Chapter - V

The Incarcerated Soul

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s The Palace of Illusions presents Mahabharata from Draupadi’s perspective. Divakaruni attempts to skew the normally androcentric focus of epics in favour of the female characters, of whom Draupadi - or Panchaali as she prefers to be known - is ‘understandably the chief point of interest.’

The Palace of Illusions in spotlighting the oft-maligned Pandavas’ shared wife offers a fresh and very readable perspective on an epic that can never suffer from a surfeit of related literature. The Palace of Illusions succeeds as an introduction to the Mahabharata. Divakaruni's reinterpretation of the Mahabharata is a little deviation from the epic. The pathos of the original tale and its powerful heroine Draupadi as raw canvas, combined with her gift for imbuing beauty in even the most repetitive storylines, has made this novel the author's masterpiece.

With Draupadi as a first person narrator, Divakaruni has contrived some of the omniscience and omnipresence of the epic narrator. Background stories such as that
of Drona and Drupad’s friendship and enemity are introduced by various means – in this case as a story told repeatedly to Dhrishtiadyumna to whet his appetite for the vengeance for which he has been born. Draupadi’s dreams give her other similarly one-sided or limited knowledge – for instance she sees Karna and Kunti meet but cannot grasp the purpose of their conversation. Although she does not have the Homeric Muses to inspire her with sight beyond her immediate experience, Vyasa gives her the ability to see the most important events of the war as it unfolds – a gift he has also given to Sanjay, Dhritarashtra’s charioteer and narrator of the Mahabharata.

Vyasa appears at several junctures in his role as the writer of the story, reminding Draupadi, that this is of course a story which he has already written. Krishna, as the god of the Bhagavad Gita, too often tries to help Draupadi realise the ephemerality of the events she is witnessing and enacting. But despite the sound Gita advice he dispenses, Draupadi, as she herself admits, is enslaved by desire and hatred and cannot or will not distance her.

Much more successful is Krishna’s full bodied presence as a god in the mould of the personal ‘bhakti’
divinity for Draupadi. Her gradual awareness of his more than human nature and her baffling love for him, his omnipresence and his fleeting divine appearances enact a relationship similar to that of followers of Jesus or Buddha with their gods.

In the novel’s opening pages, Panchaali relates the story of her birth. Dhai Ma says that voices spoke from the fire just before Dhri and Panchaali stepped from it. Given that this narrative is a retelling of the ancient Indian epic, the readers find these events as literal or symbolic.

Divakaruni has more scope to colour the narrative and to play on the emotional or psychological reasons behind a character’s actions. Draupadi’s transformation from headstrong eager princess to embittered vengeance-seeking queen is quite reasonably put down to her public shaming and the loss of her one home, the title’s

*The Palace of Illusions.* It is Draupadi’s ongoing and inexplicable fascination with Karna that provokes her to urge Yudhisthira to accept Duryodhana’s invitation to Hastinapura to play dice - a decision which we are led to believe he would not otherwise have made. But Divakaruni’s novel does not seek to explain actions and
events by simply attributing a single motive to a single character.

She is well aware of the complexity of a story in which pupils fight teachers, cousins fight cousins and brothers, unwittingly, fight brothers. She expertly draws her reader along this tangled web of grievances, loyalty, honour, vows and emotion. “The chariot of vengeance, which requires no horses or wheels” rolls on. So Drupadi’s initial shaming her friend Drona leads finally to the night slaughter of Dhristyadyumna by Ashvattama. By fleshing out her characters and judiciously deciding when and where to introduce or drop the thread of each person’s story, she navigates our way through what is always going to be a hugely long and complex narrative.

Though Draupadi is destined to change the course of history, she is usually left playing a supporting character role. From being born of the sacrificial fire, to her strange, lonely childhood, her tricky marriage to five men with a persecution problem and a control freak mother, and the unbelievable traumas that follow that nobody should have to go through. Having her home, freedom and honour gambled away, she is almost stripped in public and she has to undergo a
terrible life of hiding, servitude, evading assault and finally, the grim justice of war and a lonely death falling off a mountain track.

Told in the first person, Divakaruni’s tale takes us through the epic in Draupadi’s voice. Most of this is ‘true’, as in the original epic, but Divakaruni adds other imaginative twists of her own. She leaves the readers to guess which man does Draupadi really love and who is the one who really, truly loves her.

