



# Exploring Women's Identity through Chitra Banerjee's Novels

**Author Name: MINAKSHI SHARMA**

**Institutional Affiliation: Research Scholar at the Department of English, Capital University, Koderma, Jharkhand (India).**

## *Abstract*

*This literary research is intended to examine identities women, both within and beyond the confines of our society through the characteristics of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's protagonists. The term "identity" refers to a person's uniqueness, worth, and motivation for achieving independence. The diasporic aspect of identity crises is skilfully depicted by Divakaruni in her novels. In quest to explore the identity of Divakaruni's Women protagonists, in this study four of her novels were critically analysed. It has find that confrontation empowers individuals to take charge of their lives and make their own choices, but it also leads them to become increasingly apathetic and positivist about the world around them. Female protagonists in Divakaruni's works face adversity and find triumph rather than passively accepting male dominance. Consequently, Divakaruni's female protagonists do not conform to stereotypical portrayals. They have done the hard thinking and have seen the big picture, and they know that there is a brave new world out there for them to explore, and that they must make some courageous choices in order to get there.*

**Key Words:** Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Women Identity, Feministic Literature, Sister of my heart, Vine of Desire, Queen of Dreams, Oleander girl.

## **Introduction**

Exploring feminine consciousness in literature is a fascinating endeavor. When the universe suddenly shows its meaninglessness, this feminine consciousness is forced to reject and scrutinize every belief it has received, experienced, or learned. Then, it begins to reconsider the significance of its entire existence. The concept of female identity illustrates how female experience is turned into female awareness, typically in response to male paradigms of female experience. It is a technique and method of writing. As the female ego attempts to identify itself in the experience of creating art, women involve themselves in the process (Kelly, 2000).

Contradictory forces of modernism and convention argued between sentimental ideals and the reality of life; personal gratification of desires and commitment to family. As a result of the Indian women writers' concentration on the topic in their novels, where they are finally shown to adjust to the truth, the conflict between emotion and reason becomes unpredictable (Krishnaveni, 2021). The young women are educated with complete knowledge of their destiny but are forced to choose between their desires and parental power. In this manner, a sizable proportion of women authors have prioritized women's issues concerning transformation (Stets & Serpe, 2013). With the advent of western education and ideas in the

20th century, the Indian woman's horizon has expanded beyond the confines of her home. The broader scope of existence has made the educated Indian woman aware of the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and regulations that govern her life as a woman. She feels trapped in her familial role and doubts her socially-assigned submissive status. Awakened by her potential, she abhors returning to her previous situation (Fox et al., 2018).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, born in India in 1956, is a well-known author. In 1976, Divakaruni emigrated to the United States to pursue a more advanced English education. Her efforts in the literary arts gradually surpassed her academic endeavors. She currently resides in Texas, where she teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston. Her personal experiences motivate her to write about women who are caught between cultures and conventions. Her short tales and novels demonstrate sympathy for women of her origin. She has discussed in her writings the sources of inspiration for her novels, some of which derive from her own transformational experiences in North America and others from her recollections of India and the oral tradition of myths and folk tales. She has repeatedly analyzed the meaning of her writing within the canon of modern literature as a dynamic lecturer.

The novels *"Jasmine and Desirable Daughters"* enthralled Divakaruni that addressed the evolving identities of immigrant women, albeit in a more violent environment (Queiroz, 2011). She was also influenced by Bharati Mukherjee, whose writings on racial and ethnic dynamics in literature, such as *"The Middleman and Other Stories,"* molded her perspective. Divakaruni noted in an interview, *"When I was in graduate school, Maxine Hong Kingston was the first person who inspired me and acted as a role model for me. Her work titled The Woman Warrior greatly affected me"*. The constant themes of rebuilding one's identity, traveling to a new nation, handing down stories from generation to generation, evolving gender roles, racial tension, and myth resonated with me (Divakaruni, 2001).

Divakaruni's body of work has generated significant discussion in anthologies where it has been included. She is frequently associated with other contemporary authors of Asian ancestry, especially women who left India and chose to write in English (Nair, 2009). In this aspect, women of Asian heritage are significant authors. Consequently, numerous critics and scholars position her works within the context of worldwide criticism. Some of Divakaruni's works have been critiqued for appealing to Western fascination with the unusual. Gita Rajan's analysis of Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* reveals that others have been characterized by their combination of social concerns, acculturation, mystical realism, cultural plurality, immigration, and anti-Semitism (Iyer & Zare, 2009). In C. Wong's analysis of Divakaruni's short stories, the difficulties of complete "Americanization" is contrasted with the protagonists' passionate desire to escape the confining and authoritarian traditions of their Asian ancestry.

Although Divakaruni's writing encompasses numerous issues for literary investigation, such as cultural assimilation, exoticism, women's self-respect, and individuality, these are only a few examples. This paper examines the constant battle of women to establish their own identities within and outside of society.

## Identity

Since the 1970s, identity politics has been used in political and intellectual debates (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Identity becomes dangerous when individuals cannot achieve an identity because they are not invited by those who already possess it. Individuals may be members of multiple groups and therefore assume different identities. Identities are imagined identities; they are what we believe ourselves to be and what we must be (Anderson, 2010). Aside from parentage, sexual orientation, and age, individuals are generally permitted to define their identities as they see fit, despite their inability to implement them in the future. They may acquire their ethnicity and race, but these can be re-imagined or discarded. The significance and pertinence of "identity politics" have become arguably the most crucial factor (Crenshaw, 2013).

