

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.4., 2017 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *SISTER OF MY HEART*: COMPLEXITIES OF
SURVIVAL FOR WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, purportedly a feminist writer of Indian origin based in America is a gifted and one of the finest story-tellers. This fact can be gauged by the numerous novels she wrote with an irresistibly interesting and factual story-line. In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, Sudha and Anju love each other so much that they are eager to sacrifice everything for each other's happiness. Then there is Sudha's mother who is too selfish and narrow-minded but Anju's mother makes a point to be just to everyone in the household and not favour her own daughter over others. Divakaruni takes lesser important characters to present the different psychological facets of women like Sudha's mother-in-law in spite of being a woman fails to empathize with her daughter-in-law. It is this intrinsic connectedness of different issues that bring about holistic imagination of the author. Her heroines become a part of larger section of women who begin to identify themselves in the similar situations. Indian traditions and culture are part of the rich environment portrayed in the novel and the description of Calcutta is especially vivid. *Sister of My Heart* is a story about family, friendship and the bond between sisters.

Key Words: marriage, widowhood, friendship, love.

Divakaruni's job as a Professor of Creative Writing at University of Houston vouches her ability as an acclaimed writer. Although she has been residing in America since 1976, she generously imbibes various Indian culture, traditions and beliefs in her stories perhaps due to her own close involvement with Indian culture when she lived in India till she was 20 years old. She also portrays life in America and the difficulties faced by immigrants due to differences in culture and beliefs of east and west. Living in a foreign country makes one yearn for one's own homeland as Bharati Mukherjee winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1988 pointed, "Even in Manhattan we'd smile at another Indian if they walked by us," she further added, "You felt an affinity to other Indians that you might not have felt in India." (*Passage from India*) After her death on 28th January 2017, "I have an old copy of *The Middleman* (1988) with many phrases underlined," remembered novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, saying Mukherjee "paved the way for many of us". (Scroll.in,) Even Pulitzer-Prize winning author Jhumpa Lahiri remarked in an interview after the publication of her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003) that her mother while walking along Cambridge's Harvard Square with her in a stroller "and every time she would see someone who looked Bengali there was this instant: 'Who are you? Where are you from? Let's be friends'." (*Passage from India*)

Divakaruni proclaimed in her biography that specifically she involves herself in women's issues as she feels they have been meted with injustice due to patriarchal value system which gives more credit and power

to men. Due to her affinity for women, in almost all her work she has endowed major chunk of her novels to female characters. Divakaruni's forte in writing enables her to present both past and present life of the characters perfectly. This immigrant experience was crucial for her in becoming a writer, she observed. "I did not think I had a story to tell," she wrote on her blog. "Moving to a very different culture and learning to live on my own made me see the world much more clearly... I thought about India more than I had ever before. I realized what I appreciated about it; the warmth, the closeness of extended family, the way spirituality pervades the culture. But I also recognized problems [with regard to] how women are often treated."

Being a contemporary writer Divakaruni has developed a nick to blend the tradition and modernity. In almost all her novels we see discord comes into existence when protagonists try to co-exist with the traditional and modern values to create an identity of their own. The affliction and anguish that come with the ordeals of following the traditional values and to combine these values with the modern values of the present time make them strong female characters. She has not outrightly rejected either the traditional or modern value system but has focused in harmonizing these two different trends. Though she is living in modern times and settled in America, there is a feeling of belongingness and rootedness to India and her interest in women make her feel that women should be free from the patriarchal mindset.

Divakaruni had been very close to her grandfather and spent her vacations with him who often told her family stories, folk stories or ghost stories. It had great impact on her young impressionable mind and she realised the power of story-telling which could communicate so much to the readers. She grew up in a traditional Indian-middle class family and hence these traditional values also paved into her way while writing novels. Her novels have close association with her roots, as most of the protagonists are based in Kolkata who later migrate to America and she diligently portrays the various events which happen in their lives both in India and America. She often puts her own experience of living abroad and also takes the experience of immigrants whom she meet in various organizations which helps women who are in trouble. *Daily Telegraph* has rightly summed up, "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a true story-teller, like Dickens, she has constructed layer upon layer of tragedy, secrets and betrayals, of thwarted love... [a] glorious, colourful tragedy."

