

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl*- The Quest for Identity

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Abstract: *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who occupies a prominent place in diasporic literature, is an internationally acclaimed poet, novelist, and short-story writer. She traces the struggle, footlessness, and anxiety as well as the adaptation and assimilation of foreign cultures in the Indian diaspora. Divakaruni has explored the diasporic consciousness in Oleander girl efficiently "Oleander Girl" is a work of fiction set in India and America. The search for the identity of the protagonist is the theme of the novel. This paper focuses mainly on Korobi Roy's search for her father and, thereby, her identity. It also illustrates how Korobi was portrayed at the beginning of the novel and how she changed towards the end. Oleander Girl concentrates on how Divakaruni employs women's liberation to enable the characters. As a worker, she encounters social conflicts when she travels to America in search of her father. It shows how she explores her character and finds her dad following a few physical experiences.*

Keywords: Footlessness, Foreign Culture, Identity, Liberation, Social Liberation

I. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American author. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the popular contemporary Indian women novelists in English, deals with the feminine feelings of Indian women as well as immigrant women in her works. Her stories bring forth social issues such as racism, gender bias, and the generation gap in contemporary diasporic literature. She highlights diasporic female protagonists, living in two cultures, her alienation, isolation, exile, mental trauma, scattering, and dislocation at the level of diasporic consciousness in particular. Her themes include women, immigration, the South-Asian experience, history, myth, magical realism, and multiplicity. Divakaruni's writing brings out the distress of women in the modern world. Her major works include Arranged Marriage (1995), The Mistress of Spices (1997), Sister of My Heart (1999), Queen of Dreams (2004), One Amazing Thing (2010), The Palace of Illusions (2008), Oleander Girl (2012), and Before We Visit the Goddess (2016).

This paper attempts to describe the concerns of Divakaruni's modern youth and to demonstrate how her latest novel, Oleander Girl, inspires them to stand up for the right things in life. The theme of the novel also advocates the fact that we should leave our comfort zones and stand up for what we believe in. Through the portrayal of Korobi, Divakaruni wants to convey her message to today's youth that we should possess the courage to accept the reality of our identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *Oleander Girl*, is about a 17-year-old girl, Korabi Roy, who lost her mother at birth. After that, she was brought up by her grandparents, Bimal Roy and Sarojini. Bimal Roy is a powerful person, a retired barrister with high social status in his society. His wife Sarojini also belongs to a family of high social class. They are historically and culturally rich, and they are well-respected in their community. Their only daughter is Anu. Korabi Roy longed for her parents love throughout her childhood days. Anu, whom Korabi had never seen or known, becomes Korabi's inspiration and guide into the unknown and propels her to take on adventures that were unimaginable in her sheltered boarding school-educated life.

Korobi was raised by her grandparents in their town, giving her a way of life as a grandkid of the Bimal Roy family. She has been given consideration and never allowed herself to get some information about her folks. She finds a sort of murkiness in her brain and feels total detachment in her life. There is a quietness that drives her life, whether they are alive or not. The main proof about her folks is the letter that Korobi gets from her mom's book. The demise of her granddad, Bimal Roy, during her commitment with Rajat totally dispersed her life into pieces. She says to Rajat, "I'm so confounded. All the things I was so grateful for, my family, my legacy, they're just half-valid. The other portion of

me-I know nothing about it. Then again, actually all this time my dad was alive and in America” (Oleander Girl 66). Sarojini feels scared about the passing of her husband. Sarojini opens with the reality of Korobi’s folks saying her mom Anu kicked the bucket and her dad is an Afro-American named Rob, who is as yet alive in America.

Consequently, Korobi has made a solid choice to go to America, keeping her marriage and looking for her dad. Her energy and interest in thinking about her dad drive her in her search. Huge numbers of pundits acclaim Korobi’s choice at the most youthful age all by herself. At first, Rajat doesn’t need her to go alone. In the wake of understanding her solid and decided self-discipline, Rajat is prepared to help in her search. Mrs. Bose advises holding the wedding as soon as possible, but Korobi prefers to consult with her father first. She denies, but she realizes Rajat is a wonderful person and that if she marries him, she will have a wonderful life. She has a women’s activist decided psyche. That is the reason she has chosen to look through her dad first.

