



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed English Journal

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LITERARY THEORIES (IJELLT)

ISSN: 3107-6505

Vol.:2: Issue: 1:2026.

(International Peer Reviewed and refereed English Journal)

Editorial Board:

Dr. R. Gobinath

Prof. Sharif Atiquzzaman

Dr. Dr. Aravindan Balakrishnan

Dr. Athisayaraj Jebakumar J

Dr. P. Dinakar

Dr.P.Chitra

Dr. M.K. Praseeda

Prof. D. Deepikadevi

Dr. K.Usha Savithri

Dr. D.Solomon

Dr. S.Subash

Dr. K.M. Keerthika

Dr. B.Lingeswaran

Mr. B. Damodhara Prasath

Ms. P. Sherli

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories (IJELLT) is a peer-reviewed, open access academic journal dedicated to promoting research and scholarship in the fields of English language, literature, and literary theories. Published monthly, IJELLT provides a platform for academicians, scholars, educators, and researchers to present their original work to a global audience. The journal upholds the highest standards of editorial integrity and academic excellence through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process. We welcome a wide range of submissions from theoretical and critical analyses to practical research, creative writing, and pedagogical studies related to English literature and language.

**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

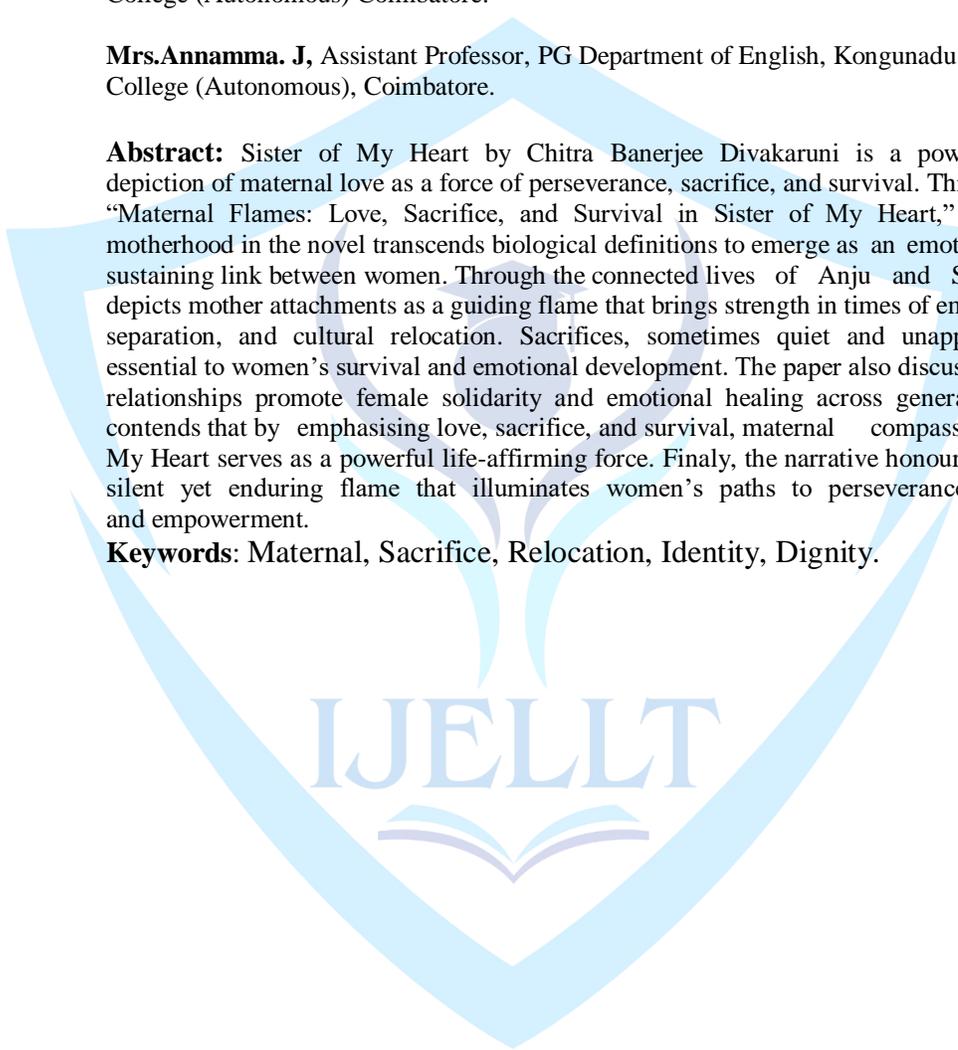
Maternal Flames: Love, Sacrifice, Survival in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "Sister of My Heart"

Shalini. P., II MA English Literature, PG Department of English, Kongunadu Arts and Science College (Autonomous) Coimbatore.

