



Diasporic Tendencies in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*

Ajay Makwana

Research Scholar, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Received: 19 Jan 2022; Received in revised form: 15 Feb 2022; Accepted: 22 Feb 2022; Available online: 28 Feb 2022
©2022 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *The present paper aims to trace out the diasporic tendencies in the selected novel of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams. Diaspora literature constitute the problematic abroad life of immigrants. As an outsider, diaspora community faces many critical issues in their host land. Alienation, racial segregation, cultural conflict and identity crisis are core issues faced by immigrants. Indian diaspora literature is an academic body of writing enriched by Indian immigrant writers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has occupied adorable status in female category in the literary canon of Indian diasporic writing. She has artistically projected the survival issues of immigrant women in her poetry, novels and short stories. Divakaruni has critically examined how Indian immigrant women struggles in assimilation with western culture and survive with hyphenated identity. Indian immigrant's experience, contemporary America, history, fantasy and the difficulties of immigrant's living in an alien land are her major thematic concerns. Divakaruni's novel Queen of Dreams is a journey of young Indian artist named Rakhi in California, United States. Surviving in abroad, Rakhi perceives the conflict of hyphenated identity. She asserts that as an immigrant, she is having a dual identity and she swings between 'real' and 'reel world'. Rakhi's two daughters survives as second generation immigrants in United States who are not much aware about India and its culture. The novel profoundly focuses on the identity conflict, east-west conflict, cultural clash, assimilation, pain of immigration and belongingness.*

Keywords— *identity, assimilation, cultural conflict, belongingness, immigrant.*

I. INTRODUCTION

International migration has been increased rapidly in the age of globalization. People adopt their desirable destination land to gain better prospects in their lives. Better economic opportunity in abroad has been placed as the dominant motive in the contemporary migration. In current era, education, better employment, family, peer group and marriage are other prominent determining causes to adopt migration. In the case of India, well educated, professional and skillful Indians have been scattered in different continents of the world. As per the report of Ministry of External Affairs, in recent years, there are 28 million people in different corners of the world who are Indian origin living outside from the country.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research paper is based on the following methodology.

- ❖ Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel Queen of Dreams is the main primary tool of the paper.
- ❖ The findings and observations in the present research paper is based on the primary and secondary data.
- ❖ The relevant diasporic tendencies in Queen of Dreams would be explored through extensive study and close reading.
- ❖ The present research paper would be descriptive and analytical in nature.
- ❖ In the paper, 8th edition of MLA would be followed to cite the adopted sources.

Objectives:

- ❖ To study the notion of 'Diaspora' and 'Indian Diaspora Literature'.
- ❖ To explore Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as a diasporic writer of Indian continent.
- ❖ To explore diasporic tendencies in the selected novel *Queen of Dreams*.
- ❖ To study *Queen of Dreams* as a diasporic novel.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Devendran.R. and Dr.P.Vasuki in their collaborated article titled "Immigrants Identity in the novel of *Queen of Dreams* By Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" has addressed the issues of identity and assimilation in new culture. After settling in abroad, the very first issues that the immigrant face is the identity conflict in a new land. Because, as an outsider, they constantly feel alienation in unknown land. Immigrants live with the sense of estrangement and separation from their homeland as they torn between 'home' and 'host' land. They do not merge easily in new culture and society. They receive feeling of non-acceptance from their host land that creates the feeling of inferiority in them. As immigrants try to adopt the culture of their host land, as a result, they survive with dual(hyphenated) identity. The conflict of identity affects more to second generation immigrants because of their socio-cultural connection with their ancestral land. In *Queen of Dreams*, Mrs. Gupta as a mother and first generation immigrant, survives with hyphenated identity. She considers herself as Indian not as Indian-American. Gupta's younger daughter Joya is a person of second generation in California. As she was born in America, she completely raises within American culture. She remains untouched from Indian culture.

