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Diasporic Experiences In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen Of Dreams

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Abstract

The present study aims to find out the impact of diasporic experiences on the identity of the Indian-American migrants particularly women migrants in *Queen of Dreams* and the *Vine of Desire* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. She is a creative writer and award winner. She was born in Calcutta in July 1956. She is a teacher, poet, novelist and social activist. Most of her works centre around women, that too Indian immigrants to America. She creates emotional heaven for diaspora by discussing their physical and emotional conflicts. Stories are not merely passing the time or putting dreams into words. In Divakaruni's creative hands the story within stories with their sights and smells and enchanted imagery transport the reader to an India that is at once timeless and evocative of the present-day through the eyes of people caught in the dash of cultures and by constantly interposing Calcutta with California City. She became active in women's issues and started working with Afghani women refugees and women from dysfunctional families. Maîtri was started to teach women. It provides support to them apart from medical and legal help.

Keywords: Diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Women, immigrants, culture, conflict.

1. Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an immigrant, herself from a middle-class educated family from Kolkata, India she portrays immigrant experiences in her writings. She delineates the expatriate young women living in the U.S. who struggle hard to sustain self-identify in fluctuating alien culture. She depicts the women in special who challenge sometimes and are also affected by such multiple cultures. She brings out the state of flux and reflects the mirror image of the particular environment and the world around her, the relations are torn between belonging and not belonging fractured. Yet not fragments, the immigrant's willpower alone can soothe the wounds of longing. Divakaruni exemplifies her own experience. "As a woman and an immigrant myself I have obviously experienced or at least observed many of the challenges, problems and the pains of immigration that I write about, says Divakaruni (2009).

Divakaruni mainly signifies the struggles for identity and the construction of new identities. The location drift causes individuals to get dislocated migration to different countries governed by different reasons at different times of history.

The issue of identity is a complex one it is fluid, flexible and ever-changing it also includes many facets of our being like our sexuality, gender class, race, and sense of belonging to a particular religion culture family community and nation. It also includes individual beliefs fears, ambitions, interests and experiences.

Michael Hogg defines identity as people's concept of who they are what sort of people they are and how they relate to others Human beings are considered social animals. so they cannot segregate themselves from society and their identity is constructed in relation to the people around them.

The migrants face many problems in the last countries some of them are alienation, displacement homelessness, rootlessness nostalgia, identity crisis racial discrimination and many more. But amongst these, the problem of identity crisis is gaining prominence in modern and ever-changing society.

While depicting the experience of the diaspora community in the host land the novel *Queen of Dreams* synthesis the Indian American experiences. The major problems faced by these immigrants are those of their search for identity. Generally, the political crisis in the host land causes an identity crisis in the imagined sense of community of the immigrants. At such crucial times, immigrants are generally stereotyped as terrorists and culprits.

Chitra Banerjee's *Queen of Dreams* (2004) deals with the experiences of first and second-generation immigrants. Both first and second immigrants face the dilemma of belongingness. First-generation immigrants are unable to cope with the alien environment and yearn to return back to their homeland. The dilemma of belongingness is more crucial for second-generation immigrants who do not have true knowledge of their homeland and their true identity.

“What we know and what we do not know are like-Siamese twins,
inseparable”

Confusion, Confusion. “Who can really distinguish between the sea
and what's reflected in it? or tell the difference between the falling rain
and loneliness?”

These lines highlight the status of immigrants in the host country. The novel begins with the dream of Rakhi's mother who sees a snake 'snake is a symbol of rebirth' in Indian mythology. The snake was almost invisible as he curled and uncurled. Hieroglyphs knots, ravellings.

In *Queen of Dreams* Rakhi's mother, Mrs. Gupta offers her with few revelations through her dream journals Rakhi mother Mrs. Gupta was an orphan She was chosen by an aunt who had a gift of dream telling. Mrs. Gupta's aunt had taken her along with her to the dream caves where she could refine her gift to help society. Mrs. Gupta after migrating to California with Rakhi's father. Rakhi's mother tries to see dreams which delude her and she used to remain sad.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* explorer of the unusual relationship between an Indian mother, a dream teller, who refuses to talk about her past and her American-born daughter, Rakhi, a single mother, painter and coffee shop owner, who is desperate to learn about her ethnic heritage, though her mother Mrs. Gupta hides her past in an attempt to prevent her daughter to imagine her own ethnicity as well as her mother's native country through the western perspective of the majority culture. Tragically, it is only after the mother dies in a car accident that Rakhi and her father discover the mother's confessional dream journals in which she finally allows her family a glimpse of her real self.

In this novel Mrs. Gupta possesses the mysterious ability of mind reading and dream telling, her cognitive capacities can be considered unusual, even superhuman. According to Mrs. Gupta in troubled moments the elders would recite from the Brihat swapna sarita: She did the same:

The dream comes heralding joy
 I welcome the dream
 The dream comes heralding sorrow
 I welcome the dream
 The dream is a mirror showing me my beauty
 I bless the dream
 My life is a mirror showing me my ugliness
 I bless the dream

From which I will wake into death, which is nothing but a dream of life. In this novel Divakaruni not only foregrounds the immigrant experience but wonderfully unleashes the conscious and unconscious bonds between mother and daughter. The knowledge that is handed down from the dream-teller, Mr. Gupta to Rakhi, is highly significant and female solidarity seems the only way of survival. This gets, further explored with Rakhi and her daughter Jona. However, her father as a distant figure is also considered, and after her mother's death, Rakhi develops a genuine relationship with her father, who will tell her stories of India that her mother would not.

