

Exploration of ‘self’ in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni

Dr.K.K.Sunalini¹

Associate Professor¹, Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation
Green Fields, Vaddeswaram, Guntur Guntur -522 302, Andhra Pradesh India

P. Venkata Ramana²

Research Scholar², Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation
Green Fields, Vaddeswaram, Guntur Guntur -522 302, Andhra Pradesh India

Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the interpretation of Indianness through the characterization of protagonists in her novels. The present paper aims to focus the unfolding struggles that women faced in her novels in various aspects.’ Identity of self ‘is one of the prominent diasporic elements that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni exposes in a brighter way was really admirable. She has provided a never ending platform to the woman characters from voiceless to voice. *The Mistress of Spices* is one of the unique novel in which she gives life to inanimate objects like fenugreek, Turmeric, Zeera etc., as if they were real characters. This type of characterization speaks of her greatness in depicting the inanimate objects in such a way that the reader feels her writings inspired the folk with an enigmatic sense. ”Oleander girl” is another outstanding novel of chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in which she clearly explores the concept of identity in a well-established way.

Key words: Identity, Indianness, Diaspora, Exploration

Introduction

‘Identity’ is one of the prominent concepts of Diaspora. Diasporas are defined as people who have left their homelands to settle in strange countries. As migrated to other countries, referred themselves as migrants, they need to seek support and protect themselves along with representing their culture with communicating positively to the host culture is the

prioritized one. Thus this research article examines and explores the concept of ‘self’ which gives lot of exploration for the post-colonial discomforts of the migrated Indians. Along with the concept of identity of ‘self’, the migrated Indians wandered for self-alienation with respect to represent culture, other social and personal prejudices. Most of the time migrants are influenced by the family, society and religious beliefs of an individual. Thus diasporic writers are those which are concerned zealously producing and reproducing the migrants with a new form through the process of transmission.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one among the diasporic writers who made an ineradicable impression on the literary world with her first novel *The Mistress of Spices*. She has portrayed almost all her characters in her select works. The two novels have their own significance in putting their efforts to transform their attitudes in order to stabilize themselves as the better one’s in society. This was an advantageous transformation in which the writer shows through the novels to make a strong nation and helps them to create their own identity in the contest of Diaspora.

Self-Projection

Identity is the projection of oneself. In her most selected novel “The mistress of spices” Divakaruni portrays the female characters especially the character of the protagonist named Tilo in a dauntless way. She is a business woman who came from India to Oakland and runs a spice bazaar. She assists customers with fulfilling their requirements and wants with the other worldly properties of flavors. She possessed with the magical powers to see deep in to the minds and hearts of the people in the Oakland. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows the racism in America here through the interactions that her protagonist made with fellow clients who visited spice bazaar very often. Divakaruni presents every aspect in this enchanted fable upon the fault line in American society that lies between self and the community (Divakaruni, 2005).

She portrayed the character of the protagonist, Tilo in a way that how concernedly she offers spices in order to cure diseases of the folk over there. While she is offering spices to the people of Oakland she explores the significance of each spice in the Indian context. This shows how she is giving importance to motherland. It depicts not only giving prominence to mother land but also struggle for making her own identity. Here there was a point to note that Divakaruni named each chapter of the novel, a spice. She specks her struggle for

existence through the voice of each spice. Tilo meets some people who help her in various aspects. She applies magical powers on Lalitha, Ahuja and Geetha (Divakaruni, 2005). When she happens to treat customers, she used to ask questions relevant to their problems. Thus she projects herself as a very amiable person towards the clients as they firmly believe that she is Tilo, the great lady cures everything with ease. This is all to quest for identity and self. Tilo learns the indulgences of flavors and shipped off Oakland. Tilo is a healer and spice seller and through her psychic forces she analyzes her multiethnic and multigenerational customers' physical and mystic disease with the assistance of her mystery flavors. During the time spent this treatment, she creates problems of her own when she falls in love with a non-Indian Raven.

The Oleander Girl

The Oleander Girl by Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni is a beautiful tale and a powerful exploration of family secrets, betrayal, love and ultimately, the search for self. Divakaruni paints colorful characters on a rich tapestry of modern India, all still haunted by the past. After all the search around the world she found her father alive in North-America and the story ends with a happy note of a marriage ceremony of Korobi with Rajat (Divakaruni, 2013).

Divakaruni through this book offers up much of the content that makes this genre so likable and readable. Korobi Roy is the granddaughter of a famous lawyer, Bimal Prasad Roy, and along with his wife, Sarojini, has raised Korobi after the death of her mother, Anu, in childbirth. She is told from a young age that her father also died in an accident, so she is an orphan. However, after her engagement to Rajat Bose, the dashing Bengali James Dean, the myth of her childhood is shattered when she learns that her father may still be alive, living in America. So her journey starts in search of her father and where she belongs to. After their engagement, however, a sudden heart attack kills Korobi's grandfather, revealing serious financial problems and a devastating secret about Korobi's past. Shattered by this discovery and by her grandparents' betrayal, Korobi decides to undertake a courageous search across post-9/11 America to find her true identity. Her dramatic, often startling journey will ultimately thrust her into the most difficult decision of her life.

