forms of women's empowerment. The novel highlights the importance of education, financial independence, and emotional strength while revealing the lasting effects of trauma, silence, and fractured mother-daughter relationships. By centering women's voices and ordinary experiences, Divakaruni presents feminist survival as complex, unfinished, and deeply rooted in intergenerational endurance and selfhood.

Keywords: Feminist Emancipation, Migration and Alienation, Female Resilience, Cultural Identity.

Introduction:

Modern Indian diasporic literature has emerged as an important domain for exploring women's challenges against patriarchal systems, cultural borders, emotional detachment, and historical silences. Among authors who have delved into these subjects with emotional insight and cultural awareness, Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni holds a distinct place. Her novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* features a complex narrative focused on three generations of women whose experiences are influenced by poverty, migration, memory, love, betrayal, and strength. In contrast to traditional feminist stories that highlight outright defiance, the novel depicts feminist emancipation as a slow, sensitively nuanced process that is intricately linked to individual change.

The story spans various periods and locations—from countryside Bengal to city Kolkata and ultimately to the United States—following the intertwined lives of Sabitri, Bela, and Tara. Divakaruni explores through these women the varying ways patriarchy functions across generations and how women navigate freedom amid social and emotional constraints. The novel depicts emancipation not as a total freedom from suffering, but as a constant journey of self-awareness, staying power, and defiance. In the novel, feminism manifests not via ideological statements but through daily acts of bravery, resilience, and personal identity.

A key element of feminist liberation in the novel is the depiction of education as a powerful agent of change. Sabitri, the initial-generation main character, is raised in severe poverty in rural Bengal. Her existence is characterized by financial struggles, societal limitations, and few prospects. In typical patriarchal societies, impoverished girls are anticipated to embrace domestic roles without challenging their situations. Nonetheless, Sabitri has remarkable intellect and willpower. She foresees education not just as a means of social progress but also as a way to break free from set constraints.

Divakaruni depicts Sabitri's desire for knowledge with deep emotion. In spite of financial hardship and societal discouragement, she stays resolute in her pursuit of education. Her educational path embodies defiance against patriarchal beliefs that women's ambitions are subordinate to family duties. Through Sabitri, the narrative illustrates how gaining access to education serves as a means of feminist empowerment. Knowledge enables her to envision different possibilities for herself beyond domestic limitations.

Nonetheless, Divakaruni does not idealize this struggle. Sabitri's journey towards personal growth is marked by embarrassment and sacrifice. She gets assistance from Leelamoyee, an affluent woman who sees her intellectual capability. Still, this connection illustrates class disparity and reliance. Sabitri has to consistently manage the struggle between appreciation and self-esteem. Thus, feminist liberation in the novel is neither straightforward nor one-dimensional; it necessitates navigating power structures that cannot be completely avoided.

Sabitri's love affair with Rajiv adds complexity to her quest for liberation. Rajiv initially seems to be a character linked to emotional satisfaction and upward social movement. However, their relationship highlights the imbalanced expectations placed on women regarding love and marriage. Sabitri gives up stability and reputation for emotional connection, ultimately facing betrayal and desertion. Divakaruni employs this relationship to criticize patriarchal romantic notions that frequently require emotional surrender from women while justifying male negligence.

Motherhood represents a key aspect of feminist liberation in the novel. Sabitri becomes an unwed mother when Rajiv abandons her. Historically, abandoned women in Indian culture endure social stigma and financial instability. Still, Sabitri declines to succumb to societal scrutiny. Through unwavering resolve and continuous hard work, she nurtures her daughter Bela and ultimately establishes a thriving candy store. Her business achievements serve as a significant emblem of women's independence. The candy store holds symbolic meaning. Food and cooking have historically been linked to domestic femininity, yet Sabitri converts these abilities into financial autonomy. Divakaruni delicately reinterprets domestic work as a means of female empowerment instead of oppression. Sabitri's employment enables her to live independently of male control. In this transformation, the novel confronts patriarchal beliefs that women's domestic skills are confined solely to private spheres.

