



A study of individuality of diaspora chitra banerjee divakaruni's identity and nationality

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Abstract: Diaspora experiences are accurately portrayed through their representation and expression, which place an emphasis on culture, custom, history, heritage, and other related topics. It's also worth noting that women from the Diaspora have contributed to a wide range of literary genres, from fiction and poetry to memoir and nonfiction. The writers of the Diaspora have established themselves as masters of the genre of fiction. Though excellent poets and short story writers from the Indian diaspora have emerged in recent years. The scope of this theory, however, is limited to novels. There are two motivations behind this restriction: First, contemporary women writers of South Asian descent who have published widely and won critical acclaim. The literary form used to create these stories that empower Diaspora subjectivities is also examined in the thesis, as how it intersects with female sensibilities. However, due to the fact that this type of literature has only flourished in the previous two decades, only works published after 1998 are chosen for close examination. There are a lot of factors at play here, but its sheer size is the most obvious one. It has been noted that the South Asian Diaspora today boasts a larger number of women writers working in English than at any time in the past. It has been shown that female authors, in addition to having a larger representation of female authors, also have a greater sensitivity to Diaspora issues than male authors. There has been work done to demonstrate how this literature sheds light on the predicament of the Diasporic subject who exists on the cultural periphery. These authors, whether they are first- or second-generation Diasporas, infuse their writing with a Diaspora sensibility.

Keywords: Individuality, Diaspora Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Identity, Nationality, female sensibilities, South Asian Diaspora

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INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian American who first came on the international literary stage in 1990, is a great triffecta of novelist, activist, and professor of creative writing. She is a prolific author who has authored both poetry and fiction. On July 29, 1956, in Kolkata, India, Divakaruni entered the world. In 1976, she graduated from Calcutta University with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She then continued her education in the United States, first earning an M.A. in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and later a Ph.D. in Renaissance English literature from the University of California, Berkeley in 1985. She has lectured on English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Houston, Diablo Valley College, and Foothill College in the United States. As a social crusader, she helped establish MAITRI, which aids South Asian women experiencing intimate partner violence. She has experience working in abusive women's shelters, with women from broken homes, and with Afghani women refugees. She dedicates her spare time to helping the spiritual and cultural group Chinamaya Mission and the MAITRI. Divakaruni taught at Foothill College in the Bay Area for a total of twenty years. She uprooted her family to Texas in 1997 to pursue a career in creative writing at the University of Houston. Poetically

and then short story and novel writing came naturally to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni when she felt inspired by the contrast between her life before and after immigration, as well as by the plight of women in patriarchal societies. Her works have been analyzed, and it has been concluded that she strives to preserve sentimental memories of her native India while also bringing out representations of Indian-ness and shattered identities that lead to Identity Crisis. While most writers from the Diaspora examine diasporic themes, it is via the novelist's use of fragmentation that these challenges are often identified and the Diaspora psyche is shown. The majority of her works center on female protagonists, whose emotions and thoughts revolve around issues such as Indian heritage, the search for an individual identity, the difficulties of adjusting to life in a multiethnic society, immigration, personal growth, and historical discovery. Chitra Divakaruni is a prolific author whose books have been very well received in the United States. Among the many honors she has received are the following: the South Clara Arts Council Poetry Award (1991), the Editor's Choice Award from Cream City Review (1991), the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize (1994), the Pushcart Prize (1994), and the California Arts Council Award (1998). (1990). Her most lauded works combine elements of Indian and Western culture with lyricism, reality, myth, and fantasy, and have garnered international acclaim as a result. On the other hand, her works have been panned by some for what they see as a demeaning portrayal of Indian culture and a romanticization of the openly sexualized and technologically advanced Western world, in especially the United States. Nonetheless, it's essential for developing characters and emulating the real world.

