



**IDENTITY POLITICS AND CULTURAL DILEMMAS OF WOMEN IN CHITRA**

**BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S SISTER OF MY HEART**

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**ABSTRACT**

Identity Politics and Cultural Dilemmas of Women in English-language Indian fiction have primarily followed two paths: the philosophical and the sociological, as exemplified by Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya. But the majority of Indian writers writing in English don't appear to have the perseverance to see the quest for identity through to its inevitable end. They were utterly unprepared for the revelation of who they were. They were unable to acknowledge and assert their personal and national identities because of their sentimentality, window dressing, and nostalgia that verged on ponderous bewilderment. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a novelist and short story writer, rose to fame for her portrayals of Indian immigrant women. The search for identity among women in relation to their career, marriage, and parenthood is discussed in this study article. In Divakaruni's book, women are portrayed as being intellectually, emotionally, and morally crippled by the men who impose themselves on them. These books raise issues regarding women's roles in conventional discourse and even propose rejecting it. This study also shows how Divakaruni's women are shedding their roles of subservience and creating new identities for themselves. When a civilization ignores its own ancient principles, it burdens itself rather than uplifts it. In the end, they want to adjust to the norms of the nation in which they will reside. Giving a group or groups of people in society the autonomy to make their own decisions is the aim of sociological empowerment.

**Key words: Identity, Crisis, Self, women hood, Conflict, individuality, respect,**

The issue of Identity Politics and Cultural Dilemmas of women has drastically changed since the modernist movement emerged at the start of the twentieth century. One may contend that the globalization of the economy inherently leads to diversity and intercultural communication. Each culture has its own quirks and inclinations that necessitate a different response in a variety of cultural settings. The United States' immigration process peaked in less than a century at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This country draws tourists from all over the world for a variety of reasons. Those who eventually decide to settle down will undergo a qualitative cultural shift that has been described by the literati in their writings.

People who migrate from one nation to another nation encounter several forms of oppression, traumas and cultural dilemmas. Novelists such as V.S. Naipal, Arun Joshi, and Jhumpa Lahiri, along with female authors Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, have adeptly explored immigrant experiences in their works. The pain of female characters in an immigrant community is the primary subject of attention. Most literature depicts the psychological suffering of a disgruntled homemaker. The main cause

of women's standing in Indian society is the difficulties they face as immigrants. Diaspora literature addresses themes such as questioning, protest statements, nostalgia, alienation, loneliness, homelessness, and the search for one's identity. It also covers concerns of the merger of two cultures, former lives in new land, native land, and settled land. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian immigrant writer, wrote the novels. Divakaruni has endeavored to provide a thorough picture of South Asian family life. She writes about her experiences and feelings. She excels in exploring issues such as love, friendship, assimilation, self-analysis, and discovery. She shares the emotions of her protagonists in her novels and sees them as a kind of feminist expression.

An Indian writer from the American diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a self-described feminist who is skilled at exploring the uncharted territories of women's consciousness. The emotional connection and competing desires that Anju and Sudha, the female characters, deal with as they grow up are explored in *Sister of My Heart*. They have different personalities and approaches to life, even if they are close. After learning about her father's betrayal from her aunt

Pishi, Sudha becomes troubled by remorse and her relationship with Anju suffers. She even consents to an arranged marriage and gives up her affections for Ashok in order to prevent her cousin's match in a conventional household from ending. In addition to their first separation, marriage brings with it their first rivalry—a rivalry based on sentiments rather than tangible goods. Their relationship starts to fall apart when Anju moves to America and Sudha starts a loveless relationship in India. Both women's pregnancies result in more suffering and a new dynamic between them.

The status of women in modern India is rather contradictory. Despite being at the top of the achievement ladder, she is attacked by her own family, which makes her say nothing. Though they have made great strides, women today still have a great deal more work ahead of them than in the past. Numerous impediments stand in their way. Women have emerged from the protective shelter of the home and onto the battlefield of life, fully equipped with their abilities. They have shown to be valuable. But in India, they still haven't gotten their just desserts. Indian women deal with many difficulties on a daily basis. Divakaruni, an Indian-born American who immigrated to the US in 1976, reexamined Indian women's status in

society. She draws on the experiences of their Indian immigrant women as well as her own. 1998 saw the publication of Divakaruni's most well-known book, *Sister of My Heart*. The conflict between the objectives of mothers who uphold traditional Indian culture and cousins who adopt contemporary Western ideas is examined in the story. Anju and Sudha alternately narrate the story of the cousins' connection across several decades in *Sister of My Heart*, which is a true story.

