

Diaspora and its Impact in the select novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**P.Nainar Sumathi**

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Abstract

Diaspora is synonymous with new literature of immigration such literature springs from a thorough going engagement with the host country on the part of the immigrant. Immigrant literature captures the wrenching experience of relocation in an alien country for the immigrant. The important obsessions for the new literature of immigrant include nostalgia as well as guilt for the home country and intergenerational conflicts between immigrant parents and American born children. The experience of migration and living in diaspora have produced plethora of studies on the recent post-colonial literature, criticism and theory. The immigrant issues/problems have been explored by diasporic writers Hanishkureshi, Bharathi Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee and other in their works. In recent years much critical interest has grown in the writings of Indian immigrant writers settled in the U.S. they raise their voice against the mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the dislocated people from their homeland India. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Asian American with her ancestral roots in India. Living in the U.S. Divakaruni is more aware of the differences in culture which urges her to explore in all its essentials .Divakaruni believes that the immigrant Indian women feel the impact of the cultural schism caused by dislocation more immediately than men and that because of this she tends to look back even as she evolves on to a new being in the diasporic setting. The present papers concentrates on the difficulties and the problems faced by the immigrants as presented by the immigrant writer.

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Chitra Banerjee the Bengal born writer immigrated to the U.S. in one of the foremost writers of the Diasporic literature. She often focuses on the character balancing two worlds, particularly Indian immigrants struggling for peaceful life in America . The united States of America a land of opportunities and culturally pluralistic society, is no exception to it,. It is a kind that opens up avenues for all those immigrants who initially seek their economic condition. The aspiring and ambitious individual uproot themselves from their cultural moorings and migrate to countries which promise them better living condition and comforts. The immigrants who carries dreams of aspiration also carries with him his natural identity . His reluctance to shed his identity makes it difficult for him to get assimilated in his hero home. The natives too are not ready to accept him without any reservation. This harsh reality, besides causing innumerable problems to the co-migrant , lead to various tensions in the society. Divakaruni's book are directed to women of all races and faith who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their culture and religion. She states :

My characters struggle in the balance between family responsibilities and Individual happiness which is in away, at the centre of conflict between our Hindu culture, which always shows the mother as the giver, nurture and sacrificing herself for the good of the family and the western concept of self happiness. (8)

In *Sister of my Heart*, cousin Anju and Sudha born on a same day were brought up together by their widow mothers. Anju and sudha gets married on a same day , Sudha remains i India whereas Anju flies to America with her husband Sunil a computer scientist. Anju is happy in her marriage and she is eager to go to America when sunil describes America. It seems almost as amazing as the fairy kingdom."You can be any thing in America, Angel"-that is special name for Anju he says excitedly. This is not only the thought or the expectation of Anju but all who are non-immigrants."You can be what you want"(16). Marriage has changed Anju in unexpected ways , where she feels everyone as an intruder.

America in Anju's life has not satisfied her as she expected. Anju's life in America was a hectic one since morning she has to take sunil to the station; she has to go to her classes, then library, then the grocery, the dry cleaners and atlast cooking which she hates . ” Of the many realisation I've had since I came to America the fore most thing is that I hate cooking. Its not what I imagined my American life would be like”(186).This is the result of many of the expectators .

The novel *The Vine of Desire* is a sequel to the *Sister Of My Heart* consists fullof American life where the two protagonists face challenges . As Sudha comes out of the marriage life Anju invites her to America so that she find a job for herself to lead a comfortable life. Anju use to think how she imagined America before she came .She read all types of books especially *Anna Karena and Sons and Lovers, The Great Gatsby and A Rooms of One's Own*, which aroused interest in her for distant places and thats how she felt of America before coming:

They filed me with dissatisfaction with my own life, and a longing of Places. I believed that , if I could only get out of calcutta to to one of those exotic countries I read about, it would transform me. But transformation isn't easy is it?(i4)

Divakaruni has mingled the famous parts of America as well as the Indian popularities like Kanchipuram silk, All india Radio, or Akasbani Kalikata, Tanjore paintings where Anju proudly exhibits “ There's nothing like our Indian fabrics”.(114)

There is a exposure of cultural changes, which she accepted by Sudha in a party of Mr. Chopra where she sips wine. But incidents happen in such a way that ruin the party when one of the companion starts “fucking Indians showing off”, spitting on side . Hearing this Anju's husband Sunil twists the attendants behind his back with one deft motion . Next time you want to talk about Indians, remember this”(138).This shows his respect and attachment towards his nation though he ins in United States .

