Chapter - I

Introduction

Indian Writing in English has a relatively recent history, for it is only one and a half centuries old. It enhanced its growth in the beginning of the twentieth century. The English people who invaded several parts of the world started their colonies in India also. This paved the way for the growth of English Literature in Indian soil. Epics, Lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables existed in our country as literary forms even many centuries before the Britishers’ arrival in India. But novel as a literary genre is new to India. Novel showed its face in formal prose form and slowly emerged as an artistic form. Translation of western classics followed by the novels marked the beginning of the novel era. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian.

The novel emerged on the Indian English literary scene during British colonization in India. The impact of westernization and industrialization are predominant in the Indian English literature during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The novelists not only
demonstrate a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively evince an intensely felt Indian sensibility and a new consciousness.

Indian English literature contains the theme of the Post-colonial period. The writers, who belong to this period, mostly concentrate on the social awareness, East-West confrontation and search for roots. However, a post-colonial sensibility was felt only in the 1960s, marked by an expression of the private voice. As Meenakshi Mukherjee explains, "The fiction of this period has turned introspective and the individual's quest for a personal meaning in life has become a theme of urgent interest for the Indian English writer (204)."

The worldwide dispersion of South Asian people from countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is now a sociologically acknowledged phenomenon known as the South Asian diaspora. Multiple immigrations from South Asia and Africa to Europe and the United States, and multiculturalism are essential facts of dispersion of such magnitude and dimension. Despite, being the fourth largest Asian American community, South Asian diasporics, as a group, have largely been overlooked by historians and social scientists in the United States.
This forced invisibility is now being contested by contemporary South Asian writers, many of whom have made their homes in North America in the post-1965 immigration era. Although on the peripheries of mainstream culture, the diaspora can provide an empowered space. It produces subversive narratives which complicate questions of American and South Asian identity. In his essay, *Dissemination*, Homi Bhabha writes:

The boundary that secures the cohesive limits of the western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious internal luminosity providing a place from which to speak, both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent. (9)

It is this location that is being turned into an advantage and new waves of writings, articulating the concerns of the minority, are coming out of the South Asian diaspora. Several anthologies representing new and familiar voices are trying to define the contours of the imagined communities of the South Asians which, given their diversity in language, class, customs, sexuality, is a challenging task.

The commitment and the political stances of the millennium writers, who have just burst into the
literary scene in North America, differ from the earlier generation of expatriate writers including Raja Rao, Santha Rama Rao, Anita Desai and even Bharathi Mukherjee. They do not carry their India with them wherever they go; neither do their characters blend into the American melting pot with miraculous ease. The term expatriate can be defined in the words of Chirstine Gomez:

Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion, which includes a wishful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself, and the new, unfriendly surroundings, and assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forced on one by the environment. (72)

Post-colonial fiction is free from social and political implications of a nationalistic variety. It has concerned with the human society and explores the problems faced by the man in the twentieth century. The Indian English novels reflect the subtleties and complexities of contemporary Indian life. The writers
of this period shifted their thoughts from public sector to private sector of individuals by delving deeper into individuals psyche.

The Indian literature in English recorded a drastic development in all literary genres. The freedom fighters used literature as their voice to express their rebellious, and thought provoking ideas against the ruling Government. Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru are some notable nationalist writers. Fiction being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indo-English literature.

Despite its delayed entry, it has evolved as the dominant literary form in the twentieth century, it is commonly accepted that the novel is the acceptable way of embodying the experiences and idea in the context of our time. The Post-colonial literature refers to the literary works emerged during the Indian independence. The Post-colonial 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 post-colonial writings.
Literature is a creative art where its primary aim is to portray the social consciousness that prevails during a period of time. The Indian-English fiction in Post-colonial India has assumed over the preceding forty years all kinds of colourful traditions. Literature defines two types of relationships, namely man-woman relationship, human beings relationship with the universe. These relationships are artistically revealed and reflected with reality in most of the fictions. Indian novelists had felt the responsibility of bringing these relationships, which included the image of woman in relation to man. Komarovsky observes thus:

Both men and women authors of India saw women in different perspectives. They discussed the different roles played by women. The intellectuals observed Indian society as a male dominated society. Here the women have very little options to take up. They are grown up with a submissive nature inculcated in them even from their childhood. (160)

In Komarovsky's words to be born a woman means to inhabit from early infancy to the last day of life a psychological world which differs from the world of men.
They never rebelled against the actions of the male-dominated society. The Indian woman accepted, and adapted herself to the demanding circumstances. She was never recognized as a person and her ideas were never identified. She was deprived of opportunities to prove her individuality. She was constantly reminded about her commitment to the forthcoming family and her husband. Thus the society refused to give equal rights to the women folk. So, Indian women were examples for dependent figures, depending on father, husband or the society.