And as a writer, Divakaruni shows us the darkest terrors and traumas that women in India and abroad must through. The female protagonists in her works are shown to develop into independent and powerful figures. Many of her female protagonists appear to serve as inspiration for feminist writers and campaigners. She believes that many female authors benefit from being in the United States. Her fiction also reflects this perspective toward other countries that is distinct from that of previous diasporas. She integrates into American culture while yet maintaining her Indian heritage in her writing. Chitra Divakaruni's earliest works are poems, as was noted at the outset. Her poetry collections include *Reason for Mastanimms* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991), and *Leaving Yuba City* (1992). (1997). *The Unknown Errors of our Lives* (2000) and *Arranged Marriage* (1995) are two of her short story collections (2001). The impact of the new generation of South Asian female writers on the literary landscape has also been analyzed. However, Novel continues to be her preferred mode of expression. When asked which type of writing was the most difficult, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni said, "The Novel," in an interview with Sujata Shekhar published in *Guernica* on August 3, 2015. You have a lot larger canvas on which to paint, so you'll want to make the most of it. The novel-in-stories style I used was fun to write, though (*Guernica*). *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Divakaruni's debut novel, is a blend of magic and realism, with magic representing the traditional Indian worldview. Tilo is a mysterious proprietor of a grocery store who use the power of spices to help his customers. But when she falls for Raven, a Native American, she is forced to confront her ancestry and choose between following in her family's footsteps and following her own path to happiness and helping others via the power of spices. Tilo's predicament is emblematic of the immigrant's struggle to balance the allure of home and the demands of a new country. *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), her best-known book, is surprisingly relevant to today's war-ravaged world. The wife of the five Pandavas, Panchaali, tells us what happened during the events of the Mahabharata. Divakaruni imagines a feminist take on the classic epic, which is unusual. In this uncommon universe of warriors, gods, and fateful manipulation, Panchaali stands

out as a fierce female voice. The Mahabharata is retold in an ambitious artistic endeavor. The enchanting story of moms and daughters, love and cultural identity that is Queen of Dreams was released on October 11, 2005. Rakhi is a young artist and single mother living in Berkeley, California, who is coping with the challenges of her family and the world around her. Her mother's unique ability to decipher dreams has helped her steer many people toward happier outcomes. This ability amazes Rakhi, but it also makes her feel separate from her mother. They're emotionally distant, and she wants desperately for them to find common ground. She opens the long-locked door to her history by reading her mother's dream journals after her passing. However, Rakhi faces her own identity crisis in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Citizenship is called into question as she searches for who she is and viciously attacks those closest to her. Two cousins are drawn together by fate in the 1999 film *Sister of My Heart*. Both of the cousins were born on the same night, in the same house. They open up to one another about their happiness and their sorrows. While Anju is average-looking, Sudha is magnificent. They share an unexplainable bond that makes them sisters at heart. They mature into women together, yet their destinies are still intertwined. While Anju reveres tradition, her sister Sudha is a meek and humble peacemaker. When tested, though, Sudha gives more than anyone else and takes the riskiest action. When the family's financial situation improves, the daughters are pressured to get into marriage.

As one goes to the United States, the other stays in India. When tragedy strikes both of them, they realize they need to give one other another chance despite their long separation and marital status. Divakaruni, as usual, portrays the United States as a nation of promise and opportunity, while India is portrayed as a land of despair and abandonment. *The Vine of Desire* (2002), the sequel to *Sister of my Heart* (1996), was released. Anju and Sudha reconnect years after growing apart and finding each other again, far from Calcutta, the city of their upbringing. Anju's husband's dangerous fascination to Sudha's attractiveness, the birth and death of their children, and Sudha's difficulty in resettling in a new city are just some of the additional difficulties the couple must now confront. Divakaruni is able to convey the truth about the benefits and risks of untethering oneself from the past. Additionally, the most of her female characters are strong, realistic caricatures of Indian women in the diaspora. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes about women of different races and religions going through everyday situations. All the women she depicts as being linked by tradition and faith in her works. K.S. Dhanam, in his essay *Negotiation with new culture: Divakaruni's depictions of sex*, describes how Divakaruni portrays women. In *Critical Essays on Diaspora Writings*, edited by Dr. K. Balachandran, there is a study devoted to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (2000)

