

**MAPPING ‘HOME’: PLACE, MEMORY, AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY
IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S FICTION**

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Abstract:

The present research paper tries to focus on the transforming concept of ‘home’ in the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with the special focus on place, memory and diasporic identity. In her novels, ‘home’ is not simply a geographical location and it is being shaped by migration, displacement, and belonging. The paper further highlights how the female protagonists negotiating the cultural spaces between India and the United States. The paper also highlights, ‘home’ is re-configured through personal memories, familial relationships and cultural traditions. Memory is used a link between the ‘homeland and the adopted country, and the characters in the novels always maintains cultural continuity between the two homes. Diasporic identity is identified as a fluid process of cultural negotiation, where hybrid identities replace singular notions of national or cultural belonging. The article draws on the postcolonial and diaspora theories, particularly the concepts of hybridity, cultural identity and diaspora space, to argue that Divakaruni challenges conventional ideas of ‘home’ by portraying it to be a fluid space of emotional attachment, self-discovery and intercultural dialogue. Divakaruni’s fiction explores women’s experiences of migration, highlighting the resilience, and reconstruction of self in transnational contexts. Finally the novelist proves that the ‘home’ is not a fixed physical space but a symbolic space of memory and identity. The paper contributes to the existing scholarship on Indian diasporic literature and highlights Divakaruni’s significant contribution to the discourse on migration, gender and cultural identity in Indian Writing in English by mapping these multilayered notions of ‘home’.

Keywords: Diasporic Identity; Migration; Cultural Identity; Hybridity, transnational contexts

Introduction

The notion of ‘home’ has been a central issue in modern diasporic literature, particularly in works dealing with migration, displacement, identity and cultural conflict.

The word 'home' has traditionally been tied to concepts of place, origin, and cultural heritage; however, its meanings have grown as a result of globalisation and transnational migration. "Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too, says Uma Parameswaran. Diasporic groups perceive 'home' not simply as a physical space, but as a complex emotional, cultural and psychological space, constructed out of memory, belonging and lived experience. (Uma 2001) As a consequence, the quest for a 'home' is frequently a quest for identity, especially for those who are multicultural. Indian writing in English has contributed significantly to the diasporic literature through its portrayal of the experience of migration, cultural adaptation and identity making. One of its leading voices is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, known for her nuanced portrayal of immigrant life, especially women negotiating cultural shifts. Through her personal transnational experiences, Divakaruni explores how the concepts of 'home', belonging, family and selfhood are transformed by migration. Instead of a destination, she offers 'home' as an ever-changing environment, constantly reconstructed through memories, connections, cultural traditions and personal experience. "Are you saying that all immigrants are dreamers? Yes, but they are realistic about it. They know what they are allowed to dream of and what they are not." (The Vine of Desire 181).

Migration, the emotional troubles of migration and reconstruction of 'home' across geographical and cultural barriers are highlighted in the selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, including *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams*, *Oleander Girl* and *Before We Visit the Goddess*. Divakaruni demonstrates that belonging is negotiated, not given, through memory, intergenerational relations, cultural traditions and hybrid identities. Exile is horrible to live through but strangely interesting to think about. It is the permanent severance of a man from his natural environment and his true 'home'. The essay discusses the concept of 'home' in Divakaruni's fiction through the interlinked ideas of location, memory and diasporic identity.

Based on the theory of Diaspora, the novelist argues that 'home' is a changing site of cultural negotiation and identity construction, rather than a mere geographical location. "The migrants maintain the language, customs, values, norms, tools, technologies, products, organizations and institutions of their homeland in the unaccustomed earth" (Mhalunkar 2).

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In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction the place 'home' is not just a physical location but serves as a potent instrument and try to rearticulate the culture and belonging. The concept of 'home' is described as a dynamic entity influenced by individual experiences and cultural interactions. Divakaruni illustrates them as intertwined realms where identities are perpetually shaped and evolved, rather than portraying India and the US as dichotomous entities. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the spice enterprise serves as a metaphorical domicile that connects the cultural divide between India and America. The reality of immigrant life is adapted, yet Indian customs, dialects, and memories are preserved. The novelist employs this

liminal space to illustrate how communal cultural practices and connections can redefine the concept of 'home' in unfamiliar settings. The store serves as a sanctuary for immigrants to reaffirm their ethnic identities and seek emotional comfort.

Diasporic groups do not think of 'home' as a place, but as a complex emotional, cultural and psychological context, shaped by memory, belonging and lived experience. Hence, the search for a place to live often becomes a search for identity, especially for people who are multicultural. Indian writing in English has made a substantial contribution to diasporic literature through its engagement with immigrant experiences, cultural adaptation and identity formation. One of its most prominent voices is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, known for her nuanced depiction of immigrant life, particularly the experience of women who negotiate cultural upheavals. Drawing from her own transnational experiences, Divakaruni examines the effects of migration on notions of 'home', belonging, family and selfhood. 'home' is not a static place, but a fluid environment that is constantly being reconfigured through memories, relationships, cultural conventions, and personal experience.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's selected novels, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams* and *Before We Visit the Goddess*, address the emotional struggles of migration and the re-creation of 'home' across geographical and cultural borders. Divakaruni employs themes such as memory, intergenerational relationships, cultural traditions and hybrid identities to demonstrate that belonging is negotiated and not inherited. Exile is a terrible experience, but it is a surprisingly interesting thing to consider. Distance is the one thing that so irrevocably distinguishes a man from his natural habitat and true 'home'; its essential sad is insuperable. (Said 137) The present study examines the representation of 'home' in the literary works of Divakaruni through the related themes of geography, memory, and diasporic identity. "Physical separation from India almost certainly means we will be unable to recover exactly what was lost; therefore, we will, in essence, create functions—not real cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 10-12)

The concept of 'Home' has been described as a powerful tool to define, negotiate and re-invent one's identity. Her stories describe 'home' as a place that is dynamic and changing, shaped by human experience, cultural exchange and migration. Instead of placing India and the United States in two different worlds, Divakaruni shows them as intersecting spaces where identities are formed and performed. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the spice business is a metaphorical 'home' that bridges the cultural divide between India and America. It evolves with the realities of immigrant life and yet preserves Indian traditions, dialects and memories. In this in-between place, Divakaruni shows how shared cultural mores and affiliations can breed a feeling of belonging even in a foreign country. The

business becomes a safe place for immigrants to affirm their ethnic identity and receive emotional support.