The Western impact brought a drastic change among the women in India. Feministic movements took a new dimension as a result of the Western impact. New definitions were given to feminism. Chaman Nahal defines the feministic movements thus:

I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (30)

The position of women underwent a metamorphosis. The present day feminist’s thought seeks to destroy
masculinity hierarchy but not sexual dualism. Indian Independence in 1947 marked the beginning for this change. Changes and revolutions took place in all walks of life and women too advanced to acquire their own identity in the society. The Post-colonial India laid a great stress on women's education. Women-education endorsed refinement of their role in family and society. Women's higher education inculcated confidence and they emerged successfully in all walks of life. They started proving their individuality and showed their best selves in all emerging fields.

The concept of feminism and feminist movement from the West brought these drastic changes in the women society. Women were no longer treated as a property. Nayantra Sahgal, the noted Indian novelist, strongly condemns those who regard women as property:

When I heard someone remark, we never allow our daughters to go out or I can't do that, my husband would not like it, it sounded a very peculiar, alien jargons as if, I thought, women were property and not persons. (220)

This kind of awakening among the women writers has helped them to project women as the image of new era.
Most of the women in India desired to accept this radical change and they tried to distinguish themselves from the conventional side. Not only had the women in the society but also their families also undergone the process of social change. These changes naturally affected the man-woman relationship on the whole. The social changes in India brought significant changes in the structure of families and relationships. The feminist movements made women confident and independent. Literature played a vital role in defining the image of woman and the man-woman relationship. Literature has become the medium of communications which expresses these changes through its characters.

The woman novelists of 1960's and 1970's concentrated on the complex problems of women, namely their career, motherhood, marriage, sexual and economic freedom. The battle of women's freedom has not ended triumphantly. The women writers are still deeply concerned with the problems of the women. They write necessarily for women, but this does not mean that it is anti-men. They have brought out the victories as well as the defeats of the women folk through their artistic works. In this instance, it will be relevant to discuss some of the Post-colonial women authors, who
deal with the plight of Indian women, caged in foreign countries as immigrants.

Apart from the feminist ideologies there are other subjects that take prominent place in the novels of woman novelists. The immigrant experiences are greatly touched by the contemporary woman writers as many of them are immigrant themselves. This helped the writers greatly in bringing out their immigrant experiences effectively. Most of the contemporary writers have attempted to focus these problems in their novels.

Young, avant-garde, provocative and born in India, Divakaruni uses English as her first language. Her works, focus on the brief succinct images of women caught between the values of two worlds--old and the new--how women cope with cross-cultural relationships, and how they ultimately try to achieve self-esteem and autonomy denied to them within their own somewhat insular and bigoted community. Divakaruni locates her texts at the troubled intersection of female subjectivity and national identities. Her stories provide a spectrum of feminist resistances in the Diaspora. They are part of a complex effort at creating a space for a female subject where she can articulate her desires.
Divakaruni's books, which are set in both India and America, “feature Indian born women” torn between old and new world values. She gives an in-depth insight to her stories, plots, and lyrical description to give the readers a many-layered look at her characters and their respective worlds, which are filled with fear, hope, and a quest for self identity. Most of her work is partially autobiographical and based on the lives of Indian immigrants she has dealt with. She says that she writes to help unite people by breaking down the old stereotypes.

Divakaruni's writing relates to Asian American aesthetics because of the fact that she not only is of Asian descent but she incorporates Asian traditions in writing such as the roles women as portrayed throughout Asian history and today in society. Women are seen as people who cook, clean, and follow rules that are demonstrated by men. Divakaruni puts a little twist in pieces of her writing. She demonstrates characters that want to break away, lead their own lives, and facilitate a sense of bravery that most women are unwilling, hesitant to encounter.

