



## Diasporic Identity and Feminine Consciousness in The Selected Works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19366910>

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### Abstract

In this paper, the themes of diasporic identity, feminine consciousness, and cultural negotiation are discussed in the chosen works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Divakaruni uses her novels and short stories to depict the plight of Indian women not only in their native country but also in other countries and how patriarchal systems, social values, and cultural demands shape their identity. Her stories have a combination of magical realism, folklore and mythology in describing the psychological and emotional world of women who experience different cultural realities. The paper focuses on how the characters, such as Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* and Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions*, manoeuvre their place in the family, society, and diaspora, which demonstrates the problem of gender and identity in general. The works by Divakaruni focus on the conflict between assimilation and the preservation of culture and therefore, reflect on the issue of the immigrants in balancing their ancestral culture with the new surroundings. Through the feminist literary theory, the paper will examine how feminine consciousness has changed, how the feminine has been oppressed to a position of recognizing itself and being empowered. Finally, Divakaruni fiction gives a complex understanding of the psychological, social, and cultural realities of women and provides some insights on gender, culture, and diaspora interrelations in modern literature.

**Keywords:** Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Diaspora, Feminine Identity

### 1. Introduction

In the book *The Second Sex* written by Simone de Beauvoir, patriarchy has relegated women to a subordinate role in comparison to men. A case like that of racial minorities even though they are only half of the world population. This inequality of status is not prescribed by intrinsic feminine qualities, but, rather, by the politically potent norms and educational systems that have always been male-dominated. This is how women have been unable to establish themselves in society. The woman is more than just a vessel for the natural world; she is an embodiment of it. To humans, she stands in for the rich soil. She has the power to provide harmony and tranquility via her passivity, and she is destined to be the intermediary between this world and the next. She plays the role of the privileged "other" to the male in each of these instances. There is an inseparable connection between the struggle between one's own identity and that of the other and the struggle between the sexes in literature. All across the globe, women face similar challenges. When opportunities for education and social

equality are there, the situation changes. However, they are subhuman compared to humans due to psychological, social, and political difficulties. Their awakening to the patriarchal world prompts them to wonder who they are.

The creator gave it a shifted structure based on another measurement. It gives her works a distinct flavor while also clarifying their interconnectedness. Divakaruni has mostly expanded the mystical aspects in her works via the use of dreams. Real life mirrors the fantastical occurrences that transpire in the characters' dreams. Amazing snakes, tastes, and conch, among other extinct animals, may talk to the protagonists in her stories just like any other person. Because of this, the author writes to them as if they were intelligent and full of life. The characters not only recognize them, joke about with them, and reply to them, but they also address them without hesitation. This led her to merge authenticity with magic. With a blend of everything in enthralling authenticity, Hitra Banerjee Divakaruni brings back the long deceased Indian narrative, ideology, custom, culture and dream that we require to be there. The dream

aspect, however, takes a back seat to the more realistic aspects as the story develops.

Ancient Indian legend is given new life by Divakaruni. She specialized in studying Bengali culture, Indian mythology, eastern magic, and being an outsider. In terms of her social status as an Indian immigrant, the heroine doesn't acculturate or acclimate; instead, she adapts her life to her new environment without really changing who she is. The renowned structure of her works helps bring up a feminine universe. The fantasy world is mostly feminine, in contrast to the masculine. She writes with the intention of inspiring new ideas and clarifying existing ones. She thinks the new dream is symbolic of women's lives in general, where they support each other and don't go to men for support. She assessed Indian women based on their giving behavior and used folklore as a way to connect with India. One of the biggest issues with extraterrestrial authenticity is the need to demystify. Divakaruni mines myth and prejudice about Indian women she comes to study after leaving her home and vows to destroy. One of the fantasies that Divakaruni examines is the fantasy of becoming a widow. Widows, regardless of age, are subject to cultural punishment in male-dominated societies, where they are looked down upon and seen as harbingers of disease.

