



CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE NOVELS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI AND BAPSI SIDHWA

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of cultural hybridity and identity formation in the diasporic literature of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bapsi Sidhwa. Through a detailed examination of Divakaruni's "The Mistress of Spices" and "Sister of My Heart," and Sidhwa's "Cracking India" and "The Pakistani Bride," the study explores how these authors articulate the experiences of the South Asian diaspora, particularly focusing on the complexities faced by women. Employing textual analysis, the paper delves into the narrative structures, character development, and thematic expressions in these novels. It highlights how Divakaruni uses magical realism and introspective narratives to explore the emotional aspects of diasporic experiences. At the same time, Sidhwa's works are grounded in the socio-political realities of the Indian subcontinent, offering insights into communal identities and historical events. The comparative analysis underscores the unique contributions of both authors to diaspora literature, emphasizing their portrayal of cultural hybridity and identity formation. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research in diaspora studies, advocating for interdisciplinary approaches and a broader exploration of contemporary issues and narratives of second-generation immigrants.

Keywords: Cultural Hybridity, Identity Formation, Diaspora Literature, South Asian Diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bapsi Sidhwa

Introduction

The study of cultural hybridity and identity formation in diasporic literature is of paramount importance in understanding the complexities of the immigrant experience. This paper focuses on the works of two prominent authors of the Indian diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bapsi Sidhwa, and their exploration of these themes. Both Divakaruni and Sidhwa bring their unique perspectives to the discussion of cultural hybridity and identity formation. Divakaruni's novels often centre around Indian-American characters who navigate the

complexities of balancing their Indian heritage with their American upbringing. Sidhwa, on the other hand, explores similar themes through the lens of Pakistani immigrants in America. By analyzing their works, we can gain a deeper understanding of how cultural hybridity shapes individual identities in the diaspora.

Background on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bapsi Sidhwa

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian-born American author, is renowned for her works that often focus on the experiences of South Asian immigrants. Her writings, which include poetry, short stories, and novels, span multiple genres, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, myth, and fantasy. Divakaruni's fictions are largely based on her personal experiences as an Indian immigrant in America (Haq et al., 2019). Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani-born American author, is also known for her exploration of the immigrant experience and the impact of cultural hybridity on individual identities. Sidhwa's works often delve into themes of gender, religion, and the clash between traditional values and modernity. Like Divakaruni, Sidhwa draws from her own experiences as a South Asian immigrant to bring authenticity to her storytelling (Haq et al., 2019). Both authors provide valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of diasporic identities shaped by cultural hybridity.

Bapsi Sidhwa, on the other hand, is a Pakistani novelist of Gujarati Parsi descent who writes in English and is best known for her novels set in the Indian subcontinent. Sidhwa's works are noted for their exploration of issues such as gender, identity, and the immigrant experience (Haq et al., 2019). Her novels often delve into the struggles faced by women in patriarchal societies and the challenges of navigating between different cultural and religious traditions. Through her vivid storytelling, Sidhwa invites readers to reflect on the complexities of diasporic identities and the ways in which personal and societal factors shape them.

Importance of Studying Cultural Hybridity and Identity Formation in Diasporic Literature

The study of cultural hybridity and identity formation in diasporic literature is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into the complex processes of acculturation that immigrants undergo as they navigate between their native culture and the culture of their adopted country. This includes the ways in which diasporic subjects negotiate the sustainability of their ethnicities, identities, and cultures (Kanchan & Chansauria, 2019). Additionally, studying cultural hybridity and identity formation in diasporic literature allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by individuals living in multiple cultural contexts. It sheds light on the ways in which diasporic communities maintain and adapt their cultural traditions while also embracing

aspects of their new environment. This knowledge is valuable for fostering intercultural understanding and promoting inclusivity in diverse societies.