Identity is the collective component of the collection of qualities by which something is certainly known or recognizable; a set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which a person is identifiable as a group member (American Heritage Dictionary, 1993). In this sense, identity is the distinguishing characteristics or traits of a person as seen by society. Their self-esteem rises and falls with the prosperity

of the group they identify with and the extent to which other people are rejected from their group (Mercer, 2009). Ethnocentrism follows logically from egocentrism".

"Identity does not originate in adolescence, nor does it stop in adolescence; the child learns what matters in his culture's space-time and life plan through the community's differential responses to his maturing behavior. He learns to identify with ideal kinds and to distance himself from negative ones. Nevertheless, youth identity formation reaches a significant crisis that is soothed or imposed in various ways by different civilizations (Erikson, 1994).

As the social identification hypothesis predicted, individuals continue to segregate for their group compared to other groups, even though their group is entirely arbitrary, temporary, and insignificant. Acknowledgment of differences does not generate competition, much less hatred. However, even those with a lower psychological need to despise might become involved in processes that generate enemies. Identity demands separation. Separation necessitates contrast, the identifying evidence of how "our" group differs from "their" group (Weiland, 1993). Thus, the comparison produces evaluation. Group egocentrism inspires support. Individuals from separate groups will participate in various activities to demonstrate their superiority over the other group. Rivalry generates hostility and expands what may have begun as a limited perception of distinctions into increasingly harsh and fundamental ones. There are stereotypes, the opponent's derision, and the other's transformation into the "enemy" (Weiland, 1993).

Erikson popularised the concept of the "identity crisis" that adolescents experience on their route to maturity. Although Erikson believes that all sexes undergo the same maturational stages, he also believes that there are fundamental biological and psychological distinctions between the sexes.

Selfhood is typically associated with a person's personality and character, which contradicts them (Freud, 1953). According to Sigmund Freud, the self does not exist as such; instead, it is created via the unconscious operations of desire. He inquires about the ego in connection to human sexuality. He proposes that identity is fabricated or manufactured. The ego is developed by the unconscious identification and selection of items. By incorporation, this identification with another becomes a part of the topic. Identification and integration are, therefore, identity's twin boundary markers (Davidson, 1987).

Freud's beliefs regarding femininity stem from his theories regarding the unconscious and the significance of human sexuality. The development of the feminine personality is initially influenced by the absence of a male organ, a defining attribute of men. All feminine personality qualities, including interests, attitudes, emotions, and desires, are reactions to this fundamental flaw (Freud, 2017).

## Indian Feminism

The substantial influx of Indian feminism in the 1960s and 1970s aids in estimating a woman's discourse. Feminism is the study of women's subjugation to abolish it (Gordon, 2012). The feminist literary norm arose from the stresses of the female experience. The underlying reality of a woman's living circumstance, namely that it interferes with nature, is why women enjoy fiction writing. Feminist authors have been attracted to fiction writing more than poetry and theater's various classifications. "I do not know politics, but I know the names of people in power and can recite them like the days of the week or the names of the months" (Das, 2011)) is a quote worth remembering for feminist writers.

Feminism is a global movement that seeks to ensure women's full enjoyment of all human rights - moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal, and economic -. It was initially used by Alexander Dumas the Younger in his 1872 pamphlet, *L'Homme-femme*, to describe the then-emerging movement for women's rights in the 19th century. In the United States, this term is known as "the woman movement" (Swain, 1999). This was a collection of varied organizations dedicated to expanding and enhancing the position of women. This is a world dominated by men, but in a sense, feminism has always existed. There has always been some form of resistance and protest whenever and wherever women have been subordinated. Occasionally it has been collective and conscious, but usually, it has been individual and unconscious, such as when women have sought to escape their socially mandated roles through illness, drugs, and sometimes insanity. Despite this, the documented history of feminism begins with the publication of project-related publications.

In India, feminist actions date back a very long time. Colonialism created different patriarchal characteristics in addition to those already prominent. In other words, 'tradition' and modernity have been construed in specific ways in order to exacerbate the oppression of Indian women (Jaidev, 1992). These two words, in particular, are the scourge of the Indian woman, although there is much more to come. Since the early 1980s, much literature has been published on feminist literary theory. In addition, we must recognize and comprehend the diversity of feminist literary thought (Humm, 2022). With so much variety, it is primarily due to the cooperative spirit within feminist criticism that the work of the last 40 years can be viewed as a historical progression or evolution, with feminists building on and redefining what came before (Bharucha, 1998).

The difficulties encountered by women's movements are not unique. The rewards of the moments are both tangible and intangible and were attained through arduous labor and pain.

"A backlash against women's rights is successful to the extent that it looks to be neither political nor a struggle. It is most effective when it becomes private, lodges in a woman's mind, and turns her vision inward until she believes the pressure is all in her head and until she begins to enforce the blowback, too on herself (Faludi, 1993).

