

# **Multiculturalism and Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakurani's *Queen of Dreams***

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Chitra Banerjee Divakurani presents her vision of life which deals with various fictional themes as alienation and involvement, multiculturalism, compromise, existentialism materialism, quest and complacency. Through her protagonists, Divakurani makes her readers glimpse into the confused inner self of the contemporary westernized and materialistic man who is spiritually barren. Divakurani's novels are structured in the immediate socio-cultural situations and are concerned with moral and spiritual problems of the contemporary Indians. They suffer from uprootedness, cynicism, evils of materialism, loss of faith and identity crisis. This paper highlights the issues of ethnicity, race, multiculturalism, displacement and identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakurani's *Queen of Dreams*.

The Postcolonial literature refers to the literary works emerged during the Indian Independence. The Postcolonial authors tried to establish their identity through their literary works. Socio-economic conditions and the sufferings of women, and the down-trodden were the major themes dealt within these postcolonial writings. Postcolonial fiction is free from social and political implications of a nationalistic variety. It has concerns with the human society and explores the problems faced by the man in the twentieth century.

Women writers project a new vision of else whereness and develop what may be called discourses of double displacement, on reading writers as different as Bharathi Mukkherjee and Suniti Namoshi, Kamala Markandaya and Chitra Banerjee Divakurani, Meena Alexander and Sujatha Bhat one may single out three recurring tropes in their work home and family, ethnicity and identity, body and sexuality through which they articulate a perspective of alienation in

## Multiculturalism and Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

*Queen of Dreams* – July – September - 2018

general. Home as a symbol of metaphor dominates all the diasporic imagination and hence has been theorized upon sufficiently. Ethnicity becomes an important concern as one shifts one's location and becomes a member of a minority community in alien environment. A shift in location and a change in location status make one conscious of one's ethnic identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a wonderful award winning author and poet. She is one of the very widely known Indian writers writing in English. She incorporates a lot of her personal life throughout her writings, poetry and stories. She brings herself into her novels. Many of her novels take the readers to the Bay area of California, although Divakaruni is not a born American. This relates to the understanding of her experience of migrating to the United States. The Indian experience in American and the conflict between the traditions of her homeland and the culture of her adopted country is the focus of much of Divakaruni's writings and it made her an emerging literary celebrity.

Divakaruni's literary output treats all shades of identity crisis such as alienation, marginalization, despair, nostalgia, readjustment assimilation, adaption or adoption. As a woman writer her writings are autobiographical. She portrays a kind of cultural in-betweens. She also contrasts the lives and perceptions of first-generation immigrants with that of their children born and raised in a foreign land. And, inevitably, it includes the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities.

Divakaruni's novels challenge and redefine the bound areas of conventional narrative. She has responded to the current fluidity of the genre, making use of the conjunction between dual and written traditions, purity and western construction, of American culture and identity, the nature of the cross-cultural conflicts, dislocations and relocations portrayed.

Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* (2004), the sixth novel of Divakaruni is about a dream interpreter who is an Indian but lives in America and her relationship with her daughter. It reveals the conflict between traditions and cultures of their places of adoption as well as of their homelands. She analyses the anxiety, sense of dislocation and relocation of the protagonists. It is a postmodern text containing the shadows of the horrors of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre. The plot of the novel revolves round the life of an American-born Indian girl, Rakhi, who lives in California with her daughter Yona and husband Sonny. In spite of her birth and rearing in America, she inherits Indian sensibility with an irresistible passion for the Indian mode of living. She tries to reconstruct the life of her dead mother who lived a mysterious life as a dream teller.

For Rakhi, her mother's power of interpreting the dreams is a symbolic expression of her super-oriented power to interpret conditions of life on the higher planes of reality that demolishes

## Multiculturalism and Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

### *Queen of Dreams* – July – September - 2018

existing dualities. In spite of her American rearing she retains exceptional awareness to cope with Indian Cultural heritage. For Rakhi, the psychological trauma of displacement is more significant than that of culture and geography. Her idea of getting fellowship for India is her effort to relocate herself in Indian surroundings. Her passion of India and Indianness is so strong that for her it becomes a matter of her own existence. She makes a desperate confession, "I think that before I die, I would like to go India- if only to lay to rest the ghosts that dance in my head like a will O" wisp over a rippling sea"(92)

In this novel, the 'Chai House' works as a central location to expose Divakaruni's vision of Indianness that is often to be found among immigrants. It is the meeting place of a common sensibility and it becomes a centre of the multi-cultural society of America. In *Queen of Dreams*, the mention of the event of attack on the World Trade Centre is the final stripping of the curtain of illusion that often facilitates Indian Americans. Rakhi is stupefied at the idea of closing the shop because she realizes that Chai House would be a rare consolation for all the panic stricken Indian immigrants. It is not a question of serving tea only but a question of solidarity of nationality. With a realization of her responsibility she admits, "We'd been providing a valuable community service" (286). Her dream of American identity finally collapses. The worst of the situation occurs when on the spread of terrorist attack; all Indian immigrants are assumed to be terrorists.

Chitra Banerjee's writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women. As Rakhi attempts to define her identity, absorbing her mother's Indian past and thus rediscovering her own roots, her life is shaken by new horrors. In the wake of September 11, 2001 she and her friends face with dark new complexities about their acculturation. The ugly violence visited upon them forces the reader to view those terrible days from the point of view of immigrants and Indian Americans whose only crime was the colour of their skin or the fact that they wore a turban. As their notions of citizenship are questioned, Rakhi's search for identity intensifies. Haunted by her experiences of racism, she nevertheless finds unexpected blessings; the possibility of new love and understanding for her family. Rakhi's experience like that of her other Asian friends demonstrates the fragility of an immigrant's situation in the adopted land. The novel synthesizes an Indian –American experience with magic realism. The major problems faced by the immigrants are those of their search for identity and a sense of emotional fulfilment.

Divakaruni's multidimensional characters in *Queen of Dreams* do not share any hostile distancing from their homeland. They even do not neglect the call of the alien identity. The rigid concept of irreconcilable hostility thus seems to be receding in favour of an evolving consciousness of coexistence. The characters of Divakaruni are expatriates and modern citizens

## Multiculturalism and Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

*Queen of Dreams* – July – September - 2018

who are from a country or a community. Divakaruni's Indians have severed their roots in India- a dislocation is experienced by Mr.Gupta and Mrs.Gupta as they move from their homeland to America in quest of fortunes. Typically, Divakaruni explores the individual rather than the community as it can be seen in *Queen of Dreams*. She creates a tale of mothers and daughters tracing through love and the sense of belonging.

The *Queen of Dreams* has a loose and marvelous end to expand the frontiers of immigrants' dilemma in the wake of massive terrorist attacks, like the attack on the World Trade Centre. In contrast to the massacre at the Trade Centre, the immense sympathy for Rakhi's father for his customers is another living echo of the sublimity and humanism imparting a distinctive identity to Indian immigrants at the global level. Indians in America find themselves in a dubious position of being exploited and privileged at the same time. They find themselves targeted for racial bias precisely because of their skin tone and general social and economic success.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni projects two or more cultures to accomplish different, sometimes divergent roles and functions, their distribution in different contexts and geo-political identities. Bi-culturalism or multi-culturalism, in whatever way we interpret Divakaruni's works as a socio-cultural class-cross is there in all her novels. Therefore the concept of post colonialism plays a significant role in her fiction. This novel establish interpersonal bonds without bondage.

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