Divakaruni frequently mentions about education, marriage and food. She knows that a change in the role of a woman is possible only through education. And the inflexibility of age old customs that are not so friendly towards women folk can be moulded only with the help of education. There are other issues like marriage and with it come motherhood and relation with in-laws and the change of identity of woman. Then there are conflicts based on class, caste, marginalization and traditional values of older generation. *San Diego Union Tribune* claims *Sister of My Heart* as "Magically affecting ... her intricate tapestry of old and new worlds shines with a rare luminosity." She has presented women in variety of avatars; women as wife, lover, mother, sister, daughter and finally as a human being with her own mind and identity who aspire to adept themselves with modernity along with the connection with their roots. Divakaruni portrays her protagonists as a modern day woman struggling with the complexities of social, political and cultural changes due to globalization and postcolonial consciousness. She may present the expression of protagonists in different ways in different novels but her ultimate goal is to create a peaceful and progressive life that is favourable for women community as a whole. Even the psychological feminist aspect of inner conflict is dealt with accuracy in most of her novels. *Sunday Times* writes, "Divakaruni strikes a delicate balance between realism and fantasy ... a touching celebration of enduring love."

Divakaruni's feminism is multilayered involving three or more distinct levels of women's rights and interests. Many of her novels concentrate mainly on the unexpected power of women in the face of cultural and social inhibition. Apart from her interest in women's issues, her willingness to do something for the cause of women by being active member of different organisations that look into the various controversial issues concerning women motivate her to write about women. Perhaps Divakaruni perceived that the world never belonged to women. We were second class citizens' dependant on men. Women could belong to any race, caste, class and religion but men decided and were in control on all matters. The dismal involvement of women in the decision making process, complexities of female subjectivity and collective feminist struggle formed the themes of her novels. The determinations of individuality of her heroines make them stronger women.

Her novels trace the lives of women engaged in pursuit for values. This is apparent in novels such as *Sister of My Heart*, *Vine of Desire*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Queen of Dreams* and *Oleander Girl*. These novels are the result of an intense imaginative and intellectual engagement with the socio-economic realities of the writer's contemporary world; a mixture of fiction and autobiography. *Sister of My Heart* was first published in 1999 followed by sequel *The Vine of Desire* (2002). The story centres on the lives of two Indian girls, Anju and Sudha. The girls use their own voices to narrate the story of their lives. In alternative chapters the reader closely follows the lives of Sudha and Anju through childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Divakaruni enriches the narration of the novel by alternating the narration between protagonists and by using interior monologues and letters. Although some of the characters immigrate to America, most of the story is set in India. *San Francisco Chronicle* assesses the novel as "A pleasure to read ... a novel fragrant in rhythm and language."

Marriage has been projected as something which is sure to happen in her novels. It is an inevitable entity which all the girls have to go through. Unlike Western countries in India marriages are fixed by the elders of the family and the prospective bride and groom are expected to live together as husband-wife. Love happens after marriage is solemnised with no escape route for the couple. At the same time divorce, separation, widowhood or spinsterhood is not acceptable in our traditional custom. Women coming under these categories are barred from many social, religious and family customs. But the same doesn't apply for men. This entire gender stereotype thinking about women's fate right from their birth and the life she spends as a child and then growing up till she attains old age is intricately presented by Divakaruni in her novels. Marriage is very important in *Sister of My Heart*. It is expected that all girls will eventually marry. Divorce is looked down and widows are pitied. The house the girls grow up is very unusual in that it is run by three women. The dynamics of joint family is explored, as it is traditional for women to join their husband's families. Many of the expectations Anju and Sudha face as far as education and marriage are concerned are traditional. By the end of the novel, however, there are changes. Both Anju and Sudha become more independent, as do their three mothers.