### Contemporary Feminist Friction Writer

Beginning with Nur Jahan and Zeb-un-Nissa, Indian women have used feminist fiction for decades to express their emotions through writing. During the British Raj and after Indian independence, the feminist movement flourished, with Tarabai Shinde's *Stri Purush Tulane* (1882) considered the earliest contemporary Indian feminist work. It campaigned against women's issues such as education denial and widow remarriage. *High Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) by Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati highlighted how years of Indian "traditions and customs" repressed women. Since then, Indian female authors have advocated for women's freedom through their fiction. Some contemporary authors include:

**Shashi Deshpande:** She is the daughter of renowned Kannada playwright Shiranga. Her debut novel, *The Dark Holds No Fear*, was published in June 1999. Her other well-known works are "*That long quiet*" and "*Roots and Shadows*." She considers the difficulties and concerns of white-collar Indian women whose identities conflict. Her work, "*A Matter of Time*," continues her inquiry into the numerous aspects of female participation in writing. In this novel, she expands the themes of silence, gender disparities, latent sorrows, and common ties into various additional realms. In an interview, Shashi Deshpande clarifies using the feminist technique:

*"If people see something feminist in my writings, I must stress that it is not intentional. It is because that is how the world is for women, and I reflect the world."*

**Manju Kapur:** is an English literature professor at the University of Delhi whose novels include "*Troublesome Daughters*", "*A woman who is married*" and "*Difficult Daughters*." Her essays highlighted concerns about a man-centered culture, religious marriage, family ties, and male-female ties. She depicts her female protagonists as victims of biology, gender, marital violence, and circumstances. "There is a man in every woman and a woman in every guy," believes Kapur. "Women are fractured when the male is questioned."

**The Arundhati Roy:** Arundhati is a natural-born orator and writer. She believes that "*a feminist is a woman who negotiates herself into a position of having options*" Her Booker-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*, has earned her international recognition. Her most influential works are "*The End of Imagination*" and "*The Greater common good*." Although she has never admitted to being a feminist, "*The God of Small Things*" reveals numerous instances in which both her feminist attitude and her hero speak to feminine sensibility. She has identified environmentalism and subalternity as the central topics of the work.

**Anita Desai:** the exceptional author of contemporary Indian English literature maintains a special place among current Indian women novelists. Her works include *"Cry, The Peacock, Clear Light of Day, and Fire on the Mountain, Where Shall We Be This Summer, and The City."* Her female characters rebel against patriarchal networks to explore their potential or live on their terms without regard for repercussions. Anita Desai investigates the many mental states, clairvoyant perceptions, internal motives, and existential quests of man. She successfully breaks nonsensicality for her fictional artistry among her contemporaries while addressing the dilemma of man and his social and moral difficulties.

**Ashapura Devi:** Her work focuses on restoring an improved traditional womanhood that meets the need for self-expression among women. She considers the education of women to be of the utmost importance. In her trilogy *"Pratham Pratishruti," Subarnalata, and Bakul Katha,* she traces the evolution of the Indian feminist movement from the pioneer to postcolonial eras. She advocated that modern, educated, and financial independence for women may renew traditional networks in which the relationships between men and women and between older and younger women can and must be rechristened. Women must break down the psychological walls that confine them to achieve domestic peace.

**Kiran Desai:** She is an Indian diasporic in the USA. In 2006, her novel *"The Inheritance of Loss"* won the Booker Prize. In addition, she is noted for *"Turmoil."* She addressed several significant themes of contemporary development, such as the multifaceted impact of globalization, in which women play a vital role. Globalization affects her female heroines such as Jamubhai Patel, Mrs. Mistry, Sai, Biju Nonita, and Lolita. As an erudite writer and keen observer of human behavior, Kiran Desai is responsible for writing about spectacular contemporary themes.

**Jhumpa Lahiri:** was born in London to Indian immigrant parents and attended Barnard College. Her previous novels, *Interpreter of Maladies* (which garnered her the Pulitzer Prize) and *The Namesake*, explored the cultural dissonance faced by immigrants caught between the culture of their native India and the strange ways of their chosen country. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, a collection of eight short tales, Lahiri continues her exploration of this issue, focusing on the lives of second-generation immigrants who must negotiate both the traditional norms of their immigrant parents and the mainstream American ideals of their contemporaries.

**Anita Nair:** born in Palakkad, Kerala, in 1966, is renowned for her feminist perspective on the subtle rebellions of everyday people. Her well-known piece *Ladies Coupé (2001)* describes a group of women's train journey to Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu. By listening to these women, she discovers the answer to a topic that has long perplexed her: *"Can a woman be happy being single, or does she require a man to be whole?"* *Mistress (2005)* and *Lessons in Forgetting (2010)* won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film, while her other novel *Mistress (2005)*, examines women's identity issues (English).

**Arupa Kalita Patangia:** born in 1956- Arupa Kalita Patangia is a prominent voice in contemporary Assamese writing. Patangia's fiction, which has been translated into English, Hindi, and Bengali, examines how violence and insurgency affect her characters from the middle and lower classes. Her 2014 Sahitya Akademi Award-winning story collection, *Written In Tears*, depicts the suffering of Assamese women during decades of abuse. Despite creating novels about women, she resists the term *"woman author."* She declined an award from the Assam Sahitya Sabha since the category was *"women only."* She noted in an interview that a published novel should be evaluated based on its merit, not gender.

**Meena Kandasamy:** Born in 1984 in Chennai, Meena Kandasamy's works tackle feminism, caste destruction, and linguistic identity, and she has been criticized for criticizing casteism and right-wing Hindu dogma in India. From 2001 to 2002, Kandasamy edited *The Dalit*, a biweekly alternative English publication. The protagonist of her 2017 novel *"When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young*

Wife" is a housewife. Through the protagonist's journey, Kandasamy attempts to dismantle toxic masculinity and demonstrate the difficulties women endure in traditional marriage.

**Sonia Faleiro:** The nonfiction in '*Beautiful Thing*' that deals with challenges underprivileged women experience has generated great discussion in the literary community. It examines the lives of the women who work in Mumbai's dance clubs and what happens to the dancers when the bars are suddenly judged immoral and shut down (S Faleiro, 2011).