Mrs. Annamma. J., Assistant Professor, PG Department of English, Kongunadu Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Coimbatore.

Abstract: Sister of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a powerfully emotional depiction of maternal love as a force of perseverance, sacrifice, and survival. This paper, titled "Maternal Flames: Love, Sacrifice, and Survival in Sister of My Heart," investigates how motherhood in the novel transcends biological definitions to emerge as an emotional, ethical, and sustaining link between women. Through the connected lives of Anju and Sudha, the novel depicts mother attachments as a guiding flame that brings strength in times of emotional difficulty, separation, and cultural relocation. Sacrifices, sometimes quiet and unappreciated, become essential to women's survival and emotional development. The paper also discusses how maternal relationships promote female solidarity and emotional healing across generations. This study contends that by emphasising love, sacrifice, and survival, maternal compassion in Sister of My Heart serves as a powerful life-affirming force. Finally, the narrative honours motherhood as a silent yet enduring flame that illuminates women's paths to perseverance, self-realization, and empowerment.

Keywords: Maternal, Sacrifice, Relocation, Identity, Dignity.



IJELLT

**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

Introduction

“Youth fades; love droops; the leaves of friendship fall; a mother’s secret hope outlives them all.”

- **Oliver Wendell Holmes**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a renowned Indian-American writer, poet, and academic, best recognized for her stunning reimagining of mythology and passionate representation of women's life across cultures. She was born in Kolkata, India, and later moved to the United States, which had a significant impact on her literary vision. Divakaruni's writing frequently delves into themes of diaspora, identity, womanhood, sisterhood, love, sacrifice, and empowerment, making her a significant voice in current Indian English and diasporic literature. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has written a number of famous literary works that have received both popular and critical recognition. Her most famous novels are *The Palace of Illusions*, a powerful feminist retelling of the Mahabharata from Draupadi's point of view; *The Forest of Enchantments*, a reimagining of the Ramayana through Sita's voice; *Sister of My Heart*, a moving exploration of female bonding and emotional endurance; and *The Mistress of Spices*, which combines magic realism with the immigrant experience. Her acclaimed short story book *Arranged Marriage* received international praise and the American Book Award.

Divakaruni has also garnered honours such as the California Book Award, the Asian American Literary Award, and the Pushcart Prize. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart* is a poignant story of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, who are nurtured as sisters in a traditional Bengali family. As they grow older, social conventions and patriarchal expectations impact their lives, particularly via marriage, which physically and emotionally separates them Anju pursuing education and freedom before traveling to America, but Sudha remains in India, experiencing sacrifice and misery.

Despite distance and suffering, their bond endures, and the novel ultimately emphasizes the importance of sisters, love, and female tenacity as sources of strength and survival in a constrained social world.

Motherhood has always been associated with devotion, endurance, and moral authority in Indian English literature. However, contemporary women writers have reinterpreted this role, emphasizing emotional complexity and resistance rather than idealized self-denial. *Sister of My Heart* holds an important place in this literary change. The novel investigates how women inherit, challenge, and reshape maternal beliefs in a world dominated by rigid gender conventions. “*Good daughters are bright lambs, lighting their mother’s name; wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching their family’s fame*” (18). Motherhood has always been connected with devotion, fortitude, and moral authority in Indian English literature. However, modern female writers have reimagined this role, highlighting emotional complexity and resistance rather than idealized self-denial. *Sister of My Heart* plays a significant role in this literary shift.

The novel delves into how women inherit, challenge, and modify maternal views in a world controlled by rigid gender norms. One of the novel most remarkable elements is its exploration of motherhood beyond biological definitions. Sudha's caring instincts, emotional generosity, and ability for unconditional love set her up as a maternal figure long before she becomes a mother. Her relationship with Anju exemplifies a sort of emotional motherhood founded on caring, sacrifice, and protection. “*My heart is yours, as yours is mine*”.