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. Not that she is writing to fulfil her passions, but to tune the reader into her personal life as well. 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.

Before she began her career in writing fiction, Divakaruni was an acclaimed poet. She writes poems encompassing a wide variety of themes, and she directs much focus on the immigrant experience and to South Asian women. She shows the experiences and struggles involved in women trying to find their own identities.

While Divakaruni explores many different richly descriptive storytelling forms, her subject remains steady. She is centrally concerned with giving shape to South Asian women's lives in a gendered India and the United States. Living in San Francisco, Divakaruni works as a writer to express a more complexly contoured politics of the oppressed and also, within her South Asian community, to improve the living conditions of women.
Indian English fiction had wandered at the verge of being and was appeased with the depiction of the outward existence of man. In broader sense, socio-political issues come to light from the altered historical perception of the country had led the Indian English novelists to scan the relation of man and his surroundings in a realistic way. But when the protagonists of Divakaruni’s novels begin to confess their soul-sickness and trace their distressed soul-searching, they lead the readers into a deep concern with the self.

The passionate self-exploration and burning quest for self-discovery in terms of the Indian past lie at the centre of Divakaruni’s contribution to Post-colonial Indian fiction in English. In an age when religious faith fades away and man feels culturally uprooted and socially alienated from the society, Divakaruni’s choice and treatment of subjects might be modern but she draws strength from the deep well of her cultural heritage.

Marriage" (1996) and "The Unknown Errors of Our Lives" (2001) are very popular among women.

Divakaruni’s concept on feminism has been put forth by other writers too, like Elaine Showalter who describes the three stages of woman’s struggle- 'Female, Feminine, and Feminism’. Divakuruni moves from feminist, womanist to humanist. But that also calls for a redefinition, a redefining in ideological terms of humanism to become a category which does not demand the price of submerging gender differences or placing them in a hierarchical relationship but valuing them are of equal importance.

The day Divakaruni came to the U.S. from Calcutta in 1976, at the age of nineteen cannot be erased from her mind easily. When she was walking down the streets of Chicago with some relatives, wearing a saree, some teenagers called them 'nigger' and threw slush at them. “That was such a shock to me, I realized that people didn't know who we were” (25). Although she kept quiet about the incident, it tormented her soul spurring her to write. “I never talked to anyone about it. I felt ashamed. Writing was a way to go beyond the silence” (26).

The Indian experience in America and the conflict between the traditions of her homeland and the culture
of her adopted country is the focus of much of Divakaruni's writing and it has made her an emerging literary celebrity. We come to know that Divakaruni drew her inspiration mainly from the Indian epics like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. She writes that as a child her grandfather would tell her stories from the epics. She loved to hear about the valiant deeds of warrior heroes like Rama and Krishna, their magical weapons, the enormous bows and the powerful chakras. They were human heroes too, the prince Arjun, the greatest archer in the world and Krishna's best friend, and Guha, the tribal chieftain who loved Rama with all his heart. "Their friendships ... unselfish, devoted, noble were meant to inspire us to similar emotions" (22), adds Divakaruni.

She was even impressed with the great women of the epics like Sita Devi, Draupadi, Queen Kunti Devi, and Shabari. All these women devoted their lives to the wish of the men. Interestingly, unlike the male heroes, the main relationships these women had with the opposite sex i.e their husbands, sons, lovers or opponents. They never had any important woman friends.

"The aloneness of the epic heroines seemed strange to me even as a child, I could see this was not how women
around me lived” writes Divakaruni (108). Perhaps in rebellion against such thinking, “I find myself focusing my writing on friendships with women, and trying to balance them with the conflicting passions and demands that come to us as daughters and wives, lovers and mothers.” Friendships are at the heart of stories such as “Affair”, where the protagonist suspects her best friend of having an affair with her husband and is deeply hurt by the fact that her friend has chosen not to confide in her. In “Meeting Mrinal”, the protagonist meets her best friend and competitor from childhood after many years but does not know whether or not to tell her about her broken marriage. She says,