Modern diasporic Indian authors fall into two broad categories. One category consists of persons who have spent a portion of their lives in India and have brought with them the baggage of their home country. The other segment consists of persons born and raised outside India. They had only viewed their home country from the outside as an exotic location. The authors in the first group experience literal dislocation, while those in the second group are rootless. Both groups of authors have produced an admirable English literature corpus.

As an Indian immigrant to the United States, *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni* strives to overcome prejudices and uses her past experiences and the desire to convey the predicament of Indian women in America to motivate her work. Her writings attempt to emotionally and physically reconnect her with her immigrant status. She has investigated the influence of tradition in her native nation and the obstacles immigrants encounter in her new country. Divakaruni draws on her inner consciousness to create a new story that shows the repressive force exerted over women in their native and non-native cultures and the survival and mutation of transplanted traditions on alien territory.

## Aim and objective

Since from olden days, women's quest for identity has been never-ending. Identity means individuality, self-respect, the value of their thoughts, and wanting to have liberation. Divakaruni beautifully portrays the diasporic element of identity crisis in her novels. It demonstrates the author's skill as a storyteller by evoking and attracting the interest of a broad readership, particularly in the West. In this research copy, I have analyzed some of Divakaruni's novels to explore and establish that she gave a new dimension to women's identity, which is more synchronous to the modern time rather than the one shaped by Indian traditional family and cultural values.

**Objective:** To achieve the aim mentioned above following objectives has set:

- ✓ Investigate the women's identity through the protagonists of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
- ✓ Investigate the dimensions and points of view put forward by the author in quest of identity through self-respect and cultural assimilation.

## Methodology

As literature research is based on the work done by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a data analysis-based approach cannot be adopted. In this study, a critical, comparative, and descriptive approach to analysis will be utilized. The subsequent novels have been included in this research:

- *Sister of my heart* (1999)
- *The Vine of Desire* (2002)

- *The Queen of Dreams (2004)*
- *The Oleander girl (2013)*

"No one can accompany us, not even those who would give up their hearts for our happiness." This quote from the book *Sister of my Heart* perfectly sums up the predominant theme that revolves around the life of two inseparable girls, Anju and Sudha. *The Vine of Desire* is a sequel to her earlier novel *Sister of My Heart*, in which she explores the emotional bond between two cousins. Devastating events in both of their lives bring them together. In this novel, *Queen of Dreams*, Divakaruni depicts the Indian American experience of struggle with two identities. She attempts to bridge the gulf between an American-born daughter and an Indian immigrant-mother. *Oleander Girl* begins with the most classic Indian themes: a wedding; the main character Korobi, named after the Bengali word for Oleander – a beautiful but challenging flower.

## Analysis and Result

Divakaruni's female characters struggle and find happiness rather than merely submitting to male dominance when given a chance. Thus, Divakaruni's female heroines are not portraits of conventional women. The act of confrontation gives individuals the strength to make their own decisions and leads to an increasing positivistic apathy towards life. Despite development, progress, and emancipation, women in India are oppressed, with religion possibly one of the oppressive systems. However, inside this restrictive system, women protest for their liberation.

In this course phase, we will critically analyze the works mentioned above. Our stated objectives will limit the scope of the analysis.

### *Sister of My Heart*

*Sister of My Heart* is an emotional tale about two cousins, Sudha and Anju. Born twelve hours apart in the same house, the women consider themselves twins, and from a very young age, they demand from each other all the essentials of life: love, respect, advice, and companionship. Their extraordinary friendship remains the novel's central theme.

"Do not stand like a male" is a famous admonition used to educate girls on femininity requirements. A girl should not be contentious; she must display her aptitude for self-control. Sudha's mother, Nalini, frequently instructs her daughters, Sudha and Anju, on proper female behavior. She employs little rhymes.

"Good daughters are bright lamps, lighting their mother's name; wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching their family's fame."

Sudha hesitantly accepts Nalini's statements, while Anju never stops battling. She says:

"Why must Ramurma go with us every time we leave the house, even to get books from the neighbourhood library?"

At a young age, Sudha protested against discrimination in search of her identity.

"I am tired of these old-woman saris you make us wear. You would think we were living in the Dark Ages instead of in the Eighties. Why can't I wear trousers, or a maxi, or at least some Kurtas once in a while... I bet if I were a boy you wouldn't be saying no to me all the time like this".

When Nalini stated that Sudha must remain at home while Anju attended college, Sudha felt as if she were in a dark, winding tunnel that was closing in on her. She objected unsuccessfully. The girl receives no training for a job path. They are led to believe that marriage is their sole source of subsistence and justification for existence. Their whole objective in life is to obtain a spouse.

Additionally, violence inside the family posed a threat. Divakaruni shows this domestic abuse and horrors through the character of Sunil's mother. Anju says,

*“In one swift motion Sunil's father flings the bowl across the table at Sunil's mother, who has taken a longtime to prepare that tamarind chutney. What upsets me the most is the meekness with which she lowers her eyes and doesn't even wipe her spattered arms. 'Haven't I told you never to make that unhealthy stuff?' thunders Sunil's father, 'Haven't I told you I can't stand the smell? Who pays for the food you eat in this house? Answer me', Sunil's mother's lower lip quivers. How humiliating it must be for lire to be treated this way in front of her new daughter-in-law”.*

In patriarchal societies, domestic violence and sexual harassment are commonplace for women. They are the victims of excessive materialism and institutions dominated by men. Depression looms over them because they view themselves as powerless, helpless, and insecure, a perception that is not genetically given but somewhat socially conditioned. They frequently resort to self-denial, blame-shifting, or resignation to their situation. Siddha's musings on

*"Years later I shall wonder, that final phrase Bidhata Purush wrote, was it 'Sorrow'?"*

It reflects the status of women in India all too plainly. Depending on the circumstances, women face psychological oppression and physical assault at the hands of the in-laws, the husband, or both.

