

Familial Relationships In Diasporic Perspectives: A Critical Analysis Of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Before We Visit The Goddess

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This study examines the intricate mother–daughter relationships that transcend generations and nations, from India to America, in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Before We Visit the Goddess*. Divakaruni, a diasporic writer, skillfully constructs the emotional landscapes of three strong women—Sabitri, Bela, and Tara—as they struggle for freedom and the fulfilment of their dreams. Throughout their journeys, these women often challenge social norms and make sacrifices that result in irreversible consequences. The novel highlights that Indian women, whether within India or abroad, often face hardships caused by choices shaped by emotional disillusionment. Divakaruni demonstrates how women may experience emotional and psychological suffering due to their unwise relationships, particularly with men. Despite generational gaps and emotional distance, Sabitri, Bela, and Tara ultimately sustain their familial bond and overcome adversity by supporting one another. Exploring themes such as cultural nostalgia, family ties and immigrant identity from a diasporic perspective, this research analyzes the tensions within mother–daughter relationships.

Keywords: mothers, daughters, culture, diaspora, immigrants, identity, women.

Introduction

The term diaspora refers to people who have left their homeland in search of a better life in another part of the world. India has one of the world's oldest diasporic histories, with major waves of migration beginning in the seventeenth century. After 1965, Indian immigration to the United States increased significantly, with men forming the majority of early migrants. By the 1990s, legal immigrants included spouses, academics, scientists and entrepreneurs, accounting for nearly half of the migrant population. Several women not only pursued professional careers but also emerged as writers, contributing significantly to diasporic literature. Their fictional portrayals of social and personal experiences in unfamiliar countries highlight emotional journeys, adaptation and hardships, especially among immigrant women.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, born in Calcutta, India on July 29, 1956, is a celebrated first-generation immigrant writer who has authored eighteen novels. She explores the cultural and

emotional struggles of Indian women navigating patriarchal pressures in both their homeland and the Western world. Her female protagonists face restrictive gender norms despite being educated and financially independent. As Sipahutar (2018) states, “Male power is constructed and maintained through institutional and cultural practices that aim to bolster male superiority through the reinforcement of female inferiority.” Women’s emancipation, societal prejudice and interpersonal conflicts are major themes in Divakaruni’s works. In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, three generations—Sabitri, Bela and Tara—experience emotional isolation, displacement and self-inflicted suffering resulting from their choices. Although the setting shifts from rural India to metropolitan America, the fundamental challenges faced by women remain unchanged; they continue to struggle with emotional and social disconnect.

Leelamoyi, a wealthy benefactor, briefly supports Sabitri’s education, but a moment of personal weakness destroys this opportunity and leaves her with lifelong regret. Bela, Sabitri’s independent daughter, elopes to the United States despite her mother’s concerns. Her experience of betrayal and cultural alienation shatters her fantasies about Western life. Her daughter, Tara, born in America, rejects her Indian heritage and faces psychological turmoil and social disorientation. Like the women before her, Tara is shaped by destructive choices and unhealthy relationships.

Through these intertwined stories, Divakaruni highlights generational conflict, cultural displacement and immigrant identity. Although strong and resilient, these women suffer emotional fragmentation within family relationships. This research examines *Before We Visit the Goddess* through the lens of female subjectivity, diasporic identity and immigrant anxiety.

Literature Review

This study uses Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Before We Visit the Goddess* as the primary source to examine challenges faced by immigrant women in their new environments. Conflicts in family relationships, particularly involving men, are intensified because these women are torn between opposing cultural realities. The gender gap remains one of India’s most significant social challenges (Kalaivani, 1995). Educational opportunities empower migrant women to confront psychological and physical hardship and the emotional separation from loved ones caused by cultural and generational divides. According to Mookherjee (2015) and Suhana (2018), education is women’s greatest asset for achieving independence.

Sabitri, a 67-year-old woman living in India, reflects on the mistake that sabotaged her education and changed the course of her life. Her daughter Bela likewise suffers irreversible emotional trauma. When Bela leaves home, Sabitri is powerless to stop her.

Discussion

Divakaruni presents the stories of three generations—Sabitri, Bela and Tara—each yearning for freedom. These strong and determined women transform themselves and confront adversity to achieve their goals. Chitra portrays strong female figures capable of challenging patriarchal social norms (Suhana, 2018).

Traditional values shape Sabitri's upbringing, and although she dreams of obtaining a degree, a single mistake—her relationship with Rajiv, Leelamoyi's son—results in her expulsion and lifelong regret. Bela later experiences similar emotional devastation when her husband, Bijan, suspects her of infidelity and ends their marriage, reflecting patriarchal attitudes regarding women's sexuality in Indian society (Mahajan et al., 2019). After Bijan's death, Bela confronts hardship with determination and raises her daughter alone, eventually becoming a successful entrepreneur.

Bela later rebels against Sabitri's advice and marries for love, moving to America in search of happiness. However, her dreams collapse, revealing the difficulties faced by immigrants who feel isolated from emotional and familial support systems.

Results and Discussion

Life brings unexpected changes. After her divorce and Tara's departure, Bela becomes emotionally devastated and develops alcoholism. This reflects the emotional struggles of migrants adapting to foreign environments (Kalaivani, 1995). Friendship with Kenneth, a homosexual man, helps Bela reconnect with her cultural identity and culinary heritage.

Tara, raised in America, rejects her education and spirals into destructive behavior involving substance abuse and unhealthy relationships. Her abortion leaves her emotionally shattered. A turning point arrives when she meets Dr. Venkatachalapathi, whose guidance inspires her spiritual reflection and reconciliation with her mother. She later returns home, restoring familial bonds.

As the novel concludes, Bela and Tara reflect upon Sabitri's letters and memories, realizing the importance of family ties. Sabitri's final words emphasize traditional values: "Good daughters are fortunate lamps, brightening the family's name. Disgraceful daughters tarnish it."

Conclusion

This study highlights Divakaruni's portrayal of complex mother–daughter relationships. Shifting between nations and identities, her characters experience cultural dislocation and emotional disturbance. Despite their courage and resilience, miscommunication and emotional distance persist within their relationships. Migration intensifies emotional pain and identity loss, leaving women longing for belonging, acceptance and love. Ultimately, positive relationships and reflection enable them to rebuild their connections and rediscover purpose.

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(Cleaned formatting; URLs removed unless essential)

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