I didn't really see my culture until I came to America and discovered what it meant to be woman of colour in the U.S. This gave me the impetus to write, to explore new identities. Badly and tentatively I began writing early poems, you think I'm being modest but I'm not. I destroyed those sentimental and bad poems recently so no archivist could find them. Coming to America for me was an amazing experience that began to change me from the minute I sat in the airplane, but the
experience took years to process I was full of fear, excitement, opportunity I have been waiting for now for almost 20 years but I still make discoveries. (22)

Those discoveries and explorations are collected in a book of short stories published in 1995 entitled “Arranged Marriage.” The conflict between the traditions of her homeland and the culture of her adopted country is the focus of much of Divakaruni’s writing, and it has made her an emerging literary celebrity. “Arranged Marriage” won the American Book Award. Divakaruni's writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women. She says:

Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them, women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships, I want people to relate my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to (be) prejudiced when they meet them in real life. (26-27)

Her interest in women began after she left India for the U.S.A. where she came to re-evaluate the treatment of women there. Divakaruni was greatly inspired by the works of Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhri and Rohinton
Mistry. “It's as though we're all dealing with the same world but seeing it from very different angles” (29), says Divakaruni. Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* has had a great influence on her. “I learnt a lot about technique and characterization from that novel particularly” (30), adds Divakaruni.

Divakaruni is influenced by Virginia Woolf and her idea of “A Room of One’s Own” for women. The influences can be seen in her stories when women are creating their own rooms. Mahesweta Devi, an Indian feminist writer who wrote about women's issues long before it became fashionable or political to do so, has been a wonderful role model for her. Divakaruni says, “I look up to her enormously. She’s in her seventies and still writing” (39). But a lot of women from different traditions have also influenced her. When she started writing, she felt that she did not have the confidence in her. So reading Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, was a big moment in her life. She has also admired Sandra Cisneros and Louise Erdrich immensely. They gave her inspiration to write.

Her book “Arranged Marriage” is all about women from India caught between two worlds. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the character Tilo provides spices, not only
for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants experience. She writes to unite people and she does this by destroying myths and stereotypes. As she breaks down these barriers, she dissolves boundaries between peoples of different backgrounds, communities, ages, and even different worlds.

Arranged Marriage and her novel The Mistress of Spices are both highly acclaimed works by Divakaruni. Few writers speak about hyphenated American experience more gracefully and accurately than Divakaruni. This gracefulness has been amply applied in Arranged Marriage. Divakaruni beautifully narrates stories about immigrant brides who are both liberated and trapped by cultural changes. But they are struggling to carve out an identity of their own.

In one story, “Doors”, the character Preeti, after moving to the US, has come to love Western idea of privacy. She faces a dilemma when her husband's cousin wants to come and live with them. She expresses her discontent with the situation, which shows her newfound decisiveness and her fight against her husband's view of a traditional Indian wife.
In another story, “Clothes”, the husband of the narrator, Sunita, dies and she is faced with the decision of staying in America or going back to India to live with her in-laws. Sunita calls widows who are serving their in-laws in India as “doves with cut off wings” (120). Divakaruni deals with a variety of issues in the book including racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion, and divorce. She says that the stories are inspired by her imagination and the experiences of others.

Divakaruni’s novel, *Sister of My Heart* is about the lives of two women and how they are changed by marriage, as one comes to California and the other stays behind in India. In an all-women household, the women shouldering all the responsibilities, there is no way for any compromise till the girls get married. While the husband of one of the girls likes the other, things do not remain the same between the two sisters. Marriage separates them—one in America and the other in India, trying to reconcile with their fate. There is not much of happiness for one of them as she is harassed in her in-laws house. The other sister on realizing that there is no love lost between them tries to bring her to America. And in the end, they form a united bond
not to be separated by any force unaware of what their future holds for them.