The opening lines, "The old tales say this also: in the wake of the Bidhata Purush come the demons, for that is the world's nature, good and evil mingled." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.15) is quite realistic statement. One can anticipate the writer's idea of the opposite phenomenon of happiness and difficulties going together in the characters life as it happen in our lives. Sudha and Anju the two cousins born on the same day were fatherless. The cruel hands of fate had snatched their fathers even before they were born. The societal norms and the traditional beliefs haunt the girls as "For girl-babies who are so much bad luck that they cause their fathers to die even before they are born." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.18) Anju the more suave and outspoken disagrees with the biased notion, declared 'Maybe there's no Bidhata Purush either.' (*Sister of My Heart*, p.18) Abha Pishi, sister of Anju's father widowed at young age of 18 years lived with her brother's family and was like mother to both the girls. Divakaruni has described life of a widow spent in austerity through Pishi and later through Gauri ma and Nalini. Gauri Ma took the reins of running the family by supplying steady flow of money through the earnings she made in her book-shop. Sudha's mother Nalini endowed with beauty is not much involved in the running of the house except complaining for everything. Life had been hard both emotionally and financially after the mysterious death of their husbands on a journey they had taken together.

Anjali (Anju) which means offering and Basudha (Sudha) meaning patient as the earth goddess, the two main protagonists around which the whole plot of *Sister of My Heart* revolves examines the emotional bond and the sacrifices and desires which they both go through in the process of their growth. The first book 'The Princess in the Palace of Snakes' portrays the protected life of girls with their three mothers (Gauri ma, Pishi and Aunt Nalini) right from the birth till their marriage. The second book 'The Queen of Swords' present the girls as confident and strong; portrays the ups and downs in their life post-marriage and how relentlessly they deal with it. She intricately weaves the story around the realities of life, relationships and traditional beliefs.

Divakaruni adhere to the feminist theory of female bonding in *Sister of My Heart*. Rebecca Traister, American author said, "Female friendship has been the bedrock of women's lives for as long as there have been women." This has been specifically true for Anju and Sudha who have been constant strength for each

other since they were born on the same day in the same house in the gap of twelve hours. Though they were not sisters in the real sense but they were sisters at heart. Indeed this exceptional sister-knot remains the gist of the novel and their affection for each other increasingly shapes the course of their lives. Since their birth and in the growing years they played together and yearned for each other's company sharing their little secrets and dreams. Despite close proximity they both have different personalities and approaches to life. The chapters are alternately named after Anju and Sudha that unfolds the perspectives and interpretation of their internal feelings towards the realities of life. This is a unique form of narration by Divakaruni as we get to know the characters more closely. Anju is interested in reading literature and going to college while Sudha's interest lies in stitching and designing clothes.

Sudha learnt from Pishi a dark secret about her father who was responsible for taking Anju's father on a dangerous journey that resulted in their death and he was not even cousin of Anju's father as claimed by him. This realisation for Sudha that she was not even related to Anju tore her apart. She endures guilt complex which tests her relationship with Anju. Sudha asks in anguish, "Suppose I wasn't who you thought I was, suppose" ... "Would you still love me?" (*Sister of My Heart*, p.60) Anju answered, "I would love you," ... "no matter who you were. I would love you because you love me. I would love you because no-one else knows us like we know each other." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.61) Though satisfied by her answer she goes to great length to sacrifice her happiness in the hope of reducing a part of her father's mistake committed to Anju's family.

Sudha pours her heart out in front of Anju as she proclaims her undying love for Ashok. Anju is of course amused at this behaviour of her cousin who is ready to marry a man whom she talked just twice. She wants to spend her life with him but being a fatherless child she cannot afford to defy her mother's wish and not get married in a conventional way. Anju was furious at Sudha's decision and asked her not to let her mother have her way. But Sudha insisted that she cannot break her mother's heart. Life is not a bed of roses. Some of our dreams maybe fulfilled but not in the way we imagine. Life takes an unexpected turn for both Anju and Sudha after Gauri Ma fell seriously ill. Gauri ma needed bypass surgery and two major decisions were made – to get Anju and Sudha married before anything happened to her and secondly to sell the bookstore. The girls are forced to enter into arranged marriage not out of desire but out of a sense of familial obligation. Anju was reluctant but due to her mother's condition she kept quiet and bridal preparation was in full swing with proper diet, face packs, cooking classes and other sundry things to help them become good brides.