The people of India have a deep faith in superstitions and a vibrant cultural heritage. Whenever possible, it is more important to safeguard the culture than any other consideration. Evidence of this may be seen in the works of Chitra Banerjee. A bicultural personality may be cultivated, as her writings show. It is surprising how Divakaruni handles ethnic individualism given her perspective on South Asian Diaspora, which holds that it is necessary to combine Indian culture with its American experience. Chitra Divakaruni is deeply connected to her Indian roots. The dream interpreter would beg her mother for a collection of Bengali literature on the subject. It brought back memories of how her society's members saw things. An ever-expanding crowd listens as she recounts her experiences. As social branches, the designer's books include local rituals and customs, as well as her efforts to establish connections to the area's cuisine, clothing, and language. By banding together all the fragments of the imaginative as witnessed in enchantment, religion and fantasy, enchantment realism may further our comprehension of what is "real" in the world. Finding the extraordinary in everyday things, people, and events is central to supernatural realism, which pits authors against the real world in an effort to make sense of it. Her essays focus on women and use enchantment to create a realist atmosphere. Works selected for examination include *The Mistress of Spices* (1995), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *The Conch Bearer* (2003), *Queen of Dreams* (2004) and *The Palace of Illusion* (2004). Some of her works, such as *The Mistress of Spices*, *Queen of Dreams* and *The Conch Bearer* have the mystical elements. Both *Sister of My Heart* and *The Palace of Illusion* have references to folklore. Almost every work incorporates social features, particularly those that address issues impacting outsiders.

## 2. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Of Indian descent, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a poet and a writer who is the Betty and Gene McDavid Professor of

writing in the Creative Writing Program of the University of Houston. She was born Chitralakha Banerjee in 1956. In 1996, her short stories collection *Arranged Marriage* received an American Book Award. Two of her books, *Sister of My Heart* and *The Mistress of Spices*, and one of her short stories, *The Word Love*, have been made into films. Most of the stories by Divakaruni revolve around the lives of the South Asian immigrants and are set in India or the US. Among her many published books are works of mythology, fantasy, historical fiction, magical realism, and realistic fiction, All of which she writes both to adults and to children.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a Creative Writing Professor, a poet, fiction writer, and award-winning novelist of South Asian American descent. Indian culture, modern America, women, immigration, mythology, family and the upsides and downsides of a mixed society are some of her recurring topics. More than a hundred publications, including periodicals and anthologies, have included her writing, her works have been translated into 29 languages. Some of her works have been adapted to the stage and the cinema. She has received various awards including the American Book Award, the Light of India award, the Premio Scanno (Italy) and the Barbara Deming award. Divakaruni is readable by all ages and she is a creative writing teacher in UH. She was listed in the *Economic Times* as one of the Twenty Most Influential Indian Women Abroad in 2015.

## 3. Concept of Identity

An individual's identity encompasses not only his or her ideas and emotions but also his or her psychic presence, dwelling location, aspirations, hopes, and desires. Each person's unique personality develops from a patchwork of seemingly unrelated experiences. Several elements interact to shape an individual's sense of self. The first and most important factor is the impact of one's early life experiences and goals. Second, one's level of rebelliousness and the shape it takes are important factors in establishing one's personality. And last but not least, zeitgeist. These components encourage young people to cultivate traits that were prevalent in various eras of history. A person's identity is greatly impacted by their parents, their home, society, and the zeitgeist. When an individual's "I" is repressed to the point that he is unable to engage in society, Erik H. Erikson has coined the term "negative identity" to describe this condition. When a person has negative identity, they are more likely to follow the advice of their "other self" and "outer conscience" rather than their "core self" or "inner conscience" when making decisions.

Personality is a reflection of one's identity. Identity is shaped and transformed by one's self-image. Attempts to find one's identity, both in the public and private spheres, are fueled by a need to be identified with the here and now. When it comes to the outside world, a woman goes against her nature. Someone else becomes her measure of self. One way in which masculine prototypes for women's experiences shape female consciousness is via the idea of feminine identity. The subordination of women in politics, economics, and culture is something that the feminine consciousness fights against. In her work *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter breaks down the feminist consciousness into three distinct stages: The feminine stage

of internalization, the feminist stage of revolt and the female stage of self-discovery. There is a delicate balance for women to maintain between the two extremes of accepting and rejecting society. For a feminist's journey towards self-discovery, this is a pivotal turning point.

