21st Century Diaspora

A study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction

SAMPLE

नमूना • SAMPLE

21st Century Diaspora

A study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction

RUKHSANA SAIFEE

SAMPLE

AKHAND PUBLISHING HOUSE
DELHI (INDIA)

Published by



AKHAND PUBLISHING HOUSE

Publisher, Distributor, Exporter having an Online Bookstore

Head Office : L-9A, Ist Floor, Street No. 42,
Sadatpur Extension, Delhi-110094 (INDIA)
Phone No.: 9968628081, 9555149955 & 9013387535
E-mail : akhandpublishing@yahoo.com,
akhandpublishinghouse@gmail.com
Website : www.akhandbooks.com

21st Century Diaspora
A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction

© Author
Ist Edition 2019
ISBN 978-93-88998-59-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner Author/Editors. Application for such permission should be addressed to the Publisher and Author/Editors. Please do not participate in or do not encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

The responsibility for facts stated, opinion expressed or conclusions reached and plagiarism, if any, in this book is entirely that of the author. Neither the publishers nor the editor will be responsible for them whatsoever.

Printed in India

Published by Jhapsu Yadav for Akhand Publishing House. Cover Designed and Laser Typesetting at VM Graphic and Printed at VM offset Printers, Delhi.

ABST • SAMPLE

Foreword

Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee, one of the most prolific Asian American writers, creates narratives that address the issues of diaspora, location, history and memory. Post-colonial migrancy has radically reformulated the earlier dynamics of migration characterized by loss and disempowerment to a redefinition of the dynamics of location and representation by creating new relations between the homeland and host land.

A novel "should make you enter the world it portrays" opines Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee. In her works we enter the world of women who either live abroad or happen to be visiting India. These women though conditioned by their Indian upbringing have risen above the traditional constraints. They think more rationally, but they mentally retain some of the traditional beliefs.

They question the nature of their lives, and their roles as mothers, wives, daughters and professionals. This awareness leads them to rethink about their own lives as women and instills in them the confidence and strength to go ahead. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni focuses on the diasporic Indian women caught between two opposing worlds. They find themselves in an in-between state struggling to carve out identities of their own. They not only resuscitate their origins but fundamentally reconfigure the South Asian cultural imaginaries of home, identity and belonging.

Ultimately Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee's books highlight the strength of women who become not only

SAMPLE

independent and autonomous but also lend support to others around them to find their better and truer selves. Her books transcend the Indian cultural experience and provide a multilayered site where they can be successful as individuals, and as members of the new community of which they are a part.

The present book *21st Century Diaspora: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction* published by Akhand Publishing House, Delhi is an attempt at a systematic study of the thematic and stylistic concerns of her selected works and is authored by Dr. Rukhsana Saifee.

A true bibliophile, she is a Ph.D. in English Literature and a dabster in conversations pertaining to Indian authors. She is an Associate Professor of Communication Skills at Chartered Institute of Technology, Abu road since 2009 and loves to spend her time researching on trending topics. Dr. Rukhsana Saifee, is a journalist and writes for online papers like *Udaipur Times* and *Abu Times*. She has a strong command over the Art of Communication. As a teacher of communication, she showcases the worth of communication skills. She not only has mastery in teaching but also has this trait quite visible in her personality.

Written in a simple and effective style, the book is informative and readable. It will appeal to scholars and also to general readership. With its insightful and engaging text, it will help in generating discussion on South Asian immigrant narratives.

Dr. Sudhi Rajiv
Formerly Dean, Faculty of Arts,
Education & Social Sciences
And Formerly Prof. & Head,
Dept. of English, J N Vyas University
Jodhpur

SAMPLE

Acknowledgement

The book can never be complete without the expression of gratitude to all who supported me in my scholarly pursuit. First of all, I would like to express my profound sense of indebtedness and heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Mukta Sharma, Head, Department of English, M. V. Shramjeevi College, Udaipur for her magnificent and sublime guidance and affectionate treatment during the process of my work. She has been the guiding light behind this entire work.

I owe my heartfelt gratitude to Honorable Prof. H. S. Chandalia, Professor, Department of English, M. V. Shramjeevi College, Udaipur for his scholarly and angelic help. I will always be thankful to him for teaching me to keep trying and never to lose hope.

It gives me immense pleasure to give my regards to my mother Mrs. Mehfuza Meyaji, father Mr. Asger Ali Meyaji, mother-in-law Mrs. Salma Saifee and father-in-law Mr. Hatim Ali for their blessings and incessant motivation. You gave me wings and taught me to fly.

My special thanks to my husband Mr. Akhtar Ali with whom I discussed ideas and insights which have contributed in various ways to complete my study. His constant encouragement to me through all stages of this work is responsible for the present shape it has acquired.

