

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Female Bonding in Her Select Novels

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Abstract

This study explores female connection in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writings. Her short tales and novels focus on sisterhood and friendship. These numerous relationships between women are used to build a woman's society, free of male domination, in which one woman's existence relies so greatly on the other that interdependence helps them overcome life's problems. Without one, the other cannot exist in her books' female protagonists' lives. This study argues that women need one other to survive life's challenges. Contrary to fairy tales in which ladies wait for their prince to save them, these women assist each other turn their lives from Yin to Yang.

Keywords: Diaspora, Oedipal Theory, Ecriture Feminine

Introduction:

“Once a woman is self-sufficient and ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator” (Beauvoir 689). It takes a lot of courage on the part of women

to go through the process of breaking out of the cocoon of obligations that society has designed for them; this is due to the fact that they have to go through a lot of upheaval in their life. The effort of breaking out of the cocoon of duties that society has constructed for them. The current ladies of India are shown in the paintings of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It is illustrative of the inner turmoil and the challenges that women face both in their home communities and outside in the world as they pursue their ambitions. The lady's chance encounter with a friend paves the way for both of them to triumph over the obstacles that life throws at them.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indo-American writer. She was born in the year 1956 in the city of Calcutta. Chitrlekha is not her given name but rather her birth name. She was born and raised in India for the first nineteen years of her life. After that, she made the decision to go from India and eventually found a new home in the United States of America. She went on to complete her college education in the United States. She uprooted herself and moved to a foreign country in order to further her studies and advance her job. She attended Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, for her master's degree and received

it there. The University of California in Berkeley was where she completed her doctoral studies. Her two master's degrees were both in the field of English. She has taken an interest in the problems facing women for a number of years. She has established a group for women who have endured a great deal of hardship in the new world for the sake of their rights.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of my Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Mistress of Spices*, *Before We Visit the Goddess*, and *The Oleander Girl* focus on women's bonds, sisterhood, and friendship. These various types of bonds between women are used in the novels to create a woman's world, devoid of male control, in which one woman's life depends so much on the other that their interdependence helps them overcome their various struggles in life and find meaning in patriarchal society and social stigmas. In her works, ladies love their female friends more than the males in their life because they understand one other better. Divakaruni explains why she depicts women connecting. She believes that in epics, women's relationships end when they meet a male. "... perhaps in rebellion against such thinking, I find myself focusing my writing on friendships with women, and trying to balance them with the conflicting passions and demands that come to us as daughters and wives, lovers and mothers (Huang 71)."

There are no male characters in *Sister of my Heart*, the home is re-imagined as a world controlled only by women. This is because there are no male characters to impose their authority on the household. As a consequence of this, just as the text is

disrupted, gaps, and silences are there, etc. in *écriture féminine*, we see that the lives of these girls also walk through a disconnected, unmanned journey, but in the end, they find a purpose to everything. "Écriture Feminine is believed to have originated from mother in a stage of mother-child relation before child acquires the male centered verbal language (Abrams 128)." The fact that Anju and Sudha's fathers were not there when they were born means that their mothers have a significant amount of control over everything that their daughters do and say. This is made clear by the fact that Anju would rather read works by Virginia Woolf than pieces of literature written mostly by men:

Woolf has been a favourite of mine since the time I stumbled upon one of her books at the store...I persuaded mother to order all of Woolf's novels, and whenever she allowed me to accompany her to the store, I would go into a corner and devour them...But they were never popular with our Indian literati, who much preferred Dickens and Hardy and E.M. Forster. (134-135)

Relationships between mothers and daughters may also be found in the Divakaruni books that were discussed before. This connection is being tested, but it will not be broken. In the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the mother figure is not praised in the context of the connection between a mother and her daughter. Mothers, in these works, sometimes pressure their daughters to adhere to societal conventions. Simone de Beauvoir states in the section of her book titled

"Mother" that one must first comprehend the mentality of the mother.

Some women feel their femininity as an absolute curse; such a woman wishes for or accepts a daughter with a bitter pleasure of self-recognition in another victim, and at the same time she feels guilty for having brought her into the world...Vexed at having produced woman, the mother greets her with this ambiguous curse: 'You shall be a woman.' She hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double; and she also tends to inflict upon her the disadvantages from which she has suffered (Beauvoir 533).