She also compares and contrasts the experiences and outlooks of immigrants and their children who were born and raised in the host country. Also included is the struggle that many Indian Americans have faced trying to reconcile their dual heritages. She is in tune with the diaspora, which combines eastern and Western ideals and perspectives. A bold new world is forging to life in her writing course, and she sees herself as part of that. Her openness to modern perspectives and the challenges of the day are woven together with an exploration of self that goes beyond anthropology, sociology, and the academy. Dhanam 62)

CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI AND HER WRITINGS

Most of Chitra Banerjee's writings detail the experiences of the Diaspora, particularly the Diaspora of women. She discusses the difficulties immigrants face in a new nation, including the loss of one's identity and the resulting anonymity, as well as the unexpected liberation that comes with it. For example, in her poem "Leaving Yuba City," she writes, "On streets where no one knows you (She recalled) you do the anonymous dance, not touching ground" (Divakaruni 96). While doing so, she successfully connects the worlds of Kolkata and Los Angeles. She is a strong symbol of Indian Americans and brings with her the traditions of an early immigrant group. In her art, she shows how people of Indian descent living in the diaspora feel about having to abandon their homeland. Her writing is more powerful because of the way she depicts real-life events. At the same time, she depicts the difficulties, triumphs, and, most importantly, the problem of identity that faces men and women of the Indian Diaspora in the foreign place. Her works also feature themes of immigration and its impact on native customs and identity. All of her more recent works take place in the present day. She stands in for female characters who have alternate personalities or none at all. While describing the events of *Oleander Girl*, Divakaruni ultimately reveals the characters' inner lives. Korobi and her mother both hold significant roles throughout the book, therefore they don't leave the novel. Even while Korobi is in America, she is guided on her journey by her constant presence in the story. From getting engaged to searching for herself to discovering who she really is to finally getting married, her mother is always in her thoughts. She also thinks back on how she persevered while her lover was halfway across the globe. Korobi expresses this hope in *Oleander Girl*: Did early love, which grew out of body's needs requires the body's present to nurture it, without those wordless glances that made the heart race, without the touch of lips that sent electricity through the body, without a shoulder to lay the dispirited head on and arms to shore us up against the world's cruelties, even the most affectionate words weren't enough. "(Divakaruni 160) Unlike many other authors, Divakaruni is not primarily concerned with social justice issues like as religious intolerance and racial prejudice. In her writings, she gives significance to minor issues that are often overlooked. The themes of immigration, history, myth, magical realism, and multiculturalism permeate most of her writings. The author's Diaspora sensibility, as it relates to the issue of Indianness and Identity Crisis, is analyzed in depth in two of her novels.

DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

In 1976, Divakaruni made the transition to the West and adopted the Diaspora identity label. She knows what it's like to be a first-generation immigrant and a woman caught between two worlds. Yet she has never had a bad experience with the Diaspora. She has tried her best to adopt, assimilate, and adjust to her new environment, but she is having trouble finding her nationality and sense of self. Even while living in a faraway country, her worries about the plight of underprivileged Indians, children, women, etc. were evident. Her work as a short story and novelist, which has won awards, and her involvement with groups in the San Francisco Bay Area and Houston that aid South Asian and South Asian American women in crisis and who are victims of domestic abuse both demonstrate her deep care for women of her own culture and community. She also gives considerable thought to the schooling of Indian children. To some extent, she embodies the intersection of mystical realism, social activism, and other contemporary societal issues such as hybridity, multiculturalism, immigration, and racial and social intolerance. Divakaruni, as a member of the first generation of migrants, is cognizant of the full scope of the diasporic problem, which includes questions of personal identity. Her awareness of her Indian heritage is also apparent. Furthermore, she

