



## QUEST FOR PEACE THROUGH MIGRATION IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S SISTER OF MY HEART

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### ABSTRACT

*People migrate to foreign countries in quest of a better future, better opportunities, and through this they seek harmony and peace away from the problems - financial and otherwise in their families. It is also a fact that a peaceful mind is needed for the all-round development of a human being and perhaps, for some, migration could be a means of an all-round development as is evident in the novel "Sister of My Heart" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who is a diasporic writer. In the novel, there are two people Sunil and Sudha who take a decision to migrate albeit for different reasons. If Sunil who is Anju's husband decides to migrate in order to escape from the clutches of his tyrannical father, Sudha, the chief protagonist of the novel takes the decision to migrate to America in order to make a new beginning in her life along with her infant daughter Dayita. The whole novel is looked at from a diasporic perspective with emphasis on migration a harbinger of peace.*

**Key words:** migration, insecurity, divorce, harmony, dignity, peace, alien.

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Migration into an unknown land is often a decision taken by man for a variety of reasons. A man may feel that his native country does not have much to offer for him and therefore he may migrate to an unknown land in search of better avenues. He may migrate to a foreign country in search of a better job, better future or a better atmosphere. Sometimes, adverse situations at home may propel a person to migrate to a foreign land. A none-too-better financial position at home may induce the idea of migration in a person's mind. There are instances where people from financially insecure families have migrated to the prosperous Middle-East in India itself. At the same time there are ambitious youngsters who have migrated to other countries so that their talents may find a better outlet. But rarely does a person take the decision to migrate for peace - both inner and outer.

And it is also said that a peaceful mind is needed for the all-round development of a human being and it is for this elusive peace that man strives day in and day out. And it takes a lifetime or even more for individuals to seek peace. This, is exactly the crux of the novel "Sister of My Heart" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The entire novel is looked at from a diasporic perspective and there are two individuals in the novel who take the decision to migrate for entirely different reasons. If Sunil, Anju's husband, decides to migrate in order to escape from the clutches of a tyrannical father, Sudha, the chief protagonist of the novel takes the decision to migrate to America along with her infant daughter Dayita to begin life afresh. The whole novel is looked at from a diasporic perspective and the novelist projects two categories of diaspora in this novel the first one is individual while the second one is social. Chitra Divakaruni, the novelist has succeeded in portraying the sensitive character of Sudha in a successful manner.

Sudha or Basudha (which is her real name) is the daughter of Gopal and Nalini. Gopal is the cousin of Bijoy Chatterjee, though an illegitimate one. And worse, Gopal was supposed to have caused Bijoy's death, for, it was he who had induced Bijoy into undertaking the hazardous journey into the jungle in search of rubies. Both Bijoy and Gopal were presumed dead and for no fault of hers, Sudha was looked upon as the daughter of a murderer. Thus, Sudha had, right from the beginning, an insecure background and was always psychologically on the backfoot. She was more beautiful than her cousin Anju. Anju was the daughter of Bijoy and Gauri Chatterjee and by virtue of her birth was on a surer background. Though not as beautiful as Sudha, Anju was very generous to Sudha and she knew that both of them were not related. But yet, she considered Sudha to be her "sister of my heart" and this is how the novel gets its name.

Both the girls are brought up by three women-Pishi Ma, Gouri and Nalini and they are rather cut-off from society. The family is conservative and whenever the girls have to go out, they are either chaperoned by the elder women or are escorted by Singhji, the car driver. After their schooling is over, both the girls enter college and, despite being brought up in an orthodox atmosphere, Sudha falls in love with Ashok Ghosh, who is rather inferior to the Chatterjees by caste.

