



## Ramifications of Decisions: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's, *Before We Visit the Goddess*

Aarthika M.

Ph.D. (PT) Scholar, Postgraduate and Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous), Coimbatore, India

Received: 08 Nov 2023; Received in revised form: 10 Dec 2023; Accepted: 18 Dec 2023; Available online: 25 Dec 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *Diasporic writing is an attempt to express the predicaments of immigrants as they land in an alien land. Migration both forced and voluntary resulted in the feelings of dislocation, alienation and confusion as they are made victims of discriminations based on race, culture, religion and language. Diasporic writers have attempted to express some of the inexplicable problems of immigrants. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as a diasporic writer focuses on the trajectory of immigrants and the trauma of being in exile. Her novels explore the problems of settlement, fractured identity, immigrant experiences, and multi-cultural society, intergenerational and cross cultural conflicts and ramification of decisions from female protagonists. Ramification of decisions continues to shape literature in time immemorial. Serious decisions taken by characters develop the plot as well as make narration interesting. Decision making is actually a cognitive process that result in a selection of belief among other alternative possible actions. The consequences of decisions are to be focused because failing decisions may lead to complications, challenges that would turn someone's life upside down. Divakaruni picturizes adventurous characters who always find possibilities to shine in their lives by breaking their shackles. Her characters would take venturesome decisions especially when they are in a complex situation. The author motivates her immigrant readers by projecting challenges to the characters and shows ways to overcome the situation. In her novel, Before We Visit the Goddess, three generations of women who take significant decisions that bring drastic change in their lives that result in their quest for identity. This paper highlights the gradual development of characters from stepping out from their homeland to facing challenges and establishing an identity in an alien land. This paper is an attempt to explore how the characters with ramifications of decisions, several distractions and different dreams, figure out their identity and continue to evolve.*

**Keywords**— *Migration, identity, challenges, ramification, decisions and consequences.*

Literature is one of the most important medium through which experiences of migrants are transformed from one generation to the next. Literary texts carry a perception of life that link the past, present and give an insight to the future. Modern Indian writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, Meena Alexander, Jumpha Lahiri, Anita Desai, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni write about identity, and issues related to socio-cultural inequalities. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is contemporary Indian – American writer known for her outstanding exploration of immigrant experiences. She expertly weaves her novels around the issues of diaspora,

identity crisis, culture, and the struggles of women in a patriarchal society. The protagonists of her novels are adventurous, they travel from ignorance to experience and identify who they truly are, and evolve into a more independent person to lead a dignified life.

The novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni provides a chance to critically examine major issues of diaspora such as identity, immigrant experience, cross-cultural conflict, multi-cultural society and its intricacies and ramification of decisions. Ramification of decisions are essentials in plot construction and contemporary narratives. From ancient myths and religious texts to contemporary

modern novels, ramifications of decisions in literature is an inevitable element of storytelling that inspire readers and elevate them. The strength of her novels is in the portrayal of women's shifting thoughts and emotions, their expression of desires and memories, cultural conflicts, identity crisis and other diasporic issues are being the nuances of her writing.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni states in an interview given to The Times of India that she is dedicated to bring women's perspective to the foreground in her novels where she says, "I am more interested in telling the stories of women, or having them tell their own stories in their own voice. The narrator of a book always gains extra depth because we feel so close to them".

Ramification of decisions, though emerge from confusions and complex situations provides hope and possibility of change, even in the seemingly insurmountable problems. It teaches people to learn from their mistakes, makes them independent and courageous as the consequences are the result of their personal choices, and help them to start their journeys of personal transformation. It also fosters liberation and empowerment. It carries symbolic and allegorical meaning beyond the literal representation of action. Moreover, it may represent the condition of immigrant women, societal redemption and more significant themes of identity and women empowerment. It allows the immigrant readers to reflect their lives, empathize with complex characters and explore freedom and self-identity. Ramification of decisions result in complex circumstances, though it turn the lives of people upside down, it increases self-confidence and provides possibilities to survive in an uncomfortable situation. The adventurous decisions break the monotony of life and provides great experiences. It strengthens the mental and emotional health bringing a ray of hope.

Ramification of decisions is a psychological and cognitive process, which has an objective of resigning from the past but learning from it that enables one to face future with positivity. It further explains life is not always a question to be answered but a quest to be experienced.