No disparities are to be permitted; the woman's identity is required to fuse entirely with her husband and his family, regardless of the family's social and educational background or progressive perspective. In certain circumstances, the woman is viewed as an enslaved person, expected to cook, wash, clean the house, earn a living, and sometimes sleep with her master (De Beauvoir, 2014). In the case of Indian women, specifically Sudha's mother, patriarchy is internalized, and they become mirrors for males. They never object or consider it unfair.

Motherhood is imposed on women since it is considered a woman's inescapable destiny and the only alternative that could provide her happiness. It is a do-or-die situation for Sudha. Otherwise, she has no place in the household and must give birth to a son. Nevertheless, when the test reveals that the baby is a girl, they wish to murder the infant. Even then, Sudha cannot depend on her husband. She queries him,

*“I need you to help me to protect our daughter. But he plucked my fingers off his arm as though I was speaking a strange language he'd never heard before and walked out of the house”.*

Aunt Pishi, who lost her spouse at eighteen and is now a widow, came forward to save Sudha from society's cruel practices. The death of Pishi's husband signifies the end of her social existence and individuality. Soon after the death of her husband, the widow's appearance is markedly different from that of other women since she has to give up all types of decoration and the rites and symbols associated with marriage.

Regardless matter the disparities, Sudha confronts reality. Her stamina and vitality have not diminished. She says,

*“I am washing away the stamp of duty. I am washing away the death sentence that was passed on my daughter. I am washing away everything the Bidhata Purush wrote, for I have had enough of living a life*



*decreed by someone else. How easy it seems! What power we women can have, If we believe in ourselves!"*

In her struggle for a new perspective on reality, Sudha has demonstrated such tenacity, vitality, and ferocity that, whenever and wherever she appears, she leaves an unmistakable imprint of her desperate confrontation as a fighter, victim, heroine, and mother against what she refuses to accept as an immutable order of reality. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni emphasizes Sudha's perseverance, her tenacity, and her refusal to be defeated by misfortunes and disappointments.

Through the characters of Sudha and Anju, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni intends to demonstrate how a girl is raised of great significance. There are numerous restrictions placed on girls. In addition, she receives sufficient training. The steps of a young girl should be so delicate that they are barely discernible to others. Long strides are indicative of masculinity. Girls are regularly scolded for jumping, sprinting, and hopping. They are inappropriate for a woman. She wishes to underline that lovemaking and domesticity are not women's only concerns and that she must reclaim her dignity and honor.

### ***The Vine of Desire***

Sister of My Heart's sequel, Vine of Desire, continues Sudha's journey. Sudha has more room to develop her self-assurance, self-reliance, and independence. In this work, the author intends to illustrate the intricacies of the relationships between Sudha, Anju, and Anju's husband, Sunil. She was inviting Sudha to America. She is aware.

*"America has its own problems, but at least it would give me the advantage of anonymity. No one in America would care that I was a daughter of Chatterjees, or that I was divorced. I could design a new life, earn my own living, and give Dayita everything she needed. Best of all, no one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me, who had decided that living alone was better than with the wrong man".*

Due to her excessive work hours in the university library, Anju loses her child. This brings Sudha to the United States to care for her sister. Anju emerges more robust, optimistic, and resilient in the face of adversity. In addition, she supports her spouse when his body, will, and spirit begin to fail. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni employs gliders as a metaphor for liberty, independence, and self-assurance.

Anju does not wish to be labeled as a real woman,' who is expected to be emotional, passionate, and impulsive. She wants a different, liberated life characterized by individuality. In her desire to actively shape her existence via self-fulfillment, Anju yearns to explore her inner self, which is less aware of social conventions and more concerned with her existential awareness. She does not wish to be a submissive wife or her husband's shadow. On the other side, she desires to develop a deep bond with her sister Sudha. Anju shows a protesting tone in all of her activities and emerges as a lady with a strong will. Anju replies with a grin,

*"You won't believe it, Sudha, but I've learnt to fly!"*

Sudha encounters a woman named Sara, who is wearing cut-off pants. She represents the adventurous and liberated lifestyle that Sudha desires. Sara says,

*"I was all set to go back and get married to a guy I had met in college in Bombay, then, about a month before my return, it hit me that for the rest of my life, I would never have another chance to be alone. In-laws, kids, servants, you know how it is in India, scary. So I bought myself a bus ticket to California. It is not hard. I love the freedom, the risk. It is like being in a play."*

Sudha is jealous of Sara's selfishness and arrogant confidence that she will always be loved. Sudha wonders where this girl from India learned such recklessness. Who taught her to care so little for what people might think? Sara is strong, dresses up fashionably, and asserts herself with confidence. Sara becomes the figment of Sudha's wanting. She becomes a symbol of what Sudha wishes for. Sudha cannot return to India as she is helpless and dependent. She says.