I must not forget to express my thanks to my loving daughters, Aashna and Saba who never disturbed me in my work in spite of being deprived of my love and affection. Their patience and support have kept me

SAMPLE

going far and their love will keep me going further. My deepest appreciation and love also go to my brothers and sisters for their moral support.

It seems to be the most apt platform to extend special thanks to my best friend Shabana Meyaji for her constant reinforcement and untiring efforts during the whole procedure. I take this opportunity to say you are my silent mentor. Thank you…

I also express my indebtness to Director Mr. Tejas R. Shah and all the members of Chartered Institute of Technology for their support and encouragement during my work.

Besides this, I acknowledge my sincere gratitude to all my teachers, seniors, juniors, well-wishers and friends, for their encouragement and inspiration in my study and life. I thank all those who directly and indirectly provided me the much-needed assistance in completion of my work.

Let credit and praise be to the Almighty God with whose grace and blessings anything is possible.

Contents

	Foreword	*v*
	Acknowledgement	*vii*
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Culture and Tradtion	53
3.	The Bonds of Womanhood	91
4.	Immigrant Experience	135
5.	Style	214
6.	Conclusion	261
	Bibliography	278
	Index	*286*

नमूना SAMPLE

नमूना • SAMPLE

1

Introduction

Indian English Literature has matured from a sapling to a firmly rooted tree that blooms with its entirety still awaiting its yet-to-come metamorphosis. It took umpteen historical events and illustrious and notable personalities to bring Indian writing in English to its contemporary eminence. The basic historical perspective of Indian English literature is an effort to contextualise the growth and rise of this genre - from its inception to its present-day glory. Early Indian writer made thorough use of unadulterated English by Indian words to communicate an experience and understanding which was fundamentally and in essence, Indian. Indians began with reading, speaking and apprehending English and they soon started writing also in such a 'foreign medium'. Once this was ushered in, the history of Indian writing in English began to range from the most useful and functionary prose to the most motivated and determined verse-epics. Indian writing in English was but only one of the materialisations and expressions of the new creative impulse in India - what is often referred to as the 'literary Renaissance in India. The study of English literature as can be seen historically, had energised and perked literary creations in Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, Gujarati and other various Indian languages. Indo-Anglian literature possessed the same origin as the other modern literature in India, although

SAMPLE

here the foreign factor seemed more noticeable and marked. In this context, the two distinct categories of Indian English literature during British India and Post-colonial Indian English literature came to the surface, perfectly mirroring the pre-Independent and post-Independent society.

The first book written by an Indian in English was by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet;* Mahomet's travel narrative was published in 1793 in England. In its early stages it was influenced by the Western art form of the novel. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) wrote *Rajmohan's Wife* and published it in the year 1864 which was the first Indian novel written in English. Raja Ram Mohan Rao (1908–2006), Indian philosopher and writer authored *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* which are Indian in terms of its storytelling qualities. Ruskin Bond, winner of Sahitya academy award and the author of many novels including *The room on the roof, Flight of pigeons*, etc. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) wrote in Bengali and English and was responsible for the translations of his own work into English. Dhan Gopal Mukerji was the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* where he relates his life experiences and influences. P. Lal, a poet, translator, publisher and essayist, founded a press Writers Workshop, in the 1950s for Indian English writing. Ram Nath Kak (1917–1933), a Kashmiri veterinarian wrote his autobiography *Autumn Leaves*, which is one of the most vivid portraits of life in 20th century Kashmir and has become a sort of a classic.

The 1980s witnessed a second coming for the Indian writing in English with the writers like Salman Rushdie. The appearance of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 brought about a renaissance in Indian writing in English which has outdone that of the 1930s. Its influence, acknowledged by critics and novelists alike, has been apparent in numerous ways: the appearance of a certain post-modern playfulness, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, even the prominent references to Bollywood, all seem to owe something to Rushdie's novel. Nevertheless, to attribute everything to a single, personal intervention would be naive. The pretensions of the messianic critic are irrevocably deflated if he or she reads Allan Sealy's account of the origins of his own first novel, *The Trotter-Nama* novel. In the published versions of both stories the fate of the narrator still mirrors the fate of the nation. Sealy's view is that it represents 'two writers responding to the same historical moment. They have read the same book, but the book is India. India is dictating, the country is doing the "thinking". "We do not write but are written" (Sealy 44). The question which follows from Sealy's statement is: what is the India that is writing these texts? Various economic and social pressures have led to the end of the so-called Nehruvite consensus in India. The idea of unity within - so central to the years of nationalist struggle and the building of the new nation state - has been displaced by an urgent need to question the nature of that unity. The issue of imagining the nation, the issue of the fate of the children of the midnight hour of independence, has become a pressing one throughout India. It is an issue which has been debated in all languages. The better novels in English of the past twenty years participate in this larger debate. If Rushdie ushered in a new era of Indian writing in English, it has to be acknowledged that he was more a sign of the times than their creator.

