



IMPACT OF DIASPORA IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY WITH REFERENCE TO CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *BEFORE WE VISIT THE GODDESS*

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Abstract: The idea of borders and their unsaid counterparts, home and identity, have a fundamental position in diasporic discourse and act as a thread that unites it. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores this issue in her book "*Before We Visit The Goddess*" This research would be active in order to challenge and transcend these boundaries and also analyses the impact that it possess on search for identity. The novel-in-stories to look for a home that, while it may not be permanent in its physical form, is one that aims to anchor the intellect and free the person from the constraints it paradoxically become personal restrictions after previously just existing as societal ones.

Keywords - Identity, challenge, intellect

INTRODUCTION

Literature was actually first originated from some of the ancient civilizations such as ancient Egypt. Literature was started by singing and by oral form of reciting. The term "Indian literature" refers to works written both inside and outside the Republic of India, both before and after 1947, on the entire Indian subcontinent. Indian literature is among of the oldest in existence and has served as a model for the rest of the globe. The phrase refers to ancient literary works that have been written in several Indian languages. The literary work was originally transmitted orally in ancient times. The Rig Veda, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, which were penned in the first millennium BCE, were the first works of ancient Indian literature ever produced.

Indian fiction and the novel in particular, is influenced by Western culture. The novel is not a literary genre that is naturally associated with Indian temperament because of its focus on character analysis and associated storyline. However, India has generated a lot of excellent literature during the past fifty years, including novels, short tales, sketches and satires. For the ethnographic and cultural information, they can produce, Dorothy M. Spencer has chosen and annotated about 300 pieces for this book. There include English translations, original works written in English and translations from different regional languages; overall, this collection represents a broad cross-section of Indian literary innovation.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a poet and author who was born in Kolkata, India and moved to the United States to pursue graduate studies. She obtained an MA at Wright State University and a PhD at the University of California-Berkeley. Divakaruni, a prolific poet and writer, is renowned for her meticulous examination of the immigrant experience, especially that of South Asian women. The best-selling *Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and its follow-up, *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *Queen of Dreams*

(2003), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), *One Amazing Thing* (2009), and *Oleander Girl* (2013) are just a few of the many works by Divakaruni.

Before We Visit the Goddess captures the gorgeous complexity of these multi-generational and cross-continental relationships through a sparkling symphony of voices those of the women themselves and the men who loved them and reveals the enduring threads of love, hope, and bravery that define a family and a life. This story illuminates the opposition women must face, generation by generation, as they seek both independence and connection in a gracefully insightful, dazzlingly descriptive and covertly stinging manner.

The novel explores complex familial relations across borders which are presented in an empathic way, giving us more of an understanding of love, loss and Bengali culture, like Divakaruni's earlier books. The three female protagonists of the book, Sabitri, Bela and Tara, who represent three generations, search for their own identities as the plot develops in an effort to understand or, occasionally, even to justify their own lives and actions. In the process, they unintentionally gain a better understanding of one another's motivations and behaviours, crossing and ultimately erasing the boundaries of space that had previously kept them apart.

The novel opens with Sabitri, the eldest of the three female protagonists, writing a letter to her granddaughter Tara and telling Tara the story of her own life, the decisions she made, and the actions they set in motion, some of which were premeditated and others which she had not anticipated. She tries to persuade Tara to reconsider her decision to drop out of school. In the letter, the grandmother, Sabitri, who tells her own story wonders, "What can she write in her rustic English to change Tara's mind? She cannot even imagine her Granddaughters life, The Whirlwind foreign world she lives in. All Sabitri has is handful of photos. The child Tara in a costume, brandishing a broomstick, celebrating some odd American festival, the point of which Sabitri could not figure out" (3). These words of Sabitri reveal that diaspora indeed place a vital role in their relationship. Sabitri was unable to meet or communicate with Tara in a normal manner because of this distinctiveness that both of them face due to their separation of boundaries. Sabitri could not understand the mentality of Tara because she is not familiar with American lifestyle and surroundings where Tara lives in. She has only been able to piece together information about her granddaughter Tara from pictures that Tara's mother, her own daughter Bela, has sent her. This lack of ethnic understanding is also an impact of diaspora which in turn has a major impact on the identity of a person.

Sabitri makes several attempts to write, all of which are unsuccessful and result in false starts that make the letter sound preachy and inappropriate, even to her, before finally writing down her own experiences and decisions that have unintentionally shaped not only her own future but also that of her daughter Bela and possibly even her own in the future. A letter that spans both time and geography and that, despite going unread for nearly 25 years, helps to remove barriers that have separated the three generations of mothers and daughters. When we read the words of Radhika Santhanam, in her review of this novel, she states that "Divakaruni seamlessly takes us from rural India to modern life in Houston and Austin. If Sabitri is Bengali in her passionate love for sweets and Bela straddles two cultures, Tara is as far removed from her roots as one can imagine".

