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A Study on Sisterly Bond In Divakaruni “Sister of My Heart”

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Abstract

The plot of Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* revolves around the lives of two close sisters who are dependent on one another. Additionally, according to C. Bharathi, Chitra Banerjee wrote on friendships with women and how to reconcile them with the competing demands and passions that women have as mothers, lovers, and daughters (Bharathi 89). Divakaruni also emphasizes the contradictions that arise in female relationships when sisters go from the sisterhood stage to the womanhood stage. The story essentially revolves around the alluring love that binds the two women together, and it is full with unusual and lovely lingo. The flashback and flash-forward narrative devices are used by the author to coordinate the memories of the female characters. The author both artistically and autobiographically depicts the two sisters' inner conflict stemming from the separation between their imagined reality and illusion. Their imagination and sentimental memories are the source of this mental conflict in their lives.

Keywords: Divakaruni's, *Sister of My Heart*, imagination and sentimental memories.

Introduction

The main ideas of the book *Sister of My Heart* are expressed in the words above. The emotionally very personal relationship between two sisters is re-examined in this book. Divakaruni illustrates in her work the fine line that separates the expectations and realities of women as sisters and women. Divakaruni explores expectations for maintaining individuality as a woman and for being in enduring sisterhood relationships. The truth of an overly dependent sisterhood relationship and its consequences on a woman's life path are re-examined by Divakaruni.

She illustrates how the concept of femininity is in opposition to the demands of sisterhood. Because of the identity issue and dilemma, sisterhood and womanhood are both characterized by inconsistencies and paradoxes. Womanhood is a post-marital stage that signifies the demand for independence in married life and also poses a control in the sisterhood relationship, whereas sisterhood is a premarital stage that aims to share the emotions, fortunes, and everything that two sisters own. On one point, the narrative explains the illusions of two sisters: Anju (Anjali) and Sudha (Basudha). While their differences in the context of their sisterhood and womanhood lead to contradiction and conflict in their relationship because of societal expectations, their fragile



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feelings of love for one another, and the difficulties that undermine their relationship and make them realize that they are first women and then sisters, they get along well because of their similarities. Second, in order to fulfill their potential for self-discovery, the story talks about the limits of a partnership.

Divakaruni looks at how a woman always turns to other women and men in her community for support. She never finds the inner strength to deal with life's obstacles on her own. She's still in a delusion. She expects assistance from others in any challenging circumstance. Women rely on the patriarchal forces in society, and when they fail to support them, they begin to think negatively about men. Women believe that women are the only ones who can assist other women. She overlooks the fact that a woman cannot feel whole without men and that the sole foundation of societal balance is the understanding between men and women. She never makes an effort to become independent and is always relying on other people. The main cause of her presence in conflict areas is her perception and nature of dependence. She gets depressed and loses faith in life when she doesn't receive help from people for any of her issues. She becomes disillusioned as a result of her incapacity to reflect on herself and to change. By overcoming their physical cravings and fortifying their souls, some women gain independence. Some women continue on the stereotypical, loaded path of survival, which makes them reliant on specific shoulders. Their delusions and expectations turn into a barrier and a form of slavery. The novel *Sister of My Heart*'s intertextuality raises concerns about whether a woman's dependence is appropriate for either a male or female. Additionally, Lerner critiques women's tendency toward reliance, quoting:

Indeed, dependency, like passivity, has been considered the very hallmark of femininity...On the maladaptive side, women more frequently display pathological dependency; such women do not take action to solve their own problems...turn fearfully away from the challenges of outside world, and avoid successful and autonomous functioning at all costs. (Lerner 125-126).

In this captivating book, Divakaruni dismisses common myths and creates new ones. She examines the characters Anju and Sudha's mental and psychological growth in their various premarital and postmarital circumstances. 'The Princess in the Palace of Snakes' is the title of their first part. This fairy tale is utilized allegorically by Divakaruni in her book to illustrate how reliant women are. Before getting married, Anju and Sudha, two sisters, try to conform to the traditional feminine ideal that multicultural society has set for women. The hegemonic culture of men is designed to either protect or represent women. This alludes to their predicament as the princess imprisoned in the snake castle, waiting for Prince Charming to liberate her. This passage conveys the idea that women should rely on themselves instead of other people.