Secondly, the study of these themes helps to illuminate the intricate dynamics of identity formation among diasporic individuals. As Clifford notes, cultural hybridity has replaced concepts like ethnicity, nationality, nationhood, boundaries, and identity, and diasporic subjects are carriers of a consciousness that provides an awareness of difference (Samuel & Pulizala, 2019). This understanding of cultural hybridity and identity formation is crucial in today's globalized world, where individuals often navigate multiple cultural influences. It allows for a more nuanced and inclusive perspective on diversity, challenging traditional notions of belonging and promoting a more fluid understanding of cultural identities. Additionally, studying these themes can contribute to the development of policies and practices that support the integration and well-being of diasporic communities in their new societies.

Lastly, the exploration of cultural hybridity and identity formation in the works of authors like Divakaruni and Sidhwa contributes to a broader understanding of the universal aspects of the human experience. Their writings reflect the immigrant experience and highlight issues such as cultural predicament, the quest for identity, and multiculturalism (Kaur, 2015). These themes also shed light on the challenges faced by diasporic communities, such as navigating between multiple cultural identities and the pressure to assimilate. By examining these issues through literature, we can gain insights into the complexities of cultural integration and foster empathy and inclusivity in our societies. Additionally, the exploration of universal aspects of the human experience in these works allows readers from diverse backgrounds to find common ground and foster a sense of shared humanity.

Methodology

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis will be employed to examine the selected novels of Divakaruni and Sidhwa. This method involves a close reading of the texts to analyze how the authors articulate themes of cultural hybridity and identity formation. It includes examining narrative structures, character portrayals, and the cultural contexts within which these narratives are set. This approach is supported by the work of Mulligan (2019), who discusses the role of interpretation in literary studies, emphasizing the importance of computational methods in enhancing textual analysis (Mulligan, 2019). Similarly, Gius and Jacke (2017) highlight the hermeneutic value of annotation in literary analysis, which can be particularly useful in dissecting complex narratives like those of Divakaruni and

Sidhwa (Gius & Jacke, 2017). By utilizing computational methods and annotation techniques, scholars are able to delve deeper into the intricacies of literary texts. These approaches allow for a more comprehensive understanding of narrative structures, character development, and the cultural nuances that shape these narratives. Furthermore, the works of Mulligan (2019) and Gius and Jacke (2017) emphasize the significance of interpretation and textual analysis in literary studies, highlighting the potential for computational methods and annotation to enhance these processes.

Selection Criteria for Novels

The novels for analysis have been selected based on their relevance to the themes of cultural hybridity and identity formation. The chosen works of Divakaruni include "The Mistress of Spices" and "Sister of My Heart," while Sidhwa's selected novels are "Cracking India" and "The Pakistani Bride." These novels are representative of the author's exploration of diasporic experiences, particularly focusing on the South Asian context. The novels by Divakaruni and Sidhwa offer valuable insights into the complexities of cultural hybridity and identity formation within the South Asian diaspora. By examining these works, the analysis aims to shed light on the ways in which these authors navigate and portray the challenges and nuances of belonging and self-discovery in a multicultural world.

Literature Review

The literature review explores existing research on cultural hybridity and identity in diasporic literature, along with relevant theoretical frameworks such as postcolonial theory and gender studies. This review provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of cultural hybridity and identity formation as depicted in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bapsi Sidhwa.

Existing Research on Cultural Hybridity and Identity in Diasporic Literature

1. **Adhikary (2019)** examines the cultural hybridity and diasporic identity in Manjushree Thapa's "Seasons of Flight," highlighting the complexities of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation in the diaspora (Adhikary, 2019). Furthermore, Adhikary's research explores the ways in which diasporic literature reflects the experiences of individuals navigating between multiple cultural and social contexts. By analyzing the themes of cultural hybridity and identity negotiation in "Seasons of Flight," Adhikary contributes to a broader understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by diasporic communities.