The 1995 short story "Ultrasound" (Arranged Marriage), which inspired *Sister of My Heart*, depicts the two people's delicate journey of love and companionship. The story of Sudha and Anju ends when they reunite in America a few years later. Consequently, the story starts when they return to their home country of India and ends with their experiences living abroad. The work sheds light on local realities as opposed to diasporic ones, which include social, cultural, familial, and economic ones and ultimately lead to the expulsion of its female protagonists to another nation. It differs from all other novels in this way.

The main protagonists in the book are all female. The male characters merely appear when required and don't really have an influence. The female characters include young actresses portraying

childhood, adulthood, and marriage, as well as the archetypal behavior patterns of modern Indian women. Ramesh's aunts are Gaury and Nalini, and aunt Pishi, who was stigmatized and subjected to prejudice as a young unmarried female. In *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni discusses the role that society and the home play in the greater scheme of things, as well as the social constraints and conventions that shackle them. She talks about how breaking these connections to America and freedom are both necessary and much desired. The story revolves around the Chatterjee residence. After the males of a wealthy family perished while out gold-hunting, Aunty Pishi and Nalini, two elderly women, helped the Gauras take charge of the household. Through highlighting these family members, the writer sheds light on a tradition followed by a noble family in Calcutta in the 1970s and 80s.

Divakaruni writes a lot of autobiographical pieces. Women who lived in immigrant households and in India during the 1970s and 1980s provide the bulk of the accounts. Divakaruni founded *maître*, an organization for South Asian women that supports exploited deaths, especially those caused by domestic abuse, with her friends. Divakaruni attempts to transform the traditional masculine world into a feminine one. The world of men is

not entirely closed off. Clearly, an effort is being made to connect the two. On a secluded island that places the feminine realm outside of conventional geographic boundaries, Tilo discovers what it means to be a lover. Before they can determine where everyone wishes to go, the other real cities are perceived as fuzzy pictures that highlight past errors. Before they can determine where everyone wishes to go, the other real cities are perceived as fuzzy pictures that highlight past errors. These are harsh, unattractive visuals. The cosmos of men is replete with the "odour of hatred." Since men are not permitted to reside on the island, there is neither fear nor animosity there. The island of women is returned to the human world. This suggests that although the planet is home to both half of humanity, it is fundamentally a man's world. For men, Tilo chooses one such world.

*Sister of My Heart* is an intensely personal story that explores Anju and Sudha's sentiments of love, envy, anger, anxiety, and rage as well as family dynamics, reputations, and the tension between their Indian girls' beliefs of superiority and servitude. Divakaruni deftly balances the emotional and cultural concerns that every Indo-American woman has in her interpersonal relationships with the difficulties, liberties,

and intersectionality of contemporary America. Their unwavering love for one another provides them with the support they need; it gives Sudha the confidence to follow her aspirations of being a mother and parenting her young daughter Dayita alone, and it offers Anju the strength to move on from a personal tragedy. For the female protagonists in Divakaruni's literary works, modernity is characterized by elements such as dress, education, and self-respect.

Contemporary women's identities are linked to rejection of antiquity and elite westernization. A multifaceted endeavor to create a space for the female subject that displaces the opposing paradigm of traditional identity; Divakaruni's works represent a spectrum of feminist strength or resistance in the diaspora. For instance, *Sister of My Heart's* heroines, Sudha and Anju, protest against serving as a storehouse of national identity. Although they frequently reflect on their own westernization, they do not wish to be forced to resume their role as communal heroes.

In *Sister of My Heart*, a complex connection inside a Bengali family is realistically shown. As distant cousins who grew up in an affluent, traditional Kolkata family, Sudha and Anju have similar worries, aspirations, and wardrobe choices.

Their wealth is limited because the Chatterjee family only comprises widows, the mothers of the girls, and their aunt. By the time the book opens, it has already lost its prior financial standing and its masculine characteristics. From the author's very feminine point of view, each stage of this family's life drama marginalization, motherhood, divorce, widowhood, etc. approaches a different aspect of Indian culture and customs. "That's how it is sometimes when we plunge into the depths of our lives. No one can accompany us, not even those who would give up their hearts for our happiness." (89)

The relationships, attitudes, aspirations, and upbringing of women in a culture that prioritizes men are the main topics covered by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It also demonstrates how a self-centered woman endangers the life of another woman. A section from *Sister of My Heart* is used as an illustration. When the test revealed Sudha's gender, her voice sounded like a hollow echo.

In societies that uphold patriarchy, where men are seen as the head of the household, it is customary to desire a male kid as the firstborn, and if a girl is born, the pregnancy should be terminated. The main character in Divakaruni's book, Sudha, decides to leave her husband

Ramesh's home in order to safeguard her child after realizing that her mother makes decisions for her and that she has no influence over them. She is talking to her cousin Anju in the lines above about how she cannot kill the child that God gave her after four years of marriage. Divakaruni is strongly opposed to gender bias against children, despite her attempts to convey that it still exists in society. The characters in Divakaruni are forced to watch a miserable condition while doing nothing about it. Instead of an active woman, society expects a docile one.