One advantage of a point-of-view telling of the Mahabharata should be that it shows the readers how much greater the epic is than the sum of its parts. In such retellings, the readers get to see people and events through the (naturally biased) perspective of the narrator, and once they have enough of these perspectives, they add up to complete a fascinating tapestry. But Panchaali too often, becomes an all knowing sutradhar figure, not very different from Vyasa himself, and the readers are expected to believe that she has the real inside dope on many things, including other characters’ motivations and struggles.

As often happens with the epics, the grandeur of the story transcends the telling. Plot wise, the story
is largely faithful to the original. The author succeeds in conveying depth and nuance in almost every character, portraying for example both Kunti’s resentfulness and righteousness, or Drona's cruelty and greatness, in different lights.

Divakaruni aims at explaining the role of Draupadi in Mahabharata. She, who was blamed for having caused the disastrous war that killed so many innocents just because she wanted to take revenge for her disgrace, was in actual acting as per her already decided fate. According to Indian Hindu thought, whatever a man does is according to the wishes of God and the same holds true for Draupadi.

The novel traces Panchali’s (Draupadi) life, beginning from her magical birth from fire along with her brother, her life as the daughter of a great king, her swayamvar, her balancing act as a wife of five husband, right up to her death. At every step of her life she faces all those traditional customs meant for women and very bravely questions them.

Many less known facts of her life have been revealed like-her rebellious nature, her resentment towards her egoistic father for not caring about her
and the prophecy she was born with and for being preoccupied with her brother, her relation with her brother Dhrishtadyumna and the stories they shared to pass their summer evenings, her love for Karna, the man who is her husband’ most dangerous enemy etc. All these aspects of her life are highly touching and evoke a whole range of emotions in a reader.

The title *The Palace of Illusions* comes from the magical palace that the Pandavas built for themselves at Indraprastha. Draupadi has been shown unsatisfied at her father's place and also at Hastinapur. She always yearned for a home where she would be the queen and the end to her yearning comes with 'the Palace of Illusions'. The palace too is described responding to her love. Her life was good in the palace and its loss hits her to the core and fuels her anger. So the book, I feel, is aptly titled considering the importance of the palace in her life.

The way Divakaruni has written about her childhood connection with Krishna who was her solace and called her Krishnae and their platonic love for each other kept my eyes glued to the book from the first page to the last. The ending of the novel is also amazing. The way the writer describes everyone reaching heaven
provides fruit to one’s imagination. Everyone is described smiling and satisfied as if just completed a role they were asked to play.

No doubt the novel takes us back to ancient times but if we look at it critically it is full of modern thought. Its modern aspect makes me comment that if all our traditional epics are written in this way we won’t find any youth complaining that such things are boring. Plus the way Draupadi rebels against customs and conventions is similar to the way these days girls have to fight against centuries old customs that hinder their growth.

Divakaruni has broken the notion that Mahabharata is all about a war fought between Kauravas and Pandavas, caused due to a woman. She clearly emphasized on the fact that ‘woman’ also had a life. But Divakaruni does not reveal the fact that the prediction that Panchaali will change the course of history influences her character as she matures.

After the predictions made for Panchaali by Vyasa the sage, Panchaali marries the five sons of the widowed queen Kunti. On her wedding night, as she lies on a mat near the brother’s feet, Panchaali thinks of
Karna. The novelist cleverly makes the readers assume that the memory of Karna guides her throughout the narrative.

Panchaali feels that, “Palaces have always fascinated me, even a gloom-filled structure like my father’s that was a fitting carapace for his vengeful obsession” (129). Thus *The Palace of Illusions* built by Maya, reveals the fantasies and longings of Panchaali’s husbands and of Panchaali herself.

After Sisupal’s death, Duryodhan builds himself a grand palace and invites Panchaali and the Pandavas to be his guests in Hastinapur. Yudhishtir’s loss in game of dice is a personal turning point for Panchaali also. During their banishment in the forest, Dhri gently chastises Panchaali, asking her where his sweet sister has gone. She thinks she is dead, when everyone she had loved and counted on to save her sat without protest and watched her being shamed. The other half perished with her beloved home. When Panchaali discovers a golden lotus floating in the river, she lifts it to her face and forgets her vengeance. When the colour fades and the petals droop, her sorrows return. The advice of Krishna makes her remain calm. She at once goes to
her faithful husband Bheem and indicates her desire for another lotus forgetting the past.

Panchaali relates the stories of Arjuna’s encounter with Shiva, his visit to Indra’s palace, his refusal of the celestial dancer Urvasi, and the subsequent year he must spend as a eunuch. She says of her husband,

He had glimpsed the truth of existence that went beyond the world of the senses that lay around us, this oscillating world of pleasure and sorrow. (139)

Thus the author use’s these tales of divine encounters to support and advance her narrative.