Finding a location to live becomes a search for identity, especially for multicultural people. Indian writing in English has contributed greatly to diasporic literature through its documentation of immigrant experience, cultural adaptation and identity building. One of its leading voices, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is known for her compassionate treatment of immigrant life, especially the challenges of women crossing cultural boundaries. Drawing on her own transnational experience, Divakaruni explores the impact of migration on conceptions of 'home', belonging, family, and self. She does not treat 'home' as a fixed place, rather she treats 'home' as a dynamic setting that is reconstructed via memories, relationships, cultural norms and personal experience.

The novelist tries to examine 'home' as the interlinking agent to explain diasporic identity. The shift of focus on 'home' as a transnational and transformational experience in the study highlights Divakaruni's significant contribution to Indian writing in English. Migration, cultural interchange and human experience shape 'home', which her stories present as a fluid and evolving space. Divakaruni, rather than depicting India and the US as two separate universes, depicts them as two interrelated landscapes in which identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the spice market becomes a symbolic 'home', bridging the cultural gap between India and America. It maintains Indian cultures, dialects and memories, but also adjusts to the reality of immigrant life. Here, in this temporary situation, Divakaruni demonstrates how the links of community and shared culture may provide solace in foreign locations. The agency offers a safe refuge for immigrants seeking emotional support and confirmation of their ethnicity.

Migration deeply transforms the way women perceive 'home': it changes the traditional social institutions and obliges them to negotiate with the alien cultural contexts. In *The Mistress of Spices* Tilo regards herself, first and foremost, as the custodian of ancient traditions and cultural values. In *The Mistress of Spices*, she gives up her own needs so that she might serve others, as required by the laws that regulate her position. But her interaction with immigrant groups, as well as her own connection with Raven, lead her to interrogate traditional notions of responsibility and identity. Tradition and individual fulfilment don't have to be at odds with each other: this is Tilo's reimagining of 'home'. In *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*, as Anju and Sudha's lives unfold, questions of gender and migration emerge. Their migration to USA opens up new social chances, but also exacerbates emotional isolation and cultural dissonance. Marriage, childbearing, and aspirations of family become the grounds for negotiation between the conflicting ideas of Indian collectivist and Western individualism. Both women ultimately refuse traditional gender roles and rearticulate family interactions on their own terms, rather than accepting them mindlessly.

In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, the novelist describes the lives of three generations of women, Sabitri, Bela and Tara, whose lives are set in India and the United States. They inherit memories and cultural traditions, but reacts differently to changing socioeconomic conditions. ‘Home’ is sacrifice, endurance and familial responsibility for Sabitri, migration is emancipation and estrangement for Bela, and search for belonging beyond inheritances of culture and nation for Tara who is brought up in a cosmopolitan community. The novelist demonstrates how ‘home’ is continuously renegotiated throughout generations, determined by shifting historical conditions and personal decisions. These actions enable women to retain their cultural heritage while adjusting to the obstacles of living in diaspora. ‘home’ is then considered a lived cultural practice that is held together by care, memory and human relations, rather than just physical borders. Divakaruni’s characters lend themselves to the definitions of Safran —maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland (...) the group’s consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland. (Safran 83-84)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni challenges patriarchal notions of female identity, usually defined in terms of marriage, motherhood and obedience. Her heroines suffer from domestic violence, loneliness, racial prejudice and emotional relocation but they are always able to fix their circumstances through education, employment, companion and self-discovery. Migration, despite its hardships, is a catalyst for personal growth and empowerment. In redefining ‘home’, these women also reinvent themselves as self-sufficient persons who are capable of navigating numerous cultural domains while keeping their heritage. In the opinion of Divakaruni ‘home’ is a site of dynamic emotions and culture shaped by women’s migration, memory, love, and resilience. She strongly believes that ‘home’ is neither lost or found, but it is always constructed through relationships and cultural practices. In foregrounding women’s perspectives, The writier frame the concept of ‘home’ from a fixed familial structure into a fluid process of belonging, one that mirrors the complexity of a diasporic life.

Conclusion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s literature dives deeply into the concept of ‘home’ as a dynamic and mutable concept shaped by migration, memory, location, and diasporic identity. She meticulously explains the experiences of the immigrants and challenges the traditional notion of ‘home’ as a fixed geographical location and redefines it as an emotional, cultural and psychological space. The paper tries to explain Divakaruni’s fiction in the area of multiple cultural identities in transnational spaces. The postcolonial issues such as hybridity and diaspora are explained in a systematic way in the fiction of Divakaruni. She proved that identity is not fixed or monolithic but continually shifting via cultural encounter and lived experience in her fiction. Finally, Divakaruni’s fiction explains the journey of mapping ‘home’ through location, memory and identity that Divakaruni embarks upon adds to the discourse of Indian diasporic writing and provides an engaging notion of ‘home’ as a resilient, inclusive and dynamic space in an increasingly globalised society.

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