Though he explains to Korobi that he is least bothered by the past and is more interested in the present and future and that his love for her will never cease, Korobi is steady in her decision. “...Rajat you don’t understand! I don’t want it to fade away. I’m shocked and hurt, yes, but I’m excited, too. Do you see? I have a father now! I can meet the man my mother loved so much! All my life I longed to understand my parents. Now fate has given me a chance.”(Oleander Girl 67)

Korobi has found a letter from her mother to her father, full of love but never sent. Therefore, Korobi herself sets out on a quest to find her father. Despite everyone else’s advice, Korobi decides to search for her father, and with her determination she finds her father, and along with him, the truth about her parents. Her father is an Afro-American, and her parents never married. She is shocked but quickly composes herself. She decides to tell the truth to her in-laws about her birth. But her in-laws find out the truth before she is able to tell them. They question her integrity. She goes back to her house and immerses herself in academic and household work. Soon, her fiancé and in-laws realize the truth, and accept Korobi.

Korobi’s journey to find her father makes her face many problems. She has faced the real, cruel world. She is controlled and focuses solely on searching for her father. She has an inner strength and confidence that comes out when she faces difficult situations. She has been protected and guarded by her grandparents all her life, hence, initially she finds it thorny, but she composes herself and moves forward. Korobi’s power is neither western nor modern, but it is her ability that fixes her status in her family and at home.

Korobi has little to pursue, but she is determined. Desai gives her three leads—one in Boston and two in California of people named Rob, who had been at the University of Berkeley at the same time as her mother. She does not give up when he is short of money in New York. The paucity of funds does not deter Korobi. She goes with limited money and stays with the unfriendly Mitra. She is not afraid; she has taken on the situation as it comes. She is committed to finding the truth about her father; she has come this far away from her own people. When she runs out of money, she decides to sell her hair to pursue her search. She has changed her perspective. She thinks like an immigrant and her every action is directed towards her quest. When she needs money, she decides to sell her hair. The loss of hair makes her more liberated and confident. “I feel light-headed, untethered. But once the money is in my hand I’m somewhat consoled. I now have enough for California; I have done it without having to beg anyone.” (Oleander Girl 177)

Oleander Girl is a story of a simple girl who discovers herself as she pursues the truth of her life. It’s about the basic convictions and values that drive the behaviour of a person when faced with difficult situations. They drive, motivate, and keep a person on the right path. As it happened with Korobi, her education and her core values dictate her actions when she is at cross-roads in life. She knows that her future is at stake, but she is not prepared to trade her conscience for happiness. Despite Sarojini’s advice and Rajat’s coercion, she does not hesitate for a moment to take her own stance.

Through Korobi Divakaruni’s Oleander Girl, she leaves a message that living with the truth is the most significant thing in life, and to get this truth, one has to have the courage to face the troubles in life. One should not throw up their hands in despair over things they cannot bear, but rather muster the courage to turn things around. Divakaruni has presented Korobi as an impression of today’s youth. Today’s youth have a practical approach towards life. They want to make a change in their lives but lack the courage to do so. They always talk about the attitude of society, religious and political issues, and they usually get quite agitated discussing their predicaments. Well, it seems that the discussion is not the means but the end. Evidently, no actions accrue from these verbal outbursts. They simply throw up their hands in



despair over what they cannot tolerate. They comprehend everything; they acknowledge that things are reprehensible, but they leave unfazed, without any feeling of guilt or irresponsibility for their inaction. Being vocal about the wrong things is not enough. The need of the hour is to act for the change we require. Divakaruni's characters have that endurance to leave their perfect life for a greater good, in search of truth.

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