In the city of Virat, Panchaali is pursued by the lustful Keechak. When Bheem kills him, the Pandavas and Kauravas do battle, and soon preparations for war are underway. When Surya, the sun-god, comes to Karna in a dream, he tells Karna how to achieve his heart’s desire. But Karna unmindful of the warning of the sun god ignores him. Divakaruni thus makes him a real hero.

Before the war at Kurukshetra, Panchaali sees a falling star and is heartened. She then says,
I should have remembered how tricky the gods are, how they give with one hand what you want while taking away, with the other, something much more valuable. (208)

Thus the author’s foreshadowing through the eyes of Panchaali enhances the intensity of the tale.

With Vyasa’s gift, Panchaali is able to see all that occurs in the war. On the ninth day, she watches Bheeshma, the grandfather, battle Arjuna, who had been loved and cared for by Bheeshma as a child. The novelist brings out the filial love between the Old Warrior (Bheeshma) and Arjuna although they are placed opposite.

When Karna learns he is Kunti’s son, he does not join with his brothers deserting Duryodhan. Here the novelist seems to be with Karna. He insists he cannot fight against Duryodhan because he has eaten his salt. When Dhri kills Drona, thereby fulfilling his own predicted destiny, Panchaali narrates the events, about her beliefs regarding fate, vengeance, and mortality.

After Karna’s death and Duryodhan’s defeat at the hands of the Pandavas, a messenger brings word that Dwarka, Krishna’s city, has been overtaken. Gandhari’s
curse, it seems to Panchaali, has been realized. When Arjuna relates what happened, Yudhisthir acknowledges that it is time for the Pandava warriors to die. As Panchaali goes with her husbands to the base of the Himalayas, to the path of great departure, her thoughts and experiences confirm her destiny. As Krishna guides her through death, she is fully convinced.

Relevant to today’s war-torn world, The Palace of Illusions takes us back to the time of the Indian epic The Mahabharata time that is half-history, half-myth, and wholly magical. Through her narrator Panchaali, the wife of “the legendary five Pandavas brothers”, Divakaruni gives us a rare feminist interpretation of an epic story.

The novel traces Panchaali’s life, beginning with her birth as the daughter of a king before following her spirited balancing act as a woman with five husbands who have been cheated out of their father’s kingdom. Panchaali is swept into their quest to reclaim their birthright, remaining at the brothers’ sides through years of exile and a terrible civil war. Meanwhile, we never lose sight of her stratagems to take over control of her household from her mother-in-law, her complicated friendship with the enigmatic Krishna, or her secret
attraction to the mysterious man who is her husband’s most dangerous enemy. Panchaali is a fiery female voice in a world of warriors, gods, and ever - manipulating hands of fate. Thus Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions* takes us back to the time of the great Indian Epic *The Mahabharata*.

A sense of displacement has become an integral part of the modern psyche. It may or may not result from physical displacement or dislocation, but it has led to a flight from certainty and timeless truth, erasing centuries-old landmarks of national and linguistic consciousness, transforming irrevocably both cultural and literary landscapes. Mass mobility of labour and socio-political upheavals are some of the reasons behind individuals or groups moving away from their place of origin. The internal dislocation is an issue of serious concern. The causes of internal dislocation are diverse and inter-related.

Displacement may be induced by conflict human values, violations or natural disasters such as drought and other factors such as food and security. Dislocation may also be associated with urban renewal schemes and development projects such as the construction of dams, roads and other infrastructure.
The question of balancing the potential positive outcomes of development projects, and the negative consequences of displacement is difficult; one which merits further consideration, drawing upon the experiences, while planned displacement of this kind may be justified as in the public interest. It was also recognized that victims of forced migration do not necessarily remain in neat categories - there is fluidity between different types of migration such as internal dislocation, refugee movements and economic migration.

There was strong consensus amongst readers regarding the importance of acknowledging and responding to the vulnerabilities facing the internally displaced. Displacement itself exacerbates vulnerability to further displacement. It is essential to tackle the root causes of dislocation, particularly conflict and under development. The root cause of displacement of Divakaruni's characters in her two novels *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams* is social oppression and economic status. The characters in both these novels want to escape from the clutches of misery and the emotional suppression in their homeland. This makes them move away from their place of origin, to find solutions and amelioration.
Both these novels are exquisitely rendered tales of passion, jealousy and redemption. The characters of Divakaruni in *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams* need a change and they want to uplift their lives. This idea of progressiveness made them to dislocate from their home. This dislocation occurs only when their lives face new ideas. In both these novels, the characters have directly experienced certain problems in their lives before entering into a new country.