Finally, Sanyals family was selected to allow bride-viewing. Another Indian custom of boys' family coming to visit and look at the prospective brides and then decide if her manners, family status and looks were good enough to become daughter-in-law of the family is highlighted in the novel. Of course Anju detested all this turmoil and thought why should boy's side always have control. She declared, "I just hate the way women are paraded in front of prospective grooms, like animals at the fair." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.123) Due to Sanyals proposal Ashok and Sudha planned to elope. A marriage proposal came for Anju too from Sunil, a computer engineer settled in America. Even brave Anju was scared at the thought of marriage. She said, "To think that I will have to go and live with a stranger. That I am supposed to belong to some man I haven't even met as soon as he puts a garland around my neck. Oh, why can't I remain just single? Why must I be yoked to a man like a cart to a buffalo?" (*Sister of My Heart*, p.129 & 130) But when she met Sunil in her book store where he had come to meet her in a casual way fell in love with him in the very first meeting. Anju now comprehended Sudha's feeling for Ashok as she realised, "Love happens, and so do miracles." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.137)

Their love for each other is irrevocable and on an equal platform; but their social and economic factors are different. Anju is in better position socially and economically compared to Sudha. Anju's family wealth and position in society permits her to overcome the restrictive demands of traditional Indian Hindu females, which might put her in an advantageous position later while fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. Anju gets the privilege of concentrating on her studies as well as her career before marriage was decided for her. Despite her marriage being fixed to Sunil due to her mother's illness, she gets assurance to continue her studies and choose her career even after being married. In contrast Sudha and her mother are not financially independent. They have to depend on Anju's family for survival, not that Gauri ma or Anju ever let them feel anything about it but the fact of being dependant on them remained with Sudha. The dark secret she had discovered of her father's action torments her and she feels herself recipient of Gauri ma's charity. She even

sacrificed her love for Ashok to prevent the breaking up of her cousin's marriage in a traditional family. The wedding happened in traditional way with recitation of mantras and fulfilling of other customs for both Anju and Sundha on the same day. During the wedding Anju noticed that her husband was attracted to Sudha by the way he looked at her. She realised, "how quickly the sweetest love turns rancid when it isn't returned. When the one you love loves someone else." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.170)

Book two 'Queen of Swords' takes the story of Anju and Sudha further. Now that both are married and settled in their respective homes. Devakurni has depicted the married life of women in India through Anju and Sudha. It is expected in India that a daughter-in-law has to agree with all the members of her husband's family and work for them relentlessly. This is not the case in America where everyone is given freedom to live as they like independently. Sudha takes the role of idle daughter-in-law who takes care of entire family – mother-in-law, husband and his two brothers. All the daily chores are done with precision. It's not that they force her to do anything but she has taken it as her responsibility of all the members of her husband's family as her upbringing had been that way. When Anju went to visit Sudha before going to America, she was not impressed the way Sudha had ended up in her matrimonial home. "I ask her if she doesn't get tired of all the work she is made to do." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.195) But Sudha replied nonchalantly that her husband's family is her family now and it is her duty to look after everyone. Anju realised, "Marriage has complicated our lives, divided our loyalties, set us on our different wifely orbits. Revealed things we must keep from each other. Never again could we live together the way we did in our girlhood. It would be too dangerous." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.196) They were inseparable before marriage but now they remained in contact with each other through letters. Anju adapted to new lifestyle in America. Sunil taught her driving and introduced her to his friends and took her to malls, clubs and other places. She learnt to manage things herself in America and to give Sunil his own space. She becomes stronger and more independent in America. Sudha felt empty without Ashok but she adjusted to her life with Ramesh. She longed for a baby to fill the emptiness of her life. She once confessed to Anju, "I want a baby more than anything else in the world. Your life is different. You've got college, and Sunil. Who do I have to love, to call my own?" (*Sister of My Heart*, p.224)

Divakaruni in her own unique way through Anju and Sunil portrayed immigrants' life in America and the contrast with Sudha's life in India. Ramesh's mother blamed Sudha for not being able to bear a child. She took her to doctor for check up but didn't allow her son to go for any checkups. Anju lived with her husband and got enrolled in a college. She learnt driving and her husband helped her in household chores and gave his support and love especially when she was disturbed. All this symbolised the liberalized life one can live in America. At the same time in her American life she missed her sick mother and cousin. On the other hand Sudha was occupied in her own set of problems. She was always scrutinised by her mother-in-law and had no liberty as she had to live according to the expectations of her mother-in-law. During one of her visits to Kolkata, Sudha learnt from Singhji that Ashok is still waiting for her. For once she feels, "*Live for yourself this one time*," (*Sister of My Heart*, p.231) but perhaps her upbringing and Indian custom force her to continue living with Ramesh and his interfering mother. Though Anju is living far she gets hint about Sudha's checkups and subsequent behaviour of her mother-in-law which makes her sad.