S.I.Sathia Sali and Dr.D.L.Jaisy in their collaborated article titled "Cultural Conflict and Issues In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*" has talked about how Indian immigrant family faces such critical hardships in American culture due to outsiders. They encounter many difficulties in merging with new people and culture. Mrs. Gupta and her two daughters face complexities in developing their social set up in westernized society. Mrs. Gupta, a mother, carries her Indian culture in America and teaches Indian cultural values to her daughters as well. As an immigrant family, Gupta family bears the issues of assimilation and dislocation. Mrs. Gupta and her elder daughter Rakhi particularly feels social and physical discomfort.

Diaspora and Indian Diaspora Literature:

Historically, the term "diaspora" comes from two Greek words "dia" and "sperian," means "to scatter."

Initially, the term was utilized to indicate the dispersed of Jew community who had dispersed from their own motherland Palestine thousand years ago. However, with the passage of time, the meaning of the term has been extended and lost its previous sense. In modern period, the term 'diaspora' is employed to mark the movement of migration. It indicates any person, group or community who have left their place of origin and survives in another countryside. Shuval defines diaspora in the following words.

A diaspora is a social construct founded on felling, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longing, dream, allegorical and virtual elements all of which play an important role in establishing a diaspora reality. At a given moment in time, the sense of connection to a homeland must be strong enough to resist forgetting, assimilating or distancing. – (Shuval 43)

From the last decade, 'Diaspora' has escalated with its use and its forms has been strengthened in various directions. It has now appeared to be prime hypothesis or notion to discuss the relationship between place and identity and the interaction of literatures and cultures through different directions. Even though the dispersion of diaspora has perceived in semantic, punitive, conceptual and many different assumed interpretations since its early times. Regardless, theorists of diaspora states about an elemental change in the social world, a radical shift in perspective and causes to treat diaspora not as a class but as a phrase, slant and claim.

In the new diaspora various forces such as globalization, neoliberalism, imperialism is the reason of migration, displacement, identity crisis, exiles, alienation, loneliness for individuals away from their homelands. The political, economic, social and cultural difficulties are created with these forces in their native places. In the present modern era, many people migrate to abroad so as to run a better life economically and to achieve something in their life this might be discretionary or not.

Other noteworthy qualities of neo diaspora are the perceptions of return to their ancestral lands, relationships with other communities in the diaspora and absence of full apprehension to the host country. They are pulled towards their motherland owing to flashbacks of past in their memory and due to some other reasons. This situation can be called journey to basics and this makes sense of displacement and exiles.

Diaspora literature is composed by immigrant writers who have left their place of origin and survives in another countryside. It is also termed as 'expatriate' or

'immigrant writing'. Diaspora writers have fruitfully captured the pain and agony of abroad life in their dramatic universe.

Literary Portfolio of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has occupied significant position in female Indian diasporic writers. She is emerged as a brilliant literary artist of Indian continent who writes from America. Born in Kolkata, Divakaruni migrated to United States and subsequently settled there as a teaching faculty. She serves as Geny and Betty McDavid Professor of Writing at the University of Houston. Even after settling in abroad, she has not forsaken her Indian identity, culture and of course Indianness.

Divakaruni has composed poetic collections, short story and novelist. Her literary expressions talk about plight of emigrants particularly of women. Divakaruni's literary scholarship comprises realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, myth and fantasy. Along with issues and challenges of abroad life, she has also inscribed Indian cultural values in many of her works, revealing her Indianness. She won American Award in 1996 for her short story collection *The Arranged Marriage*. Divakaruni's works have been appeared in 29 languages including Dutch, Bengali, Indonesia, Turkish and Japanese.

Divakaruni debut her literary journey with the publication of poetic volumes titled *Black Candle* and *Leaving Yuba City*. Afterwards, she composed her first short story collection *The Arranged Marriage* in 1995. *The Mistress of Species*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Olander Girl*, *Queen of Dreams* and *Before We Visit the Goddess* are her magnum opus novels.

