



Hindi as a Medium for Reconnecting with Cultural Roots in Indian Movie, New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

Language functions as a powerful repository of memory, emotions, and cultural continuity, particularly within diasporic contexts marked by displacement and negotiation of identity. This paper examines the role of Hindi as a medium for reconnecting with cultural roots in the poem *Indian Movie, New Jersey* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Unlike a narrative short story, the poem employs lyrical expression, imagery, and cultural symbolism to foreground the emotional resonance of language within the immigrant experience. Through poetic voice and reflective tone, Divakaruni captures the tension between assimilation into American society and the yearning for cultural belonging. The poem locates Hindi within intimate and communal spaces, associating it with nostalgia, familial warmth, and collective memory. While English often represents public life, modernity, and adaptation in the diasporic setting, Hindi embodies emotional depth and ancestral connection. The poetic structure reinforces this duality by juxtaposing cinematic imagery, cultural references, and linguistic memory, thereby highlighting how language becomes a bridge between homeland and hostland. Hindi emerges not merely as a spoken medium but as a symbolic carrier of heritage, tradition, and identity. This study argues that in the poem, linguistic retention becomes an act of subtle cultural resistance against homogenization. By invoking Hindi within an American landscape, the

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poet emphasizes the enduring connection to roots despite geographical separation. The analysis demonstrates that the poem reimagines language as an emotional homeland—one that sustains identity in transnational spaces. Eventually, the paper contributes to discussions on diaspora, poetry, and linguistic identity by emphasizing how Hindi functions as a transformative medium of reconnection and self-definition in contemporary Indian-American literature.

The experience of migration often entails a complex negotiation between loss and adaptation. For diasporic communities, the sense of belonging is frequently mediated through cultural practices, memories, and most importantly, language. Among Indian diasporic writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni occupies a significant place for her nuanced portrayal of identity, displacement, and cultural continuity. Her poem *Indian Movie, New Jersey* vividly captures the emotional landscape of immigrants who seek familiarity within foreign environments.

Language, particularly Hindi, becomes a crucial medium in this context. It is not only a tool of communication but also a repository of cultural values, traditions, and emotional experiences. In diasporic settings like New Jersey—a prominent hub of Indian immigrants—Hindi serves as a link to the homeland, enabling individuals to reconnect with their roots while navigating a hybrid identity.

This paper seeks to explore how Hindi functions as a medium for cultural reconnection in Divakaruni's poem. By examining the interplay between language, memory, and identity, the study highlights how linguistic practices sustain cultural belonging in diasporic spaces.

Diaspora studies emphasize the fluid and hybrid nature of identity among migrant communities. Scholars like Stuart Hall argue that cultural identity is not fixed but constantly evolving through representation and experience. In the diasporic context, identity is shaped by both the memory of the homeland and the realities of the host country. (Thomas Faist 21) Language plays a vital role in preserving cultural memory. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory is transmitted through symbolic forms such as language, rituals, and texts (Assmann 112). Hindi, in this sense, becomes a carrier of collective memory for Indian immigrants, allowing them to maintain a connection with their heritage. The concept of hybridity, proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, is crucial in understanding diasporic experiences. The “third space” is where cultural meanings are negotiated and redefined. (Bhabha 115) In *Indian Movie, New Jersey*, the use of Hindi within an American setting exemplifies this hybrid space, where identities are continuously reconstructed.



Divakaruni projects diaspora and Indian cultural spaces as contexts in New Jersey as New Jersey has long been a significant centre for the Indian diaspora in the United States. It hosts numerous cultural institutions, temples, and community gatherings that help preserve Indian traditions. Among these, the screening of Indian films plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity. The poem presents itself within such a cultural space-an Indian movie theatre in New Jersey-where immigrants come together to relive the sensory and emotional experiences of their homeland. The theatre becomes a microcosm of India, where language, music, and visuals recreate a sense of familiarity.

Thereafter, the poetess presents Hindi primarily as a Cultural and Emotional Anchor. Here, Hindi functions as a repository of memory. The dialogues, songs, and expressions associated with Indian cinema evoke a deep sense of nostalgia among the audience. Hearing Hindi in a foreign land triggers memories of childhood, family, and cultural practices. Hindi carries emotional nuances that are often difficult to translate into other languages. The poem highlights how characters respond more intensely to Hindi dialogues, indicating a deeper emotional connection. This reinforces the idea that language is not merely a medium of communication but also a carrier of affect. The shared understanding of Hindi among the audience creates a sense of community. Laughter, tears, and reactions become collective experiences, fostering a sense of belonging. In this way, Hindi acts as a unifying force within the diasporic community.

Moving on, Indian cinema plays a significant role in the poem as a cultural artifact that reinforces linguistic and cultural identity through nostalgia. The use of Hindi in films becomes a crucial element in reconnecting with cultural roots. Films serve as repositories of cultural narratives, traditions, and values. Through Hindi dialogues and songs, they preserve and transmit cultural memory across generations. The opening lines of the poem say:

Not like the white filmstars, all rib and gaunt cheekbone, the Indian sex-goddess smiles plumply from behind a flowery branch. / below her brief red skirt, her thighs are satisfying-solid, redeeming as tree trunks./ She swings her hips and the men viewers whistle./ The lover-hero dances in to a song, his lip synk a little off, but no matter, we know the words already and sing along./ It is safe here, the day golden and cool so no one sweats, roses on every bush and the Dal Lake clean again (Divakaruni 226)

The movie theatre becomes a symbolic “home” where the boundaries between India and America blur. The presence of Hindi language intensifies this experience, making the audience feel as though they are momentarily transported back to India.



The poetess further presents the migrants longing at Negotiating Identity through Language as diasporic individuals often face the challenge of balancing assimilation with cultural preservation. The use of Hindi represents a conscious effort to retain cultural identity amidst external pressures to conform. The coexistence of Hindi and English reflects the hybrid nature of diasporic identity. Individuals navigate between two linguistic and cultural systems, creating a unique sense of self. By continuing to use Hindi, immigrants resist the erasure of their cultural identity. Language becomes a form of cultural resistance, asserting the importance of heritage in a globalized world.

Besides, Divakaruni employs vivid imagery, symbolism, sensory details, and cultural references to depict the diasporic experience. The poem's structure and language reflect the hybridity it seeks to portray. The depiction of the theatre, audience reactions, and cinematic elements creates a vivid picture of the diasporic space. Hindi serves as a central symbol of cultural continuity whereas The tone oscillates between nostalgia and celebration, capturing the complexity of diasporic emotions.

Moreover, the analysis reveals that Hindi plays a multifaceted role in Indian Movie, New Jersey. It acts as a bridge between past and present, homeland and hostland, individual and community. The poem demonstrates how language can sustain cultural identity even in the face of displacement. By projecting Hindi within the context of Indian cinema, Divakaruni highlights the interplay between language and popular culture in shaping diasporic experiences. The poem highlights the importance of preserving linguistic heritage as a means of maintaining cultural continuity.

Thus, the study explores the role of Hindi as a medium for reconnecting with cultural roots in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's poem Indian Movie, New Jersey. Through a detailed analysis, it has demonstrated that Hindi functions as an emotional, cultural, and symbolic anchor for diasporic communities. The poem illustrates that language is central to the construction of identity and the preservation of cultural memory. In a globalized world marked by mobility and change, the continued use of Hindi enables individuals to maintain a sense of belonging and continuity. Therefore, the paper emphasizes that language is not merely a tool of communication but a vital element of cultural survival, shaping the ways in which individuals understand themselves and their place in the world.

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