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LIFE OF WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION IN SISTER OF MY HEART AND IN  
VINE OF DESIRE

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ABSTRACT

The field of exile literature has been in the limelight as it has gained significance in the recent years. Many Diaspora writers raise their voice against the mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the dislocated people from their home land India. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American writer. Her works are largely set in India and the United States, and often focus on the experience of south Asian Immigrants. Divakaruni herself is an immigrant so she had first-hand knowledge and experience about life in America. Divakaruni's writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women. *Sister of My Heart* dealt with the difficulties faced by women and the manners in which they overcome from their problems and difficulties. *Vine of Desire* tells that how the sister friend bond between Anju and Sudha collapsed after their migration. Divakaruni focuses here writing on sisterhood and women friendship through the characters of Anju and Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* and also in *Vine of Desire*.

Key Words; Divakaruni, Anju, Sudha, Immigration, Women, Sister, Friend

Women is the maker, the mother, the one who keeps the whole human race thriving. Women do so many different roles and at the same time the most vulnerable being of all. The role of women in society is constantly questioned and for centuries women have struggled to find their place in a world that is predominantly male oriented. In the contemporary age women got many opportunities in all field, even though women face many struggles in their life. Throughout history, young women have been scrutinized with regard to their attitudes, behavior, sexuality and general conduct.

Literature provides a window into the lives, thoughts and actions of women during certain periods of time in a fictitious form, yet often truthful in many ways. Through submissive natures, complaint men, using only silent means of escape. Literature forms a means to express the pent up feelings of women and women worldwide have used literature as a tool for expression. Many Indian writers have established a place for themselves by voicing out their cries on behalf of the Indian women. A close reading of British literature up to 19<sup>th</sup> century reveals that social issues and challenges faced by women form a part of it but they were

represented by male writers, the validity of which is ambiguous. Women's literature which Jane Austen gave rise in true sense, flourished not only in English Literature but also in other literatures.

Women writers at the beginning of any literature around the world were totally hidden and were out of the focus light. Their presence was considered invisible. Their writings were not made popular. Themes like women's search for identity, quest for selfhood, relocating the self, and awareness to seek a balance between tradition and modernity became popular in the works of male as well as female writers of the post-colonial Indian English fiction. The Indian English fiction resounded with women's assertion of her individuality, social and economic freedom, freedom of mental make-up and also emotional independence.

The field of exile literature has been in the limelight as it has gained significance in the recent years. The experience of migration and living in diasporas have produced a plethora of studies on the recent post-colonial Literature, criticism and theory. Many Diaspora writers raise their voice against the mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the dislocated people from their home land India.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American writer. Her works are largely set in India and the united states, and often focus on the experience of south Asian Immigrants. Divakaruni herself is an immigrant so she had first-hand knowledge and experience about life in America. Divakaruni's writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women.

*Sister of My Heart* dealt with the difficulties faced by women and the manners in which they overcome from their problems and difficulties. In this novel Divakaruni pictures the Indian joint family system. Being an immigrant writer she reevaluate the role of Indian women in *Sister of My Heart*. She has attempted to create a comprehensive picture of south Asian family life. She writes about what she feels and knows. She explored the themes of love, friendship, assimilation and self analysis of women through this novel. Divakaruni portrays the treatment of women in Indian in *Sister of My Heart*.

*Sister of My Heart* is the second novel of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni based on her short story 'The ultrasound' (Arranged Marriage 1995). It portrays the sister friend relationship between Sudha and Anju. Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* is a story that presents the predicament of two generations of women. The story is about few Bengali women who are sensitive to feel the pain, and all of them are intelligent enough to tackle their family problem. *Sister of My Heart* differs from all other novels of Divakaruni, because it throws light on homeland realities rather than on diasporic realities. All the major characters in the novel are females. Male characters are not prominent and they appear only when the situations need them.

*Sister of My Heart* is the story of two Indian girls, Anju and Sudha. The girls use their own voices to narrate the story of their lives in alternative chapters. The two girls Anju and Sudha born on a same day twelve hours apart after the sudden death of their father on a reckless hunt for rubies. It sent Anju and Sudha's mother into a premature labor, Sudha and Anju become best friends sisters and each other constant companion from their young age. Female characters form a decorative picture of Indian characters the young heroines representing early childhood to maturity and marriage, the matriarchal figures represented by Gaury and Nalini, the venetual mother-in law by Ramesh's mother and a pitiable Aunt poshi who suffered a lot as a widow from her very young life.

Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire* is the story of the same Anju and Sudha in *Sister of My Heart*. She takes up the story of Anju and Sudha where she left them at the end of her novel *Sister of My Heart*. *The Vine of Desire* is a powerful story, it has secrets, lies, truths and passions of immigrant characters. It also tells that how the sister friend bond between Anju and Sudha collapsed after their migration. In the end of *Sister of My Heart* Sudha came to America for better life and freedom but in *The Vine of Desire* the same Sudha longs to come back to India because she feels that only after. She reaches India she will have a sense of belonging.

Sudha migrated to America only to safeguard herself and her daughter from the Indian conventional ideas of a single mother, divorcee and a father less child. She thought that in America no one will care that she was a daughter of the chatterjees' or she was divorced. And also she thought to give a new life to Dayita.

No one in America would care that I was a daughter of the  
Chatterjees' or that I was divorced. I could design a new life  
Earn my own living, give Dayita everything she needed.

Best of all, no one would look down on her, for America  
Was full of mothers like me who'd decided that living alone  
Was better than living with the wrong man (272)

That was why she wanted to go to America, though she had well – known of Sunil's attraction towards her. Western influence of Indian society is portrayed in a nice way by the character of Sudha. Though Divakaruni presented the negatives of the Eastern world. She did not forget to tell the evils and shortcomings of the western world. The immigrant bought freedom and riches of the west by the love and support provided from their extended family. This is proved while Anju doubts on herself, 'Did I push Sudha into making the wrong decision misled by my American –feminist notions of right and wrong? Have I condemned her to life of loneliness? (250)

Chitra Banerjee focuses her writing on sisterhood and women friendship through the characters of Anju and Sudha in sister of My Heart and also in vine of Desire. Her women characters tried to balance them with the conflicting passions and demands that come to women as daughters and wives, lovers and mothers. Anju and Sudha share all their experiences from childhood till their marriage.

Divakaruni criticized certain aspects of the upper-class Bengali culture and tradition from her unique feminize and despotic perspective. The novel sister of My Heart portrays the world of women through Gouri, Nalini, Pishi and especially by Anju and Sudha. For Anju and sudha everything occurred at about the same time like birth marriage and pregnancy. The girls do everything together not only as sister of the heart for Sudha. Divakaruni made Anju and sudha speak alternately their own voices. Sister of My Heart, deals with two closely bonded cousin, Anjali (Anju) and Basudha (Sudha) growing up in a Hindu Zamindar family of west Bengal and eventually ending up in America.

The idea of female bonding is explored, through there is a greater focus on the theme in sister of My Heart. Divakaruni speaks of her particular concern with this topic while speaking of her second novel.

Female bonding is definitely different from male bonding. Also women relate to each other in a manner quite unlike the way they relate to men. Divakaruni's idealization of America makes her ignore the possibility that when migration pulls people away from their known environment and culture and places them in a culture that puts a tremendous emphasis on homogeneity and assimilation, they could be socially outcast even if they are technically accepted in their new home.

America becomes unique exceptional, magical country which offers a safe refuge to the female character of Divakaruni's fiction, mostly middle class Indian women oppressed by Indian traditions and having means of passage to European style. Sudha realized that even though she can choose to wear either a sari or blue jeans and a shirt in her new world, she'll only ever feel a sense of belonging when she returns to India.

Anju and Sudha were close friends and sisters and they loved each other like anything else in this world. Their experience after their marriage, and after their migration to America everything changed in their life. Places like America is good for the people those who are addicted to the western culture and people for selfish mentality. But for Sudha and Anju it was not suited for them Because they are in between east and west, traditional and modernity. They could not go with her both. They can select western culture for their food, dress, and education. But they cannot change their character. They never bold enough to do any immoral things.

Before migration, when they were in India, Anju and Sudha were inseparable. They lived for each other. They were the most happiest people in the world. They did not have any secrets between them. They shared each and every single moment of their life. But after migration all the secrets of their life started. They started hiding everything. Their innocent talk, their sharing and caring for each other shattered in America. Sudha wanted to fly away from America. Anju, the one who was very intelligent became mentally upset and lead her life like a machine in America. Though in India they do not have any freedom they were very happy. In America they got all the freedom, free to wear dresses as they like, free to eat as they like, free to talk to men, free to go to outings and parties. But they are not happy. Their hopes for life was buried in their host country.

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