Diasporic Tendencies in *Queen of Dreams*:

The novel *Queen of Dreams* begins with the epigraph of Haruki Murakami

What we know and what we don't know are like

Siamese twins, in separable

Confusion, confusion,

Who can really distinguish between the sea and what's

Reflected in it? or the difference between the falling ruin
and loneliness?

-Haruki Murakami, Sputnik

Sweetheart

Queen of Dreams is a tale of Indian immigrant family who survives in Berkeley, California. Rakhi appears as the central protagonist of the plot. Her mother was interpreting dreamer. She was interpreting a dream that

decides the future of a person. Peter Barry said about *Queen of Dreams*, "...it uses the past to read the present, revealing the politics of our society by what we choose to emphasize or suppress of the past" (Barry 1995). Through *Queen of Dreams*, Barry critiques how the sense of one's identity stems from the past, that it concerned with the roots of homeland. The search for these roots in a foreign landform is the crux of the diasporic sense and sensibility. On the diasporic note, the novel exhibits the following diasporic tendencies.

The Pain of Immigration:

Immigration is the geographic relocation from one's native place to a foreign land. The immigrants usually settle in a foreign land. Physical immigration can be a much easier process than the mental transition of living in a foreign land and accepting the host country. Mrs Gupta, in the text, not just has problems taking her life in the host country but also faces difficulties in being accepted by the society of the foreign country as well. Mrs Gupta, to a large extent, maintains her culture in the foreign land and is seen hardly mingling with the society.

Gupta's response to immigration is that it breeds a lot of isolation and heightens the cultural clash. However, she realizes the mistake of not assimilating with the foreign land's society and discovers the primary reason behind her reluctance to incorporate – her cultural roots. For this reason, she hides the Bengali culture altogether from her daughter, Rakhi. She does so to make sure that, unlike her, her daughter can accept the American society and live as an American citizen wholly without her native culture holding her back.

Identity Conflict

Queen of Dreams follows the lives of members of a Bengali family who have settled in America. The Bengali family finds it difficult to adjust in a new land and see its challengeable, be it social or financial daunting. Central to the story is the female characters, who are Indian immigrants in pursuit of reconstructing their identity in the context of the multi-cultural experiences. The main protagonist is Mrs Gupta, a first-generation immigrant, a mother and an interpreter of dreams. Other protagonists are Rakhi and Jona, born in America and daughters and granddaughters to Mrs Gupta.

Divakaruni in *Queen of Dream* presents the experiences of the Indian female diaspora, mainly the complex situation of reconciling with the foreign lands and the critical consequences which are usually estranged relationships. Merging with the society of the foreign land is a double-edged sword for them as they are not just forging a cultural identity amidst significant religious, political and social differences but also trying to get over the depression,

anxiety, misunderstanding and guilt of losing their native identities in the process.

Identity conflict is such a thing that it easily seeps into the diaspora inevitably, be it the first-generation immigrants or their descendants. While Mrs Gupta neither rejects the culture of the host-land altogether nor does she accept it fully by transforming herself or forging for herself a new identity. She would wear Indian clothes and cook Indian food. Her identity was built around her profession as a dream interpreter and not Indian or American culture. It can be said that Mrs Gupta merely adapted to her surroundings. Due to these cultural clashes, it becomes difficult for diasporic individuals to relate to one culture or the other. The culture of their host country is markedly different from the native culture in which they were born and brought up. Reconciling the two cultures becomes the crux of their identity crisis. This is because man is a social animal and it needs to belong somewhere. Not being able to see either culture as their own, is the beginning of the loss of the sense of belonging. What adds to their dilemma of identity is the rejection of both the societies not seeing them as their own as well.

Cultural Conflict:

In the novel, Rakhi's response is very different. As an American born, she inherited a mixed cultural heritage. She, too, like her mother, experienced identity conflict. While her mother could resolve her identity conflicts through her profession, Rakhi's professional as an owner of a tea shop only aggravates her quest for identity. There is a constant arrival of Indian customers in her tea shop, whom Rakhi observes intently. Mrs Gupta hiding Indian culture from Rakhi only makes Rakhi crave more for it. She is obsessed with the idea of discovering her Indian roots, which she says are shrouded in "unending mystery." Her split between her American identity and her Indian identity is furthered after 9/11.