_The Vine of Desire_ (2002) continues the story of the two friends. The problems the two women confront after their marriages have been well depicted in this novel. Divakaruni is also the editor of _Multitudes_, an anthology she uses in her own classroom. She states about the book, "I didn't want to sacrifice quality, and (the stories) focus on problem solving, not just how terrible things are" (82). The anthology includes stories about communication styles across cultures, expectations of friendships, the Los Angeles riots, and prejudice against gay people. The book contains works by a variety of authors, and some are even by her own students. Divakaruni's collection, "Leaving Yuba City" is unique because it includes a series of poems based on and inspired by various art forms, including paintings by Francesco Clemente, photographs by Raghubir Singh, and specific Indian films, such as _Salaam Bombay_. With these poems, Divakaruni once again shows how boundaries can be destroyed, as she illustrates how different art forms are not independent entities, but how they can, in fact, influence each other.
Moving away from novels probing immigrant women's lives, Divakaruni has published two books for young readers. *The Conch Bearer* (2003) is a literary fiction of the highest order. Action adventure and magic combine in this compelling quest fantasy that whisks readers to a far away land and to a reading experience they would not soon forget. *Neela: Victory Song* (2002), her first children's book is part of the *Girls of Many Land* series, featuring books and dolls based on young girls from various historical periods and cultural traditions.

Divakaruni's first book of poetry, “The Reason to Nasturtiums” (1990), was published by the Berkeley Poets Co-op Press in 1990. At this time, Divakaruni was teaching at Foothill College, and also became active in women's issues in the Bay Area. She started out volunteering at shelters in the East Bay and working with Afghani woman refugees and women from disfunctional families. “I saw that a lot of problems stemmed from issues of domestic violence” (2).

As Divakaruni began to write more short stories, fiction, her literary career took form fairly quickly. Her first book was sold to the publisher with only three stories done. Divakaruni illuminates the transformations of personal landscapes, real and imagined, brought
about by the choices men and women make at every stage of their lives. At Berkley, she volunteered at a women's centre and became interested in helping battered women.

Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire* (2002) expresses the story of two friends and their quest for identity, freedom and social and economical progress. *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. Divakaruni's two novels, *The Vine of Desire* (2002) and *Queen of Dreams* (2005) reveal the conflict between traditions and cultures of their places of adoption as well as of their homelands.

Though Divakaruni deals with a wide variety of themes in most of her novels in her *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams*, she analyses the anxiety, sense of dislocation and relocation of the protagonists. Racism, inter-racial relationships, economic disparity, social oppression, and divorce are among the other themes that she usually deals with.

Divakaruni's novels deal with the problems of the growing number of individuals in the Third world countries. She delves deep into the intricate, confused
souls also. Yet in a very simple manner she throws the characters into relief, and, she lays bare their very souls. These characters move in unfamiliar surrounding and quest for identity and economic progress. Their lives are however torn apart by an undercurrent of deep pain, fear, anxiety, and intense uncertainty. Divaruni builds the stories by revealing the relationships that stand out in contrast, and the intense emotional trauma reaches a climatic point to end on a positive note.

However, her novels are received not without any discontent; Vijay Prasad writes in *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2000), “There is little sense of the complex protect of cultural production from multiple lineage” (77). His concern about the death of representations of cultural synthesis is directed toward South-Asian Americans to the Second generation and beyond. But Divakaruni identifies herself with the multiplicity of cultural inheritances and practices, when “America” and “India” are so often positioned as strict binaries. She always emphasizes in her novels that boundaries can be destroyed.

Divakaruni herself has broken many boundaries by winning many awards and critical acclaim. Some of these literary awards include The Hackney Literary Award,

These awards have added glory to her fame of being one of the most popular Asian-American writers. She is more popular among women as she writes about the lives of Indian women caught in the trauma of displacement. To Divakaruni faith in one's cultural heritage is more important than anything else. Being a generation writer, she admits the ecstasy that overwhelmed her when she first arrived in America, which made her overlook the disturbing patriarchal society of her homeland. She was overcome by the liberty she experienced in the host
country. She seems to approve of this liberty, as it is evident from the portraits of Indians in America in most of her novels.

Divakaruni values liberty and identity alike. The quest for identity in her novels is an honest commentary on the women of Indian diaspora. Still Divakaruni does not leave her characters to be continuously hampered by insecurities and culture shock. She redeems them to a state where they gradually imbibe the culture of the host country. At times Divakaruni underplays the trauma of culture-shock by juxtaposing the immigrants from other countries who feel the same cultural dilemma as faced by the Indian immigrants.