*"I can't love like that. I can't bring my daughter to think that is how a woman needs to live".*

Sudha has a form of consciousness paralysis. The author manipulates Sudha's transition to western society and civilization, as well as the resulting challenges and pain, as a symbol of sensibility amid simultaneous idealization and brutality or as an agent in the author's quest for psychological insight and awareness. With the assistance of Lupe, Sudha has a job, a place to live, and an employer that appears to be amenable. Most importantly, she has her own money for the first time. She is beginning her new life in the United States.

The tale describes how, despite being a timid and clumsy woman, Sudha progressively overcomes her inhibitions. We discover a self-assertion developed from her awareness, conviction, and experience. What Sudha and Anju say about their respective marriages is not significantly influenced by romantic passion. How different cultures conceptualize gender disparities in love and care varies considerably. Even within a single nation, we must use the contrasting situations of Sudha and Anju to illustrate a portion of the diversity that exists. Anju takes pride in her feisty, independent, and highly combative nature, whereas Sudha has acquired a softer set of standards. She believes it is advantageous to rely on someone stronger than herself for assistance, regardless of gender. Such variances may be somewhat due to individual differences, but they also reflect the effect of cultural standards.

### ***The Queen of Dreams***

In her 2004 novel *Queen of Dreams*, Divakaruni illustrates the difficulty of Indian Americans in maintaining two identities or cultures. She seeks to bridge the gap between a daughter born in the United States and her Indian immigrant mother. Mrs. Gupta, an Indian immigrant to the United States of the first generation, is the queen of dreams. She claims, "A dream is a message from the unseen world." She retains a substantial amount of her Indian heritage. She had no desire to get married. According to society, however, she could not survive without a man. Therefore, she wed Mr. Gupta. She eschewed the usual wedding ceremony and married him legally. In order to allow her dreams to intrude, she stops herself from experiencing bodily pleasure.

Rakhi (daughter of Mrs. Gupta) read literature about India and rejected westernized clothing during her school years, unlike her Indian classmates. She had yearned for India since her youth. Born and educated in the United States, she views the country as her home. She frequently argues about her imagined history and considers a trip to the mysterious nation of India, which she will never take (Malathi, 2012). She oscillates continuously between the two civilizations. This causes Rakhi to have a sense of loss and an identity crisis.

However, Rakhi's mother believes that concealing their Indian heritage from her daughter can prevent her from feeling divided between two cultures and identities. She says,

*"I didn't want to be like those mothers, splitting you between here and there, between your life right now and that which can never be. But by not telling you about India as it really were, I made it into something far bigger. It crowded other things out of your mind. It pressed upon your brain like a tumour (Divakaruni 89)."*

After the 11 September 2001 terrorist incident, American natives began abusing and condemning immigrants whose only offense was the color of their skin or the fact that they wore different clothing than the natives. However, Rakhi does not believe in displaying her patriotism with banners or flags. She believes that

*"I do not have to put up a flag to show that I am American! I am American already. I love this country, I know..."*

By visualizing her identity in a specific manner, she attempts to organize her chaotic life of hyphenated identities, a failed businesswoman, a failing mother, a divorced mother, and a mother-obsessed daughter, into a coherent whole; nonetheless, she finds herself in an unfathomable scenario. Rakhi questions her identity and wonders,

*"But if I was not American, then what was I?"*

She feels uprooted, and her appearance suddenly seems foreign to her. None of the innate sense of being an American remains. Rakhi is appalled,

*"She feels the urge to pray, but she does not sure which deity, American or Indian, she should pray to."*

Mrs. Gupta remains Indian on American soil. Mrs. Gupta maintains her identity by being a dream interpretation her entire life, rejecting all of the significant roles in her life, including being a wonderful wife and mother.

Rakhi's adaptation to American culture as a second-generation immigrant begins in childhood, but her complete absorption and assimilation into American culture are very challenging. She had never felt like an outsider before the World Trade Center catastrophe. Rakhi develops a sense of many and multiple identities by rejecting the notion of a fixed or unique identity. She accepts her hyphenated status as a member of the Indian and American communities.

### ***Oleander Girl***

The novel *"Oleander Girl"* is told through the perspectives of Korobi, her grandmother, the rickshaw driver, and a future relative, among others. Korobi believes that her only relatives are her grandparents. As an orphan, she has never seen her parents and has believed them to be deceased since birth.

Korobi's mother chose the name *Oleander* because she wanted her daughter to be able to defend herself from predators, just as the Oleander is a beautiful but poisonous plant. The protagonist's identity crisis is one of the novel's primary themes throughout her life.

The tale begins with the dream of Korobi on the eve of her engagement to Rajat. In this dream, her mother's ghost was attempting to encourage her to travel beyond the ocean in search of something vital.

The visit to a friend's birthday party begins Korobi's transforming journey. Dressed in traditional attire, she is merely a bystander in the crowd until Rajat, the expensive individual, spots her. She accepts his invitation to dance and joins him on the dance floor. This encounter develops into a friendship, and she aspires to wed him. In contrast to Rajat, however, escaping the confines of Tarak Prasad Roy Road is difficult because of her traditional grandpa and their current financial situation. However, Korobi's first step towards maturity is her resolve to marry Rajat and her ability to persuade her grandmother of this.

Her grandfather's unexpected death, the unfinished letter from her mother to her father, and family secrets motivate Korobi to travel to the United States to pursue her family's mystery. While Korobi is dealing with her problems, Rajat and his family encounter adversity.

Korobi, a young woman educated in Kolkata by her strict grandparents, discovers a mystery about herself and her family. Her disclosure destroys her sense of self and propels her from her protected life in Calcutta into a hunt. She travels around America in the company of enticing strangers, a country she finds both enticing, perilous, and unwelcoming.