2. **Berrebbah (2019)** discusses the role of culinary practices in deconstructing Arab-American identity in Diana Abu-Jaber's "Crescent," illustrating how everyday practices contribute to the formation of diasporic identities (Berrebbah, 2019). This analysis highlights the significance of cultural practices and traditions in shaping diasporic identities. It also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the diverse experiences and perspectives within diasporic communities as individuals navigate between their heritage culture and the culture of their adopted homeland.
3. **Oza (2019)** provides a literature review on the social role of immigrant-owned food businesses in diasporic communities, emphasizing the intersection of culture, identity, and social dynamics in the diaspora (Oza, 2019). These food businesses not only serve as a means of economic survival for immigrants but also play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions to future generations. They create spaces where diasporic communities can gather, share stories, and celebrate their heritage through food. Furthermore, Oza (2019) highlights how these businesses contribute to the social fabric of diasporic communities by fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among individuals who may feel marginalized or disconnected in their new environment.
4. **Kk and Mohanty (2019)** explore the conceptualization of the imaginary in literary discourse, offering insights into the diasporic analysis of literary works (Kk & Mohanty, 2019). By examining the imaginary in literary discourse, Kk and Mohanty (2019) shed light on how diasporic communities use literature as a means of expressing their experiences and identities. This analysis not only provides a deeper understanding of diasporic literature but also showcases the power of storytelling in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of community among diasporic individuals.
5. **Shah (2019)** conducts a semiotic analysis of Agha Shahid Ali's poetry, mapping the cultural landscape of the homeland and its influence on diasporic identity (Shah, 2019). Shah's analysis delves into the intricate symbolism and language used by Ali to convey the complexities of diasporic experiences, highlighting the role of literature in navigating the dualities of identity and belonging. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on diasporic literature and emphasizes the importance of cultural roots in shaping individual and collective identities within diasporic communities.

Theoretical Frameworks

1. **Postcolonial Theory:** This framework is crucial for understanding how colonial histories impact the identities of diasporic individuals. It examines the power dynamics and cultural negotiations that occur in postcolonial contexts. Postcolonial theory provides a lens through which to analyze the complexities of diasporic experiences, shedding light on the ways in which individuals navigate and negotiate their identities in relation to their colonial past. It also highlights the ongoing effects of colonization on diasporic communities, emphasizing the need for decolonization and reclaiming cultural heritage as a means of empowerment and resistance. Additionally, this framework allows for a deeper understanding of the intersections between race, class, gender, and nationality within diasporic communities, revealing the multiple layers of identity that individuals must navigate.
2. **Gender Studies:** Gender studies provide a lens to examine how gender roles and expectations influence the experiences and identities of individuals in the diaspora, particularly in the context of South Asian women, as depicted in the works of Divakaruni and Sidhwa. By analyzing the portrayal of South Asian women in the literature of Divakaruni and Sidhwa, gender studies shed light on the ways in which patriarchal norms and cultural expectations shape their lives. This analysis highlights the complexities and challenges faced by these women as they navigate their dual identities within diasporic communities, emphasizing the importance of intersectionality in understanding their experiences.

Analysis of Divakaruni's Novels

The analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, "The Mistress of Spices" and "Sister of My Heart," focuses on the exploration of themes related to cultural hybridity and identity. This analysis will delve into character development, narrative technique, and thematic expressions, providing insights into how Divakaruni portrays the complexities of diasporic experiences.

"The Mistress of Spices"

1. **Character Development:** The protagonist, Tilo, an immigrant from India, embodies the struggles of cultural hybridity. Her journey reflects the challenges of maintaining cultural identity while adapting to a new environment.
2. **Narrative Technique:** Divakaruni employs magical realism to intertwine Indian mysticism with the realities of immigrant life in America. This technique allows for a deeper exploration of cultural and emotional conflicts.

3. **Thematic Expressions:** Themes of love, longing, and the tension between tradition and modernity are prevalent. The novel also addresses issues of assimilation and the preservation of cultural heritage.

