



The Fractured Self: A Postcolonial and Psychoanalytical Study of Intergenerational Trauma in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Novels *Independence* and *Before we Visit the Goddess*

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Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted nature of postcolonial displacement and psychoanalytic theories focusing on the intergenerational trauma in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels Independence(2023) and Before We Visit The Goddess(2016).By examining the characters across multiple generations – from rural Bengal of the 1940s to the America – the study analyses how the historical upheavals such as the partition of India and the personal displacement brings psychic ruptures. Using Frantz Fanon's postcolonial insights and Freudian/Jungian psychoanalytic frameworks, the presentation discusses how trauma is unconsciously transmitted from mothers to daughters, manifesting as a struggle for identity and independence.

Keywords: postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, intergenerational trauma, chitra banerjee divakaruni, diaspora, female agency

Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a diasporic Indian-American writer, has consistently engaged with the themes of migration, memory and identity. Her novels often foreground women's experiences of cultural displacement and psychological struggle. In *Independence*, she situates trauma within the historical rupture of India's Partition, while *Before We Visit the Goddess* traces three generations of

women negotiating diasporic identity in India and the United States. The 'fractured self' emerges as the central motif in both texts, reflecting the psychological consequences of colonialism, migration and intergenerational trauma. This paper argues that Divakaruni's novels exemplify how postcolonial literature intersects with psychoanalysis to illuminate the persistence of trauma across generations, particularly in women's lives.



Theoretical Framework

Homi Bhabha's concept of **hybridity** and Gayatri Spivak's notion of the **subaltern** provide tools to analyze Divakaruni's characters, who inhabit fractured identities between tradition and modernity, homeland and diaspora. The novels highlight how colonial legacies manifest in gendered oppression and cultural dislocation. Postcolonial theory interrogates the lingering effects of colonialism on identity, culture, and power structures. The concept of **hybridity serves as a defense mechanism in postcolonial theory**, where colonized people adapt elements of the dominant culture as a form of subtle resistance and self-preservation. Priya (the doctor) uses her professional identity to survive the trauma of the Partition. She creates a "third space" (Bhabha) where she is neither just a daughter nor just a refugee, but an agent of change.

The novel *Independence* is set against the 1947 Partition of India, depicting the "sordid liberation" and the violent birth of a nation. It explores the struggle of ordinary citizens to find their place as the British exit, specifically through the "Price of Freedom" paid by the Ganguly sisters. The partition led to a wave of communal violence, resulting in the overnight displacement of millions of people who became refugees in their land. This period witnessed the loss of countless lives, with thousands of women enduring torture and rape, homes being looted, and villages set ablaze across the country. Civilization seemed to be suspended as customs and rituals were torn apart. Amid this chaos, the Ganguly family, headed by the respected doctor Nabhkumar, finds themselves grappling with the devastating impact of the riots. The novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* follows three generations of women—Sabitri, Bela, and Tara—as they move from rural Bengal to the United States. It illustrates Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity', where characters construct new, fluid identities that are neither fully "Indian" nor "American".

Divakaruni re-centers historical trauma from an intimate female perspective, transforming her protagonists into agents of resistance against both colonial and local patriarchal structures. It captures

the overnight transformation of neighbors into "the Other" and the resulting refugee crisis, which remains a central trauma in the postcolonial Indian psyche. Characters face 'post-colonial displacement', moving from their homeland to a "host land" where they often feel at odds with the lifestyle and culture. The narrative explores the feeling of having more than one social identity, making it difficult for characters like Tara to develop a singular sense of self in a multicultural world.

In *both the novels*, the mother-daughter relationship is a "fractured mirror." Use the Freudian concept of the "**Electra Complex**" or the "**Maternal Bond**" to explain why Bela rejects her mother's traditionalism only to find herself repeating her mother's mistakes. The 'Electra complex' is a psychoanalytical term used to describe girls' sense of competition with her mother for the affections of her father. The trauma of losing their father and their home creates a "psychological scar" that dictates the sisters' later choices in *Independence*.

Jamini in *Independence*—her repressed jealousy and unrequited love for Amit represent the Jungian "Shadow"—the parts of ourselves we hide to maintain a "pure" social facade. The Jungian Shadow is the unconscious part of our personality containing repressed, rejected, or disowned aspects of ourselves—both negative (anger, jealousy, flaws) and positive (hidden talents, creativity, instincts) — that we deem unacceptable, often projected onto others, and confronting it through "shadow work" is crucial for wholeness, personal growth, and individuation, according to Carl Jung.

Freud's "The Uncanny" (Das Unheimliche) is the psychological experience of an event or thing that is unsettling in a way that feels oddly familiar, rather than simply mysterious.^[1] This phenomenon is used to describe incidents where a familiar entity is encountered in a frightening, eerie, or taboo context. For Deepa (*Independence*), her home becomes a place of terror. For Tara (*Goddess*), the American landscape is "familiar yet strange," leading to her psychological drift.