The protagonists in Divakaruni fight against injustice and attempt to alter or flee the circumstance in order to spare themselves from suffering. The writings of Divakaruni differ each generation, as we can see. In her writing, she challenges authority and asks why someone should go through it, much like a mother would when she observes and accepts a scenario. The Sudhas turn down the marriage proposal because of the relationship between Chatterjee's mother and his family name.

The characters in *Sister of My Heart* by Divakaruni appear to be certain of their supremacy. Sudha, who is preparing to travel to America with her infant daughter who is fatherless in search of a respectable life for the two of them,

said it nicely. The narrative escapes Sudha and makes Indian society appear utterly unredeemable by compelling her to travel to America instead of remaining in India and working for change there. In Indian culture, Anju and Sudha, the protagonists of Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, are cousins with the same patrilineal ancestry and are hence more appropriately called 'Sisters' than 'friends.' Divakaruni has made it clear that her book is meant for people in the West, to whom this type of family structure and connection would be foreign ideas. In *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni says "the darkness is a cresting wave. It sweeps me up out of my body until I float among the stars, those fine bright pores on the sky's skin. If only I could pass through them, I would end up on the other side, the right side, shadowless, perfectly illuminated, beyond the worries of this mundane world." (210)

In Indian culture, Anju and Sudha, the protagonists of Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, are cousins with the same patrilineal ancestry and are hence more appropriately called "Sisters" than "friends." Divakaruni has made it clear that her book is meant for people in the West, to whom this type of family structure and connection would be foreign ideas. The central theme of *Sister of My Heart* is female companionship.

Divakaruni focuses on conceited attitudes that transcend boundaries, where no one can experience complete independence. They act and feel as though it is a significant rupture from religious and cultural bonds, phenomena unique to India. No woman is pursued for love and marriage. It is imperative that Sudha escapes an "arranged marriage" with Ramesh. Divakaruni uses an Indian viewpoint to explain relevant subjects. In her novel, she references myths like the princess in the serpent palace. A princess once lived in an aquatic palace teeming with snakes. The green, yellow, and gold snakes were elegant and beautiful. They sang her to sleep, felt her, and played with her. The myth's aforementioned parallel illustrates how much Anju loves Sudha because she is a princess and Anju is a serpent who looks after Sudha.

Through the lives of Anju and Sudha, who live in both India and America, *Sister of My Heart* merely portrays the traditions and daily routines of Indian Hindus. Both Indian and foreign feelings and emotions are evoked by the mixing of their cultures. Patriarchal and matriarchal values form the foundation of Indian society, or Indians' social lives; Through the lives of Anju and Sudha, who live in both India and America, *Sister of My Heart* merely portrays the traditions

and daily routines of Indian Hindus. Both Indian and foreign feelings and emotions are evoked by the mixing of their cultures. Patriarchal and matriarchal values form the foundation of Indian society, or Indians' social lives; nonetheless, the Indian setting consistently reveals a male-dominated society. Indian male egoists Sunil and Ramesh are in charge of their wives. However, Dayita, Sudha's daughter, who no longer has her father's relationship, is described by Divakaruni as demonstrating a newfound strength of character and battling for what is rightfully hers on a matriarchal basis. Sudha receives recognition for shattering social norms by raising her own child. Here, Sudha up until now portrayed as an endearing, gorgeous, shy, conventional Indian woman identifies her strength as a mother. She gains her independence and leaves her family. After ending her marriage to Ramesh, she attempts to define who she is. In *Sister of My Heart* Divakaruni says "But when I see Sudha, her face bright with a simple, generous joy, the walls I'd set up so carefully collapse around me like a house of cards. Inside my heart it feels like a wet, new rain. In spite of all my insecurities, in spite of the oceans that'll be between us soon and the men that are between us already, I can never stop loving Sudha. It's my habit, and it's my fate." (135)

The female universe is home to *Sister of My Heart's* characters, Sudha and Anju. The worlds of men and women in this book are metaphorical, not actual. A woman may occasionally turn against other women. In Sudha's life, her mother-in-law criticizes Sudha for not becoming a parent. When she took Sudha to see two specialists, they both claimed that there was nothing wrong with Sudha's system and that Ramesh might be the source of the issue. They also suggested that Mrs. Sanyal's son see another doctor for advice, but Sudha's mother-in-law wouldn't entertain the idea. Sudha's mother-in-law treats her with much consideration and care when she becomes pregnant. She has done a lot of the most beneficial things, and for that he is grateful. However, when the amniotes reveal that the kid is a female, the mother-in-law's perspective completely shifts. Anju makes a phone call to Sudha.