When Seema disapproves of Korobi wearing a salwar kameez to meet her prospective father, she has a culture shock. Instead, Seema provides her with a pantsuit. This affirms the existence of cultural differences. At this meeting, all her aspirations of finding her father are dashed, and she falls victim to Rob Macey's lie. When he finds her alone, he attempts to molest her. However, she does not succumb to pressure; instead, she fights back and saves herself with Vic's assistance. Vic is Divakaruni's inspiring voice for women.

*"I want you to know that you were brave and quick-witted in a situation where most women would have fallen apart. You deserve to be proud of yourself".*

These reassuring remarks urge the distraught Korobi to extend her stay and continue the hunt for her father. She gets her hair cut short and temporarily accepts Vic's relationship. All of them are viewed as threats to the traditional Korobi in India, which is diminishing daily. Only her grandmother, the embodiment of the American way of life, believes in her. Instead of being assessed in terms of public space or Westernization, Korobi's "modernity" intrudes on her on a personal level. When Vic advises that they spend the night in a motel because of the snowfall in Boston, Korobi will experience a new bout of culture shock. She claims, These reassuring remarks urge the distraught Korobi to extend her stay and continue the hunt for her father. She gets her hair cut short and temporarily accepts Vic's relationship. All of them are viewed as threats to the traditional Korobi in India, which is diminishing daily. Only her grandmother, the embodiment of the American way of life, believes in her. Instead of being assessed in terms of public space or Westernization, Korobi's "modernity" intrudes on her on a personal level. When Vic advises that they spend the night in a motel because of the snowfall in Boston, Korobi will experience a new bout of culture shock. She claims,

*"You do not know how people think back in India! I cannot spend the night alone with you. Well, not with you -ah, you know what I mean. Engagements have been broken for far less."*

Despite the financial pressure, she accepts the offer and insists they have separate rooms, demonstrating her adaptability and traditional beliefs. The determination to complete the objective of her visit and her desire for economic independence is apparent when she sacrifices her hair to satisfy the need:

*"Stay focused on the present. I commend myself on the necessity of the moment."* Vic explains the incident with the haircut by stating,

*"It was a huge step to take. I must admit, I did not anticipate that you would follow through"* (Divakaruni).

Her actions of going on a sightseeing trip with Vic and getting a haircut to generate psychological conflict. Korobi finds her father and accepts the bittersweet truth about her parentage. The fact that her father is African-American has no bearing on her acceptance of him. A victorious Korobi returns to India, but her in-laws cannot accept her new identity because of her new identity. She declares without fear,

*"I am Korobi Oleander, capable of surviving drought and frost and the loss of love."*

## **Result**

Confrontation empowers individuals to take charge of their lives and make their own choices, but it also leads them to become increasingly apathetic and positivist about the world around them. Female protagonists in Divakaruni's works face adversity and find triumph rather than passively accepting male dominance. Consequently, Divakaruni's female protagonists do not conform to stereotypical portrayals. They have done the hard thinking and have seen the big picture, and they know that there is a brave new world out there for them to explore, and that they must make some courageous choices in order to get there.

Romantic love does not play a significant role in Divakaruni's protagonists when they come under an identity crisis. We see a wide variation among cultures in the way they contact gender differences in the area of love and care. The notion of women's identity cannot be fixated in the way Indian traditional families presume; instead, it is plural and multiple, discards the fixed or singular notion of identity. Divakaruni explores the psyche of Indian ladies who never resist anything and passively withstand everything in their life to have a peaceful life. By doing so, they lose their own identity. The experience of Rakhi as an immigrant and her familial relationships play a significant part in the reformation and transformation of Korobi's journey. Her journey is an eye-opener to diasporic women to grow out of the caterpillar stage of luxury and comfort and view every stage of migration as a vehicle to transform the way they live. It is also a powerful reminder that love dissolves boundaries of color, race, or nation.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

In the books *Sister of My Heart* and *Vine of Desire*, it is recorded that Sudha, initially a timid and clumsy woman, eventually overcomes her inhibitions and becomes a self-assured person due to her consciousness, conviction, and experience. When it comes to discussing their marriages, Sudha and Anju do not place a significant emphasis on the significance that passionate love had in their relationships. Furthermore, the things that two different women have to say about caring demonstrate that they have internalized a substantial repertoire of typical social views. When it comes to matters of love and caring, how people of different cultures approach gender differences varies widely from one. The cases of Sudha and Anju, who could not be more different from one another, will help us illustrate the diversity that can be found even within a single country. While Anju revels in her feisty, independent, and highly confrontational attitude, Sudha has learned a kinder and softer set of rules. Anju revels in her feisty, independent, and highly combative personality. She believes it is healthy to lean on someone stronger than she is for support, regardless of whether that person is male or female. These discrepancies may be due, at least in part, to individual preferences, but they also reveal the influence of societal expectations.

If Sudha is successful in evading expectations, Nila in *French Lover* will succeed in taking an additional step forward, which is the topic of the following chapter.

In the novel *Queen of Dreams*, the lives of Indian American women immigrants and the conceptions of their identities are investigated. Investigating the idea of one's identity can be done on a personal level, as well as at the level of society and culture. A political catastrophe in the host land forces the protagonists in the narrative to confront an identity crisis of their own. Immigrants are almost always the first people to be blamed whenever something goes wrong in the country that they are living in. This is a common occurrence.