Divakaruni depicts mothers as defenders who shield their daughters from emotional distress. This mother presence helps Anju and Sudha develop resilience and emotional intelligence, allowing them to deal with betrayal, separation, and grief. Motherhood in this context is active emotional labour that cultivates strength and self-worth, rather than passive care giving. The novel's portrayal implies that maternal love is the psychological foundation for survival. One of the novel most remarkable features is its exploration of motherhood beyond biological definitions. Sudha's caring instincts, emotional generosity, and capacity for unconditional love establish her as a maternal figure even before she becomes a mother. Her bond with Anju exemplifies emotional motherhood based on caring, sacrifice, and protection. *"I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half"* (66). This representation challenges traditional narratives that equate motherhood solely with childbirth.

Divakaruni emphasizes that maternal love is a choice, an emotional commitment rather than a biological destiny. Such portrayals elevate motherhood to a moral and emotional principle, reinforcing the idea that nurturing relationships are central to women's survival and empowerment. *Sister of My Heart* depicts sacrifice as a voluntary act rooted in love and moral strength, rather than weakness or forced submission. Sudha's decisions, particularly those surrounding marriage and motherhood, demonstrate a readiness to accept personal loss to shield others from harm. Her sacrifices are purposeful, calculated, and genuinely ethical. This portrayal contradicts conventional wisdom that associates Mom primarily with childbirth. She emphasizes that mother Love is an emotional commitment rather than a biological necessity. Such depictions elevate motherhood to a moral and emotional concept, promoting the notion that caring relationships are essential for women's survival and strength. *"Loving someone so deeply was dangerous. It made you too vulnerable"*. She presents sacrifice as a powerful mother trait. Rather than celebrating suffering, the novel emphasizes the emotional cost of sacrifice while appreciating its importance in preserving dignity and agency.

Maternal sacrifice becomes a form of resistance, allowing women to exercise control over their choices within limited social contexts. Motherhood and Survival in patriarchal environments. Survival is a reoccurring topic in the narrative, which is inextricably related to motherhood. Women thrive not by blindly adhering to social norms, but by drawing strength from maternal bonding and instinct. Sudha's experience, particularly, exemplifies how motherhood gives women emotional resilience and moral clarity in harsh situations.