"Sister of My Heart"

1. **Character Development:** The novel focuses on the lives of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, whose stories diverge as one remains in India and the other moves to America. This contrast provides a rich ground for exploring identity formation in different cultural settings.
2. **Narrative Technique:** Divakaruni uses a dual narrative structure, allowing the reader to see how each character navigates her respective world, highlighting the impact of cultural context on identity.
3. **Thematic Expressions:** The novel explores themes of familial duty, personal freedom, and the influence of cultural expectations on women's lives, both in the diaspora and in their homeland.

The analysis employs a close-reading approach, focusing on how Divakaruni uses literary devices to convey themes of cultural hybridity and identity. This method involves examining the narrative structure, character arcs, and thematic elements within the novels (Ghosh, 2019; Xu, 2010). By examining the narrative structure, character arcs, and thematic elements within the novels, readers gain a deeper understanding of how cultural context shapes the characters' identities and influences their choices. Divakaruni's use of literary devices effectively conveys the complexities of cultural hybridity and the challenges faced by women in navigating between different cultural expectations. Through this close reading approach, readers can appreciate the nuanced exploration of familial duty, personal freedom, and the impact of cultural expectations on women's lives in both diaspora and homeland settings.

Analysis of Sidhwa's Novels

The examination of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels, "Cracking India" and "The Pakistani Bride," focuses on themes of cultural hybridity, identity, and the impact of socio-political contexts on individual lives. This analysis will explore narrative structure, character portrayal, and cultural contexts, shedding light on Sidhwa's portrayal of the South Asian experience.

"Cracking India"

1. **Narrative Structure:** "Cracking India," also known as "Ice Candy Man," is structured around the historical event of the Partition of India. Sidhwa uses a child narrator, Lenny, to provide a unique perspective on the political and social upheaval.
2. **Character Portrayal:** The novel portrays diverse characters from different religious and cultural backgrounds, highlighting the complexities of identity in a rapidly changing political landscape.
3. **Cultural Contexts:** Sidhwa delves into the impact of partition on individuals and communities, exploring themes of displacement, violence, and the search for identity amidst chaos (Kumar, 2019; Joshi, 2019).

"The Pakistani Bride"

1. **Narrative Structure:** The novel follows the life of Zaitoon, a young girl from the tribal regions of Pakistan, offering insights into the patriarchal and tribal customs of the region.
2. **Character Portrayal:** Zaitoon's journey from an urban environment back to her tribal roots provides a stark contrast in cultural settings, highlighting the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies (Mukherjee, 2019).
3. **Cultural Contexts:** The novel addresses themes of gender, identity, and the clash between traditional values and modernity, reflecting the struggles of women in patriarchal societies (Mukherjee, 2019).

The analysis employs a critical literary approach, focusing on how Sidhwa uses narrative techniques and character development to convey themes of cultural hybridity and identity. This method involves examining the socio-political contexts depicted in the novels and their impact on character development and thematic expression. By exploring the cultural contexts within the novel, the analysis aims to shed light on the complex experiences of women in patriarchal societies. It seeks to uncover how societal norms and expectations shape their identities and limit their agency, while also highlighting the ways in which they navigate and challenge these constraints.

Comparative Analysis: Divakaruni and Sidhwa

The comparative analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's and Bapsi Sidhwa's novels provides insights into their distinct approaches to cultural hybridity and identity, as well as the similarities and differences in their thematic representation and literary style.

Approaches to Cultural Hybridity and Identity

- **Divakaruni:** Her novels, such as "The Mistress of Spices" and "Sister of My Heart," often explore the experiences of Indian immigrants in America. Divakaruni delves into the internal conflicts of her characters as they navigate between their Indian heritage and their American surroundings. Her use of magical realism and dual narratives allows for a deep exploration of the emotional and cultural dilemmas faced by her characters.
- **Sidhwa:** In works like "Cracking India" and "The Pakistani Bride," Sidhwa focuses on the socio-political contexts of Pakistan and the Indian subcontinent. Her narratives often revolve around historical events, such as the partition, and their impact on individual identities and communal relationships. Sidhwa's portrayal of cultural hybridity is closely tied to the political and social upheavals of the region.