Divakaruni’s thought process, her liking for poetry, love for nature and morals which are deep in her blood, are present in each and every character she has painted. Her feminist characters all long for their motherland i.e. India. They miss the natural beauty of their own country. Though they are in USA struggling to survive in the competitive world, they miss each moment they had lived in Calcutta. All her characters are struggling to survive in the ultramodern USA. They are struggling against their own set of rules which were forced upon them by Indian way of life.
In the story “Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter” from *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* the old aged Mrs. Dutta is trying hard to survive in USA. For, it is difficult for her to collect all the dirty clothes and give it to her daughter-in-law only on Sundays to be washed in the washing machine. It is against the ethics which Mrs. Dutta's mother-in-law had taught her when she was a young bride. She fails to understand why she should keep collecting the dirty clothes for a week while she can easily wash them everyday. She does not want to embarrass her daughter-in-law any more and therefore she decides to leave.

On the other hand, there are characters although they long for Calcutta, who do not leave the US and decide to fight till they are successful. They do not want to leave the battlefield without fighting. They want to live in USA and create their own identity. Mrs. Sumita Sen from the story “Clothes” is an example. She comes to USA as a young bride with dreams in her eyes. She wants to help her husband in up keeping of store.

When her husband dies, as an Indian bride her world comes to an end. But she accepts the circumstances and challenges which a widow has to face in India. She says
That's when I know I cannot go back. I do not know yet how I'll manage, here in this new, dangerous land. I only know I must. Because all over India, at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings. (121)

Mrs. Sen is already aware of the orthodox Indian society which has no respect or gives no sovereignty to a widow. She decides to stay back in USA where the society is not as fanatic or orthodoxical as in India. She wants to stay back in the US and work for her own identity.

There are some other characters living in USA who are haunted by the fact that they are not living an ideal life as they were taught by their parents in India. They fear that their parents and friends may disown them when they hear the news of the moralless lives they are leading in America. Although these characters still want to stay in America, and live like Americans they are haunted by the Indian tradition and culture.

Divakaruni has a spell bound effect over her poetic words. They are like her favorite silk saris which she
talks about in most of her works, including “Clothes” from “Arranged Marriage.” “Its body was a pale pink, like the dawn sky over the lake. The colour of transition embroidered all over it were tiny stars make out of real gold zari thread” (34).

“The Maid Servant’s Story” has beautiful description of her favorite sarees, “A saffron silk with a gold border worked in the shape of peepal leaves” (44). Her characters observe the minutest details of design, the texture and the colour. They speak about the colour in such a style that it is in harmony with the characters’ inner being. Although the characters are born in America they still have their longing for India. Rakhi of *Queen of Dreams*, who throughout her life has never been to India, wants her mother to paint the picture of true India. As the childhood stories have a lot of impact on Divakaruni, her characters are also much influenced by the stories of their childhood. Basudha in *Sister of My Heart* does not want Anju to pursue Gauri Ma for proposing Ashoka. Basudha wants that Ashoka has to overcome all obstacles if he is in love and she does not want anyone to come to her rescue except Ashoka. She wants Ashoka to be like a prince to rescue his ladylove all alone on his own.
Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams* also wants her mother to narrate stories of India. She wants to know of her mother's past and of the land of enchanting beauty. It is only after her mother’s death she gets a picture of India through her father. Divakaruni's feminist characters are very observant. They are keen to compare the things to uncommon object.

The imagery is very different and uncommon. The images are hard to imagine. Comparing of characters to unusual things is an art which the novelist has well mastered. For example in *Sister of My Heart*, “A passing servant seemed distant and full of mystery like the dim roar of an ocean seen through a telescope” (128).

Divakaruni has tried at times to cover the truth with the robe of humour to hide the ugliness of the society. She has an artistic hand over the words which like the early sun rays are felt and admired by one and all. She has tried to soothe the rude facts of life behind the veil of humour. To quote from *Sister of My Heart*, “The way her smile does not falter when one of the boys pushes away the plate, telling her - the cheeky brat - that the fish curry didn't turn out right” (87).

Sudha although ill-treated by her in-laws does not complain about anything. She smiles at people who are humiliating her.
The protagonists of Divakaruni, who are well settled in America, imagine India to be a fantasy land. They are not aware of the social dogmas, political drawback and economic biases there. Unlike in India, these characters born in America are working equally well with menfolks. They have never undergone the trauma of differentiation of sex at work. Leela one of the protagonists of Divakaruni is working well as a computer software engineer along with other menfolks. She is efficient as well as a good competitor to others.