The Chai House in the *Queen of Dreams*, where much of the action in the novel takes place, is a coffee shop in Berkeley, California jointly owned by Rakhi, the protagonist of the novel and her Sikh friend, Belle But contrary to the conventional belief that space is an inert and dead place the Chai House is presented as a living entity sensitive to its environment and capable of dialectical relationship and progress. As a space proper, it draws as its. Level the mental perceptions and the 'lived' existential experiences of it together into a coherent ensemble.

Rakhi reflects that "without me they might not survive, my store and my daughter". At the emotional level too it provides Rakhi comfort on the bad days that followed her divorce. In the moments of confusion and guilt and doubt she says it gave her 'something tangible to hold on to'. After her divorce, Rakhi devotes excruciating three months to sketching the interior of Chai house which she pins on her bedroom wall next to a sketch of her daughter. Financially, it comes to Rakhi's aid by swinging the balance in her favour when she struggles to take possession of her daughter after she got separated from her husband.

Rakhi struggles to survive the challenge posed to her existence by its formidable adversary in the form of Java, a café shop of a popular American brand which opens across the street. Rakhi visit. Java with her mother and Belle when they face a business crisis. The Chai house, on the other hand, looks for a typical ethnic sensibility in its customers. Rakhi reflects that at the chai House they insisted that "our customers allow us into their lives just as we've invited them into ours. That our shop stay with them even after they leave it".

As a result, Rakhi started making pure Indian dishes for the customers of the Chai house, especially a Bengali dish kurma which was thought to be authentic and unique. Rakhi's father also gives the Chai house its new name Kurma house to mark the authenticity of the Indian dish and to accentuate the difference between the Chai house and Java.

In fact, the Kurma house became a place of expression and celebration of their ethnic culture and solidarity. Another regressive step of Chai House is seen in Rakhi's narrowly conceived view of internationalism. In wake of the fire accident in the Kurma house, musicians in a gesture of extraordinary sympathy and in a spirit of oneness help renovate it and gift their precious ethnic items to it. Overwhelmed by their response one-day Rakhi took up the paint and brush and adds 'International' after the Kurma House. The narrowness of her conception of internationalism comes as

a rude shock to her in the aftermath of tragedy. Indeed, what Rakhi takes to be an international community is only an extension of the Indian ethnic community and its culture.

Mrs Gupta, Rakhi's mother feels increasingly alienated from her talent of telling others dreams. Dreams do not come to her. She realizes that in order to have her dreams, she will have to stop sharing her husband's bed, "for dream tellers cannot squander their nights as ordinary women do". Mrs. Gupta decides to disobey the injunction to be a good wife. Doing so it particularly hard because she loves her husband and enjoys their intimacy. The impossibility of the coexistence between hegemonic heterosexuality and a women's devotion to her talent and work in this novel directs the reader's attention to the incommensurability of two epistemologies with on being the patriarchal system of knowledge and other understanding of Mother Goddess.

In this novel, the sake is referred to a "he" its description as "green", shining like "rainwater" (1) and a raindrop on a ear of maize" evokes the Feminie imagery of regeneration and Earth Itself. Mrs. Gupta Clearly knows the snake,

"Last night the snake came to me. He was more beautiful than I remembered His plated green skin shone like rainwater on banana plants in the garden plot we used to tend behind the dream caves The last time he'd appeared was a time of great change in my life... he had not returned after that though I'd cried and called on him until I had no voice left (1)"

Rakhi does her best work painting the presence/absence of the man practising Taichi in the eucalyptus grove. The mysterious man purchases this painting from the gallery where Rakhi has a show, and the gallery manager takes down his name as Emmeth Maeerd. Only much later does Rakhi realize that his identity is "Dream Time", Emit Maerd spelt backwards.

"Dream time" suggests a time and space that is simultaneously separate from and connected with the dreamer's walking life time and space that are both remote and intimate. According to Jane Caputi 'a State of consciousness characterized by the play of mythic imagination' and subversive to hegemonic rationality and science 'Dream Time' is also relative to 'Real Time' Likewise in Chinese Daoism dream and reality are understood as two interrelated realms. Zhuangzi described his dream in which he was a butterfly kissing flowers and doubted if he knew for sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming that he was a man. Divakaruni invites here reader to interpret Mrs. Guptas' death in the same spirit that Zhuangzi dis his dream. "Dream Time" has led Mrs. Gupta through the gateway into a dream time a space that seems both remote from and intimate to this world where her husband and daughter live.

First Divakaruni does several things to blend our science-packed minds. She endows the granddaughter Jona, with her grandmother's gift of dreaming. It is through Jona that the reader gains the sense of Mrs. Guptas' ghostly presence.

Rakhi's metamorphosis is complete in the end as she sheds her inhibitions and mixes well with the people of other communities. Rakhi finally realizes that one cannot live a life of isolation but one has to adapt to the circumstances. She also learns the lesson of forgiveness and adaptation which are required in life.

2. Conclusion

Divakaruni Says, "No journey is common place. Each person's journey is unique and changes that person in a special way. I hope I am able to show that through my different characters. She portrays remarkable characters every character yarn a hope in an alien country where the immigrants venture to set an identity amidst suffering and overcoming in the novel. The emotional communication through letters also expresses the family bonds responsibilities and yearning for a home.

America holds out to the immigrants the promise of a bright future, a world free from inhibitions, racial differences based on multinational customs, religions, traditions, languages etc.

Chitra Banerjee says, “Coming to U.S gave me the distance I needed to look back on my culture with objectivity to pick out what I valued and realised what I didn’t agree with one of the letters was the double standards in effect in many areas for women and I strove to remove these from life.

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