*The Vine of Desire* is a work about immigrant experience. This novel focuses on family - arranged matches, a century old tradition in India. The story of *Queen of Dreams* is also about Indian immigrants to the United States and it vividly shows how the dislocation of immigrants is making tradition problematic. *The Vine of Desire* expresses the story of Anju and Sudha, the two young women at the centre of Divakarani's best selling novel *Sister of My Heart*. Far from Calcutta, the city of their childhood, and after years of living separate lives, Anju and Sudha rekindle their friendship in America. Sudha left a ruined marriage with Ramesh. Sudha wanted to escape from a society where the people are sunk in old beliefs, who are
blindly attached to superstitious faiths and where she faced a life of suppression and nothing else.

Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* is a work of an emotionally disturbed mother and a daughter trying to find themselves transcending cultural boundaries. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's preoccupation with romantic exoticism is characterised by the interspersion of the factual and the imaginary into a tale of mystery. She turns the mystery into romance, revealing hidden facets of character and identity as the novel progresses.

In both of these two novels, *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams*, Divakaruni enables and dramatizes her characters by placing them in a quest for identity. Innovative in narrative structure, the conditions of the characters before displacement is expressed in various points of view. In these two novels, the author renews the theme that has been explored through the ages: national identity, the connection of body and times, and that love will transcend place and time.

Divakaruni's these two novels illustrate the reasons for the dislocation of characters. The characters of Divakaruni want to escape from the social oppression and are in search for identity and independence. In
The Vine of Desire, Sudha wants to relieve herself from social atrocities and ill-treatment of women. She suffers in the name of belief. “When she discovered that her first grand child was going to be a girl, she insisted that Sudha should have an abortion. So Sudha ran away” (16).

In this story the women’s bond is shaken to the core when they must confront the deeply passionate feeling that Anju’s husband Sunil has for Sudha. Sudha’s past memories reveal her girlhood love for Sunil, who got married to Anju later. Not knowing this part of Sunil, Anju expresses casually, “But is the real world that differs who knows how many lovers were separated by the will of others or circumstances, or their own misunderstanding of duty” (49).

The persons who were in love are separated in the name of creed, caste or by interruption of others. In Queen of Dreams, Mrs. Gupta’s character reveals the mystery of her past in her dream journals. When she was an apprentice and wanted to become a novice, she met Mr. Gupta in a garden, and fell in love with him. She says:
When I opened my eyes, he was watching me. He sat under a tree, leaning against its massive trunk and there was an ease among dream interpreters for three years, I had grown used to intensity. (169)

Both of Divakaruni’s novels *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams* portray the life of women in India, where they cannot decide their life on their own. The invasions of society always interrupt women’s lives in India. Divakaruni has a remarkable gift for intertwining romance with trenchant insights into the harsh realities of immigrants’ past lives. Independence is an absent paradigm in their lives, in their homelands.

In *The Vine of Desire*, the old beliefs, rituals and bigotry restrain Sudha to be independent. Here, Divakaruni shows the completion of Sudha’s dislocation. The diffidence and social occultism was overcome by Sudha only by entering into a new country. Too many people have the tendency to go behind superstitious beliefs and ill-treat women. Sudha felt that to be an independent woman is a difficult task in her society. There is no possibility to express her feelings or ideas freely. Freedom for a woman is not found in India. Women live in India as dependants on father,
husband and son. Sudha does not want to depend on others. She says, “I turned him down because I didn’t want him to take care of me.” Sudha said “I wanted to be independent” (93).

Divakaruni’s dream journal in *Queen of Dreams* is a strong device to reveal the mystery of Mrs. Gupta. The journals all punctuate this cleverly imagined tale of love, forgiveness and beginnings. Before the displacement, Mrs. Gupta practised dream interpretation.

“The interpreters I saw did not appear unhappy (164)”, says Mrs. Gupta, though she wanted to be a dream interpreter. She grew up in a slum area where she had grown up with an ability to interpret dreams. She desired to become an amateur dream teller. As a novice she felt that she would be happier than an average Indian wife who struggles all the time in her life. Divakaruni’s portrayal of wifehood in India is a picture of a drudge’s life, all day at the beck and call of the in-laws or of the husband. Wives work endlessly and without hopes of praise, and if things go wrong, there was always plenty of blame.
The invisible lives of wives in India are carried out in darkness in closed bedrooms. The condition of life is filled with formality. Social oppression, economic status, independence and identity are the main issues of these two novels of Divakaruni.

