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**WOMAN'S STRUGGLE AFTER MARRIAGE IN THE SELECT  
NOVELS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S 'SISTER OF  
MY HEART' AND 'THE VINE OF DESIRE'**

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**Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the life of woman after marriage. The portrayals of women in English fiction are silent sufferers of the tradition and culture. Women are always considering as 'Second Sex' and depend on men. They are not allowed to take any decision by themselves. So far men are considering as superior. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur And Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni try to explore their women characters against the traditional value, breaking the silence, try to come out as an individual self. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels mainly focus on immigrant experience. Her focus is mainly on South-Asian women, who struggle in male-dominated society in search of their identity. Her women characters are not only sufferers. They adopt themselves for the needs of others. They sacrifice their needs for others life, may be for their sisters, family, friends, in-laws, husband etc., When the situation changes, they mould themselves to fight for their rights. In accordance, Likewise, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels 'Sister of My Heart' and 'The Vine of Desire' deals 'how' and 'where' the woman struggle after their marriage- in their family? In the society? Or both? This paper specially deals the struggles of one of her main protagonists Sudha . Sudha, a traditional family girl, who sacrifice her love for her sister Anju. Well behaviour of her family as well as her in-laws family. Eventhough she does everything for others, her life is not a successful one. She struggles throughout her life for self- identity.*

**Keywords:** Tradition, culture, self- identity, struggle, immigrance, female friendship.

In early Indo-Anglian novels, women play a traditional role, particularly as home maker and child bearer. The writers have preoccupied with the trouble of women. Later novels show the sufferings of the women by their husbands and in-laws. As awareness grew, the image of women in South Asian novels has undergone a terrific change. Women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have presented the women as an individual. These novelists are tried to bring out the predicament of Indian women.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian-American writer, author of fifteen books. Her short story collection, Arranged Marriage won an American Book Award in 1995. Her two novels 'The Mistress of Spices' and 'Sister of My Heart' are affiliated into films. Her works are basically set in India and the United States, and focus on South Asian immigrants. The women characters in Chitra Banerjee divakaruni's novels have their share of adjustments and compromises but these adjustments are made to live life on one's own terms. She has given voice to raise women's community to fight for their rights. On one side she has represented her male counterparts as an obstacle to the growth of women but also shown them as supporters and motivators. So male characters in the novels have not just been criticized but also justified many times.

Basically understanding a woman is not an easy task. An exploration of the depths of a female mind gives an idea of its complexity and mysteriousness. The society is a partial one where women are always considered as subordinate to men, and so, they have to live within the circle of social norms making compromises in one situation or the other. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's latest novels, *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* deal with two closely-bonded cousins, Anjali (Anju) and Basudha (Sudha). Both belong to Hindu Zamindar family of West Bengal. Chatterjee family runs by three women, Gouri Ma (Anju's mother), Nalini (Sudha's mother) and Pishi (Anju's paternal aunt).

Through these two novels, the author explores the moving story of two cousins, Sudha and Anju who begins their lives in close contact with emotional bond ties for each other. Though Sudha and Anju born twelve hours apart in the same house, they are considered as twins and from their early age, they are provided everything they are needed from life-love, respect, council and friendship from each other. Though Sudha and her mother Nalini depend on Anju's family economically, Sudha and Anju experienced the joys, pains, and mystical tales together. They love each other and they never fight for anything. Anju says:

I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half. *The Sister of My Heart*.

I can tell Sudha everything I feel and not have to explain any of it. She'll look at me with those big unblinking eyes and smile a tiny smile, and I know she understands me perfectly. (SMH 24)

Sudha is a storyteller and dreams of crafting clothes and craving to be a family girl. On the other hand, Anju possesses an aggressive spirit and wishes to study literature in college. The three mothers strive hard to run the family after the mysterious death of the Chatterjee men and the responsibility to run the family is left to Gouri Ma, who is bold and strong than the other two. Nalini, who wants to lead a luxurious life. In order to fulfil her wishes, her husband persuade Anju's father to go in search of treasures. In that adventure the mysterious death occurs. No men are allowed to enter Chatterjee's gate except Singhji who is a driver of Chatterjee family. Sudha and Anju are not allowed to study go-education and they are controlled by their Bengal tradition and culture. Sudha, a traditional family girl, but Anju yearns to be modern in her thinking and attitude. She confronts her mother by saying, "I bet if I were a boy you wouldn't be saying no to me all the time like this." (SMH 53).

When Sudha discovers a dark secret about her father that tests her relationship with Anju: "Something has changed between us, some innocence faded like earliest light." (SMH 39) For Indian women, marriage is the key, even for those who desire to go for higher studies as Anju does or those who fall in love at first sight like Sudha. Family, tradition and culture, responsibilities of a daughter stops women's individual desires. Sudha wants to spend her life with Ashok but stars are not in her favour. She has planned to elope with him but being a fatherless child she cannot afford to take risk of getting married against her mother's desire by saying, "Good daughters are bright lamps, lighting their mother's name: wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching their family's fame." (SMH 23) and also she realises that by doing so, she ruins her sister's life. She remembers that Sunil's (Indian-American man, a computer scientist, prince of Anju) father is very particular about princess family background that it is to say that he will never hesitate to send the girl back to her parents if he finds anything wrong with the family, so she drops the idea of eloping with Ashok and has got married to Ramesh, an officer of Indian Railways, an unsteady son of officious and cruel woman Mrs. Sanyal. By resisting the elopement plan, Sudha feels that she has saved her family from humiliation and this leads a happy marriage of Anju with Sunil.