displays the problem of cultural shock, differences between old and new world values, and acculturation, all of which she is aware of as an immigrant caught between Indian and American cultures. Since Divakaruni has worked closely with MAITRI and is regularly exposed to domestic abuse victims, she finds it compelling to write about Indian American women as victims. Divakaruni feels lonely, empty, and nostalgic most of the time. Subconsciously, she keeps thinking of the traditional spices and oils her mother put on her hair and body. Since moving to the United States, Bharti Mukherjee's writing has captivated and inspired her, particularly the author's examination of racial identity and the effects of multiculturalism on romantic relationships. At every turn in her life, she struggles with a sense of otherness and a crisis of identity within her own mind. It is also mentioned that she has experienced the agony of living in a foreign country and is familiar with the current crises and natural disasters in India. It is clear that she was profoundly affected by the natural disasters, 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Godhra Kand in Gujarat, etc., all of which are represented in her writings. Chitra Banerjee, who has spent time in both India and the United States, appears to be perpetually uprooted by the latter. However, her kind and devoted demeanor betrays her respect and admiration for India and its culture.

A. Oleander Girl: A Novel: Traditional Values and Identity Crisis

The 2013 film *Oleander Girl* displays traditional traditions infused with Identity Crisis while living abroad. It also shows that the story's female protagonist is willing to risk everything by going to a foreign country in quest of her identity and a family secret. Divakaruni's excursions to Kolkata and her ruminations on the secrets her family has kept from even their granddaughter because they are considered dishonorable in Indian society inspired *Oleander Girl*. I was also thinking about how the inability to live in amity with difference can generate so much trouble and misery, both in the larger political arena and at home, in an interview with Terry Hong published in *Bookslut* in August 2013. In the novel *Oleander Girl*, all of these elements converge. (Bookslut) The India that Divakaruni sees is a worldwide powerhouse where the ancient and the modern coexist. Through her depiction of the Korobi family, a traditional old Bengali family, and the Rajat family, a beautiful modern family, she investigated the coexistence of modernity and antiquity. She writes from the perspective of a Diaspora and uses imaginative techniques to explore issues of identity, uprooting, tradition, and tradition loss, all while acknowledging that modern technology helps to close some gaps, but only for the well-off, the educated, and those with special visas. In contrast, the difference persists for the relatively disadvantaged, such as those with minimum wage jobs or who are in the midst of an immigration crisis. They are not as likely to be comfortable using the internet, and they do not frequently travel to India. They haven't fully embraced American society yet, and they long for their homelands. The events of September 11th, 2001, which also play a significant role in *Oleander Girl*, cause havoc for everyone, including those who thought they were safe.

B. Issue of Social and Gender Identity

Most of Divakaruni's works show that she is well-aware of the fact that Indian girlhood is perpetually engulfed in the societal restrictions of gendered spaces that cater to specialized identity and function for females. The author is well-aware of the importance of one's network in shaping their sense of self. Chitra Banerji Divakaruni, in *Oleander Girl*, suggests a new way of depicting her female heroines. Korobi's sense of self is interwoven with the honor of his ancestors and the legacy of the family name. Although she took

pride in being the granddaughter of the Roys and the fiancée of the most desired and wealthiest man in town, she now considers herself worthless after learning the truth about her father and the racial inferiority considered by Indians, being the daughter of an African American man. Astounded, she learns the family secret: her father is actually an Afro-American, not an Indian. Korobi's grandma Sarojini reveals some shocking information: her father was neither an Indian, a foreigner, a lawyer, or killed in a vehicle accident. During the time that Anu's mother, Anu, spent in the United States studying on a scholarship, she fell in love with a man named John. Anu's father, Bimal Roy, did not approve of her marriage to the man who loved her so much. Even though Anu was already pregnant with Korobi when she returned to try to win her father's approval, she ultimately failed. She exhausted every avenue in an attempt to persuade her traditional father. After a heated dispute, she fell down the stairs and cut herself. So she passed away in the hospital while giving birth to Korobi. Losing their only loving child in front of their eyes was a crushing blow for Bimal Roy and Sarojini, but they found solace in the arrival of their newborn son, Korobi, whom they vowed never to let go of. He was the only thing that could keep Anu connected to her family. Again, the patriarchal mindset and deep desire of cultural and traditional grip in Bimal Prasad Roy's psyche are revealed in *Oleander Girl* through Bimal Roy's promise to Sarojini in their temple not to expose these facts to anybody, not even to Korobi when she grows up, or to leave him for good.