Korobi starts her search in America to find out her father. In order to know her parentage she moved all the way from her mother land to other land. Here Divakaruni clearly

explores the struggles faced by korobi to get her own identity. Divakaruni says in her interview given to suneetha Balakrishnan that the novel has a great significance to her, “It symbolizes for me the hero’s journey in search of self. It brings together America and India. It examines religious violence. It underlines the importance of loving coexistence in today’s multicultural world (Barker, 2004). It is also important to me because it explores the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, and that is a relationship that has meant a lot to me (Divakaruni, 2013).

Thus Divakaruni explains her own agony comparatively with the consequences during the times that America has undergone with regard to racism. Divakaruni, in different ways, has empowered her character korobi. She goes through the changing phases of her identity accepting the turbulences with strength and courage. Through the protagonist, named korobi Divakaruni makes an important point that the changing phases contribute to flexible concept of identity. By her landing in America she started facing challenges on her way to find out her father. Staying in America for a period while in the part of searching her father makes korobi a strong woman fight for identity. Korobi’s journey in search of her parentage makes her facing many hurdles. She has faced the real, cruel world. Her projection of inner self on her way in finding of her father presented by Divakaruni in an extraordinary way. Whatever the challenge came to her way she is controlled and focuses solely on searching for her father. This is all to get identity of her. She has been protected and guarded by her grandparents all her life.

Korobi enjoyed grand parentage at her native place. But all of a sudden when she came out to find her father she started struggling to find her identity and existence. She started struggling physically and financially too. She goes with very much limited money with unfriendly mitra. She is always feeling lonely and alienation that she has come this far away from her own people. Through the condition of karobi in native America Divakaruni presents how far a girl suffered from the identity crises. 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 (Gavani,2011). When she needs money, she decides to sell her hair. The loss of hair makes her more liberated and confident. Through Korobi Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl*, she leaves a message to all the girls that living with the truth is the most significant thing in life, and to get this truth, one has to

have the courageous attitude to face the challenges in life. One should not compromise the situations and gave up their hands in despair over things they cannot bear, but rather should have 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 can't be serious about relationships around.

Transcultural voyage in the works of Divakaruni in search of self

Korobi's journey to California to find her father was a transcultural voyage that she undertakes; to not only locate her father but also to determine her own identity too. This types of journey leads to transformations, as one is to expand to new cultural habitats from which they can learn new lessons (Barker, 2004). It is necessary that one has to observe keenly the shades of social behaviour of the new place and try to establish cordial relationships with others which pave the way for good and effective communication. Coming to the mistress of spices, Tilo the protagonist after acquiring the magical powers she came to North America (Oakland) and runs a spice bazaar. She is called a transcultural person who will always be willing to cross boundaries in spreading their culture and accepting the shades of other cultures . Tilo meets there people with different cultural backgrounds in her shop, it is not only indian who came to visit the store but also many other people from various cultures very often visits in order find there a cultural space with the help of spices (Barker, 2004)..

Discussion

In both *The Mistress of Spices* and *The Oleander Girl*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni intricately weaves narratives that details about the complex theme of 'Projection of self' and the pursuit of identity. In "The Mistress of Spices," the protagonist Tilo, a determined businesswoman in Oakland with mystical abilities, serves as a lens through which Divakaruni explores racial dynamics in American society. Tilo's magical powers, coupled with her role as a spice seller, reflect her deep connection to her Indian roots. Divakaruni uses the naming of chapters after spices to symbolize Tilo's struggle for existence and identity, portraying her as a transcultural figure crossing boundaries to spread her culture.

Similarly, *The Oleander Girl* introduces Korobi, whose journey takes her from India to America in search of her father. Divakaruni paints Korobi as a resilient character facing the challenges of discovering her true identity. The sudden revelations about her family's past shatter the myths of her childhood, leading her on a courageous quest across post-9/11

America. Korobi's physical and financial struggles in America, including the decision to sell her hair, symbolize her determination to face challenges head-on in the pursuit of truth and identity. Divakaruni presents Korobi as a reflection of contemporary youth, emphasizing the importance of a practical approach to life and the courage to confront difficult situations.

In both novels, Divakaruni explores the protagonists' transcultural voyages as transformative experiences. Tilo's spice bazaar in "The Mistress of Spices" becomes a cultural melting pot, attracting people from various backgrounds seeking a connection through spices. Similarly, Korobi's journey to California in *The Oleander Girl* represents a transcultural voyage, where she not only seeks her father but also endeavors to define her own identity. These narratives underscore the significance of observing and adapting to new cultural habitats, fostering connections, and learning from diverse experiences. In essence, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, through these compelling stories, offers profound insights into the intricacies of self-discovery and identity in the face of transcultural challenges.

Conclusion

In both her pioneering works Divakaruni explores the identity of self through the voice of the protagonist. Thus the journeys taken by the protagonists through the cross cultural boundaries help to redefine themselves. Hence the author succeeded the experiment that the coalescing of diverse cultures took a root cause to create new concept in the post-colonial literature. Both the protagonists struggled to combine cultural values of the countries India & America in enriching their identities was really appreciable and admirable.

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