Across the globe, women face similar challenges, and India is no exception. The real status differs greatly from the status depicted in sacred texts. Over the centuries, Indian ideas on what it means to be a woman have evolved and changed dramatically, reflecting the diversity of the country. Through spiritual domination, mutual struggles, imprisonment, and freedom, India has gone from a brilliant past to a deterioration. Also, the Indian woman's traditional position has evolved from that of a goddess to that of a Devadasi, a Shakti to an Abala, and a creature of the house to an independent worker. An accurate depiction of the shifting socioeconomic conditions of this momentous century may be found in Indo-English literature.

#### 4. Diaspora

In Greek, diaspeirein, means to scatter, therefore the term diaspora is used to describe the dispersion of a people outside their ancestral land. It incorporates the experiences that individuals undergo when they have to abandon their homes and move to other locations. Diverse groups and their shared experiences of relocation are included by the idea of diaspora, which is not restricted to any one ethnic or cultural group. Motives for diaspora may range from economic opportunity to political instability or even forced migration, and it can be either voluntary or involuntary. As people adjust to their new homes and communities, they face the difficult task of negotiating their cultural identities. At its heart, The analysis of the concept of diaspora in the works of fiction by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is based on this interaction of the ancestral motherland and the new country, the present and the past. Any people or ethnic group that is forcibly or politically displaced from their ancestral homelands and then spread around the globe, together with any cultural changes that occur as a result of this displacement, is called a diaspora. Exiles, immigrants, refugees, and exiles are all metaphorically referred to as "Diaspora," a word that originally referred to the Jewish people's separation from their country. Anyone whose political, existential, or symbolic displacement has caused them to feel uneasy or dislocated may relate to the work of expatriates and exiles.

#### 5. Diaspora in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni Fiction

Banerjee, Chitra A multi-layered and insightful depiction of diasporic life is presented in Divakaruni's novels. She vividly depicts the mental and emotional anguish that people experience when torn between their home and a new life via her poetic prose. While dealing with issues of cultural assimilation, the characters created by Divakaruni wrestle with concerns of who they are, where they fit in, and how much they miss their heritage. In Divakaruni's "*The Mistress of Spices*," we are introduced to Tilo, a Oakland, California spice merchant. who is an immigrant from India. Tilo can read her clients' minds and know exactly what they want because of her magical abilities. As the tale progresses, Tilo meets a wide variety of immigrants, each with their own story of relocation and set of difficulties. Divakaruni's

symbolic spice descriptions are a metaphor for the many backgrounds and experiences that immigrants bring to a new country. The stories of two Indian ladies named Anju and Sudha are entangled in Divakaruni in her book, *Sister My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*. and their connection is profound and everlasting. Their cultural background influences their decisions and goals, and the books explore the nuances of their family connections and their adaptation to American society. Those who have experienced the challenges of trying to balance several cultural identities will find the complexities of Divakaruni in accordance with the struggles between tradition and modernity, the pull of family obligations, and the search of personal freedom.

#### 6. Themes and Motifs Related to Diaspora in Divakaruni's Work

A variety of themes and motifs permeate Divakaruni's investigation of diaspora, striking a chord with readers across many cultures. An often-present emotion is homesickness, or a profound desire to return to one's own country and experience its sights, sounds, and scents again. Readers are whisked away to the vibrant streets of Kolkata, the crowded marketplaces of Chennai, or the tranquil countryside of rural India by Divakaruni's vivid descriptions, which bring to life the vivid dreams and recollections of the characters. Another theme that Divakaruni has frequently written about is the difficulty of maneuvering through your cultural identity. The struggle between assimilation and cultural preservation is a common theme among her characters. As individuals deal with familial obligations and social pressures, they often encounter this struggle via the collision of traditional values and contemporary ambitions. Cultural identity is not a fixed concept, but rather a fluid entity shaped by the experiences and the choices of the individual; this is profoundly brought home by Divakaruni's examination of this issue.

