

Status of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Novels

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The modern women writers now-a-days occupy a strong position in literature. Women are integral part of civilization. No society or country can ever progress without an active participation of women in its overall development. Although the place of women in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age yet one has never been considered equal to men.

Bharathi Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Meena Alexander, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Shoba De, Manjula Padmanaban, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Meera Syal are the eminent women novelists in the modern literature era. Their novels deal with the position of women in society. Most of these writers have given expression to their feelings in the form of fiction. They depicted the man-woman relationship and the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni settled in U.S.A., is an award winning author and poet. Her works have been widely published in over 50 magazines including Atlantic Monthly and New Yorker. Her works have been translated into 11 languages including Dutch, Hebrew, Japanese and this has settled her into a role as one of the premier Asian American writers of today. Divakaruni is a co-founder and former president of Maitri, a helpline founded in 1991 for South Asian women dealing with domestic abuse. Divakaruni's works are largely set in India and the United States, and often focus on the experiences of South Asian immigrants.

Tilo, a magical figure runs a grocery shop. She uses spices to help the customers to overcome difficulties. She sells and even provides spices according to their suited problems and troubles. She provides spices not only for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop experience. In fact, not only the Indian immigrants flock to the shop but also the original inhabitants come to her shop with an intention of getting healed. In this process, she develops dilemmas of her own when she falls in love with a non-Indian, which is

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– October – December - 2018

against the rules of mistresses. As well as that may affect her in losing her powers on the spices. This creates great conflict. She has to choose whether to serve her people or to follow the path leading to her own happiness. Tilo has to decide which parts of her heritage she will keep and which parts she will chose to abandon.

The novel is a spellbounding and hypnotizing tale of joy and sorrow and one woman's special powers to solve them with the help of the power of the spices. There are many women characters in *The Mistress of spices*. Divakaruni demonstrates the suppressed identity of women through the character of Ahuja's wife. The first character Ahuja's wife comes into Tilo's store. She is young and beautiful immigrant woman. Her name is Lalita. Tilo wants to call her by her name but Lalita prefers to be called Ahuja's wife. Lalita's story is the same story of many of the women in India. She does not want to get married. It is only before three days to the wedding, she has seen her husband. He is totally different from the photo shown to her, which has taken years back. He has come from America. She does not like him but the wedding has been arranged to an old man. She agrees to marry him for the sake of her parents. She has to be silent with tears, as she can't explain her desires to her parents. She accepts him as her husband.

Lalita's life after her marriage is not a happy one. Lalitha confesses to Tilo about her married life. She also tells that her husband is extremely possessive and harasses her physically and watches her always. Lalita is an apt example of the oriental culture, where a woman hides her own identity willingly in order to pacify the male dominance of the husband, by referring to her husband's wife. Lalita knows sewing. She has been to a sewing school in Kanpur. Lalita wants to continue to do sewing in America, after her marriage to Ahuja. But she has been denied of her desire, because of her husband's dominance. He has a firm view that his woman should not take up any profession. "Aren't I man enough man enough man enough" (16). She remained Ahuja's wife. This shows how women in general care for their family and how they are restricted by the society. She longs for a child but she does not conceive, "Child- longing, deepest desire, deeper than for wealth or lover or even death" (*The Mistress of Spices*, 16). She goes for a checkup and comes to know that the problem is not with her but with her husband. When she tells this to her husband he gets furious and assaults her physically. Tilo realises that Ahuja's wife is a victim of cultural apathy and male domination.

Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, follows two cousins from birth until their wedding day. From a young age the girls Sudha and Anju become best friends, sisters, and each other's constant companion. Anju and Sudha are inseparable, but different. Beautiful and calm, Sudha is a storyteller and dreams of designing clothes and having a family. Anju has a fierce spirit and longs

to study Literature in college. The girls get caught skipping school and this event, along with a health scare in the family, suddenly changes plans for college to plans of marriage. Book one ends with Anju and Sudha getting married on the same day. Sudha will move in with her husband and in-laws who live in another part of India. Anju's husband works in the United States and she plans to join him after getting a visa. More than marriage has driven Anju and Sudha apart. Sudha has learned a dark secret about their family's past. Shame and guilt over keeping this secret causes Sudha to pull away from Anju. But her love for her sister does not falter and she even refuses to elope for fear it would damage Anju's reputation. On the night of their double wedding, Anju becomes aware of her husband's attraction to Sudha. Anju does not blame Sudha, but it is with some relief the two young women begin to live separate lives.

In *Sister of My Heart*, Sudha quickly learns the ways of her demanding and controlling mother-in-law. After five long years, Sudha is elated to learn she is pregnant. Meanwhile, Anju's life in the United States has not entirely turned out as she expected. Anju and Sudha exchange regular letters and short phone calls, but their old intimacy is missing. The friends discover they are pregnant at the same time and both seem finally happy. Sudha's mother-in-law finds out that Sudha's child is a girl. She demands Sudha to abort the baby, believing the first child should be a son. Sudha has nowhere to turn; leaving her husband would be grounds to talk to each other again as true sisters. Refusing to tie her life to another man and realizing Anju needs her, Sudha and her daughter decide to go to the United States. After many years, the sisters are reunited, but future obstacles still loom.

In *The Vine of Desire* continues the story of Anju and Sudha, the two young women at the center of Divakaruni's bestselling novel *Sister of My Heart*. Far from Calcutta, the city of their childhood and after years of living separate lives, Anju and Sudha rekindle their friendship in America. The deep-seated love they feel for each other provides the support each of them needs. It gives Anju the strength to pick up the pieces of her life after a miscarriage, and Sudha the confidence to make a life for herself and her baby daughter, Dayita-without her husband. The women's bond is shaken to the core when they must confront the deeply passionate feelings that Anju's husband has for Sudha. Meanwhile, the unlikely relationships they form with men and women in the world outside the immigrant Indian community as well as with their families in India profoundly transform them, forcing them to question the central assumptions of their lives.

Through these novels, the writers explain the position of women in different point of view. In Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, Sudha was struggling with her husband and mother-in law to save her unborn baby. Even though her mother-in law is a female she cannot understand the

Status of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Novels

– October – December - 2018

feelings and love of a mother. The sequel of *Sister of My Heart* is *The Vine of Desire*, Sudha leaves her husband and joins with her cousin sister Anju in America. In America, she lives for a short span of time because Anju's husband spoiled her. Without informing Anju, she leaves her house and went somewhere. In both the novels, the voices of women could not be heard by the men.

The status of woman has constantly been changing, yet hundred percentage equal treatment is not attain. We have come a long way but few steps are still needed. The image of women is continually changing, often to suit the changing needs of man or society in general. These women in the novel exists within us especially women. At many given situation according to me it is women who are responsible for the atrocities of another women as we have also notice in the novel

The women begin to reject the rigid rules and regulation which are limited for women in the society. Ironically without any male intrusion, the sisters and the mothers are able to carve out a position for themselves in the society. The protagonists, Anju and Sudha, and their mothers are able to re-discover themselves through the various trials and tribulations, and thereby assert their identity. The power of sisterhood is the tower of strength for all the women in the novel.

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[http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chitra_Banerjee_Divakaruni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chitra_Banerjee_Divakaruni)