This conflict between a mother and her daughter can be seen in both *Sister of My Heart* and *Before We Visit the Goddess*. In each of these stories, the mother accuses her daughter of deviating from the anticipated responsibilities that she should be doing. Even though she has nothing but the best intentions for her daughter, Sudha's mother Nalini has a very harsh demeanor. Because, in her opinion, Sudha may have another chance at pregnancy but not at finding a spouse who was suited for her, she blames Sudha for fighting against abortion and abandoning her marriage. Although it may seem that they had a tense connection at first, Nalini eventually supports her daughter in the choices that she makes in life, despite the fact that it may have appeared that their relationship was strained at first.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow finds that women have more fluid ego boundaries than men...a result of asymmetrical child-rearing, which fosters a girl's close identification with her mother. As a result, Chodorow claims that girls, unlike boys, come to define their personality in relation to others, and that during adolescence they do not completely relinquish their strong maternal bond (Kowaleski 9).

In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, a compelling narrative of four generations of Bengali women, mother-daughter bonds flourish and then sour, allowing Divakaruni to create the fierce Sabitri, who demonstrates Durga's battling skills. French feminism is also present here, since it advocates women stay sexually tied to their mothers and return to the pre-Oedipal connection they enjoyed with them as parents. Though daughter and mother have a breach at initially, their bond stays strong enough that moms stick by their daughter's actions, such as divorce, quest for truth, abortion denial, etc. *Before We Visit the Goddess* shows this in Bela's comments to Tara, "When you told me you were dropping out of college, Tara, I didn't know what to do. I'd dropped out of college myself- so many of my problems stemmed from that. I didn't want the same thing to happen to you...I didn't know then that mothers can't necessarily save their children, no matter how much they want to (206)."

In *Sister of My Heart* and its sequel *The Vine of Desire*, Anju and Sudha develop

a "sisterly kinship." French feminist theory says, "...child rearing, if not bearing must be shared by men and women. The role of mothering is one of nurturing and of caretaking and almost anyone can mother (Tandon 131)." Anju and Sudha are so dependent on one another throughout their entire lives that if one of them suffers a loss or experiences a problem, it is perceived as being of the utmost importance by the other, to the point where they take on the role of a mother in order to save the other when they are in a hopeless predicament. Their lives are characterised by a harmonious interplay of Yin and Yang, which goes to show that the absence of any component renders the other one impossible to realise. By doing so, Divakaruni wants to create an universe that is entirely her own, one in which the binaries themselves would be girls who, in some way or another, complement each other and, as a result, enable the other on emotional levels to endure losses, grievances, and other such things.

Divakaruni focuses the most of her writing on the experiences of immigrant women who form connections with other women, which eventually serve as a refuge for these women among the many challenges they face. She says, "Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them: women in love, in difficulty, women in relationships. I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to [be] prejudiced when they meet them in real life (Gale)."

The Vine of Desire, and *Sister of my Heart*, depict a sisterly relationship. In this

scenario, Sudha and Anju are cousins who were born on the same day, which also happens to be the day on which both of their dads vanished while searching for treasure. The book describes how both of them give up the love they have for one another as well as the conveniences and pleasures that life has to offer in order to ensure the other person's happiness. It also demonstrates how the companionship of one person may assist the other in overcoming challenges that life presents. After being married, Sudha decided to take the drastic step of divorcing her husband and moving to the United States with her daughter Dayita in order to provide emotional support to Anju, who was suffering from despair as a result of the loss of her pregnancy. Anju had a miscarriage. Anju's pregnancy ended in miscarriage because she put in a lot of additional effort and worked a lot of extra hours so that she could save up enough money to buy plane tickets for both her and Sudha's child. This was done in order to save Sudha from the maltreatment meted out to her by her in-laws for having a baby girl and for pressuring her to get an abortion. This was done in order to save Sudha from the mistreatment meted out to her by her in-laws.

The struggle for self-esteem and balancing opposing desires and expectations in women's life as daughters, spouses, lovers, and mothers prompted Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to build a profoundly entrenched and powerful link amongst her female characters. Divakaruni claims she opposes separate refuge houses for abused South Asian women in her piece.

She believes that living with abused women from diverse countries and origins will help women adapt and enhance their perspective of the world. "The proponents of such homes believe that many South Asian women are uncomfortable living with other battered women from other cultures...It is not an easy thing, this kind of adjustment. But we should not further isolate our women. They will learn a few lessons in a hard way but by living among battered women of other cultures and backgrounds. South Asian women will deepen their understanding of the world."(Tandon 132) This brings to a successful conclusion and the effort to discover the many different forms of female connection shown in the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Some examples of these sorts of connections include bonding between sisters, bonding within families, and so on. This lends credence to the idea that the link that is shared amongst women is exactly what is needed to keep them going through the myriad of challenges that they experience in life. In addition, in contrast to the fairy tales in which the women wait for their prince to save them, these women work hard and find a way out of problems that exist in their woman-centric universe, and in the process, they help one another transform their lives from yin to yang. This is in contrast to the

fairy tales in which the women wait for their prince to rescue them.

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