C. Protagonist's Quest for Self-Identity

Divakaruni's identity crisis topic in *Oleander Girl* has been analyzed for its artistic composition. Korobi's search for who she is and her attempts to make sense of who she is in a society that rejects her are at the heart of the story. Her hair color has always perplexed her, but her skin tone has led her to believe that she is descended from the Roys. She doesn't know whether to embrace her Indian heritage or her western upbringing. She must weigh the benefits of each culture and make the best decision for herself. Consequently, Korobi, who has always been self-aware, understands that it will be challenging and ill-advised for her to start a new life with Rajat until she discovers the genuine nature of her disjointed self. Her entire range of emotions, from rage to sadness to discomfort to disgust, were present. At the same time, however, she isn't holding out much hope of discovering an authentic self. The United States, where her mother studied for a while, holds the key to her true identity. Despite Sarojini's urging that she forget the past and start fresh with Rajat, she does neither. If she does, she will be carrying on a long line of lies spoken to her devoted parents, one of whom is still living and aware that his daughter is dead. Korobi tells Rajat that she is so curious about her father that she will gladly accept the challenge of traveling to a faraway place.

D. Consciousness of Indian (National) Identity

The concept of "national identity" encompasses both the shared characteristics of a people and their individual perceptions of those characteristics. It's a well-known fact that people of the same nation share a shared ancestry, racial/ethnic background, religious/cultural background, and linguistic/cultural lexicon. Countries have become multilingual, multiracial, and multireligious as a result of globalization and migration. Countries like India, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have a wide variety of cultures and languages spoken within its borders. The thoughts of its members are split in two. Thus, it creates hyphenated national identities like Indo-American, Indo-British, and Indo-Canadian. However, the

hyphen that connects them is also a symbol of accepted marginalization, as Jasbir Jain points out. The novel's main character, a woman, experiences a National Identity Crisis, which is one of the book's central topics. To find herself, the protagonist travels from India to the United States, avoiding the identity crisis that so many people of the Diaspora experience when they move to a new country and must adjust to its culture. Specifically, the surprising revelation that Korobi's father is not Indian raises the topic of identity. Thus, a question mark hangs over her own identity. Her cultural and geographical roots are mixed up as a result of her mother's migration. In search of her own father and, ultimately, herself, Korobi embarks on a journey after discovering a letter from her mother to her father that was full of flair but never mailed. The novel's protagonist embarks on a voyage of self-discovery. The author "revisits her favorite themes of immigration and self-discovery in her latest work, *Oleander Girl*," writes Preeti Zacharia in an essay titled "In Search of the Self" for *The Hindu* (*The Hindu*, Bangalore, April 24, 2013). Korobi's identity crisis and subsequent migration demonstrate her liminal Diasporic potential. Actually, nearly all of her fictional characters willingly embrace relocation to the United States. To a much greater extent than the environmental conditions people face, the state of mind plays a role.

