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## JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

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ISSN: 1305-578X

*Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3298-3301; 2021

### **Korobi As A Troubled Spirit In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Oleander Girl**

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**APA Citation:**

Ravikumar, K., Sait, M.S., Prabakar, K., (2021). Korobi As A Troubled Spirit In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Oleander Girl , *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3298-3301; 2021.

Submission Date: 25/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 20/12/2021

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines the portrayal of diasporic identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl* through the lens of modern critical approaches to diaspora. It is maintained that, beyond its concentration on the poetics and politics of colonialism, postcolonial literature is venturing into diasporic dynamism to the degree that contemporary fiction within its scope may be considered diasporic literature to a large extent. *Oleander Girl* by Divakaruni traces the message of identity crises. The novel questions national, religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural roots as determinants of identity. In the process, the notion of multiplicity ingrained in one's identity, rather than the illusion of any solitary identity, has been proposed. In her work *Oleander Girl*, Divakaruni represents inspiring female characters and reveals the height and depth of feminine strength across generations. It is a narrative of love, grief, discovery, and the ultimate quest for self.

**Keywords:** Identity, Multiplicity, Quest for self, Diaspora, Postcolonial, etc.,

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**Korobi as a Troubled Spirit in Divakaruni's Oleander Girl:**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni holds a prominent position in the current Indian Diaspora as a keen observer of the lives of Indians, particularly Bengali women, in the United States of America. She depicts the struggle, rootlessness, and worry of the Indian diaspora, as well as the adaptation and integration of foreign cultures. Traditions in their land imprison Indian ladies physically and emotionally, yet they face overwhelming experiences in a different land. Divakaruni beautifully depicts how expatriate women are born with the feminine capacity to relate to two homes at the same time. They use knowledge and compassion to understand two distinct civilizations, Indian and American. They combine the finest of both cultures and therefore mend the rift. According to Jasbir Jain "Indian women, writers adopt the strategy of

foregrounding the female body as they try to handle the problems of communicating a cultural inheritance and creating space for construction or recovery of a self” (Jain 139).

*Oleander Girl*, like earlier works by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, cleverly explores diasporic awareness. In the guise of Korobi, a seventeen-year-old girl, she has conveyed cross-cultural understanding and the search for identity in a strange nation with amazing dexterity. Korobi, the little girl, is called after the Oleander flower in Bengali. Oleander blossoms are lovely, yet many believe them to be the most harmful plant in the world. As interviewed by Debby Derosa, Divakaruni was asked about using this particular flower and its importance in the story. She responded, “The Oleander seems to be the perfect symbol for the book on many levels. It is ambitious positive and negative, beautiful and dangerous and capable of protecting itself” (Times of India, May 6 2013).

In terms of their characteristics, men and women are primarily different from one another. Men are perceived as being hardworking, uniform, logical, forceful, independent, and proud; none of these traits are easily correlated with nature. Women are viewed as domestic, religious, moral, pure, kind, elegant, simple, and lovely, and nature is thought to be the epitome of all the qualities that women possess. According to ecofeminists, this relationship is demonstrated by the fact that both women and the environment exhibit the typically feminine virtues of reciprocity, caring, and cooperation. Through their shared history of being oppressed by a patriarchal society, women and the environment are also severed from one another. Vandana Shiva, in her book ‘Stay Alive’ claims that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions and this connection has been ignored. She says:

Women in substance economies, producing and reproducing wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of a holistic and ecological knowledge of nature’s processes. But their alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to social benefits and sustenance needs, are not recognized by the reduction, interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women’s lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth. (23).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni beautifully portrays strong female characters in her novel “*Oleander Girl*”, elucidating the breadth and depth of female strength across generational lines. It tells the tale of love, loss, self-discovery, and the ultimate quest for love. Her grandpa Bimal Roy, who controls all choices for the home and determines what is good and bad, is to blame for the loss and the search for identity. His wife Sarojini, his daughter Anu, and his granddaughter Korobi, who stand in for nature, are suppressed by him, representing the patriarchal system. Third-generation Korobi begins howling and melts herself into a new shape.

Throughout her life, Sarojini has been a subpar partner. She isn't consulted and Bimal doesn't take her advice seriously. Sarojini weeps as Bimal refuses therapy while he is in the hospital, “All my life he’s plagued me with his stubbornness! He ordered the nurses to get out”. (39-40) Bimal Sarojini in the middle. She does not know to think and lead the rest life. She sees Bimal’s image in the mirror and mourns, “Tell me! All my life you insisted on making the decisions until forgets how to think for myself. And then you leave me like this?” (44) She simply cared about what he wanted and obeyed him despite her conscience protesting. When Anu disobeys Bimal, he puts Sarojini under his control so that she says inappropriate things. “He insisted that I too, swear not to contact her. When I protested that I couldn’t do that to my only child, he told me that in that case, he would send me to live by myself in his ancestral village” (58).