The sad part of many immigrant is that they are not able to attend their relations funeral which Divakaruni exposes it through Sunil where he is not able to do the funeral rite to his father. When one depends on money and pleasure throughout his life he has to remain helpless on them who depend on him. Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*(1994) states that it is an axiomatic truth that the migrant dreams are futile and it would not be possible to return to the

homeland . The longing for the homeland is countered by the desire to long for the new home, so the migrant remains creatures of the edge, the peripheral man(222).

Anju also comes out of the marriage life unwillingly when she comes to that her husband is attracted towards Sudha though Sudha avoids him, these two protagonist finds a job as a care taker and a librarian respectively and lead their life successfully in an adopted land.

Queen of Dreams is a tale of East meeting West . It talks about the trials and tribulations and experience of the Indian American community through the lives of Bengali immigrant family. The novel is divided between India and the United States of America, although the entire story takes place in America.

Mrs.Gupta has come to America in order to save her gift to interpret dreams. She is a first generation Indian immigrant in America. Her job consists of interpreting other people dreams and warning them about the imminent danger and problems. Rakhi her daughter is an American by birth and grows up with a feeling of belonging to her land of birth . She is a young divorcee and a struggling artist. She runs a teashop “The Chai House” to earn a living and provide for her six year old daughter Jona. Her partner in business and her best friend is Belle , a second generation Indian American who provides a sharp contrast to Rakhi in her pro-American attitude. Although Rakhi is comfortable in her American life, she feels a strong connection towards her Indianess. However, her mother wants to spare her the face of her ability to read dreams, this only arouses her curiosity. So, she starts carving for all things Indian. She admits;

I hungered for all things Indian because my mother never spoke of the country she'd grown up in- just as she never spoke of her past.(35)

Rakhi's parents have been typical in not letting her know much about India which would reveal about her mother's past. Belle was opposite to Rakhi who wanted to escape from all the pressure that her mother put upon her to be an “Indian”. After Rakhi's separation from her husband , she felt threatened the second time which came in the shape of a rival coffee shop across the street from the Chai Shop. The low-priced food items of the competitors tempted the Rakhi's customers to shift their loyalties to the newly opened shop which led Rakhi to lose her business and that would lose the custody of her daughter to her ex-husband Sonny.

Rakhi needed her mother's advice in the case of her Chai-house which was running on a loss. After visiting the coffee shop she asks Rakhi to find a new angle for the store.

Something with spirit and energy to bring people back in. And you must do it quickly, before you grow weaker (88). Mrs .Gupta holds Rakhi responsible for the loss of their business she says :

The reason you do not have enough power to fight that woman there is that She Knows exactly who she is, you don't. This isn't a real cha shop but a mishmash a Western notion of what's Indian; May be that's the problem. May be if you can make it into something authentic. You 'll survive.(89).

Rakhi angrily replies" And whose fault is it if I don't know who I am? It have wrapped sense of what's Indian?(89)Mrs.Gupta admits her fault and acts thus:

Your'e right . It is my fault that I brought you up wrong. I thought it would protect you it I didn't think about the past that way you wouldn't be constantly looking back, hankering, like those other members spitting you between here and there, between your life right now and that which can neverbe. But by not telling you about India as it really were, I made into something far bigger. It crowded other things about of your mind. It pressed upon your brain like a tumour(89)

After her mother's death by amysterious accident Rakhi discovers a collection of her dream journals written in Bengali. She becomes dependent on her father to translate though "she has never felt him so close to her at any stage on her life"(192). Slowly Mr.Gupta emerges as a star in his own right in various cook, singer and practical business man help to stabilise the failing business in the Chai House which is now rechristened as a 'The Kurma House' . As things return to normalcy Rakhi's life is shaken by new horrors - september11 terrorists attack. The events followed that bring the family into contact with self professed patriots who attack them and cause them of being terrorists due to the colour of their skin and this calls their notion of citizenship into questions. However as an unexpected blessing, the dark complexities of life provide her an opportunity to renew her love for her husband and family.