Simultaneously, the book uncovers the emotional price of staying alive. Sabitri's challenges toughen her character and influence her bond with Bela. Feminist liberation does not eliminate suffering or ensure emotional satisfaction. Divakaruni depicts women as psychologically intricate characters influenced by trauma, sacrifice, and unmet aspirations. Sabitri's resilience exists alongside isolation and emotional stiffness, rendering her portrayal profoundly human rather than romanticized.

Bela, as a representative of the second generation, signifies a distinct form of feminist fight. In contrast to Sabitri, she matures with enhanced educational prospects and city experiences. However, her existence is characterized by emotional defiance and unpredictability. Bela defies traditional norms surrounding marriage and propriety by eloping with Sanjay, despite her mother's objections. Her actions seem liberating at first since they embody personal choice and defiance against societal control. Nevertheless, Bela's marriage slowly reveals another aspect of patriarchal oppression. Sanjay exhibits emotional abuse and control, demonstrating that mere romantic rebellion does not ensure liberation. Divakaruni challenges the belief that marriage inherently provides women with emotional stability or personal liberation. Bela's experiences show that patriarchy can endure even in relationships originally built on love and free will.

The novel's exploration of emotional abuse and domestic violence holds considerable importance from a feminist viewpoint. Bela feels mentally trapped in her marriage, while societal norms compel women to suffer in silence. Divakaruni reveals how patriarchy legitimizes female sacrifice while downplaying women's emotional requirements. Bela's eventual departure from Sanjay transforms into a means of self-protection and defiance.

Relocating to America adds a new dimension to Bela's feminist experience. Living in a diaspora provides fresh possibilities yet also leads to estrangement and cultural dislocation. In the United States, Bela faces isolation, financial instability, and the difficulties of parenting her daughter Tara alone. Divakaruni steers clear of oversimplified images of the West as a land of freedom. Instead, she shows that migration transforms rather than removes patriarchal pressures.

However, migration provides Bela with increased personal independence in comparison to conventional Indian social frameworks. She operates autonomously, chooses for herself, and raises Tara based on her personal principles. Feminist liberation manifests through flawed survival instead of victorious freedom. Bela's life embodies the challenges faced by numerous immigrant women who balance cultural customs with individual freedom.

Tara, the third-generation protagonist, embodies modern feminist awareness influenced by globalization and a fractured identity. In contrast to Sabitri and Bela, Tara is raised in a transnational setting that lacks stable cultural foundations. She feels emotional turmoil, dissent, and isolation. Her difficulties mirror contemporary worries about identity, belonging, and social connections.

Tara's path as a feminist contrasts greatly with earlier generations since she enjoys liberties that Sabitri and Bela did not have. She experiences increased educational opportunities, social advancement, and individual autonomy. Nevertheless, these liberties do not guarantee emotional steadiness. Divakaruni implies that the evolution of feminist liberation over generations changes in style but is still unfinished.

A key feminist theme in the novel is the transmission of trauma and silence between mothers and daughters. The connections between Sabitri, Bela, and Tara are frequently affected by miscommunication, bitterness, and emotional separation. Patriarchal pain impacts not just individual women but also connections across generations. Women weighed down by the fight for survival frequently find it difficult to show affection openly.

Sabitri's severity towards Bela stems partly from anxiety and disillusionment. Bela, on the other hand, struggles to connect emotionally with Tara. Divakaruni depicts these broken relationships with subtlety and empathy. Feminist liberation necessitates both external autonomy and the emotional recovery and dialogue among women.

The nonlinear narrative format of the novel enhances this thematic intricacy. Through the exploration of different generations and eras, Divakaruni illustrates the interconnectedness of women's experiences, regardless of historical and geographical variations. Every woman receives both resilience and scars from the generation before her. Feminist opposition transforms into a shared and additive force instead of being fragmented.

A notable element of feminist liberation in the novel is the critique of conventional gender roles. In the narrative, women are continually expected to place sacrifice above their own identity. Society primarily sees them as daughters, wives, or mothers instead of as self-reliant individuals. Divakaruni confronts these assumptions by highlighting women's internal aspirations, goals, and complexities.