The novel oscillates with the setting of two places India and America depicting the variations that these women face because of the separate boundaries that they live in. We could taste the two extremes of indigenous culture and a foreign culture with the characters of Sabitri and Tara. When Tara meets an Indian man called Dr. Venkatachalapathi, she realizes the value of her own culture and homeland where her former generation belonged to. They go to a Meenakshi temple. Because of Tara's modern attire she was seen by the priest in a different way as though she doesn't belong there. Tara was not in a mood to go to temple but for Dr. V's sake she removes her eyebrow ring and swaddled herself in a shawl before entering into the temple. After entering she feels a sudden change,

"Inside the temple I hadn't understood what the priest was chanting, but the rise and fall of the syllables was hypnotic. Dr. V had told me that the mantras were thousands of years old. For a long time they had been considered too sacred to write down. I thought about how they'd wandered through the centuries until they found their way here, to America, to be recited for me. There was something breath-stopping about it" (129)

This instance depicts the realization of her own culture and tradition of Tara. Here she comes to know about her own identity. A few minutes before this incident Tara was without any identity and was searching one for her own. She was broken by her unfavourable love life which made her very much depressed. But this instance lead away for her to get an answer for the quest of her identity.

Even though Bela and Tara both reside in different parts of the United States, as do Sabitri and her mother Durga, the three generations of women have been divided not only by physical distance - Sabitri

being in India, Bela travelling from India to America, and Tara being born and raised in America - but also by their beliefs, lifestyles and the boundaries they have drawn between their minds and emotions. However, it's interesting to note how closely their lives parallel each other in terms of the decisions they make (such as quitting school) and how those decisions affect their personal lives and interpersonal relationships. Because all three women are naturally independent and impulsive. The novel marks the advent of diasporic literature, in which the journey is mostly made through the psychic realm of the three generations of women rather than just physical location.

Physical displacement ends up being the least of their issues and worries and, if anything, only helps to highlight and emphasise the emotional distance that forms between the three ladies and within each of them as they work to achieve their goals. These boundaries eventually dissolve as the women come to better understand one another and themselves, helping them to find their identity and a solid ground to stand on. The "longing to be included" (10), which is also what causes a feeling of alienation in the diasporic, is what has actually driven them apart.

Thus, despite the great distances separating them - Sabitri being in India and Bela being in America and Sabitri being unable to come to terms with Bela leaving her for Sanjay on the one hand, and Sanjay not allowing Bela to visit her mother or allowing the mother to visit her on the other - Sabitri is able to understand her daughter's worries and realities without her daughter ever bringing them up. Even though each of these women eventually succeeds in picking up her life, Divakaruni ultimately focuses on how, with each passing generation, the boundaries that separate them both internally and externally continue to diversify, making it harder for them to return to what might be deemed a "successful" life. Literary Analysis in doing so, the book largely examines what success for a woman looks like.

Diaspora being a theme more consistently and obviously explored by Divakaruni, in her earlier writing, in *Before We Visit the Goddess* serves as a concern that constitutes a flitting but persistent backdrop; but one which is nevertheless explored from diverse angles. Divakaruni encapsulates the experiences of the diasporic in an alien land and also captures the opposing emotions that go with it, though she does not dwell on this aspect too much. It is possible to look at the location, dislocation and relocation of a diasporic text. The shifting definition of home and the anxiety that comes with it about being homeless and being unable to return are recurring themes in diasporic literature.

Like her character Bela, Divakaruni opines that she too finds immigration, the physical crossing of borders, both transformative and terrifying. Consequently, she reflects upon how distance from the land and people, one has, often out of choice, left behind, makes one value those experiences and reconsider them, in a fresh light. This is also reflected in Tara's character as she gets to know about her culture only after meeting Dr. V.

The whole novel revolves around these 3 main women characters who faced the issue of unsuccessful marital life not because that they are diasporic or they had influences on each other. It was only because of the circumstances that each of them faced which was more or less similar to each other. They were not subjected to adopt such life, in fact they only chose their life. May be Sabitri was an exclusion but the other two had freedom to choose their own futures, especially Tara.

Diaspora, only to some extent, was reason for the distress in the lives of the three women. Moving from one place to another just changed their surroundings and not their inner self. They might have faced only the physical separation from their homeland but not mentally. Even though they were away from their homeland, each one of them had the indigenous feeling for their own land. We could see this especially in Tara's life as she was not in India but she wanted to be an Indian in the end of the novel.

Identity is something that every individual possesses inside them and it is not dependent on their surroundings or the people whom they live with. In this novel also, it is not true that Tara lost her identity only because she moved away from her homeland and settled in America. It is her own duty to keep up her identity. The place where she lives decides her identity only to some extent. It is indeed true for both Sabitri and Bela too. All the three were a victim in their lives for various reasons and only because of that they lost their identities and diaspora had nothing to do with that.

In all, what the book explores at length and in diverse ways is the notion of identity, as perceived by the self and others; home, as imagined and experienced by the self and others and borders as drawn by the self and others, within or without, seeking to question whether or not these are actual constructs or then creations of the mind. For, after all, as Divakaruni herself remarks, in an Interview at the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, — "Home for me is a very amorphous and shifting concept. America is my home in one special way – India is my home in another. Ultimately, though, as I grow older, I feel one's true home is internal, kind of a spiritual locale."

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