E. Cultural Identity

Thinking about what it means to be a nation, one realizes that the cultural ties that unite individuals who live in or aspire to live in the same area are fundamental to their sense of belonging to that area. They have traditionally clustered together in culturally distinct communities. Therefore, a nation consists of a people who have their own government and have a common history, culture, language, and ethnic origin. Divakaruni's Indian characters, whether they are actual Indians or Indian Diaporas, are an attempt to examine India and Indian identity from a more holistic perspective. This aspect of Indian culture may be the one she is most familiar with and fond of. She has a greater ability to convey the subtleties of Bengali culture and thought than writers from any other culture. *Oleander Girl* takes place in several locales in Kolkata, including an old house, a trendy club, and even a historical site like the Park Circus Cemetery. This suggests that she has been thinking back on her life in India, which she has long since abandoned. Through her vivid descriptions of rituals complete with enticing aromas, fragrant spices, and sacred poojas, we are introduced to Indian culture, customs, and cuisine. Sarojini hastily sets out a variety of offerings, including lamps, camphor holders, incense sandalwood powder, marigolds, enormous copper platters, fruit, milk sweets, rice, gold money, and colorful drawings showing a pantheon of Gods. Divakaruni, R. 2006. The author discusses the Hindu practices of warding off the evil eye and bringing good fortune and prosperity to the engaged pair as she describes Korobi's engagement ceremony at her grandmother's house. It's worth noting that Divakaruni portrays Indians as superstitious people who put stock in omens, horoscopes, bad eyes, and dream interpretation. Before Korobi's future in-laws arrive for the engagement ceremony, Sarojini says, he must undertake the rite of the mustard-seed ceremony to ward off the evil eye. These exchanges and accounts provide a window into the deeply superstitious culture of India and its people. Therefore, Indianness and Indian customs and mentality can be found here even in Diaspora writers who would be recalling India with such an image as she might have seen and been recalling. In the first few pages, the story introduces one of the most enduring motifs in all of Indian literature. A traditional Indian wedding and engagement ceremony are the first topics covered in the novel. It has been noted that Divakaruni addresses the anxiety and apprehension that accompany marriage and committed partnerships. The adoration of Bollywood music is not limited to the Indian subcontinent. Korobi discovers Mitra's

apartment, which is located above a karaoke club and whose windows are covered with enormous posters of Bollywood, as an example of how Indians living abroad choose to maintain a more traditional Indian lifestyle. What a strange apartment, she thinks. Guests entering and leaving the karaoke bar below send waves of noise up to me. Songs from the Indian film industry (Bollywood), especially well-known classics that evoke longing for one's native country and culture. My heart twists with homesickness whenever I hear this music because I never liked it in India. In a nutshell (Divakaruni 97) Diaspora characters' references to Indian cuisine are another evidence of how the latter helps carve out a niche for itself in the host country while also providing a taste of home. When feeling nostalgic, individuals are more likely to talk about Indian pop culture, cuisine, and ritual. The story also includes a detailed description of desi Indian food as it is prepared in an American context. Rice and daal and Gujarati Karhi flavored with ginger, cooked by Desai's cousin, are on the trays he brings me (Divakaruni 214). Korobi's provides a wide selection of dishes for the engagement party and other events throughout the book. The aromas of lunch are wafting through the air: khichuri made with golden mung and gopal bhog rice from their ancestral village, sautéed brinjals, and cabbage curry cooked in pure ghee and cardamoms. Sarojni must oversee the fish fry preparations. " (Divakaruni '07)

CONCLUSION

Chitra Banerjee's recent books, *Oleander Girl* and *Before We Visit the Goddess*, focusing on the fundamental themes of Identity Crisis and Indianness. Her most recent work, *Oleander Girl* (2012), is an examination of diasporic memory from the perspective of a modern-day Indian woman named Korobi. After discussing her past works and analyzing *Oleander Girl: A Novel*, the study concludes that this novel departs from her previous works by turning inward, to India, rather than outward, to the United States, in search of a sense of self and originality. In the study, it is revealed that the narrator's past self was an Indian girl raised by her African-American father in Calcutta. In this way, one's past is transformed into a portal into one's own identity. At the end of the novel, Kabobi's choice to return to India despite the numerous attractions of America, including legitimacy, gives insight to the research exploring the Identity with the tempering of Indianness on every page. Kabobi's experiences with Americans not only help her prioritize her life and discover her mother and her heritage, but also transform her from the inside out. But it is in India, in Calcutta, where her traditions hold her to her social and cultural roots, that she makes the choices that reinforce her uniqueness and identity.

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