Consequently, they are subjected to acts of violence and aggression. Natives of the country that welcomes immigrants often give them the impression that they are "the other." In the end, Rakhi can find a solution to the problem of her inability to reconcile her American identity with her Indian identity. Her

mother kept a journal, and her father told her stories about India, which helped her comprehend her ancestry and where she came from. Rakhi grows up due to the trauma and perplexity she experiences due to the attack. In the end, she can mend her troubled and fractured connections, and she also discovers her hyphenated identity by rejecting the idea that identity is solitary and unchanging. In the end, her marriage and the relationships within her family are repaired. In addition, she has come to terms with being an Indian-American rather than simply thinking of herself as an American.

As the story draws to a close, she concludes that, as an immigrant, she is both Indian and American in her heritage. She has come to terms with her dual identities. The years pass, and Rakhi's perspective on whom she shifts along with it. An eye-opener for diasporic women, "The Experience of Rakhi as an Immigrant and Her Family Relationships Play a Significant Part in the Reformation and Transformation of Korobi's Journey" encourages readers to "grow out of the caterpillar stage of luxury and comfort and view every stage of migrancy as a vehicle to transform the way they live." Rakhi's experience as an immigrant and her family relationships play a significant part in the reformation and transformation of Korobi. In addition, it serves as a potent reminder that love can break down barriers based on factors such as color, race, or nationality. This realization is the key to fostering mutual respect and harmony with oneself and all other beings. A victorious Korobi returns to India, but her in-laws cannot embrace the new version of Korobi because of her new identity, which breeds hostility and distrust. Make yourself a part of my life, and we can cover some ground we have lost over the years.

Divakaruni is aware of every incident in India, including how one can grasp and maintain awareness of other people's expectations. She modifies herself following the requirements of other people. Divakaruni does a beautiful job of exploring the mentality of Indian women, who, to have a calm life, never resist anything and take everything that happens to them in their lives quietly, even when doing so causes them to lose their own identities.

## References

- American Heritage Dictionary & American Heritage Publishing Staff. (1993). *The Large Type American Heritage Basic Dictionary*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Anderson, B. (2010). The nation and the origins of national consciousness. *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, 61.
- Bharucha, N. E. (1998). Inhabiting enclosures and creating spaces: The worlds of women in Indian literature in English. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 29(1).
- Breinlinger, S., & Kelly, C. (1994). Women's responses to status inequality: A test of social identity theory. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18(1), 1–16.
- Caesar, Judith. (2005). American Spaces in the Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri. *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 31(1), 50–68. <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2007.0002>
- Crenshaw, K. W. (2013). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In *The public nature of private violence* (pp. 93–118). Routledge.
- Das, K. (2011). *My story*. DC Books.
- Davidson, A. I. (1987). How to Do the History of Psychoanalysis: A Reading of Freud's "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality". *Critical Inquiry*, 13(2), 252–277.
- Erikson, E. H. (1994). *Identity and the life cycle*. WW Norton & company.
- Faludi, S. (1993). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. 1991. London: Vintage.
- Fox, K. A., Fisher, B. S., & Decker, S. H. (2018). Identifying the needs of American Indian women who sought shelter: A practitioner-researcher partnership. *Journal of Family Violence*, 33(4), 251–256.
- Freud, S. (1953). Three essays on the theory of sexuality (1905). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume VII (1901-1905): A case of hysteria, three essays on sexuality and other works* (pp. 123–246).
- Freud, S. (2017). *Three essays on the theory of sexuality: The 1905 edition*. Verso Books.
- Gordon, L. (2012). *Women, the state, and welfare*. University of Wisconsin Pres.
- Huddy, L. (2001). From social to political identity: A critical examination of social identity theory. *Political Psychology*, 22(1), 127–156.
- Humm, M. (2022). The dictionary of feminist theory. In *The dictionary of feminist theory*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Jaidev, P. F. (1992). *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, ed. Sushila Singh.
- Kelly, D. (2000). Multicultural citizenship: The limitations of liberal democracy. *The Political Quarterly*, 71(1), 31–41.

- Krishnaveni, K. (2021). The Indian women writers and their contribution to Indian Literature. *Published in Quest Journals- Journal Of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 9(2021), 56–57.
- Lau, L. (2010). Literary Representations of the ‘New Indian Woman’ The Single, Working, Urban, Middle Class Indian Woman Seeking Personal Autonomy. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 5(2), 271–292.
- Mercer, T. (2009). *Family voices: An ethnographic study of family characteristics and caregiver perspectives on street children in Eldoret, Kenya*.
- Mihesuah, D. A. (1996). Commonalty of difference: American Indian women and history. *American Indian Quarterly*, 20(1), 15–27.
- Myles, A. (2006a). *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists in English*. Sarup & Sons.
- Sekher, T. V., & Hatti, N. (2010). *Unwanted daughters: Gender discrimination in modern India*. Rawat Publications.
- Sia, S. K., Sahoo, B. C., & Duari, P. (2015). Gender discrimination and work engagement: Moderating role of future time perspective. *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management*, 2(1), 58–84.
- Stets, J. E., & Serpe, R. T. (2013). Identity theory. In *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 31–60). Springer.
- SWAIN, D. (1999). Roots and Shadows—A Feminist Study. *Feminist English Literature*, 48.
- Tsosie, R. (1988). Changing Women: The Cross-Currents of American Indian Feminine Identity. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 12(1), 1–37.
- Weiland, S. (1993). Erik Erikson: Ages, stages, and stories. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, 17(2), 17–22.

