

A Study of Family Relationships in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most well-known authors in Indian Writing in English and she is a representative of the current Indo-Anglian fiction. The novels of Divakaruni deal with the human relationships and their identity search in the miserable land. Further, the novels concentrate upon the notion of self-identity within a larger society. She gives a special focus on the female characters that are explorers and adventurers, rather than refugees and outcasts. They are part and parcel of a new changing America – the land of migrants having a migrant culture. Thus, it is clear that Divakaruni's subject matter centers on the phenomenon of relocation, their sentiments of unfriendliness and alienation as immigrants. Through her works, she highlights the Indian woman sojourning abroad and her struggle for identity. Divakaruni's fictional world flourishes with the tangling complexities of life, especially the life within the social structure of a family. Therefore, the concept of Indianism gains much importance in her fiction. She writes with such an ease that English becomes another of the various regional languages of India. She uses such language with a characteristic grace to write about Indian lifestyle, tradition and the inner workings of the human psyche.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Family Relationship

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Kolkata in upper middle-class family. She went to the U.S.A in 1976. The early years in the U.S. were the most difficult years of her life since she witnessed herself as a sufferer of racial and cultural discrimination. Her various experiences in life find a sufficient place in her writings both fictions as well as non-fictions. She can expediently be described as a writer who has lived through several phases of life, first as an Indian, then as an immigrant and later as an American. Chitra Banerjee has successfully compounded together her several experiences, background, and life. She has not had any formal training in creative writing, apart from the fact that she constantly practiced in writing and read a lot.

The novels of Divakaruni give a vivid description of the condition of the Asian refugees in North America with the particular position of the change taking place in South Asian women in a new world. Even if her characters are conscious of the social cruelty and the violence imposed on the female protagonists yet they come out as survivors. They present themselves as they have successfully borne the brunt, both emotional and physical. Her new style of writing is

different from the many other Indian writers, as it is much less conservative and materialistic than Indian literature has been in the past.

Chitra used the delicate and complex web of family variance as her greatest theme from the very beginning of her writings. Her favorite theme is alienation, both psychological and physical. Her earlier novels are notable for their evocative understatement, well thought out melodrama, and the luminous combination of elegant prose. The protagonists of Divakaruni usually struggle to achieve their goals in an unsympathetic, inhuman and complicated world.

The fighting spirit of women to affirm their independence in the narrow limits of the Indian society is one of the chronic themes in her works. Most of Divakaruni's novels give us a sight of the stress, which is experienced by the middle-class women due to their sense of alienation, their dissatisfaction, and their incapability to share feelings with the family. Her female characters generally pose themselves as "outsiders" and revolutionary against patriarchal oppression. As they effort to discover their own powers so as to live on their own terms, usually they are forced to face harsh results. Thus, the author writes out of pressure. She does not have any utopian vision that her fiction can destroy the negative attitudes against women and change the world. She is alerted of the black image that life offers, of what human nature is capable for. She knows that human beings can be cruel, impatient, pugnacious and sometimes violent. So, it means that she can produces a general consciousness among human beings and thus change them.

Divakaruni's works have remained as a riddle for a long period. Though there are no such written documents that can focus light on the underlying theories and personal feelings of her. Researchers, critics, students, and scholars have never stopped sensation at the supremacy of thoughts in her works. The enormous learning and massive talent with which Divakaruni deals with the ruminative mood and the existence of implicit realities in her novels have determinedly intrigued the minds of the discriminating readers. But in recent years the author has scaled down the gap between her readers and herself by taking part in discussions and interviews. Now she is putting across her thoughts in the articles and reviews, which appeared in scholarly journals, magazine and in the dailies.

Researchers have quite deeply and widely explored Divakaruni's novel, with a frequent push on the cultural, social, physical, and psychological area. There are many scholarly essays and full-length works written about Divakaruni's novels and her characters. The strength of characters, the small but significant turn of events, the fine details, the complicated web of relationships, the role of place in the creation of mental scene have all been examined by many scholars. It justifies that the author has become a part of Indian writing in English in a new literary tradition.

Focus of This Study

This study is an attempt to probe the traits of autobiographical elements and the spirit of Women Empowerment in Chitra Divakaruni's fiction. There is a quality of autobiography in the works of Chitra Banerjee. Not only most of her stories are set in the Bay area of California, but she also deals with the immigrant experience, which is a prominent subject matter in today's

world, where the immigrant's voice is rarely heard. It's very much true that her works are not completely autobiographical but skillfully expresses the talent of South Asians in America. She got an inspiration for writing through her own experiences. She says that her books are partly based on experience, partly on "social observation". But Divakaruni strives to weave such observations with "the element of myth, magic and ancient culture alongside contemporary culture. I try to bring those things together – a sense of ancient culture and the daily realities of immigrant life" 1.