Rakhi feeling too American and seeking out a more 'authentic Indian identity is a manifestation of her love and loyalty torn between her imagined homeland and the country of her birth. Rakhi's obsession with India is a on;ly for its myths and mystery intertwined with her mother's unspoken fast. In her real self and things concerning day-today life, Rakhi's love and loyalty weigh in favour of her birth country. The sight of the remains of her mother in an urn taken for scattering in the river make her profess the hidden American identity inside her, wapped in enticing imagined India. She says, "If I died I, too would want my remains to become part of this land, this water, because there's a way in which the geography of one's childhood makes its way inti one's bones"(133-134). Yet another place when she sees a groupof Indians coming to her shop, she feels she doesn't belong to them. The word foreign comes to me again, though I know its aironic. They're my country men we share the same skin colour(194).

A small Indian immigrant audience who visit the shop regularly demanding Mr.Gupta to sing songs from old Hindi movies underlines their constant effort to build the lost boundaries in the host space (America). It also helps them to preserve their cultural hangovers which have been often dwindled by the dominant culture. In an attempt to overcome the identity crisis with all its complexities, they feel ,as Kateryna Arthur writes in Aborginal and Immigrant writing, " the necessary to construct a new self and world, not in a vacuum, but against and in contradiction to construction already imposed by the dominant culture"(123).

The fire disaster at ' the Kurma House ' makes Rakhi identify her Indian roots partially. The unbelievable, overwhelming support and encouragement provided by the customers offer her a clear picture of where she belongs to, although she is reluctant to accept it. As oldman says:

Don't worryThe shop will be in mint condition before you know it. Meanwhile, we'll keep coming, whatever food you can manage to make, we'll buy. And we'll sing and play and keep your spirits and ours up. We're all brothers and sisters here, after all, bhai-bahen(238)

The September 11 attack changed the life of Rakhi and the Indian -American community. Rakhi and her father decided to open the shop on the horrendous day as they owe it to

their customers ' to stay open so they can come in and talk about what's happened, draw support from each other . May be can help them deal with shock"(257) .When asked by Belle to put up an American flag in front of the shop to show their solidarity, Rakhi dismisses the idea vehemently and laments thus:

Belle, I don't have to put up a flag to prove that I'm American! I'm an American already. I love this country hell, it's the only country I know but I'm not going to be pressured in to putting up a sign to announce that love to every passerby (264).

The regular musician who come to Rakhi shop for singing and enjoying they are dressed in jeans and t-shirts instead of kurtas and loose pants to be on the safer side , mean while they are beaten up by unknown who call themselves as patriots. Belle's friend says " ,We haven't done any thing wrong. Those men here were mourning, . We're Americans the way you are. We all feel terrible about what happened "(267).Rakhi quest for identity rises she looks at her reflection in the glass brown skin, the Indian features, the dark eyes with dark circles, . In familiar but suddenly alien "But I wasn't American then what was I?"(271).

Rakhi tells Sonny how her neighbourhood had changed. The identity crisis after September 11 attack not only disrupts the life of Rakhi but also all the immigrants who develop a sense of exile and homeliness. Rakhi adds her list, "And people like us, seeing ourselves darkly through the eyes of strangers, who lost a sense of belongingness"(272).This incident brings closure Sonny and Rakhi like a phoenix, reunites her love for her husband and family .

The beautiness of woman and the Indianess can be seen in her novel *Queen of Dreams*. It combines the elements that Divakaruni is known for. The tale succeeds in two levels. She effectively takes the reader in to an immigrant culture but she also shows the common ground that lies in a world that some would find foreign. The concept of home, nation and cultural identity of belongingness to the place of ancestry does not remain from individual to individual.

In the novel *Sister of My Heart and Vine of Desire* the life of the protagonist face failures and struggle hard to survive in the new land . But Chitra had cleverly bought Sudha and Anju out of the failure and made them fly independently. There seem to be no solution for the problems faced by the

immigrants. Some of their struggles are painful, but that is the part of the immigrant experience. The immigrant rooted in the new land is always haunted by the past and the immigrant issues arise between culturing and capturing. In this context, Bharathi Mukherjee asserts :

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries which are plagued civil and religious conflicts.

We have experienced rapid changes in the history of the Nations in which we lived when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb two hundred years of American history and learn to adapt American society,. Our lives are remarkable often heroic.

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