Although India has a history of ancient civilization, the surfacing of the first written record of women's literature in India has been traced back to the advent of Buddhism in the early 16th century. According to A.K.Ramanujan, who has translated most of the poems of the Sangam age, the disparity in gender is apparent in the way women have written about their experiences. The rise of Islam in India brought an innovative set of experiences and influences in women's literary world.

However, in the18th century due to political and social reasons women writing declined. Again, in the late 19th century with the rise of the reformist movement women contributed in all spheres of society. This led to a fresh stage in the development of women literature in India. The initial women writings were from the pen of Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Their writings were aimed at social reform.

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian Women Writers in English are victims of a second prejudice i e, their regional counterparts. Proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes.

The Hindu moral code known as The Laws of Manu denies woman an existence apart from that of her husband or his family, and since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Rajmohan's Wife in 1864 a significant number of authors have portrayed Indian women as long-suffering wives and mothers silenced by patriarchy. The ideal of the traditional, oppressed

woman persisted in a culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands, the Hindu goddesses Sita and Savitri serving as powerful cultural ideals for women. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying wife, Sita, supported by other figures such as Savitri, Draupadi and Gandhari. When looking at these narratives silence/speech can be a useful guide to interpreting women's responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation (Navarro-Tejero 101).

In the past, the work by the Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumptions. Indian societies gave priority to the worth of male experiences. In those days, women used to write about a woman's perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena. On the other hand, male authors used to deal with heavy themes. Thus, it was assumed that their work would get more priority and acceptance in the society. During the 18thcentury, these factors led towards the decline of Indian women writing, and with all these factors, production of women's literature declined further. In the 19thcentury, more and more women actively participated in India's reformist movement against the British rule. It again led to the women's literature. At that time, their write-ups mainly concentrated on the country's freedom struggle. Over the years, the world of feminist ideologies began to influence the English literature of India.

A specific subset of testimonies is made up of women writing narratives that cross geographical boundaries following India's independence, such as Anita Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. As

Inderpal Grewal pointed out in her book *Transnational America*, these authors were also women who were "born just before or after Indian independence, a generation wrestling with the legacy of colonialism and the problem of decolonization" (21). Many of the immigrants during that time were women and some were able to read and write in English and thereby started to contribute their narratives. As the Diaspora has grown, so has the production of Diasporic women's literature, which projects the dilemma of women living in alien culture. In Transnational America, Inderpal Grewal examines how the circulation of people, goods, social movements, and rights discourses during the 1990s created transnational subjects shaped by a global American culture. Rather than simply frame the United States as an imperialist nation-state that imposes unilateral political power in the world, Grewal analyzes how the concept of "America" (Grewal 198) functions as a nationalist discourse beyond the boundaries of the United States by disseminating an ideal of democratic citizenship through consumer practices. She develops her argument by focusing on South Asians in India and the United States.

Women Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. With Sarojani Naidu, emerged a second trend of women writers, who were fluent both in mother tongue and in English. The 20th century women writers, moved towards a more complex theme. Writers like Mahashwetadevi pooled women's causes with political movement, while Shashi Deshpande in her *Binding Vines*, built a platform of collective female experience. In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the

generation of those women writers who have money and are mostly western educated. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that have existed in the society since long. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. Their write-ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche, which has no accessibility. The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife.

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Indian English literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start in a day. It took many years and several distinguished personalities to bring the present status and distinction to Indian English literature. Indian literature is not only about novels, it is also about poetry and short stories. Before the rise of novels, several women writers composed songs, short stories and small plays. It is still believed that women are the upholders of the rich Indian tradition of fables, storytelling and more. In the mid-nineteenth century, more women started to write in the English language. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writings and it has affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature. They have brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. Nowadays, people enjoy reading the anglicised novels presented by the new age women writers.

It has not always been a matter of individual's choice, inclination, imagination or even talent to choose a form for what they want to write, rather it depends on what's permissible and what's publishable. The selection of themes by women writers is determined by factors which range from the mundanely physical to the

intricately tangled and emotional; each of them arises from the overlapping pressures of family, community and society. The famous feminist Helen Cixous in her text *The Laugh of Medusa* states that:

> Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text-as into the world and into the history-by her own movement. "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. It is time for woman to start scoring their feats in written and oral language. (880)

Since long, feminism has been used by the women novelists as the theme of their writings. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today, a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to household works. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of the Indian women authors. These facts are incorporated by the women writers. These writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to complete womanhood. Through their novels they spread the message of what actually feminism is, which actually is very broad. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence.

The writings of Indian women and the portrayal of women characters in their fiction depends or is tied up with a number of factors i.e., the situation of the female, within the historical and regional background, the degree of liberty given to a woman and the restraints