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'The Queen of Swords' is the title of the second half of the book, which tells the mythical tale of the queen of Jhansi, who lived during the medieval days of Indian history. She was a symbol of bravery, independence, and bravery who, till her death, prevented India's diverse society from becoming enslaved to foreign powers. These two myths are cleverly conceived by Divakaruni through her novelistic discourse in the distinct circumstances of the two female characters in their life's journey. In order to convey the idea that women should not sit helplessly in their snake-filled castle, which is full of difficult circumstances, the author retells these stories for the modern female audience. By overcoming their negative periods, they themselves must take great action, much like the queen of swords, in order to advance and find their purpose in life.

The two sisters in the book also continue to live their lives despite the hardships of their internal and external conflicts, but they continue to rely on one another and block their own path to self-discovery. These sisters believe that their sisterhood has no limits and interpret its restrictions as illusions. In this book, Divakaruni uses the relationship between two siblings to create a conflict between illusion and reality. "Human beings are caught between illusion and reality, as the mind dwells in the subjective world of ideas and concepts, but one exists physically in the world of objective reality that cannot be directly experienced or fully understood," Yacobi states aptly in reference to the illusionary perception (Yacobi 202).

With the telling of an omen and a puzzle of mythological stories, Divakaruni opens the life journey of the brave female heroes. A reputable Calcutta family's Gauri and Nalini each give birth to female children, but after their individual tragic deaths, they learn that their husbands have died.

Anju is the name of Gouri Ma's daughter. To hasten Nalini's labor pains, she puts her baby Anju close by. As a result, Nalini is fortunate to have a newborn baby named Sudha.

Nalini's daughter Sudha and her foster sister Anju form an unshakable friendship, and the two young girls end up becoming sisters of the heart. The little girls Anju and Sudha love each other and do everything together. They want to be called sisters and twins forever. Their desire to be considered sisters is not based on the fact that their mothers conceived them at roughly the same time; rather, sisterhood is based on both affectional and blood links for them. "I would love you because you love me," Anju says to Sudha. Since no one else knows us as well as we do, I would love you. Because I'm still the one who summoned you out into the world, no matter what (SMH 47). Here, Divakaruni highlights the tight bond between two sisters. It is possible to grasp the author's aim in the story by quoting Hasday in the context: Siblings can help and know one another from their earliest to their last years. One of the longest-lasting relationships a person can have is with their siblings, which starts with the younger sibling's birth and can last until one of them passes away (Hasday 166).



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According to Divakaruni, every woman has a unique image. They are primarily built from memory and prior experiences. Some people are aware of this fact about their uniqueness, while others are not. Some people believe that their issues, feelings, traits, and shortcomings are all the same. Sometimes their similar thoughts and emotions lead them to believe they are sisters. They make an effort to categorize their various identities as shared femininity. This idea of femaleness does hinder their ability to develop independently and evolve dynamically. In actuality, each woman has a unique personality, uniqueness, strengths, and limitations. In this book, Anju believes that she and her sister Sudha are related because they are sisters, but she eventually shows no interest in her uniqueness. This occurs as a result of Sudha's constant linking of her acquaintance to both Anju's and her own past.

Divakaruni makes an effort to reexamine feminine concepts that disturb rituals, particularly when considering dominant tendencies and self-serving impulses. While Anju expresses her dissatisfaction with her current institutions—love, patriarchy, marriage, power structures, and disbeliefs—Sudha challenges the spirit of knowing desire and attempts to elevate herself from them in order to become independent. Sunil, Anju's fiancé and Mr. Majumdar's only son, meets Anju at the Chatterjee family bookstore while posing as a buyer. In the absence of her ailing mother, Gauri Ma, Anju is managing her bookstore. Sunil bought a complete set of Virginia Woolf's novels after being moved by Anju's enthusiasm and proclaimed Woolf to be her favorite author. Sunil's unusual male interest in Woolf's books makes Anju feel drawn to him. She muses: "I want to confide in him like I've never confided in a man before because there's a certain sympathy in his gaze". After telling Anju who he is, Sunil surprises her by making a love proposal. "How taken I am by your vivacity," he says to Anju. You are deserving of all your dreams. I'll do my best to fulfill them if you grant me the honor of marriage.