Cultural clash is the core problems of a diaspora. Cultural clash is the primary reason why diasporic community members have to renegotiate or reconstruct their identities. A cultural clash can be observed in the text in straightforward terms of dream interpretation. We can see through Mrs Gupta that she believes that dream interpretation is a gift which cannot be cultivated or learnt. It is simply possessed and can just easily be lost as well. Mrs Gupta's beliefs about dream interpretation stem from the Indian culture. But Rakhi, who wants to be a dream interpreter herself, finds out that dream interpretation in the Western world is regarded as a science that trained psychologists are licensed to practice. Therefore, cultural clashes lead to a sense of alienation. Experiencing existential rootlessness begins with cultural alienation, in

fact, the entire diasporic journey is from alienation to assimilation.

There are stark differences between the Indian and the American culture when it comes to beliefs, customs, attitudes, and other social behaviours and endeavours. As it can be observed in the text, diaspora finds themselves between the two cultures, often reconciling one with the other. Cultural dilemmas lead to the dilemmas of identity, which in the novel came to the forefront with the 9/11 incident. Soon after the attacks, the immigrants faced large-scale rejection by the American society, for they were all branded as terrorists. It forced Rakhi out of her American identity and made her consider her Indian identity more seriously. She questions her identity and cannot locate herself in one place, and she feels pulled by both the places. It is nothing short of trauma as cultural alienation instigates a sense of loss.

Sense of Belongingness:

While the challenges of having bi-cultural identities or hybrid cultural identities are stressful, we see in *Queen of Dreams* that Rakhi is able to find stability and achieve a sense of belonging after all. She addresses the identity crisis and mental trauma of dislocated migrants head-on. She adapts to a new way of life that embraces the American lifestyle while still being rooted in the Indian culture instead of shunning one or the other altogether.

The perfect example of the successful creation of this sense of belonging is Rakhi's daughter, Jona. Jona is the ideal blend of American and Indian identities. We can see her not just as a painter, hinting at her individuality, but also as a dream interpreter like her grandmother. She has a self-identity created in the American society and a connection to the traditions of her ancestors' homeland. She accepts her hybridity and the circumstances that she is living in, and identifies with both her heritages. While Mrs Gupta and Rakhi's sense of belonging was shaped by the experience of migration and its consequences, Jona feels more at home in America and is comfortable with her blend of American and Indian identity as she has not experienced migration or any of its negativity was not passed down to her.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be observed that the text of *Queen of Dreams*, through its female characters, manages to depict the trauma of living in a foreign land and the diasporic challenges of adapting to the host land. The novel also presents the acceptance of hybrid identities, which creates a sense of belonging, as a solution to the problems faced by the diasporic communities in their host land.

REFERENCES

- [1] Agnew, Vijay. *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005.
- [2] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.
- [3] Devendran, R. and Dr.P.Vasuki. "Immigrants Identity in the Novel *Queen of Dreams* By Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*. Vol,6, no,2, 2019, pp.192-197. <https://jetir.org>
- [4] Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Queen of Dreams*. Doubleday: ABACUS, 2005.
- [5] Kumawat Brijesh. "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*. A Typical Tale of Reconciliation of Intricate, Intertwined and Intimate Family." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*. Vol, III, No, IV, 2015, pp. 771-778. <https://ijellh.com>
- [6] Priborkin, Klarina. "Mother's Dreams, Father's Stories: Family and Identity Construction in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*." *South Asian Review*. Vol,29,no,2, 199-219. Doi-<https://10.1080/02759527.2008.011932603>
- [7] Sali, Sathia S.L. and Dr.D.L.Jaisy. "Cultural Conflict and Issues in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*. vol,6, no.3, 2018. pp.191-194. <https://rjelal.com>
- [8] Shuval, J.T. "Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm." *International Migration*. Vol 38, issue, no.5., 2000. pp.41-56. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>