Mr. Gupta’s past life in India is hidden mysteriously in *Queen of Dreams*. Rakhi, a young artist and divorced mother living in Berkley, California, has always been vaguely aware of her mother’s unusual gift, the ability to interpret dreams. This gift of vision fascinates Rakhi but also isolates her from her mother’s past life and the dream world she inhabits. Mrs. Gupta hides her past memories; she never speaks anything about India though she knows that her daughter longs to know something about her past, about her life before she came to America. Rakhi 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. But my mother told me that she did not know any good stories and that India wasn't all that mysterious. (4)
The past life of this character is vividly explained in the dream journals by the character itself. There is no longing for homeland in her character. The hidden mysterious past life makes the readers to attune closely with this particular character.

Divakaruni used Sudha’s idea of independence as a scourge to the obnoxiousness of society. Part of the beauty of Divakaruni’s talent is her ability to capture the true complexity of the emotional landscape of her character. The author draws a compelling contrast between the selflessness required of women in India and the sometimes bewildering freedoms that are not offered in their homelands.

In *Queen of Dreams*, a dream is a telegram from the hidden world, Rakhi’s mother writes in her journals. Chitra Banerjee has crafted a vivid and enduring dream one that reveals hidden truths behind displacement. Divakaruni’s *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams* are riveting stories eloquently written. Her attention to details in descriptive passages is beautifully portrayed, being not all overblown. And her socially and psychologically precise fictions possess a mystical dimension. The narrative in these two novels is a narrative about the assimilation of an Indian family
from Calcutta, who move to America, the cultural dilemmas experienced by them and their American life in different ways; the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocation suffered by them in their efforts to settle at "home" in the new land.

The question of identity has always been a difficult one but it is more so, for culturally displaced persons, people who transgress the boundaries of family surroundings in search of fresh pastures in a foreign land. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has advocated total assimilation of an individual to the American culture and society to bring about cohesive existence in the host country.

The existential dilemma in the new country is illustrated by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. How they keep alive the memories of their “homeland” and culture in their “new homes” in some other ways, is shown by Divakaruni by giving us a peep into different Bengali homes. While making efforts to preserve their ‘home culture’ in their new homes, the first generation immigrants always have an affinity to their homelands. These immigrants facing cultural dilemmas in the foreign system are shown through the problems faced by Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams* and Sudha in *The Vine of Desire*. 
Divakaruni shows that the immigrants in their enthusiasm to stick to their own cultural beliefs gradually imbibe the cultural ways of the host country too. While portraying the theme of cultural dilemmas and dislocation of the migrants, Divakaruni does not remain confined to the dislocation of migrants in a foreign land alone. Rather she projects dislocation as a permanent human condition.

Man is dislocated in this world, he may have a home in his native nation, build a 'home' in a 'new land' adapting to the new culture, but ultimately he has no home. He has to leave all the homes as death takes him/her to the other world. This is true as in the case of Mrs. Gupta's mysterious death in a car accident. All efforts to integrate come to naught with this untimely and unexplained death.

Divakarni's novels succeed on two levels. The search for identity and a sense of emotional completion is not confined to one small corner of the world. It is a dilemma that all readers can understand. Modernity is possible only when the immigrants replace themselves into a new country. The characters of Divakaruni choose America as the best place which releases them from their problems. The atrocities and economic status they faced
in their homeland made them plan for displacement. They want to escape from their problematic circumstance. This kind of displacement is justified in Divakaruni’s novels.

To avoid social oppression, lack of independence and improvement of economic status is the idea of Sudha in *The Vine of Desire* whereas, search for identity, idea of freedom and economic upliftment are the themes in *Queen of Dreams*. The above reasons are the causes of displacement of the characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

Displacement is the only choice to escape from their problems. It also paves way for them to progress materially, psychologically and economically. This progressiveness gives them identity in society. The bitter experiences of their lives in their homeland (India) make them move towards a different place, where they find independence and identity. The life faced by them before entering into a new country or before the dislocation forced them to question the central assumptions of their lives.

Divakaruni combines a gift for absorbing narrative with the artistry of a painter. Her lyrical
descriptions of her characters’ inner and outer worlds
being a rich emotional chiaroscuro to an uplifting
story about women immigrants who learn to make peace
with difficult choices that circumstances have forced
upon them.