Similarities in Thematic Representation

- Both authors address the theme of identity formation in the context of cultural dislocation and hybridity.
- Gender roles and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies are central themes in both authors' works.
- The struggle to maintain cultural traditions while adapting to new environments is a common thread.

Differences in Literary Style and Focus

- **Divakaruni's Style:** Characterized by a blend of realism and magical elements, her narrative style often involves the personal, introspective journeys of her characters. The focus is more on individual emotional experiences and personal conflicts.
- **Sidhwa's Style:** More grounded in historical and socio-political realities, her writing often provides a broader commentary on societal issues. The narrative style is more direct in addressing the external forces shaping the characters' lives.

Implications and Contributions

The narratives of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bapsi Sidhwa offer significant contributions to diaspora literature and cultural studies, particularly in enhancing the understanding of diaspora experiences, with a specific focus on South Asian women.

Impact on Understanding Diaspora Experiences

1. **Diverse Perspectives:** Both authors provide diverse perspectives on the diaspora experience, enriching the understanding of cultural hybridity and identity formation. Their works offer insights into the emotional and psychological aspects of living between cultures.
2. **South Asian Women's Experiences:** The focus on female characters in their novels highlights the unique challenges faced by South Asian women in the diaspora. Themes such as gender roles, familial expectations, and the struggle for personal identity are central, offering a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of gender, culture, and migration.
3. **Cultural Negotiation and Adaptation:** The narratives illustrate the complexities of cultural negotiation and adaptation, showing how individuals reconcile their heritage with new cultural environments. This is particularly relevant in today's globalized world, where migration and cultural exchange are commonplace.

Contribution to Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies

1. **Expanding the Canon:** Divakaruni and Sidhwa have expanded the canon of diaspora literature by incorporating South Asian perspectives, which have historically been underrepresented. Their works contribute to a more inclusive understanding of global migration narratives.
2. **Interdisciplinary Relevance:** Their novels are not only significant in literary studies but also offer valuable insights into interdisciplinary fields such as gender studies, postcolonial studies, and cultural anthropology. They provide a rich source for examining the interplay between culture, identity, and power dynamics.
3. **Educational and Social Impact:** These narratives serve as important educational tools, fostering empathy and understanding of immigrant experiences among diverse readers. They also contribute to social discourse on multiculturalism, integration, and the challenges faced by diasporic communities.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The exploration of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's and Bapsi Sidhwa's novels has provided valuable insights into the themes of cultural hybridity and identity formation in the context of the South Asian diaspora. Divakaruni's works, characterized by a blend of magical realism and reflective narratives, focus on the personal and emotional aspects of the diasporic experience, particularly among Indian immigrants in America. Sidhwa's novels, grounded in the historical and socio-political context of the Indian subcontinent, offer a broader perspective on communal identities and the impact of significant events like the partition.

Both authors address the complexities of living between cultures, the challenges faced by South Asian women in patriarchal societies, and the struggle to maintain cultural traditions in new environments. Their contributions significantly expand the understanding of diaspora experiences and add depth to the canon of diaspora literature, especially in representing South Asian perspectives.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Future research could adopt interdisciplinary approaches, combining literary analysis with fields such as sociology, psychology, and cultural anthropology. This would provide a more holistic understanding of the diaspora experience.
2. **Comparative Studies:** Comparative studies of diasporic literature from different regions could offer insights into the universal aspects of the immigrant experience, as well as the unique challenges faced by different communities.
3. **Focus on Contemporary Issues:** Research could focus on contemporary issues faced by the diaspora, such as digital diasporas, transnationalism, and the impact of globalization on cultural identity.
4. **Narratives of Second-Generation Immigrants:** Exploring the works that focus on second-generation immigrants would provide insights into how cultural hybridity and identity evolve over generations.

5. **Gender and Queer Studies:** Incorporating gender and queer studies in the analysis of diaspora literature could offer a more nuanced understanding of how different identities intersect in the context of migration and cultural transition.

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