#### 7. Analysis of Specific Novels or Short Stories That Highlight the Theme of Diaspora

Reading the Mahabharata through the eyes of Draupadi-Divakaruni retells the story in a novel titled, *The Palace of Illusions*, and makes the wife of the five Pandava brothers its protagonist. an adaptation of the Indian epic. Divakaruni delves into the intricacies of female autonomy and identity in a patriarchal culture from Draupadi's perspective. As Draupadi is forcibly removed from her home and thrust into a dangerous and unpredictable world of political intrigue and conflict, the narrative also touches on ideas of displacement and exile. By reimagining this old story from the diaspora's point of view, Divakaruni is able to shine a new light on the eternal strength of such stories in the contemporary world. Another evidence of her exploration of diaspora is a short story collection *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* by Divakaruni. In each narrative, we follow the experiences of Indian immigrants as they seek to build new lives for themselves while holding on to their traditions. The pieces of Divakaruni, such as "*Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter*" The story about a little girl who is coping with the death of her mother, and the story about a lady who has to come to terms with her past are called, respectively, *The Word Love* and *The Word Love*. show how diaspora affects people and their relationships.

## 8. Indian Feminism

It is easier to gauge a woman's discourse because of the massive inflow of feminism in India in the '60s and '70s. Research on the oppression of women with the goal of ending it is known as feminism. The feminist literary standard emerged as a response to the unique challenges faced by women. Women love fiction writing because it captures the essence of their lives, which is that it disrupts nature. The many subgenres of poetry and drama have not piqued the interest of feminist writers as much as fiction. To feminist authors, it is important to remember the following quote: "I don't know politics but I know who are in power and can rattle them off like the days of the week and the names of the months". The global feminist movement aims at allowing all women to exercise their moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal and economic rights to the fullest. The term first appeared in the 1872 booklet *L'Homme-femme*, written by Alexander Dumas the Younger, in which he characterized the growing 19th-century movement for women's rights. This concept is referred to as "the woman movement" in the US (Swain, 1999). This was a conglomeration of several groups whose shared goal was to elevate women's status. There has always been feminism, even if males rule our planet. Whenever and whenever women have been oppressed, there has been a backlash of some kind. On rare occasions, it has been deliberate and widespread, but more often, it has been subtle and personal, such when women have tried to evade their societally expected responsibilities by getting sick, using drugs, or even going insane. However, publications pertaining to projects provide the starting point for the recorded history of feminism.

The history of feminism in India is extensive. In addition to establishing some patriarchal traits, colonialism introduced other ones. What this means is that some interpretations of "tradition" and "modernity" have served to further oppress Indian women. Even if there is more to come, these two words in particular are the bane of Indian women's lives. There has been a plethora of writing on feminist literary theory since its inception in the 1980s. We also need to be aware of and educated about the variety of feminist Literary perspectives. The collaborative nature of feminist critique is largely responsible for the wide range of approaches taken throughout the previous four decades, which allows us to see the work of feminists as an evolutionary process, with each generation expanding upon and reimagining the work of its predecessors. Problems faced by women's movements are common. The moments' benefits, which were earned through hard work and suffering, are both material and immaterial. If the pushback against women's rights can pass off as non-partisan and non-struggle-like, then it has succeeded. When it becomes personal, stays in a woman's head, and makes her feel that the pressure is all in her brain, the pressure will eventually subside, and she will be able to take matters into her own hands.

## 9. Conclusion

It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of diasporic literature as a site of cultural encounter, dual-cultural mobility, The establishment of a new culture was accompanied by the appearance of a new culture. It is important to note the cultural origin of reception as well as

the mechanics of sending and receiving. The work makes use of the concept of a voyage throughout, travelling from one nation to another It is possible to get it across the national boundaries (in this case, India to the United States) and within the bounds of a country, between the periods (one period to another) and between the states of loneliness (one state to another). Between tradition and countries, emigrant literature has a prominent position. In diasporic literature, the cultural struggle must be acknowledged for what it is. Hybrid culture occurs in the book that was chosen for investigation, where the immigrant creates a new culture. The fusion of Indian and Western cultures is well shown by Divakaruni. It has been difficult for Divakaruni to establish a connection between the two civilizations. The works of Divakaruni, who resides in the United States, are deeply rooted in Indian culture and heritage. Researchers interested in learning more about immigrant women's experiences should look into diasporic literary authors. Postmodernism, feminism, ecofeminism, and other ideologies may be used by them. Research on the storytelling approaches used in the book by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is another possibility. The studies on the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have concentrated on her use of myths and epics especially.

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