The complex reciprocal relationships between
migration and development are raising growing interest
among policy makers. Though the analytical understandings
of these links remain somewhat limited, there is today
a greater awareness that development affects migration
and the migrant influences development. The major
challenge for immigrants is to find innovative and
effective ways to enhance the benefits of migration,
whilst mitigating its adverse implications for
emigrating people.

Emigration does not only have adverse effects. It
may also have positive consequences for the development
of the immigrants. These benefits can be enriched
through temporary returns and other diaspora options;
facilitating the transfer of human, financial and social
capital back to the country of origin. Migration confirms
the usefulness of adopting a country-specific assessment
approach. It is pointed out that the historical
backgrounds as well as the future prospects concerning migration and development.

In the current phase of globalization, the migration motivated by economic reasons is a phenomenon that affects increasing numbers of people. In Divakaruni’s *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams*, the dislocation of the characters is for their individual progress.

The problem of identity is a repeated theme in post-nationalized and post-colonial existence. It is a theme often discussed in migrant communities as well. Migrants are branded as being ethnic, impure, hybrid and subsequently marginal and peripheral. They are always considered different from the mainstream.

Divakaruni’s *The Vine of Desire* is a novel interviewing the lives of many characters between two diverse cultures, Indian and American. *The Vine of Desire* illustrates the story of two friends Anju and Sudha; they rekindle their relationship in America. The day Sudha stepped off from the plane from India into Anju’s arms, leaving a ruined marriage with Ramesh behind, their lives change, forever.

The deep-seated love between these two women provides the support needed to fulfill their needs. It
gives Anju the strength to pick up the pieces of her life after a miscarriage, and Sudha the confidence to make a life for herself and her baby, Dayita without her husband. Sudha cut off her boundaries in India where she felt oppressed by her own family in the name of rituals. They never let her to take her own decision. Sudha is confident that replacement makes her life progressive. She thought that her society would not let her lead a better life and she says,

I can't go back to India, to the way I was. Helpless, dependent - I can't love like that. I can't bring up my daughter to think that is how a woman needs to live. (104)

In *Queen of Dreams* Mrs.Gupta is in need of a better and convenient life. The poverty of their past life prompts both Mr.Gupta and Mrs.Gupta to search for better and positive developments in their lives. The possible idea of a prosperous life motivates them to move to the ‘perfect’ place, the ‘el dorado’, to improve them. America promises their upliftment. These two characters completely replace themselves with innovative ideas and thoughts. Mrs.Gupta does not show any sign of longing for her past life, her husband too, because their earlier poverty had so far bound them and prevented
them to lead a successful life, though they had skills, has come to an end. As a dream interpreter Mrs. Gupta finds herself happily engaged with her customers, all the time and also makes good money.

These events are constantly presented from the viewpoint of the main characters, who have crossed their geographical boundaries but not their cultural boundaries. Mrs. Gupta in *Queen of Dreams*, loves America but she never oversteps her cultural ties with her homeland. Still she insists that this western country gives her full freedom to be a successful woman. She tells her daughter to concentrate on ‘westernity’. She states, “Women need something for their own to be independent,” she says with “unexpected vehemence” (31).

Passion and identity are interconnected in *The Vine of Desire*; Sudha's divorce with Ramesh does not segregate her completely from her married life. She has the responsibility in her daughter's growth and future. Sudha believes that America will give prosperity and a sophisticated life to her and her daughter.

In the lives of Sudha and Mrs. Gupta displacement is the only solution out of their problematic life in India in both these novels. They feel that America
would be a staunch supporter to them. Although Sudha
does not know anything about western countries, she
believes that her dreams of progress and prosperity
would come true in the new world. Anju warns Sudha
that westerners would not talk to strangers. She says,
“I walk up and ask ‘Are you Indian?’ I cannot help it,
though Anju has warned me that here people do not talk
to strangers this way, not even Indian strangers” (82).

Anju illustrates the lives of Americans who always
prefer to be in privacy. There are no barriers to the
western people; too many people have the tendency to go
behind money and sex. Rigidity is absent in westerners
according to Anju.

Through Sudha in The Vine of Desire and Mrs.Gupta
in Queen of Dreams, Divarunai explains the experience
of progress and fulfilment of the immigrants. Sudha
finds a job as the caretaker of an old man who is
terribly bedridden and is longing to return to India.
He is nursed by Sudha and later he takes care of Sudha
as a daughter.

