



Women's Quest for Selfhood: A Feminist Reading of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*

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Abstract: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's specialty is the challenges women face in finding and reclaiming their selves as wives, mothers and, most significantly, human beings in contemporary Indian culture. *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* are realistic books, both with a mythology, folktales and fairy tales about India and the Hindu faith. The story of this novel explores the struggle and suffering the characters go through as they skillfully negotiate between the conventional and the modern worlds and how these individuals develop as a result of striking a balance between their long-cherished beliefs and unexpectedly modern aspirations. This research article intended to examine various hegemony, patriarchy and other issues in the Eastern and Western contexts. It also shows the conflict of a woman trying to find her own existence by creating her own identity.

Keywords: Woman, hegemony, patriarchy and conflict.

Introduction:

Sister of My Heart and *The Vine of Desire* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are novels about female friendship in a world where males' rule. The two main characters of the book, Sudha and Anju, are cousins who were born on the same day, grew up in the same home, and got married on the same day. Their union causes a rift between them when Anju relocates to the United States, where her husband Sunil works as an IT engineer, and Sudha stays with her in-laws in Midnapur. As their happiness and aspirations were entwined with the men in their lives, their lives began to change. However, their mutual trust and emotional connection endure.

When Anju suffers a tragic miscarriage and Sudha gets divorced for refusing to terminate her girl child, it keeps them going. From a feminist perspective, their bonding as a support system against life's challenges, such as pregnancy, the possibility of divorce, miscarriage, etc., is significant. A common catchphrase of Western feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was "female bonding" or "forming a sisterhood of women all over the world to present a united front against patriarchal oppression and subordination of women." Anju and Sudha's sisterhood is significant because it helps them get over their problems, but the challenges it raises serve as a reminder that developing a strong female friendship is a delicate endeavor. The author picks up Anju and Sudha's journey from the conclusion of *Sister in The Vine of Desire*. In the book, Anju and Sudha rekindle their connection in America, distant from Calcutta, the city of their youth, and years after separating their lives. Divakaruni depicts in the book the benefits and dangers of escaping the past as well as the conflicting feelings that influence the journey towards independence. Their lives were irrevocably altered the day Sudha left a failing marriage behind and walked out of the Indian Airlines plane into Anju's arms.

The tale of Anju and Sudha is continued by Divakaruni where she left off in her book *Sister of My Heart*. Sudha and her young daughter Dayita flee the oppressive grip of their mother-in-law in India and seek safety in San Francisco, USA, with Anju's family. The reason for this is that Divakaruni, through the characters of Anju and Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*, has created an image of India as a primitive country with harsh and terrible conditions. Women's identities are inextricably linked to the social, religious, and public contexts of their lives. Her circumstances are unpredictable, and her varied nature works in different parts of the world.



This leads to an extreme case of gender comprehensiveness. Men and women have debated the topic of character, but as women come to terms with their abilities and shortcomings, their quest for recognition as unique individuals has become more difficult. Divakaruni's settings are Indian-American and her fearless female characters are from all walks of life. The issue of identity crisis in the books *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* is covered in this research paper. A woman's quest is to live her life on two different levels as an individual and as a lady. The woman's awakening to the reality of her social and cultural identity and her subsequent efforts to reconsider her life and mold it to fit her newfound understanding as a women's activist catalyzed her ongoing search for her identity. The perspectives held by female novelists about the creation of female characters are quite remarkable. They witness her up close, revealing hitherto spotless areas of her heart. The writers are ensnared in their world.

Their writings explore the complex relationships between women and the common, unforeseen meetings. To explore their untapped potential or to live on their terms, the female protagonists written by female authors challenge the man-centric network, regardless of the potential consequences of their actions. Postcolonial Indian women writers have not only criticized male-centric ideologies and their harsh inclinations against feminist advancement, but they have also come up with strategies to combat those mentalities in their writings. The core of Indian feminism is the women stuck between tradition and modernity, overcoming the weight of the past and the hope for the future. Under the impact of feminism, the pursuit of identity and self-definition has emerged as central themes in literature. Many female writers focus on issues about women; they represent the perspectives of women around the globe. A substantial amount of modern Indian writing in English is composed of fiction written by women authors.

For the sake of their families, Anju and Sudha gave up their goals. For her family's benefit, Sudha wed Ramesh. Anju married Sunil, the man she adored. This demonstrates how women are predisposed to giving their all for the good of others. They became the daughters-in-law of several other families after getting married and losing their identities as Chatterjee girls. After meeting Ramesh, Sudha made an effort to put her past with Ashok behind her. Sudha didn't have any kids of her own. Treatments in the hospital were recommended by Sudha's mother-in-law and other relatives.

Conclusion: *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a powerful novel that explores the struggles that women face in finding their identity in a patriarchal society. The novel highlights the challenges that women face in navigating their roles as wives, daughters, and mothers. The novel also critiques traditional gender roles and expectations that are placed on women in Indian society. Overall, the novel presents a strong feminist message and serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of women's empowerment and the fight for gender equality.

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