Anju and Sudha are delighted at the fact that both the sisters are pregnant at the same time. Anju was cared well by her husband and Sudha too was now pampered by her mother-in-law. However Sudha's happiness was cut short when the tests revealed she was carrying a baby girl in her womb. Ramesh's mother wanted the first child for her son to be a boy so she decided the child should be aborted. Ramesh though meekly protested, failed to take any bold step. Divakaruni has precisely touched one of the vices very much prevalent in our Indian society. Female infanticide has been a recent development perpetrated by traditional Indian society upon a whole class of people within its fold that a girl is a burden for the family so they should be either aborted before they are born or killed or abandoned after their birth. Sudha until now has been a passive person; rebelled at the conspiracy of abortion by her mother-in-law. She shared her experience of major crises in her life with Anju and her decision to leave home. Anju supported her decision and advised her to go back to mothers home. Sudha let Anju know about her mother's view, "When I told her, she said I mustn't leave, absolutely not. My place is with my in-laws, for better or worse. She's afraid they'll never take me back, and then what would happen to me? Everyone will think they threw me out because I did something

bad. They'll think my baby is a bastard." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.261) When she told about the impending abortion her mother felt, "... it's the lesser of the two evils." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.261) Sunil later remarked, "You shouldn't have told her to go back to Calcutta," ... "She might have been able to work things out with her husband, had she stayed. Now her mother-in-law will have the perfect excuse to convince Ramesh to get a divorce –" (*Sister of My Heart*, p.262) Anju is amazed at Sunil's remark. Anju and Sudha are apparently best sisters and best supporting system during the time of need. In spite of the people whom they love and trust not agreeing with them they learn to abide with the difficult choices and circumstances that are forced upon them.

Sudha was clear in her priorities as a mother and she wondered the family for whom she cared so much chose to desert her for bearing a girl child in her womb. As expected her mother raised lot of hue and cry remarking, "I told her to grit her teeth and put up with it, and try for another pregnancy. A woman can have many children, after all, but a husband is forever..." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.265) Gauri ma and Pishi were more accommodating towards Sudha. They made her feel at home and welcomed her. Sudha declared her husband knew where she was, "If he wants us, he can get in touch with us easily enough. And if he doesn't want her ... then I'm not for him either." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.268) Sudha's priority as a mother overtakes her and she realizes the meaninglessness of her mechanical life with Ramesh. She proves that a marriage bond without mutual love and respect is worthless. She begins to think about her life with her daughter and she also plans to take up her passion of designing clothes once again to support herself and her daughter. She dreams to lead a life of fulfilment as a woman and emerges as a woman of authority and determination. She becomes empowered when she has to confront and tackle the problem of pregnancy and abortion.

Pishi was more forthcoming when Sudha's mother lamented, "Why should she care anymore what people say? What good has it done her? What good has it done any of us, a whole lifetime of being afraid of what society might think? I spit on this society which says it's fine to kill a baby girl in her mother's womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.268) she further stated about her own situation as a widow at a very young age, "Men whose wives died could marry as soon as a year had passed. They didn't stop their work or their schooling. No one talked about their bad luck. We even have a saying, don't we, "*Abhagar goru more, Bhagya baner bau* – the unlucky man's cow dies, the lucky man's wife dies!" But when, after three years of being a widow, I begged my father to get me a private tutor so I would at least have my studies to occupy me, he slapped me across the face. I considered suicide, oh yes, many times in those early years... I refuse to have our Sudha live like that." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.269) She even boosted the morale of tired Sudha saying it was Sanyals who had lost and not her.