Bimal destroys all of Anu’s images and switches her phone number. The patriarchal belief system values “masculine” skills of reason and analysis while labelling ‘feminine’ intuitive and emotional traits as

passive, weak, illogical, and hence inferior. Bimal dislikes Sarojini because she is passive. She reveals to Korobi:

Every day when your grandfather was at work, I wept, certain that I would never see Anu again. But I said nothing to him. That was the way I has been brought up. If he noticed my swollen eyes when he came home, he said nothing, either. Perhaps that was the way he had been brought up. (59)

The story focuses on 17-year-old Korobi Roy, who had an expensive life in Kolkata with her grandparents. However, she is determined to use her mother's unfinished love letter to reveal the mystery surrounding the identities of her parents. In a collection of poems, she discovers. She learns later in the book that her parents' love marriage went against the advice of her elders since it did not follow tradition. Raminderpal Kaur in his article entitled "Female Quest for Identity by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, with special reference to *Oleander Girl*" voices Divakaruni's prominence of female characters and their individuality in her novel *Oleander Girl*. The novel centres on the lead character Korobi Roy who deserves everything which an ordinary Indian girl longs for but struggles to find her identity after becoming aware of her migration to America in search of her father and past history.

The protagonist of the novel is a little girl named Korobi who was abandoned at birth and has always questioned why her mother gave her the name of a stunning but lethal plant. The tale about family, marriage, and class is amusing yet intensely well-written. Korobi is raised in Kolkata by her renowned and irascible grandfather, a famous and depressing lawyer, and her kind and melancholy grandma. The loss of their daughter causes her grandparents much suffering. Korobi is a modest, smart, and unworldly college student when she meets wealthy, stylish, and jaded Rajat. Abandoning his adoring friends Rajat proposes to quite Korobi, who feels as though she has stepped into a fairy tale, showing us to expect tragedy. But there is no anticipating the complexities and implications of the crises and obstacles Korobi and Rajat face in light of Korobi's resolute quest for the truth about her father. Subhra Roy, in her article, portrays Korobi's character reasonably. She states, "While in America, with numerous allurements around her, Korobi oversees not to surrender to them however, she understands her opposing self better" ( Roy, 65).

In reality, Korobi's personality represents a triumph over the divisions and chasms that mankind has wrought in this planet. She is a devout representation of her parents' love, Rob and Anu. Korobi is the epitome of success; it takes guts to choose to embrace the truth over a lie, bravery over fear, acceptance over despair, and compassion over narrow ideas. Rajat embraces Korobi's status as a person of mixed race and the terrible reality of her illegitimate paternity with a big heart, and Grandma lets Korobi discover the truth about her parent's relationship. Referring to Korobi's identity he says these aren't even your problems they are just the circumstances you were hand. Royat's parents too after a substantial battle with their conditioning finally appreciate the courage, honesty and simplicity of Korobi and find contentment in their union. Their bond is appreciated by Sheik Rehman allow who realizes that some bonds were stronger even than religion.

Whatever Korobi does, she thinks of her grandfather and his reaction toward her. Rayat's mother buys a sleeveless Kurta for Korobi, which she has to wear for the party. Korobi likes the gift but she is worried about her grandfather because Bimal likes her to wear only saris. Korobi says "But once home, I lost my nerve and hid it in the almirah behind a stack of cotton saris. From time to time, I imagined with a mix of horror and pride what grandfather's reaction would be when he saw me in it" (18).

Korobi is bold enough to question Bimal, but he takes his age as an advantage and operates her in all ways. He fixes her marriage within three months without consulting her. Hearing this her heart knocks about like a caught bird. She resists because of the respect she has for her grandfather. She whispers, "worry

pricks me, and I swallow my anger for the moment. I'll let him rest". (23) Bimal never cares about hurting others and speaks badly in temper when he dislikes Korobi's part dress, he comments, "she looks like a call girl". (28) This makes her explode back. Also, he clears whatever interrupts his path. He informs Korobi's father that Anu and the child have died during the delivery and to Korobi that her father has died in an accident. She realizes the status of her grandmother and proclaims: "Now that I was calmer, I could see how impossible it would have been for her to stand up against grandfather. His will, which I had always thought of as protecting and supporting me, in this case, have been an avalanche, cursing everything in its path" (69).

At last, the brave Korobi goes to America in search of her father and finds him by encountering various problems. The betrayal and the rage inside her make her roar and achieve her goal of crossing the hurdles. She melts and transforms herself by overcoming the pusillanimous existence of women. She redefines herself stating, "I am Korobi, Oleander, capable of surviving drought and frost and loss of love". (274-275)

#### CONCLUSION :

Every migrant is aware about the other side of the experience until now he or she chooses to travel. Chitra Divakaruni represents her own experience of migration in utmost of her works. Her novels delineate Indian experiences, contemporary American life style, history, myth, and the challenges of living in a multicultural world. In *Oleander girl* she skilfully illustrates that how Indian society plays a major role in creating an identity of a person and further putting her in situation where she faces her own identity crisis. She successfully displays Indian society which witnesses Indianness in her writing. In addition to this, Identity Crisis is experienced by Korobi, due to patriarchal society and migration to other land. Korobi has passed through different stages to attain in her own way a sense of fulfillment. Here it is tried to examine the elements of struggle for existence and identity crisis in the selected novel. Therefore, it can be recapitulated that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has very well knitted the theme of search for identity and struggle for existence of Korobi in *Oleander girl*, which comes out of her own Diaspora experience.

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