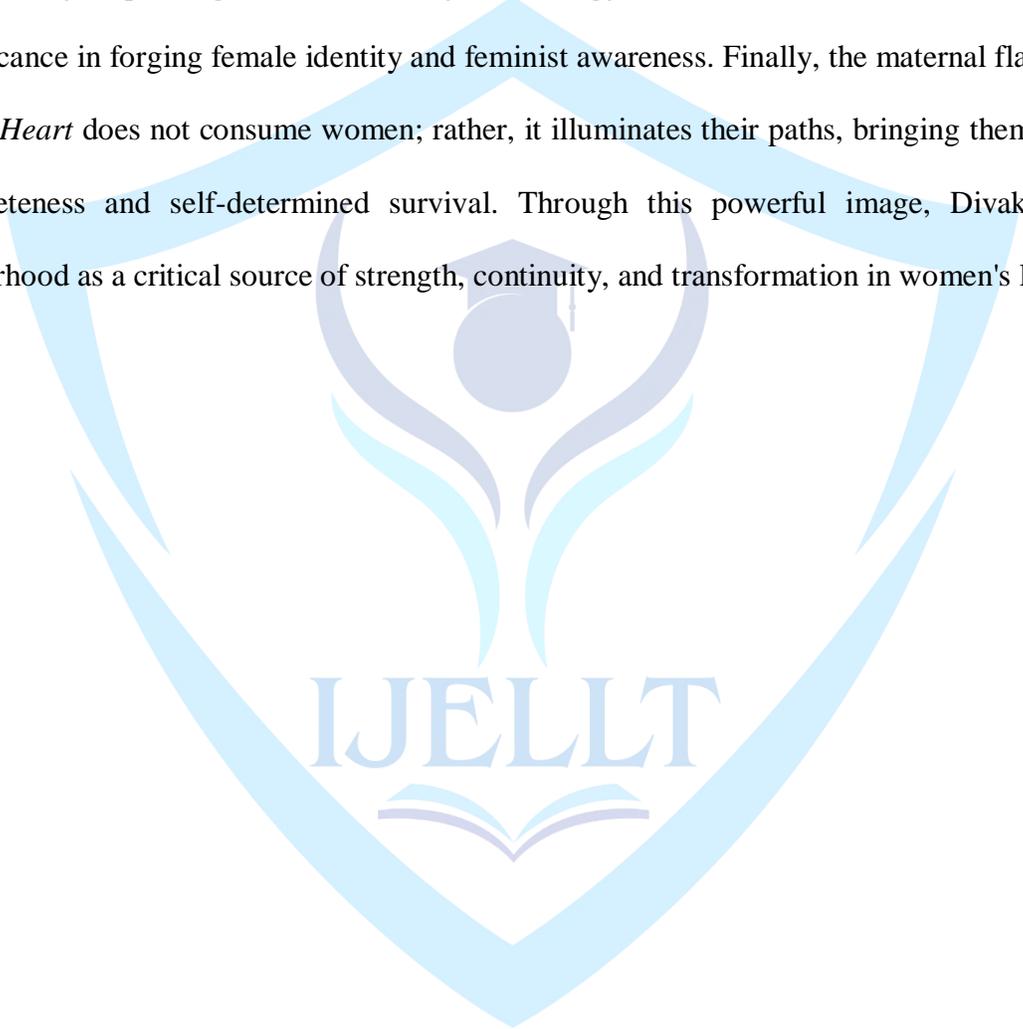
Divakaruni frames survival as both physical and emotional fortitude. Maternal responsibility becomes a driving force, compelling women to confront injustice, traverse regional barriers, and reclaim agency. Hence, parenting serves as a survival mechanism, transforming weakness into strength. Motherhood serves as a pivotal location for the development of female identity and self-realization in *Sister of My Heart*. According to Divakaruni, motherhood is a life-changing event that enhances moral agency and self-awareness rather than just a social position that is forced onto women. A greater sense of duty, bravery, and emotional clarity is awakened in characters such as Sudha by the experience and expectation of motherhood. Motherhood helps her identify her inner power and more clearly express her values rather than limiting her individuality. This change undermines patriarchal myths that reduce women to self-effacing caregivers; instead, parenthood becomes a means for women to find autonomy and purpose.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni emphasizes how parenting shapes resilient people who strike a balance between caring for others and claiming their own by portraying it as a deliberate and empowering identity. In a world that frequently aims to restrict women's options, the book reframes motherhood as a changing identity that promotes personal development, emotional maturity, and survival. In *Sister of My Heart*, the maternal flame is passed down through generations. Anju and Sudha's choices are influenced by the ideals of compassion, endurance, and moral courage passed down from their parents. This intergenerational transmission highlights the long-lasting significance of maternal influence. By portraying maternity as a legacy rather than a limitation, Divakaruni validates its role in fostering feminist consciousness.

Maternal ideals enable women to envisage identities that go beyond social norms, ensuring emotional continuity and ethical survival through generations. The images of motherhood is consistent with feminist efforts to free maternal identity from patriarchal idealization. The novel humanizes motherhood rather than glorifying or diminishing it. Women face doubt, pain, and conflict, yet they persist. This feminist reading questions the distinction between independence and motherhood. The novel demonstrates that mother love and personal autonomy are not incompatible. Instead, parenthood becomes a crossroads for resistance, care, and self-realization.

Conclusion

Maternal Flames: Love, Sacrifice, and Survival in *Sister of My Heart* portrays motherhood as a dynamic force that maintains women in the face of emotional trauma and social restraint. Divakaruni depicts mother love as nurturing yet resilient, sacrificial yet uplifting, and inextricably linked with survival. By expanding motherhood beyond biology and submission, the novel emphasizes its significance in forging female identity and feminist awareness. Finally, the maternal flame in *Sister of My Heart* does not consume women; rather, it illuminates their paths, bringing them to emotional completeness and self-determined survival. Through this powerful image, Divakaruni affirms motherhood as a critical source of strength, continuity, and transformation in women's lives.