Anju and Sudha shared a special sisterly bond with each other but now Anju was in dilemma if she had given the right suggestion especially as Sunil had not been forthright at her advice to Sudha. Even Sunil said, "Maybe the abortion would have been the lesser of the two evils." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.274) Anju was not sure if she gave the right advice and perhaps now she felt herself responsible for Sudha's loneliness. In a confused state of mind she decided to call Sudha and her daughter to America in the hope of compensating her loss to an extent by helping her in settling down with her in America. This way even Sudha wouldn't be answerable to any queries by society as in America nobody bothers and interferes in others life. She needed money to facilitate Sudha's visit to America. She took up a job in her college library as she didn't want to take any financial help from Sunil.

Sudha is undergoing emotional turmoil after leaving her husband's home and then living with the mothers giving them additional burden makes her sad. She gets a ray of hope when Ashok confesses his love for her but when he said after marriage they should give time to each other and so she should leave behind her daughter with the mothers, she became furious. For Sudha there was no compromise related to her daughter and she realised, "*In dreams begin follies*" (*Sister of My Heart*, p.286) Sudha now strong headed and firm with her priorities and responsibilities towards her daughter refused Ashok's proposal for marriage. "Dayita is my daughter." I say. "She needs me. How will I face her later when she asks me why I abandoned her for the sake of my own pleasure?" (*Sister of My Heart*, p.293) Although the mothers didn't see any absurdity in Ashok's proposal they insisted Sudha to accept him and be married especially her mother who further said that she was lucky to get even a marriage proposal after being a divorcee and pregnant. Pishi remarked, "You

know how much we love you. But we have learned, all three of us, how hard it is to live out your days without a man. Unfortunately the world hasn't changed that much since we lost our husbands." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.293) Divakaruni put forward her view through the protagonist Sudha that in Indian custom greatest achievement for a girl is to be married and life without man is difficult.

Anju has been working hard with her studies and job along with her pregnancy to enable Sudha's visit to America. Initially Sudha was reluctant but later agreed as in America she could lead an independent life by taking up her designing work. She can lead a life of obscurity where no one bothers to enquire about the personal status of a person. Many women in America opt to live alone rather than living with a wrong man. Moreover Anju would be near her and she could again live her childhood days of togetherness with her; and her daughter and Anju's son can grow together like them.

Lately, Anju had not been feeling well as the hard work along with the pregnancy was taking its toll on her health. When Sunil discovered about her job, he was angry and in the midst of their argument Anju felt uneasy. When Sunil took her to hospital her son was born prematurely in six months and there was no heartbeat. Anju was devastated by the overwhelming sorrow of losing her son. She was not able to endure the pain as she exclaimed, "My baby, I killed him." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.304) The physical strains resulted in an abortion. In spite of kind words of Sunil she continued blaming herself for the irreparable loss. Sudha was equally devastated when she learnt about Anju's loss from Sunil. When Sunil told her how Anju blamed herself for miscarriage she pacified her by telling a story about a brave princess and her unborn daughter and a twin sister. As Anju listens to Sudha her vent up emotions come out and she begins to cry and says, "I need you. I need you so much. I'm starved for you. I was trying so hard to get the money together for your ticket, but I messed everything up." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.310)

Anju and Sudha's excitement knew no bound as they met each other on the airport. They hugged and kissed and were ecstatic. Anju who had thought will not hold any baby after her miscarriage held Dayita after she was thrust on her by Sudha. Both of them held the baby together. The novel ends with a graphic description of "... two women, their arms intertwined like lotus stalks, smiling down at the baby between them. Two women who have travelled the vale of sorrow, and the baby who will save them, who has saved them already. Madonnas with child." (*Sister of My Heart*, p.339) Sunil asks the long lost sisters cum friends to hurry home.

Divakaruni herself an immigrant uses female bonding as an essential entity in her novels to assert not only the possibility of building and maintaining such bonding but also to substantiate how important these relationships are to immigrant women in America. The author conveys the message that female bonding is a beautiful delicate thing as she will be there by your side at all the most important points throughout the existence. As a woman, navigating life's many obstacles alone is a tough feat but a true friend is like a compass who tells you which way to turn. Anju and Sudha too are tied in an unforgettable bond throughout the novel. They both adhere to Bell Hooks philosophy on female bonding, "We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood." (*Feminist Theory* p.63)

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