Sudha expects that America only gives her complete
freedom to her thoughts and emotions. She does not want
to depend on others. She hates the blind belief of
people in India which is a barrier to the progress of women. The transformations and translations of identity is a strong issue to Sudha. America changes Sudha both internally and externally. The West gives her hope to face the difficulties of her life. She finds that Indian customs and blind beliefs have suppressed her completely all these years. To Sudha the very costume of the Indian women restrains freedom. She likes to dress herself in shirts and pants. “I wish I had a pair of Jeans” (91), she tells Dayita who is trying to climb into strollers.

Divakaruni renews the theme that has been explored through the ages, that of identity, the connection between body and mind. Sudha’s friendship with Anju transforms her life and place. Sudha without any professional skill has the hope to survive in America, with the friendship of Anju. But later in the story, this hope of friendship is shaken by Sunil.

Sudha leaves Anju’s apartment without informing her as she feels guilty after having physical pleasure with Sunil, who is her sister’s husband. Here Divakaruni focuses on passion. It shatters all the relationships of the characters. Sunil’s passion for Sudha creates a wide gap between Sudha and Anju, and also this gap
leads Sudha to quit for on a quest for identity. She takes the job of a care taker and finds hope and satisfaction in that job.

Divakaruni creates Mr. Gupta as a meticulous man but she highlights his character only at the end of the story. Rakhi’s focus on her father turned after her mother’s death in a mysterious car accident. The accident draws Rakhi closer to her father. Rakhi’s desire to know India is fulfilled by her father, when he starts revealing his life in India. Divakaruni describes a world of mystery in *Queen of Dreams*. It assumes a magical quality of its own and observes Mrs. Gupta as a potential character.

Even when the reader reaches the last page of the book, the novel remains as enigmatic as at the beginning—a book full of mysteries. The author keeps the readers on dilemma. She never reasons out for Mrs. Gupta’s accident. Nor any clue is given to the reader to analyse the reason for the accident. The mystery is apparent in all the characters. The author finds the form for the book of mystery, her most accomplished work of fiction, in a more fixed trace of the past. Divakarani reveals the book of secrets, necessarily incomplete records of experiences that have witness.
Queen of Dreams is significantly interlinked by cross references to episodes and events. The mysterious characters in this work suggest that experiences and images residing in private or collective memory that the power to emerge and re-emerge indefinitely.

Divakaruni blends the forms of prose and poetry, evoking passions and emotions with simple lyrical language in The Vine of Desire and Queen of Dreams. These novels are all about acculturation. To put it more simply, they are about three generations of Indian-Americans in America. They are expressions of private and communal cultures of an Indian family that immigrated to America and how they respond to the triadic trails of location.

Divakaruni portrays characters and their tormenting emotions when they choose to throw the baggage of culture and create new identity, which keeps transforming and reinventing. The choice they make and the interaction they have with the immigrant community throw them in identity crisis and conflicts, and force them to question their existences.

Divakaruni’s characters struggle to create, rather than find spaces, for building human relationships. At
the back of the author’s diasporic consciousness is the fragmented landscape of migrants made across geographical spaces and cultures and as a consequence, her books have acquired the strength inherent in the multiplicity and essentialism of dislocation experienced by people living in and as diaspora.

In Divakaruni’s novels the characters find America as a new world which gives solutions to their problems and also shows the way to make their lives better. In both these novels, Sudha in *The Vine of Desire* and Mrs. Gupta in *Queen of Dreams* attain a fulfillment in life. They are satisfied with their economic status, feel relieved from social oppression and gain an identity of their own in the new country.

In Divakaruni’s novels the migrants overcome their cultural dilemmas and sense of displacement and experience a positive change by refashioning and mobilizing received ideas from their home culture and host culture. And through their acts of performances and positioning, like the decision of Sudha, to change her costumes, as has been shown by Divakaruni in *The Vine of Desire*, new hybrid identities are negotiated. She throws away her sari and wears pants and shirt which gives her freedom to move about casually in the new American society.
The readers greatly admire Divakaruni’s magic-realist exploration, breaking down the generic boundaries. There is a subtle relation of the past and present throughout her writing. Her America is a more of a nuance, a terrain, and habited space, where the baggage of history jostles with the actions or passivity of its inhabitants and where hopes are satisfied. The displacement from one’s culture and finding oneself in a totally new environment is difficult but the difficulty teaches them to become independent. In both the novels Divakaruni embellishes her characters with their identity. The identity in the Third world is boldly experienced by the characters in the host country.