Significantly, the book refrains from depicting men as one-dimensional antagonists. Male characters have imperfections, emotional boundaries, or are influenced by societal norms, yet they are not all entirely villainous. This intricacy enables Divakaruni to highlight not just personal male brutality but also wider patriarchal structures that impact both women and men. Feminist liberation in the novel entails challenging social systems instead of vilifying people.

Economic autonomy consistently arises as an essential requirement for women's empowerment. Sabitri's confectionery, Bela's employment in America, and Tara's academic prospects all demonstrate the significance of financial independence. Divakaruni understands that achieving emotional freedom is challenging without financial independence. Concurrently, the book recognizes that financial autonomy by itself cannot mend emotional scars or ensure contentment.

The title, *Before We Visit the Goddess*, holds significant feminist meaning. The "goddess" can be understood in various manners: spiritual strength, feminine sanctity, inner insight, or self-fulfillment. Indian culture frequently reveres goddesses while concurrently limiting actual women through patriarchal traditions. Divakaruni subtly addresses this contradiction throughout the novel. Her female characters are not perfect ideals but regular women fighting for respect and acknowledgment.

The title implies a path to comprehending feminine strength. Prior to encountering the goddess, the characters must face pain, recollection, and emotional reality. Feminist liberation therefore transforms into both spiritual and social. It entails acknowledging one's value even when society tries to undermine it.

Memory is essential in forming female identity throughout the narrative. The women hold onto memories of love, betrayal, hardship, migration, and neglect. These recollections impact their connections and decisions. Divakaruni depicts memory not as a mere recall but as a dynamic emotional legacy. By sharing their stories, the women seek to comprehend themselves and one another.

This focus on storytelling in itself turns feminist. Historically, women's experiences have frequently been overlooked or silenced within prevailing narratives. By highlighting women's perspectives and inner experiences, Divakaruni reclaims narrative power for those whose challenges might otherwise go unnoticed. The novel serves as a repository of women's resilience through the ages.

The novel's diasporic aspect deepens its feminist themes. Migration complicates gender roles by placing women in situations with conflicting cultural expectations. Bela and Tara face conflict between Indian customs and American individualism. Divakaruni steers clear of oversimplified contrasts between East and West, as well as between tradition and modernity. Rather, she describes identity as flexible and collaboratively shaped.

Before We Visit the Goddess illustrates the intricacies of contemporary feminism through the character of Tara. Raised in America, Tara appreciates her freedom and independence; however, she also experiences feelings of loneliness, confusion, and challenges with her identity. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni implies through her experiences that genuine liberation encompasses both social freedom and emotional connection and understanding.

The book emphasizes the significance of friendship and support among women. Sabitri's connection with Leelamoyee provides her with support and emotional resilience despite their class disparities. Women in the story frequently support one another in overcoming hardships, defying patriarchal structures that separate them. Simultaneously, Divakaruni authentically depicts conflicts among women, particularly in mother-daughter dynamics characterized by miscommunication and emotional detachment. The book refrains from depicting women as idealized characters. Sabitri, Bela, and Tara possess flaws, emotions, and humanity, which enhance the story's feminist theme.

This novel derives emotional power by highlighting the everyday lives of women that are frequently overlooked in significant historical accounts. In the novel, significant themes include cooking, caregiving, loneliness, migration, family conflict, financial difficulties, and motherhood. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni converts these mundane experiences into strong representations of women's challenges and defiance.

Divakaruni's use of language and narrative technique further enhances the feminist theme of the novel. Her writing is straightforward, poignant, and melodic, flowing seamlessly through various generations and eras. This approach emphasizes the relationship among the lives of Sabitri, Bela, and Tara.

The novel demonstrates that feminist liberation remains unfinished and in progress. All the women experience suffering or societal pressure to some extent, but each establishes a degree of independence. Sabitri achieves financial independence via her job, Bela escapes a toxic marriage, and Tara seeks her identity apart from familial trauma. Their accomplishments might be incomplete, yet they are significant. The novel depicts feminism not as a dramatic upheaval but as an ongoing struggle and incremental progress. Women combat oppression via education, employment, migration, resilience, narrative, and individual decisions. In the end, the novel honors women's strength and resolve to pursue dignity, identity, and selfhood in spite of patriarchal constraints and emotional struggles.

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