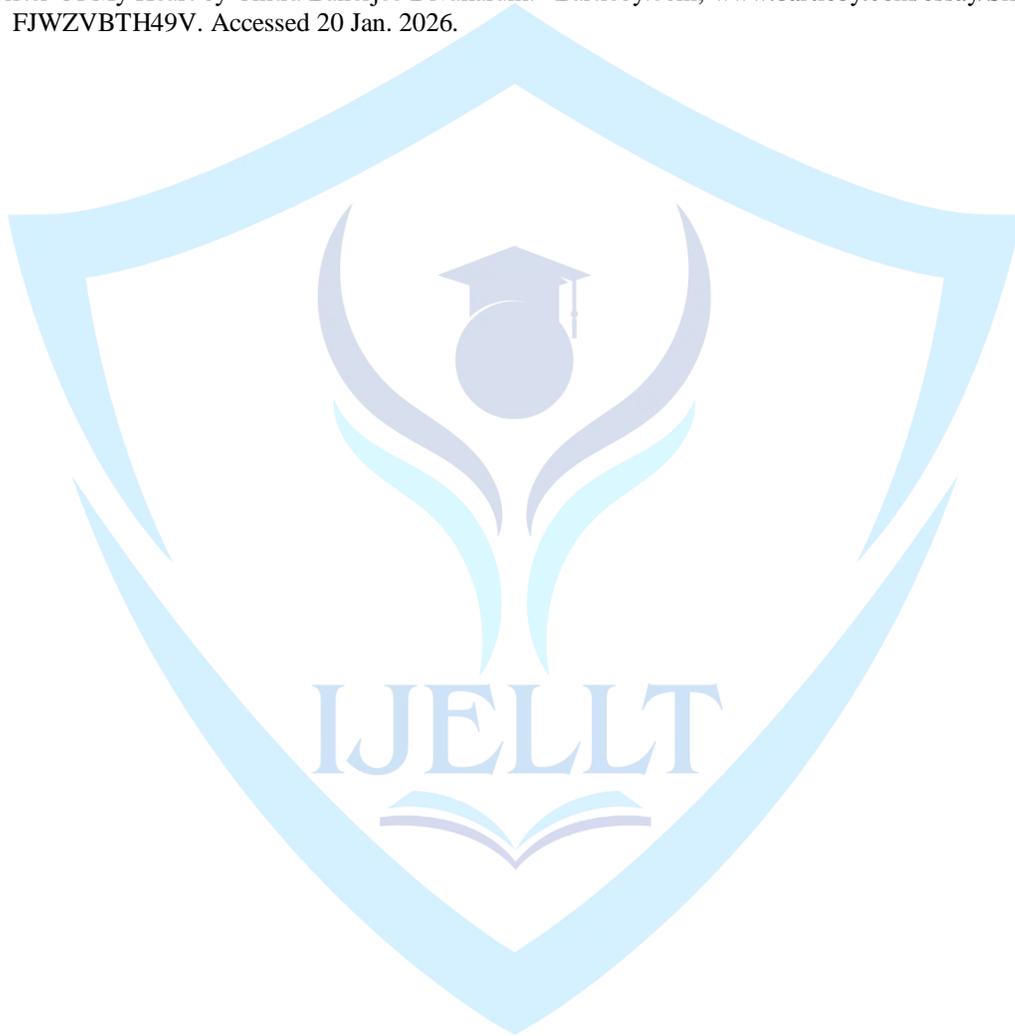


IJELLT

**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

Works Cited

1. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Sister of My Heart*. Doubleday, 1999.
2. "Sister of My Heart." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sister_of_My_Heart. Accessed 20 Jan. 2026.
3. ResearchGate, ResearchGate GmbH, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 20 Jan. 2026.
4. "Sister of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni." BookBrowse, 1 Jan. 1999, www.bookbrowse.com/reviews/index.cfm/book_number/457/sister-of-my-heart. Accessed 20 Jan. 2026.
5. "Sister of My Heart Summary." SuperSummary, www.supersummary.com/sister-of-my-heart/summary/. Accessed 20 Jan. 2026.
6. "Sister Of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni." Bartleby.com, www.bartleby.com/essay/Sister-Of-My-Heart-FJWZVBTH49V. Accessed 20 Jan. 2026.



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**