Most of her characters seemed to be attracted to migrate to foreign land in the hope of getting a better life. But reality is not as easy as what they have expected. Migration lead them to encounter harsh life truths. They experience the severity of estrangement such as cultural conflicts, identity issues, homelessness, up rootedness and many more issues of diaspora. This paper also highlights how people are attracted and move towards advancements and modernity.

According to the push and pull theory of migration propounded by Everett Lee, push factors encourage people

to leave their land of origin and settle in a foreign country, at the same time, pull factors attract migrants towards foreign country. For instance, if high unemployment in native land is a push factor, abundant attractive job opportunities in foreign land would be an effective pull factor. Unemployment leads to large-scale migration process. Development of trade and commerce in the twentieth century largely affected the small scale industries and its employers. The economic condition was not favorable for the people. So they start moving towards foreign countries to seek better employment opportunities, which is considered to be the push factor. As there are growing possibilities for migrants and multiple reasons for migration. People largely move to different foreign countries, they migrate due to undesirable conditions prevail in their country of origin such as social political issues, financial crisis, poverty, wars, disease and discriminations based on religion, class and caste. Migration has become a large world event during twentieth century that create a deep impact in literary history. Migration has been a part of human history as well. Due to globalization and advancement of technology more people are migrating than ever before. This flow of people result in conflicts and controversies that affect both migrants and the receiving community also.

In her novel, *Before We Visit the Goddess*, Divakaruni explores the peculiar dispersal of family members and the possible ramifications of relationships. She portrays the complex relationships between mothers and daughters and different kinds of love that bind migrants across generations. She captures the complexity in multi-generational and transcontinental bonds from the country side of Bengal, India to Texas, USA. The novel focuses on three generations of Bengali mothers and daughters who are head-strong, courageous and mysterious, and cover their lives from a famous sweet shop in Calcutta to a contented life in the house of America.

The story begins with Sabitri who runs a sweet shop named 'Durga Sweets' in Calcutta, writes a letter to her grand-daughter, Tara whom she never met in her lifetime. She was asked to advice Tara to continue her studies. Initially she hesitates because she doesn't have any acquaintance with Tara, rather than seeing her only in handful of photos, then she gathered up courage and decided to write to Tara, through which the life of Sabitri is revealed to the readers. She has not only advised her granddaughter but shared her vaulting ambitions, her shattered dreams, doomed love affair and her indomitable spirit.

Sabitri's life is all made up of ramification of decisions for instance, being a daughter of a poor temple priest and a sweet maker, Sabitri decided to pursue her

college education instead of getting married as most of the women of her age do, her decision to be educated opened new windows and provided new experience in her life. Her aim is uttered by her mother Durga once, "Sabi doesn't want to get married, Rani Ma. She wants to go to college, wants to become a teacher. She's smart, stood first in the matric exams in the girl's school. But we don't have the money". (Divakaruni, Goddess 6)

Then Sabitri leaves her mother Durga and their village, moves to Calcutta to pursue her higher education under the sponsorship of Leelamoyi, a wealthy woman of the village. Sabitri headed towards her academic goals but later distracted by the power and pelf of her sponsors and has fallen in love with the rich and handsome Rajiv, heir of Mitirs. Higher things such as rich life style, delicious food, and silk cloths offered by Leelamoyi and love of Rajiv tempted her that made her to believe that she is meant for rich life and she is well deserved. She is blindfolded by the fancy of love, couldn't accept the class divisions of the society. She is shattered when she was sent out of the house, then she realized education and strong support system from family are essential for a woman to lead a dignified life.

Later she married to a wealthy man, Bijan who has been a strong support for her. He has provided shelter for her when she is left homeless. But she has kept her secrets hidden from him. She often falls prey to temptations, wants to show off her wealthy life style for which she has been deprived of from her young age. She seemingly helps her husband to get promoted to the highest positions and to become richer. He is gullible in a way because he has never suspected Sabitri and not even noticed her eccentric activities. She takes advantage of his gullibility that she confesses to Tara, "I lifted my face to him and smiled my prettiest, saddest, falsest smile." (Divakaruni, Goddess 21).