The world is prepared to view a woman as sterile. However, the main form of prejudice against women is biological. In certain cultures, the preference for male offspring contributes to the gender disparity experienced by women. This is mostly an economic matter, and the sons are essential to the family's survival for reasons like these. Some societies forbid girls from owning property, therefore

having a male child is necessary for a family to maintain their fortune. Girls are members of the family that go through transitions: they marry, move out, and stay in the family, however they usually make less money than boys. When a girl marries, the family might need to provide a dowry; when boys marry, they contribute to the family's money; and a wife's status is not acknowledged until she gives birth to a son. Divakaruni says "the bird began to carry them to a new life in a new land. We'll be happy ever after, the queen wanted to whisper to her daughter as they flew, but she knew that was not true. Life never is that way. And so instead she held her daughter in silence, heart to heart, and as they traveled each heart drew on the other's strength, so that when they reached their destination they would be ready." (34)

Primitive barbarism is set against the horrifying backdrop of dowry deaths, domestic abuse, and other prevailing forces of society's ancient practices. Expectations and presumptions about women that are a definite holdover from our oppressive past rather than ones that are pertinent to their current status are still present in average Indian culture. This is very common in urban communities as well, however it may be more noticeable in traditional women in rural ones. The



women in Divakaruni's books are portrayed as a class that is never satisfied with being financially independent. It illustrates how miserable women's lives are in our culture. Anju extends an invitation to Sudha, who had always dreamed of coming to America to open her own boutique, after she gets divorced. He goes so far as to imply that people who uphold Indian tradition are highly valued by Americans. She also lends a hand part-time as a proofreader to her tutor in order to support Sudha financially and help her settle in successfully. In order to flee the patriarchal persecution in her home country, Sudha immigrated to America. From a timid, submissive woman, Sudha transforms into a naive, self-reliant child in America, making her own life decisions for the first time without seeking advice from her sister Anju. "And that is how, poised in the sky between our new life and our old one, the life we cannot yet imagine and the one we've already begun to forget, I tell her a tale to make her heart strong, to graft her life onto. For of all things in this world it seems to me that that is what women most need." (315 )

All facets of identity crisis, including alienation, marginalization, hopelessness, readjustment, assimilation, nostalgia, adaptation, and adoption, are addressed throughout Divakaruni's literary

works. Her writings are autobiographical as she is a female author. She depicts a state of cultural ambivalence. These "marginal" individuals are present in any communal organization where there is a cross-pollination of cultures. This also holds true for America, a country full of opportunities with a multicultural populace. She also draws comparisons between the perspectives and lifestyles of first-generation immigrants and their offspring who were born and reared abroad. Additionally, it always discusses the experience of balancing two identities as an Indian-American. As the narrative progresses, we follow the women as they experience joy, sorrow, envy, loss, sadness, surprise, and long-term separation. We learn that the strength of their relationship is a common thread among these triumphs and hardships that women from a wide range of cultural backgrounds can readily relate to. Because of the feminist handling of India in the plot, the novel concludes with an emotional reunion that is both incredibly happy and full of unanswered questions.

An individual's emotional, cultural, and social stability play a major role in determining their identity. Reaching stability is the final goal in this search. Identity can be strengthened by investigating many facets of oneself in

various contexts, such as one's place in the family, at work, and in love relationships. People who have made a strong commitment to their identities are often happier and healthier than those who have not, according to study. Individuals that exhibit identity dispersal frequently experience a sense of alienation and give up on developing a strong sense of self. They don't know what their purpose in life is. They believe they are aware of who they really are. Identity diffusion occurs in cultures when individuals do not share common values or lifestyles. It gives one a sense of bewilderment and disorientation.

The process of uprooting and being deprived of their belongings puts immigrants in a state of uncertainty and distress, which intensifies when their attempts to integrate are unsuccessful. The immigrants are left feeling both lost and confused, having lost both their identity and their place of origin. The alienation that results from a person's or a race's displacement is the main theme of postcolonial literature. A sense of loss is a result of alienation, but life is about rediscovering who you are, not about losing. A self that in the old nation would have appeared round and settled suddenly becomes one of many options in the new, something episodic and flexible enough to adjust to radically changing environments.

*Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the themes of identification, liberation, and independence.

In this study article, the task information and criteria are expressed clearly. As such, a great deal of study has concentrated on the inaccuracy of eyewitness accounts. The main objectives of this work are, first and foremost, to interpret the significance of the concept of self-identity in general and the societal circumstances that affect women and their identity. These topics were up for discussion until recently. However, there may still be a large body of study on the pertinent subjects. Identity politics include marginalization, alienation, assimilation, nostalgia, immigration, and diasporic consciousness. All of Divakaruni's novels address these issues. It is possible to have a quick discussion about the work's overarching motivation as well as the approaches it has established.

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