In *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni examines the advantages and disadvantages of both Eastern and Western ethos. In India, Sudha's life is also difficult. After three years of marriage, Mrs. Sanyal starts to mistreat her daughter-in-law Sudha since she hasn't gotten pregnant with her son. Sudha is sent to the hospital by Mrs. Sanyal to have her fertility examined. The problem of impotence is solely tied to her better half, Ramesh, once the test results make it clear that Sudha is extremely fertile and capable of having multiple children. Mrs. Sanyal does not think her son is capable of being pregnant. Mrs. Sanyal takes Sudha to a shrine to obtain blessings for her pregnancy, despite having successfully treated her own son. The expectations of traditional Indians that the outcome of marriage will be reflected in procreation are the novelist's main concern. If this is not the case, the female partner of the pair is subjected to a great deal of stress and anxiety. She must endure the anguish of the sterility and hollowness of orthodox society and skeptics. As an Indian-American, she suggests that the author carries the cultural burden of taboos not only in her autobiographical writing but also in the fact that all women worldwide are



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the object of this suspicion and are partially implicated in order to bear the frustration of their counterparts' impotence.

Divakaruni aims to depict the laws and beliefs surrounding women and the birth of a girl child in patriarchal Indian society. Divakaruni also emphasizes how a lady treats another woman if she is unable to conceive a son. By bringing up these concerns, Divakaruni paints an accurate portrait of the prejudiced Indian society that disregards a woman's deference to her in-laws. Sudha confesses: I had put a lot of effort into being a decent wife and loved my in-laws. It was as if I had been moving a rock uphill for years of my life, and when I stopped, it immediately tumbled down to the bottom (SMH 257). After leaving her in-laws' home, Sudha feels relieved.

The author beautifully describes the two sisters' pregnancy experience while bringing home the protagonists' progress through mental and psychological transformations amid the various environments and belief systems. To preserve the life of the female child inside of her, Sudha, who has put up with everything as a dependent woman, must now become independent. She must leave her better half's house, but she knows that no one will take the embarrassment, even if she tells someone. Even her mother, Nalini, will find it difficult to understand Sudha's decision to leave her in-laws' home because she is more concerned with the public than with her daughter's situation. Furthermore, Nalini is unable to abandon the belief that a married woman must always endure her better half's insanity, no matter what the condition. "After all, a woman can have a lot of children, but a husband is forever," Nalini tells Sudha. "What will we tell our relatives?" She has permanently tarnished Kali's reputation among the Chatterjee family (SMH 244). Divakaruni highlights how traditional Indian ladies teach the next generation of women to put their family's honor at danger. Lerner also cites the following statements regarding what society expects of a dependent woman:

The oral rage that characterizes severely dependent women stems not from the fact that their excessive dependency needs are being frustrated; rather, their rage is associated with their unconscious conviction that they must continue to thwart their own growth for the sake of protecting family ties and fulfilling family loyalties and obligations (Lerner 131).

The novel's apparent meaning leads readers to believe that it is a narrative that honors sisters. In *Sister of My Heart*, Suchita Mishra describes the relationship between Anju and Sudha as follows: "They set an example of an extra ordinary friendship, always putting the other first and crushing their own happiness" (Mishra 193). However, I disagree with this notion and would want to draw attention to the fact that a sisterhood can only be considered successful when a woman assists another woman without experiencing personal setbacks. It cannot be considered a true success if a woman sacrifices herself to save the life of another woman. There are boundaries in every relationship. For this reason, the novel's subtext hints to women of the



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current generation about the distinction between what they think triumph in their sisterhood means and what it actually means.

Divakaruni illustrates how managing the lives of other women can occasionally disrupt a woman's own. According to Divakaruni, women become disillusioned and feel bad about their struggles when they realize they can't maintain their sisterhood. Women nevertheless persist, often under false pretenses, in order to move on from their past tragedies and to survive in the world. After this life mishap, Anju starts to believe that her relationship with Sunil will improve if Sudha moves to America. Sharing her innermost thoughts with Sudha would also make her feel lighter and healthier. Anju continues to rely on Sudha for emotional support rather than attempting to correct her psychological imbalance with her husband Sunil. Knowing that their separation may cause issues in their lives, Anju purposefully distances herself from her husband. Anju's feminist ideas and neutrality toward her counterpart drive her to stop returning Sunil's affection and concern. Anju "Oh, Sudha, I need you," Anju says over the phone. I really do need you. I'm hungry for you. Make me a promise that you will arrive right now (SMH 288). In his critique of women's passive dependence on others, Lerner states: "The current feminist movement has helped therapists become more aware of their failure to confront passive-dependency behavior in women" (Lerner 131).