Once Bijan comes to know of her past love affair with Rajiv that she has maintained as a secret, disappointed Bijan starts moving away from her. Sabitri's decision to hide her past ruined her present life. After Bijan's death, she is supposed to handle the burden of her family. She decides to live a dignified life. She runs a sweet stall named 'Durga Sweets' which is named after her mother. Her decision to start a business is challenging for her in the beginning but that has provided herself and her daughter Bela a better life. The shop has become a major part of her life that has been a solution for all her problems such as loneliness, financial problems and also made her more and more creative and alive.

Ramification of decisions has brought drastic changes in the life of Bela as well. Decision making is essential in creating a better life. Bela has spent most of her life in loneliness as she has lost her father when she was

young and raised by her mother, who is busy with her sweet stall business. Bela is also seduced by her dreams, distracted by her love affairs. She is dropped out of college, left her mother and motherland, and reached the U.S. to start a new life with her boyfriend, Sanjay. She is initially happy in her married life as she has experienced the anonymity and fascinated by modern culture that she expresses her joy at the airport while meeting Sanjay, "She threw her arms around him the way she never could have done in Kolkata and kissed him on the mouth. No one catcalled. No one harassed them or took umbrage or even noticed." (Divakaruni, Goddess 92). Soon she realized these joys are temporary and her life with her mother is real. Her decision to be separated from her mother is to live with Sanjay brought perilous consequences such as, divorced, separated from her daughter, lived alone in an apartment without enough financial support. One day she almost has a nervous breakdown, she admits the same, "She was stuck in a dingy apartment, stuck in a dead-end job she hated, stuck under a load of unpaid loans so heavy that she'd probably never be able to squirm out from under them and go back to college." (Divakaruni, Goddess 107). When she has decided to pursue a better life in a better country, Bela is clueless that her escape from her motherland would turn into an estrangement from her mother and uprooted from her roots.

Tara is born and brought up in the U.S. thus she is neither fully Americanised nor has she benefited from any of Indian traditional values. She is estranged from her divorced parents, dropped out of college, multiple relationship issues and not stable in any job. She seems to be floating around like an aimless ship and doesn't have any core values and stable beliefs. The author rightly put her character in words, "She was a puzzle, with her Indian features and Texan boots, her defiant piercings, the skin stretched thin across her cheekbones and crumpled under the eyes. And that spiky hair, now fallen limp as a child's over her forehead. She had read somewhere that it was style that lesbians affected. What kind of Indian family, even in America, would produce such a hybrid?" (Divakaruni, Goddess 107)

Tara has no attachment to her own 'home' or 'homeland' and so she is clueless about Indian tradition. She never claims her Indian roots anywhere in her life but unconsciously she expects guidance and support from elderly persons when is in her times of distress. She develops a cordial connection with people of India origin that she meets in her life. Mr. Venkatachalapathy whom she drove to the temple of Goddess, and Mrs Mehta to whom she was house sitting. Stuart Hall in Cultural Identity and Diaspora, states, "The inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. If silences are not resisted,

they produce, in Franz fanon's vivid phrase, 'individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels'.

Divakaruni has portrayed her protagonists of *Before We Visit the Goddess*, Sabitri, Bela and Tara as adventurous woman who is prone to take decisions and encounter the consequences of it both positive and negative manner, but always finds ray of hope in their lives and live to the fullest with all its ups and downs. Ebb and flow, ebb and flow, our lives. Is that why we are fascinated by the steadfastness of the stars?" (Divakaruni, Goddess 68). Thus Divakaruni through her characters explores invisible borders of class, geography, culture and dejection they face while undergoing ramification of decisions.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Before We Visit the Goddess*. Simon & Schuster, 2016.
- [2] Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Official Website". <https://www.chitradivakaruni.com/>
- [3] ---. *Before We Visit the Goddess*. Interview by Debarati S Sen. *The Times of India*, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/chitra-banerjee-divakaruni-a-writer-can-never-please-all-segments-of-society/articleshow/67670829.cms>
- [4] ---. *Before We Visit the Goddess*. Interview by T. Hong. Book Dragon, 2016, <http://smithsonianapa.org/bookdragon/visit-goddess-chitra-banerjee-divakaruni-author-interview-bookslut/>
- [5] Jenny Higgins, "Push and Pull Factors". Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Website, 2008. <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/society/push-pull-factors.php>.
- [6] Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 22-37.