Autobiographical touches have always been seen in fictional works by writers from all cultures, but it is primarily in discussions of non-whites that critics say that fiction can be part of an autobiography. Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* for example. Storytelling is a part of many immigrant cultures in ways that it is not in Euro-American. Antje Lindenmeyer in her "The Rewriting of Home: Autobiography by Daughters of Immigrants" argues that immigrant women's autobiographies are a distinct genre.

When we talked about the origin of autobiography, we will find that this word was first used wryly by William Taylor in 1797. He suggested it in the English periodical the monthly review as a hybrid but destined it as pedantic. The word autobiography is derived from the Greek word meaning "self", "life", and "write", thus it is a style of writing that has been around almost as long as history has been recorded. Yet autobiography was not categorized as a term till the late eighteenth century. Its next logged use was in its current sense by Robert Southey in 1809. He coined the term for describing the work of a Provençal poet.

The main features of autobiography are the identity of the self, the grammatical perspective of the work, and self-reflection or introspection. If we talked about the grammatical perspective, autobiography is mostly written in the first person singular. It is believed that it is generally a story one tells about oneself, that's why it is not certainly followed that the writer would recount or narrate her or his past from a third and second person perspective. Jean Quigley confirms this point in her book *The Grammar of Autobiography* (2000) by saying that, "As soon as we are asked about ourselves, to tell our autobiography, we start to tell stories. We tell what happened, what we said, what we did" 2.

Biographers generally relate to a wide variety of documents or viewpoints and on the other side autobiography may be based completely on the writer's memory. One of the first great autobiographies of the Renaissance is that of the sculptor and goldsmith Benevento Cellini (1500-1571). He declares at the start, No matter what sort he is, everyone who has to his credit what are or really seem great achievements, if he cares for truth and goodness, ought to write the story of his own life in his own hand; but no one should venture on such a splendid undertaking before he is over forty.

Thus, the protagonist, the author, and the narrator must share a common identity for the work to be acknowledged as an autobiography. This common identity could be equivalent, but is not equal. The personality that the author creates becomes a character within the story that may not be an entirely factual image of the author's actual past. Notable 18th century in English

includes those of Benjamin Franklin and Edward Gibbon, following the tendency of Romanticism, which greatly highlighted the role and the nature of the individual, and in the paths of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782-1789). It is a more affectionate form of autobiography exploring the subject's emotions. An English example is William Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* (1823), a painful analysis of the writer's love life. With the rising of education, modern concepts of celebrity and name began to develop, economy newspapers and cheap printing, and the recipients of this were not slow to cash in on this by producing autobiographies. Thus, autobiographical works are by nature subjective. Some sociologists and psychologist have noted that autobiography offers the author's ability to recreate history.

Further, the term "fictional autobiography" has been invented to define novels about a fictional character written as though the character were writing their own biography. Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1721) and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) are early examples of fictional autobiography. The term may also apply to the works of fiction claiming to be autobiographies of actual characters, e.g. Robert Nye's *Memoirs of Lord Byron* (1994). In the autobiography, time and history at first glance, seem supreme. On balance, autobiography is the account of the things that have happened in a person's life. The experiences of his life were selected and made ready for public utilization and usually written in the first person. It habitually seems that while truth may be divined from one's own story, sometimes it is not one's own truth but the truth of a nation, a culture, and a generation.

An autobiographical novel is a method which is using auto fiction techniques or the assimilation of fiction and autobiographical elements. Therefore, the literary technique is differentiated from memoir and an autobiography by the condition of being fiction. Because an autobiographical novel is partially fiction, the author does not ask the reader to expect the text to fulfill the "autobiographical pact".

In an autobiographical novel name and locations are often changed and events are reconstructed to make them more dramatic, but the story still stands a close similarity to that of the author's life. At the same time as incidents of the author's life are recounted, there is no pretense of precise truth. Events may be altered or overstated for artistic or thematic reason. As a result the term autobiography novel is difficult to define. Novels which have the portray settings or situations with which the author is familiar are not necessarily autobiographical. Neither are novels that comprise aspects drawn from the author's life as slight plot details. To be measured an autobiographical by most standards, there should be a protagonist modeled after the author and a central plotline that reflects events in his or her life. Many novels about private experiences, intense are also written as autobiographical novel.

The family relationships play a key role in preparing the future generation for life in the community. Thus, usually the novelist douses in thoughtful introspection first to find out herself and then to aesthetically broadcast reality to the readers thereby succeeding in creating and defining expressively captivating personages. Even more appealing is the sequence of her women from one stage of development to the other depicting them as cheerful and brave

characters. By the way, different autobiographical semblances between the novelists and her creations can always be observed.

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