Characters like Leela and Rakhi have their own separate houses. They do not stay with their parents. Their parents too respect their independence. But Indian parents here seldom agree for such an arrangement made by their daughters. They are very protective in India. This is also a poignant issue of pain for few of the characters of Divakaruni. They feel that their parents keep them under protective environment to satisfy their own devoted ego. This protectiveness is misunderstood by the protagonist Mira in the short story “The Blooming Season for Cacti.”

Indians born in America live like true Americans. They live like their other American friends. They have not seen the true social picture of India. For them
India is an abode of hopes -- a Utopia in true sense. They have just heard fantasy stories about India. They long to see this land full of dreams, full of mythological stories, full of myths. They are actually trying to look into the past of their parents for refuge. They want to run away from their parents but want to experience the past of their parent's lives. They want to know few clues which would help them in their own struggle. They want to equip themselves with the experience of their parent's past. Feminist characters of Divakaruni also long to hear more about the land where their ancestors lived. Rakhi of *Queen of Dreams* is an example of feminist diaspora. She says "I would have preferred the stories to have come from my mother, and to have been set in India, where she grew up, a land that seemed to me to be shaded with unending mystery" (39).

A painter by profession she always has India as her theme in paintings. The novelist writes thus,

> Until now, most of her paintings had been about India - an imagined India, an India researched from photographs, because she'd never travelled there. She'd painted temples and cityscapes and women in a market place. (42)
Rakhi although not familiar with the Bengali language or traditions still finds refuge in Indian traditions. When in the evenings the Indian songs are sung, she enjoys them and dreams about India though she fails to understand the meaning. Even Balwender, Rakhi's closest friend enjoys the atmosphere in her Kurma House though she is against the Indian tradition forced upon her by her parents. On the other hand, Rakhi longs to know and hear about such traditions from her parents. She wants to find out her roots in India. Although she loves India and wants to know more about her parent country, she is very loyal to the country she is living presently. She does not agree with Balwander and Mr. Soto when they force her to hoist an American Flag on her restaurant to prove her loyalty. She finds it absurd to exhibit her loyalty. She says "Belle, I do not have to put up a flag to prove that I'm American. I'm American already. I love this country" (102).

Protagonists who have come to USA by their free will are well motivated to stay there. They struggle for their individuality in the new nation which is free of obligation. Khuku from the short story "The Names of Stars in Bengali" suffers a lot in her childhood in India. She does not even want to remember her past. She feels
that she is better in US where her individuality is respected. No one questions her about her actions. She feels that in India she was neither respected nor admired for her novel ideas.

She touches thin bony boy-shoulders with compunctious fingers, she wants to gather them back inside her, into her own childhood, she wants time to reverse and simplify itself. She wants to tell them they are loved. (111)

Khuku feels that her interest for swimming was not liked by her parents. Her going back home in wet clothes after swimming annoyed her mother who felt that swimming was not for grown up girls. She believes that Indian tradition and culture are meant only for her parents. Though after her father's death she invites her mother to come and stay in USA, Khuku quarrels with her mother, every now and then. Finally when the old lady decides to return to India, she feels relieved. She, like a pure American, does not like the Indianess in her mother. She considers the Indian tradition as the cause of despair. Now Khuku is in her new world and not under the strict instructions of her mother. This
causes more problems between mother and daughter. As the novelist says,

But in this case, they had stepped into a time machine named immigration and when they fell from its ferocious spinning, it was into the alien habits of a world they had imagined imperfectly. In this world they could not inhabit a house together in the old way. They could not be mother and daughter in that way again. (49)

Khuku is one of the few Indians who believe that life can never be better in India as in America. In India the parents want to keep their children under their protective wings to shield them. This overprotectiveness becomes a cause of pain when the independent decisions of the children are not respected. These children who are not able to understand the true nature of their parents fail to understand their affection. These very children when given the option to breakaway from their parents and homeland are very happy. These people who do not want to face the real facts of their originality are happy to forget them all. They consider economic growth as their sole aim. Khuku is very happy with her present status as a
bureaucrat in America. She has wealth and she can live any way she wants.