According to Divakaruni's depiction, a woman in despair would likewise seek comfort from another woman alone as a dependent. She believes that their male counterparts are unable to comprehend their emotions. Women keep their distance from their male peers. These women do not find serenity and become estranged from everyone when they are unable to express their feelings of stress and their male counterparts foster a culture of denial or a significant communication gap. The novelist tries to show that sharing and care must continue in order for a man and woman to have a happy and healthy relationship, even while they themselves retreat or go into denial. Destiny takes risks and creates accidents; they must be overcome with help, a balanced perspective, and effective communication.

The plot of Divakaruni's book alternates between America and India, and she employs a nonlinear storytelling method. The dowagers of the Chatterjee family in India discover how to live their lives with total independence and vitality after leaving the patriarchal home. They begin to appreciate religious excursions and all-night classical music concerts. According to Divakaruni, "the mothers seem to have shrugged off a great burden of tradition along with the old house" (SMH 274). Divakaruni illustrates how pointless Indian myths about widows' modest lifestyles are. She makes the argument that widows have desires in life and are just regular people. They ought to be allowed complete autonomy to conduct their lives as they see fit, free from discriminatory social norms.



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Divakaruni's characters seem to be convinced by America's unquestionable domination, despite the unfathomable challenges that an American lifestyle entails. These statements from Sudha strongly suggest that she should make plans to travel to America with her kid in order to find a decent life for both of them. According to Sudha, nobody in America would give a damn if I was divorced or the daughter of the Chatterjees. I could create a brand-new existence. Like me, many mothers in America had come to the conclusion that living alone was preferable to living with the wrong man (SMH 274).

Like Sudha in the book, women nowadays must deal with the necessity of relying on other people and a foreign nation. Indian women feel trapped at the intersection between progress and tradition. When a particular aspect of a stereotypical woman's life becomes depressing and agonizing, she wants to tear herself away from all social boundaries and flee into an uncharted and unknowable world full of hope, where everything is full of novelty, curiosity, brightness, and new experiences.

In order to deal with her beloved sister Anju, Sudha is getting ready to travel to America. She discusses her pregnant experience with Anju over the phone. Knowing that her beloved sister Sudha will be visiting America in a few days also helps Anju regain her mental stability. Sudha's ex-boyfriend Ashok Ghosh contacts Gouramma once more about getting married again, but with a catch: Sudha must leave her young daughter with her mother. Dayita, her young daughter, will be permitted to stay at his house throughout the holiday season. Sudha chooses to be by herself for her daughter and refuses to accept the condition. She decides and believes that: On the day Ashok sent my matchstick dreams falling, Sudha's daughter Dayita is rejected by Ashok. I made a self-promise to stop putting my expectations for happiness in the hands of others (SMH 271).

Sudha's character presentation is very active between this early conflict and the potential resolution. The plot of Divakaruni's story is driven by its characters. Following Dayita's birth, Ashok extends a marriage proposal to Sudha once more, and this time he accepts her daughter Dayita while also expressing regret for the circumstances he had previously created for Sudha. Although Sudha is aware that she has a very strong chance of marrying the person who truly and completely loves her, she decides to travel to America in order to support her sister and test her anonymity in a foreign country. Additionally, Ashok's innate refusal to accept her daughter has caused her to lose faith in him. Sudha makes the decision: "I used to rely on men, but now I wanted to stand on my own two feet." (SMH 302). The primary reason Sudha declined Ashok's proposal was that she was once more overcome with guilt following Anju's miscarriage, which she caused. "Anju, whose father would not be dead except for my father," she muses. Perhaps her son wouldn't be dead if it weren't for... (SMH 293).

Sudha refuses to turn back to her agonizing past; she has no idea what lies ahead, but her gaze is fixed on the future. Nobody can now attempt to stop her on her upward and forward journey



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because of the blazing soul of flame inside her. Without a doubt, Sudha becomes a changed woman. She transforms into the ruler of swords from the princess in the royal home of snakes. She denies returning to Ashok and Ramesh in order to spend time with her sister Anju. Sudha wonders, though, if this has been a true companion's decision. Although Sudha is aware of her perilous voyage, she declares: "I am going despite the fact that I know this will not be a fairy-tale journey, with my winged steed leaping over all barriers with unerring ease. I am unable to describe what I am leaving behind, but I am certain that I will never find it in America (SMH 294,300).