At their wedding, Anju notices her husband's infatuation for Sudha's beauty: "The wedding dinner is over. "We raise Ramesh and Sudha walk ahead, his arm under her reluctant elbow. She pulls out a handkerchief to wipe her face. She replaces it-but no, it falls behind the table. No-one notices Sunil bending to pick it up, to slip it into his pocket where he fists his

hand around it. No-one except me.”(SMH 322) Marriage separates their lives and takes a new turn, Anju moves to America whereas Sudha remains in India. Sudha realises her inability to adjust herself to a passionless marriage. She feels:

“My days have such sameness to them, a hypnotic placidity, like a pool into which nothing ever falls, leaf or stone or human life. I float on this pool. I know I am needed: I know I am liked. And so I am not unhappy.”(SMH179)

Sudha and Anju exchange their marital experience through letters. Anju is not satisfied with his husband who is busy and not able to spend time with her. She hates the mechanical life like to drive Sunil to station, attend her classes, write assignments at the library, visit the grocery and the drycleaners, preparing dinner and drive home Sunil. This routine is entirely different from her dreams. She feels “It’s not what I imagined my American life would be like.”(SMH 186) whereas Sudha, though she is married Ramesh, she fails to forget the memories of Ashok. Even then she tries her best to prove herself as a good daughter-in-law of Sanyals. But all her effort comes to nothing. Things take on a different frame, when the test establishes that Sudha will deliver a girl baby. Mrs. Sanyal is very particular that the eldest child of the Sanyal family has to be a male and hence Mrs. Sanyal forces Sudha to go for an abortion. Sudha is shocked. Her husband fails to support her. Sudha feels deprived of her strength of mind and feels:

“I put my hands on him and shook him..... I need you to help me, to protect our daughter. But he plucked my fingers off his arm as though I was speaking a strange language he’d never heard before and walked out of the house..... I can’t depend on him.”(SMH 239)

The attitude of Mrs.Sanyal and her son Ramesh, impels Sudha to leave her in-laws house to safeguard her unborn daughter. She is not willing to abort her daughter just because of a female child. Her husband also incapable of convincing his mother. In such situation Sudha takes a firm decision that she abandons Mrs. Sanyal’s family to protect her daughter. Nalini, her mother consoles Sudha to yield Mrs.Sanyal. No one is able to understand Sudha. She is an obedient daughter, dutiful wife and a well mannered daughter-in-law. When the relationship between her and her daughter is challenged, she progresses from subordination to an emancipated mother.

Nalini is not happy of her daughter decision, but Gouri Ma and Pishi extend a warm welcome to Sudha. Pishi instructs Gouri Ma to sell their traditional house to support Sudha and her daughter also convinces Sudha that the Sanyals have not realised the worth of Sudha. The Sanyals have lost out, and not Sudha. When Pishi pronounces it, Sudha’s future offers scope for a happy life ahead and plans to move to America. She wants them to bless her thus:

“Bless me that I have the courage to go into battle when necessary, no matter how bleak the situation. Bless me that I may be able to fight for myself and child, no matter where I am.”(SMH 249)

Mrs. Sanyal has planned for divorce for her son and arranged for second marriage. Sudha signs the divorce paper and she observes: “We were starting a new, my daughter and I, and because there were no roles charted out for us by society, we could become anything we wanted.”(SMH257) Meanwhile Anju in America, is too pregnant and prepares names for her unborn son. Even though she is not happy with this mechanical life in America as like India, she is happy of her unborn son. She is anxious about Sudha’s prospects. Sunil and Anju run shorts of money. Anju wishes to reserve ticket for Sudha and Dayita to visit America. Without the knowledge of Sunil she works extra hours to save money to send ticket. It results miscarriage. She cannot digest her loss of her son.

In this contrast, Sudha tackles another problem that she confronts Ashok, her first love, who wants to marry her, but he insists to leave her daughter to her grandmothers for some years. Sudha will not wrest herself from Dayita. She has abandoned the Sanyals because

they planned to abort the child in the womb. Next Ashok, he too refuses to take care of her child, so she turns down his wish and plans to fly to America to meet Anju. She feels that she is also responsible for Anju's miscarriage. And so, she decides to move America to support Anju and to start a new independent life of her own.

During the departure, Sudha receives a gift of diamond ring from Ashok, a rubee necklace from Gouri Ma. The letter from Singhji, which indicates that he is none other than her father and he is not responsible for the death of Anju's father. So, she is relieved that her father is not a murderer.