In this patriarchal society, women had limited desires and choices. They were forced to suppress



their desires and accept decisions made for them by others. Deepa's mother, upon learning of her relationship with Raza, became furious. Fuelled by her hatred for Muslims, she could not accept her daughter's love. Left with no other option, Deepa moved to Calcutta, where she faced numerous challenges due to her customs, beliefs, and cross-religion romance. She sought shelter with a Muslim woman in a tiny flat, but she felt uncomfortable and suffocated. To fit in, she completely changed her appearance and disguised herself as a Muslim girl named Aliya. She adopted the burkha, hiding her face from others. The elegant Deepa in a saree was lost, replaced by a new identity governed by societal frowns. Deepa started working at a political office, specifically the Muslim League Office. Here, she faced countless complications concerning her culture, identity, and beliefs. All her coworkers were Muslims, and their thinking, dressing sense, and cultural practices were very different from hers. Deepa's true identity was completely erased as everyone knew her by a different name or a different persona. She learned Islamic customs from her roommate to survive and even accompanied her coworkers to the mosque. Throughout this journey, Raza remained a constant support for Deepa. However, their relationship within the office remained hidden until they decided to announce their marriage. Deepa, who was not particularly religious, loved her religion and its customs. Initially, when asked to convert to Islam, she refused but eventually did so for the sake of her love for Raza. They moved to Dacca together. However, the move to Dacca did not bring the betterment and peace they had hoped for. Tragedy struck when Raza unexpectedly passed away, leaving Deepa and their daughter alone. Deepa's struggle for survival became increasingly difficult, especially with the mistreatment from the members of Raza's political league. They demanded that she vacate the house provided by the league and even disconnected her phone line. To make matters worse, one member of the league, a friend of Raza, tried to trap Deepa into a marriage of convenience. Despite all these challenges, Deepa remained resilient and determined to protect herself and her

daughter. The story of Deepa's transformation from a beloved daughter to a secret lover, then a hidden Muslim woman, and finally a widow facing unbearable hardships showcases the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal society. It also highlights the cruel impact of religious divisions on personal relationships and lives.

Jamini, the second daughter of the Ganguly family, was a victim of society's torment and the horrors of the partition. Living in a conservative village, she faced constant criticism for not being as sharp-minded as her younger sister Priya, or as beautiful as her eldest sister Deepa. Adding to her burden, Jamini had a defect in her leg which became gossip fodder among the villagers, leading them to believe that no man would ever marry her. This narrow-minded society only accepted women who fit their idealized image, leaving no room for imperfections or shortcomings. Women, who are the backbone of society and inherently valuable, were not given the respect they deserved. In this patriarchal society, men could not tolerate women being seen as superior or having any deficiencies. Such social evils have repeatedly destroyed countless women's lives, perpetuating the cycle of oppression. The partition also had a horrifying impact on Jamini's life. The riots unleashed during that time brought devastation and irrevocable change to people's lives. Villages were attacked, houses were burned down, and women became targets of unspeakable violence. Jamini's village fell victim to a mob attack, resulting in the destruction of her home and injuries to herself and her mother. She narrowly escaped a rape attempt and was burnt alive. The flames of partition left people blind to the value of women and their physical purity. The lust that consumed people overshadowed the lives of millions of women, robbing them of their bodies, their dignity, and everything they held dear. Jamini managed to escape the terrible attack, but the wounds inflicted upon her soul were deep and everlasting. Physical wounds may heal, but the scars etched in her mind, heart, and soul remained. In the eyes of a society that equates a woman's worth with her physical purity, nothing else matters.



Priya, the youngest daughter of the Ganguly family, is a beacon of bravery and determination. She possesses an unwavering courage that drives her to speak out against narrow-minded thinking and societal evils. Priya dreams of becoming a doctor, a pursuit that requires tremendous perseverance in the face of numerous challenges. Priya yearns to break away from these restrictive traditions, beliefs, and societal boundaries, striving to carve out her own unique identity. Dowry has long been a source of tension within households, and unfortunately, continues to be prevalent today. Everyone desires to marry their daughter into a wealthy and respected family, but without a sufficient dowry, such aspirations seem impossible to achieve. Dowry reduces women to mere commodities, perpetuating the idea that they are inanimate objects to be exchanged. Priya is forced to suppress her voice, continuing to navigate a life filled with societal struggles, patriarchal beliefs, and inner conflicts. Priya's dream of becoming a doctor, like her father, becomes both a source of suffering and a catalyst for her detachment from close relationships, her village, and her home. She exists within a society where education is scarce, particularly for women, who are largely confined to the roles of wives and homemakers. Despite the difficulties she faces, Priya perseveres, determined to forge her path and break free from the limitations imposed upon her by society.

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 multigenerational 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.

Tara (*Goddess*) is born and brought up in the U.S. thus she is neither fully Americanised nor has

she is benefitted 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?" 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.

Conclusion

The whole discussion of this article deals with mother and daughter relationship. The author Chitra Banerjee shuffles the story between two countries and her characters. She has focused on the struggles and the miseries of these characters but portrays them as strong and self-esteemed personalities. We find these energetic women never fear of the troubles in their life. They strive to fulfil their dreams and goals and succeed to move forward shaping them to the situation. But the familial bonding of these characters is contradictory to each other. A mother's love is considered as the greatest love of all in this universe but the daughters here lack the feeling of being loved. It also lets them get caught in the web of physical issues leading to their mental sickness. The fractured identity as a migrant and the alienation from the family make them long for love and care.



Their own choices in life decide their destiny. Finally the interference of positive personalities in their lives helps them to bond with their relationship. Divakaruni's *Independence* and *Before We Visit the Goddess* exemplify how intergenerational trauma fractures the self across historical and diasporic contexts. Through postcolonial and psychoanalytical lenses, the novels reveal how trauma is transmitted across generations, shaping fractured identities. Yet, they also highlight resilience, suggesting that the fractured self thus becomes both a site of trauma and a potential space for transformation.

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