According to Divakaruni, women attempt to escape their reality but are unable to attain mental peace, which prevents them from feeling successful in life. They continue to be confused and fall into their delusions in an attempt to protect themselves from the harsh realities of life; they refer to these delusions as hope and carry on with their lives. Additionally, Sudha has made the decision to continue living her life in the delusional expectation of finding refuge for Anju and establishing her identity in America, the country of opportunity and promise.

Sunil gives Dayita and Sudha their visas and flights in the hopes that once Sudha arrives Anju will have improved mental wellness. During her trip to America, Sudha learns that Singhji, the driver for her parents' family, is only her father through a letter from him. He informs her in writing that someone else, not him, killed Anju's father. He poses as their driver while wearing a burnt face to protect himself from unjustified accusations. Sudha says, "If my father hadn't killed Anju's, then I wouldn't have to carry the guilt any longer. I wouldn't have to give my life to make up for the one her father lost." (SMH 314). Sudha travels to America with a hope of individuality And Freedom In A Foreign Country.

Conclusion

Indian customs and the lower classes in the center continue to be very different from the influence of the West and the Westernization of Indian culture, especially in the affluent societies. If this work occasionally presents the Eastern world in a somewhat unfavorable light, then the Western world is also shown to have its own unique flaws and shades of malice. As Anju cleans her home to greet Sudha, she discovers her handkerchief in Sunil's drawer. Anju discovers that her husband still finds her sister Sudha's feminine charms attractive. Anju believes that calling Sudha to America was a mistake. She remembers how Sunil disagreed with Anju's choice to invite Sudha to their home. Anju expresses regret: How many times did Sunil attempt to prevent me from bringing Sudha to the United States? He had simply been attempting to save me; how many clues had he given? After pleading with Sudha to come to America, I was unable to convince her not to, but now I fear that her presence in my house may cause problems (SMH 299, 318). Even though the news that Sudha is traveling to the United States has helped Anju overcome her own mental depression brought on by her miscarriage, she still feels as though she



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is not at peace with her thoughts. Another question Anju asks herself is whether any man in America could love her as deeply as Ashok does. (SMH 295). Anju is emotionally reliant on Sudha, therefore despite the hazards, she wants her in America. Anju gives in to her physical cravings and delusions rather than strengthening her soul to confront reality and find solutions on her own. This reality of reliance causes a dilemma for Divakaruni's female persona.

With these conundrums, Divakaruni illustrates how a woman who indulges in her physical luxuries never finds mental tranquility since the truth of her flaws lingers in her subconscious and plagues her with doubts throughout her life. Despite their dependence and delusions of a brighter future, the female protagonists of Divakaruni continue to spend their lives without finding mental peace. Because of this, when the two adorable sisters reunite in America, Anju embraces her anxieties and concludes the book by saying, "There'll be enough trouble later." I feel it prickling my neck like an animal. (SMH 322).

Through her book, Divakaruni teaches women of the current age that they should not continue to be reliant on others and should not suppress their physical cravings. To achieve the highest level of mental fulfillment in their lives, they must fortify their own souls to confront the realities of their own circumstances. Only in India can Sudha make a name for herself through her skill in clothing design, and Anju can regain her mental balance with Sunil and her love of learning, but they both decide to live simply and fall for delusions. They become more reliant on one another to help them get through the challenging times in their lives. They both have the illusion that they can handle the difficulties of the world by relying on one another. They make an effort to get away from their own reality. However, both of them ultimately confess their illusions that have destroyed their personal lives. They use delusions to avoid their responsibilities as wives. They never offer affection and support to their male counterparts; they simply expect it from them. The lack of understanding between them turns their life into a tragedy.

Divakaruni is both an individual writer and a humanitarian. She preaches to the public about the boundaries of relationships. According to Marcia Millman, the too dependent sisters should keep in mind that "every close attachment has conflicts" (Millman 129). Dependency on other people, physical cravings, or delusions weakens a woman's ability to confront reality and causes her to experience a variety of worries, confusions, and uncertainties. Even though Anju and Sudha encourage one another in an attempt to find meaning in their destroyed lives, their troubled and confused psyches leave them feeling empty. Through her book *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni demonstrates that the only way to truly succeed and find comfort is to explore freedom within the constraints of one's surroundings and space, which is the real means and strength to confront life's realities.



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