She is not aware of life in America. It is not easy to her. Though America is a modern country, it is not like India. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's descriptions are mainly focused on the mixture of Indian - western culture. Anju motivates her that no one in America will care that Sudha is a daughter of Chaterjee or she is a divorcee. She could start a new life of her own, provide everything for Dayita. She states: After all living alone is better than living with wrong man. Anju and Sudha are happy for their reunite after a long time. Anju spends her time with Dayita. Sunil reveals his love for Sudha. Even though he does not like his wife Anju, he tries to convince himself after marriage that he could love her and did not want to disappoint her. Being in two minds, Sudha questions herself that if she accepts his request, will it be good on her part: "And, if I follow this voice inside which says, take him, you'll never find a man who loves you more intensely, will there be any goodness left in me?"(VD187) Though she feels he is her sister's husband, somewhere in a corner of her heart: she has a passion for him and cannot stop him. She remembers Pishi's words "A woman's beauty can be her wealth, but also her curse" (VD69). But she cannot control her body, Sudha trembles and says "I fear my body. I fear his. Because bodies can pull at us, whispering, why not, I deserve more, I am young and life is passing."(VD241) Later she feels guilty for her behaviour. Therefore, she decides to get a job and leave Sunil's house immediately where she emotionally states:

"East and West, east and west ..... The river of my life is speeding towards an analysis. What shall I do? I want an existence as nail polish. I want sleep. I want to bite into the apple of America. I want to swim to India, to the parrot-green smells of childhood. I want a mother's arms to weep in. I want my weather-vane mind to stop its manic spinning. I want Sunil."(VD87)

Sudha's confusion mind sometimes think about Ashok and sometimes Sunil. She turns away from the proposal of Ashok even he shows eagerness to look after Sudha and her daughter. She doesn't want to depend on anybody. She frequently asks job to Sara. Ashok has come to America and surprised to view the changes in Sudha's attitude. He is unable to believe her words and says: "I'll go because I can see that you have indeed, detached yourself from your past completely. I hadn't quite believed someone could do that..... (VD337) Ashok feels pain and understands that he has lost his love. Finally he has given a notepad full of her pictures as his last gift.

Finally, Sudha has got an opportunity to take care of an old man namely Mr.Sen, who is an American immigrant, has planned to spend his last days in India. She learns many things in America especially to live independently and it is not possible in India. She says to that old man: Mr.Sen, "going back with you would be a way for me to start over in a culture I understand the way I'll never understand America. In a new part of India where no one understands me without the weight of old memories."(VD321). Lalit tries to convince Sudha to stay back in America where she can get more opportunities but Sudha replies, "What life Lalit? What kind of life do I have here? I'm tired of this mantra that everyone chants, this cure for all ills. America, America, America for you, yes, America did help you to make yourself into what you wanted. But I don't have any professional skills."(VD330)

Before she leaves America she wants to meet Anju to apologize for whatever has happened, but Anju replies, "No... I don't want to hear it..... It took me a long time to close

the door. Don't start opening it again.”(VD361-362) She further states that whatever has happened to her is like a dream. She doesn't care whether it is good or bad dream because neither kind will help her to lead her present life. Anju sign a divorce paper. She starts her life by her own and refuses Sunil's help in any way. Sudha leaves America with full of pain.

As observed, these two novels, deal the issues of women characters. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives importance to the women characters than men. Gouri Ma, one of the women characters in these novels, Anju's mother, one of the sufferer, head of Chaterjee's family after the death of her husband. She has not given-up her responsibilities to run the family as well as to take care of her daughter Anju. Secondly, Nalini, who is the mother of Sudha, she wishes to lead a luxurious life and it causes the death of her husband, so the situation makes her to lead a dependent life. Pishi, a widow, Anju's paternal aunt. After the death of her husband, she settled in Chaterjee's house, good story teller, supporter of Sudha and Anju during their difficult situation.

Other than these characters, one of the main protagonists Sudha, who is a traditional family girl, story teller and a dreamer. As we have seen earlier Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni portrays her women charaters are not only sufferers, also learners to withstand on their own. Sudha has learnt many things from men. Her struggles start from her in-laws house. When she marries Ramesh, who is a son of Mrs.Sanyal, her life is good but he is not ready to help his wife for her delivery. It results Sudha to abandon her marital life. Even though Mrs. Sanyal is a woman, she is not ready to accept her granddaughter as a first child of Sayals family. Sudha never expects this kind of change from her in-laws house. It is the place, where she takes a decision of her own. Sudha adjust and adopt her in-laws house. When the situation changes, she raises her voice for her identity. When Ashok proposes her for the second time with the condition of leaving her daughter Dayita with her grandmothers, she has given up his wish.

In America, She expects a peaceful life through her sister Anju, who settled in America. Again she fails to succeed her life. Sunil, Anju's husband, has an infatuation with Sudha. S, she plans to move from her sister's house and earn money for her own. Even she has hurt by all, (Ashok, Ramesh and Sunil) she is not disappointed herself. However, she doesn't have good professional skills, she believes that she can earn by her own for her daughter and America has not fulfilled her expectation

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