“Meeting Mrinal” is the last story in the collection “Arranged Marriage.” The protagonist of “Meeting Mrinal” is Asha, an Indian-born woman who immigrates to the United States to join her Indian husband. In her new home, she leads the life expected out of a traditional Indian wife until an event occurs that forces her to move beyond her accustomed role. Her husband leaves her for a younger white woman. The story opens at this point, recounting Asha’s attempts to come to terms with her feelings of failure and her need to carve out an independent life in an alien culture. This process reaches a crisis during a meeting with Mrinal, a childhood friend from India who is now a successful businesswoman. Divakaruni explores here the immigrant’s search for identity in the adopted culture.

“Affair” is another story from “Arranged Marriage.” In this story the protagonist Abha feels that all her life she has been trying to be a perfect role model. She never thinks beyond her role as a wife. It is only when Meena’s decision of leaving Sri Kant for her own happiness, Abha also realises that her unhappiness is due to her perfectionist role model which she has been
playing. Abha therefore decides, now to live for her own self, and fight for her own identity. To quote her, “Had I ever really been myself? I didn't think so. All my energy had been taken up in being a good daughter. A good friend. And of course a good wife” (55). Abha finally breaks the chains of tradition which is deep rooted in her by her Indian way of life. She now derives compunction under the stressful influence of the adopted culture. She feels “It’s better this way, each of us freeing the other before it's too late” (56). Most of the characters of Divakaruni want to make their own identity in USA. They want to change their destiny which according to Hindu mythology is predestined.

Mrs. Gupta, the protagonist of Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*, longs for the caves where she was taught to be a dream teller. Although she feels that American culture is much trivial she does not want to leave America. Although the traditional Indian society with its dogmas has been accepted by her from her childhood, she tries to keep pace with ultramodern American society. People like her want their own identity to be shaped in America with their traditional way of living. When this is not possible they find it difficult to compromise with their social values. These groups of people have
accepted the fact that no country can give them better independence of thought process and acceptance of individual talent than America. But still they long for their homeland India with its traditional way of thinking and social code of conduct. They are valuing the legacy which they are carrying forward from India to another foreign home America.

Thus the novels of Divakaruni, it is true, bear the themes which mainly deal with the people settled or unsettled in alien countries giving way for Post-colonial study. The thesis entitled A Post-Colonial Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Select Fiction deals with the post colonial aspects that abound in the fictional works of Divakaruni. Being a woman, an immigrant in the US and also a seasoned feminist, Divakaruni’s works are giving expression to her post-colonial bent of mind. Divakaruni is modern in her outlook and unconventional in her approaches. But, at the same time, she is not against tradition, especially the tradition of her homeland, India. In her works one can find the fusion of the best of the tradition and the modern, and East and West.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, “Introduction”, deals with the history of Indian English Fiction and it also aims at analyzing
Divakaruni’s place in the tradition. The second chapter, “Diaspora: A Post-Colonial Scenario”, deals with the emigrants who move from their mother land to alien countries in search of prosperity. The Post-Colonial Indian migrants in the novels of Divakaruni, in general, fail to work as a cultural link between the homeland and the host land to create a constructive of conjunctive tripod. They do not mature enough to distinguish between the good and the undesirable features of both the American and Indian systems. They, therefore, are unable to adjust either with the alien people or their culture. The third chapter, “The Conquest of Women”, brings to light the fact that most of the women characters of Divakaruni are independent, self-reliant, and enterprising also. The conquest of women can be clearly inferred from the novels where most of the characters depicted are woman. The fourth chapter, “Displacement and Replacement”, presents her vision of life which deals with various fictional themes as alienation and involvement, east-west encounter, compromise, existentialism, materialism, westernization, quest, complacence and multiculturalism. The fifth chapter, “The Incarcerated Soul”, brings out the inner conflict in the character of Draupadi in The Palace of
Illusions. The inner conflict of Draupadi is depicted by retelling a myth The Mahabharata from female perspective. Woman Empowerment is one of the major themes in her works and it is also discussed in this chapter. The last chapter, “Conclusion”, sums up the discussions in the previous chapters, and arrives at the conclusion of the thesis.