When the girls attain marriageable age, the girls are married off. Anju gets married to Sunil while Sudha gets married to Ramesh. Ramesh is a businessman and is brought up by his authoritarian mother Mrs Sanyal. After a long wait, both Anju and Sudha get pregnant. Anju is already in America along with her husband Sunil while Sudha is in Bardhamanpur. Mrs.Sanyal, Sudha's mother-in-law wants that Sudha's first child should be a male because it is the custom in the Sanyal family that the first child should be a male. Therefore, Mrs Sanyal gets a sonography done and it is revealed that Sudha is carrying a female foetus within her. Sudha is happy but Mrs Sanyal is not. Ramesh, who has always been a mamma's boy sides with his mother. Mrs Sanyal wants Sudha to abort her child. Sudha is horrified and she gets out of the house and manages to make a phone call to Anju, who advises her to go to the mothers. Sudha heeds her advice and returns to her maternal home. The mothers speak to Mrs.Sanyal who is willing to accept Sudha only if she aborts the child. Sudha refuses and this time, the mothers support her. Ramesh divorces Sudha. And ironically, Sudha gets peace of mind when she is divorced from her spineless husband. And there is harmony too in her life, for, her mothers and Anju are supporting her through this trauma. For her sake, they sell the old house and buy a flat and once they are in the middle of the city, they get involved in social work. Sudha is at peace with herself though there are minor irritants like Sarita Aunty. Sarita Aunty looks upon her as an abandoned woman and this pains Sudha immensely.

At this juncture Ashok Ghosh again appears on the scene. He is not married. He feels sorry at Sudha's predicament and is willing to accept her again. He wants to marry her but is not willing to accept her child.

He wants Sudha to give up her child. He wants Sudha to give up her child because he feels that both Sudha and he "need to be along together atleast for sometime", Sudha, however, does not want to give up her child even though the mothers are more than willing to be good grandmothers to the child. They too want her to marry Ashok but Sudha is unwilling to leave her child. Therefore, she rejects his proposal. Through this little, but important episode, the novelist, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni has brought the gender issue to the fore. She points out that even in a progressing India, girls are not welcome and it requires the grit of a Sudha and the presence of mind of Anju to protect a girl child. The novelist also points out that the patriarchal shackles are still strong in India through the character of Mrs.Sanyal. And Sudha has to face all this in order to give birth to her child and seek peace in motherhood.

Then again, the novelist touches upon the attitude of society towards a single woman. Society does not look kindly on deserted women and it is the attitude of males like Ashok which make matters worse. He wants Sudha, but not her child. Maybe, psychologically, he does not want to be reminded every time he sees Dayita that Sudha had another man in her life.

When Sudha is in this precarious position, Anju wants her to come to America so that she could stitch designer clothes. Sudha has nimble fingers and can stitch beautifully. Anju wants Sudha to come over to America and set up a boutique. So, she arranges for her tickets and Sudha prepares to begin life afresh. She wants to be away from a conservative society like India where women who are single are not looked upon kindly. Anju knew about this and despite her misgivings about her husband Sunil's reaction to Sudha's arrival into their home, she goes ahead and makes arrangements for Sudha's stay in her house.

For Sudha, it is a bold and a courageous step. She wants to lead a life of peace and dignity. She wants to give a better future for her daughter too. So, she wants to migrate to America where her "single woman" status would not bother anybody, for, in America, it is common to be either a "single man" or a "single woman". In this way, Sudha wants to achieve peace and harmony in her life. Ironically, her journey to America also brings about internal peace too. Though a letter written by Singhji, her car-driver, who was really her father Gopal in disguise, Sudha comes to know that she is not the daughter of a murderer. Gopal had not killed Bijoy. It was the treachery of their agent Haldar and Bijoy's inability to swim that led to his death. Thus, even as Sudha descends on the soil of America, she is internally at peace with herself. She knows that she is not the daughter of a murderer as she had supposed herself to be. She now looks forward to begin life afresh in a new land, amongst new people. She hopes to find peace and harmony in an alien land. She is there in America on a tourist visa for a year. She does not know what the future holds for her But she is confident now at present for she was now in the image of the queen of swords- an image that she had dreamed of as a child - that of the queen of Jhansi, Rani Laxmibai. Her dream, now, to be the master of her own fate is about to be realised. And thus, migration, atleast in the case of Sudha is the harbinger of peace and harmony.

To sum up, the novelist Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni has thrown up many perspectives in the novel. She has been able to project migration as the means for a better future for individuals who find conditions in the country of their birth far from being satisfactory to lead their lives with dignity and peace.

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