Divakaruni’s picture of America as a land of hope invites the immigrants to lead a natural life in their adopted home. The hope with which Mrs. Gupta and Sudha take up their lives is further enhanced by the promises of liberty, economic status and identity offered by the host country. These promises help them go on with their lives not with the alienation of a dislocated immigrant but with the confidence of a person who tries to relocate himself / herself in the new place.

Divakaruni projects dislocation as a permanent human condition. According to her, birth is the first
dislocation and from then onwards man is continuously being dislocated in this world. He may have a home in the native land, build a home in the new land adapting to the new cultures, but ultimately he has no home. He has to leave all as death takes him to the other, nameless location, the unknown world after death—the ultimate relocation.

In India when a girl is born, she is destined to be someone else's property. Her luck is good if she gets good husband and in-laws. She is considered exceptionally lucky if she dies before her husband. The orthodox Indian society on the first place does not consider it lucky to have girls. If a girl is born then she is expected to live as her parents' dictations. As a girl she has to abide by the strict social rules, her wish can never be above her parents. A girl is not supposed to cross question her parents because she is to be trained to be an obedient wife. Her marriage is decided by her family elders. She is not even asked for her opinion.

After marriage she has to work according to whims and fancies of her in-laws and husband. Divakaruni has painted a true traditional and orthodox Bengali family in her novel *Sister of My Heart*. The protagonists
Basudha and Anjali from the moment they are born are taught a lot of etiquette, manners and social norms to enable them to find a decent and raised status in their new environment after their wedding. Divakaruni has talked about real people in all her novels and in *Sister of My Heart* she has got into the mind set of orthodox Bengali family. “Good daughters are bright lamps lighting their mother’s name, wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching the family’s fame” (38).

A daughter has to oblige in the present time, her parents and is even taught to oblige in the same way to her in-laws. A daughter, who does not have her own identity and cannot make any decision, is expected to do the same at her in-laws place. A daughter in a traditional Indian family is not even supposed to speak of her opinion; her likes and dislikes are of the least importance to ponder upon. A daughter does not require having her own being. The trauma under which the daughters go in a traditional Indian family is painted well by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

As a young girl a daughter has to blindly follow her mother’s footsteps, accommodating all members by following dictums learned from her mother, in her future household. Daughter’s likeness is sacrificed at
the altar of traditional way of thinking. The protagonist in *Sister of My Heart* Anjali questions her mother of the fact that why her wishes are unfulfilled just because she is a girl. “Or is it because I'm a daughter that my happiness does not matter?” and “I bet if I were a boy you wouldn't be saying no to me all the time like this” (44).

The author is very open and frank in her approach towards the difference between a boy and girl in Indian society. She pays her tribute to feminine disparity. In India, a girl is Goddess of renunciation where all her wishes are sacrificed for the betterment of the family values. The real problem begins when she is forced by the circumstances to make decisions against her own wishes. She is in utter commotion between her independent thinking which every human being has and the traditional way of thinking which is infused in her blood. Here she is in dilemma.

She does not know whether she should follow her mother’s footsteps of going blindly by tradition, or she should go by her own will. But if she chooses her own way then she might lose all her family, friends and their moral support. These circumstances are peculiar in one’s life, when one is forced to make their
compulsive decision. The traditional way of thinking is strongly built where in, one has to focus a lot of energy to come out of it, to choose for one's own sake. In the first place society will not welcome such kind of daughters, failing in such situation to even get family’s help.

The protagonist Basudha of *Sister of My Heart* from her childhood is told to modify and work according to the likeness of parents and after her wedding according to her in-laws. Anjali is living in the same house as Basudha and facing the same situation. It is difficult for both of them to accept the fact that they are being trained to be ideal daughters and daughters-in-law. They rebel from time to time but their wishes are not heard.

They are married according to their mothers’ wish and after marriage they learn the ways of their in-laws. Basudha has trained herself as any other ordinary daughter-in-law to be dutiful and be delighted of every responsibility she has to take on her way to be a perfect role model. Anjali is taken aback by the change she sees in Basudha. Anjali does not agree to Basudha for doing everything in the household where she is of
no relevance, not even to her own husband. Basudha is satisfied with what she has to do as a daughter-in-law.

“Is this what marriage is, this settling for the mediocre? The thought terrifies me” (59). Anjali in these lines is not only thinking in the context of Basudha but in her own role which she is expected to play. Both the protagonists have settled down on this contract which is between daughters of the society and their in-laws. When the time of trial comes, Basudha is also in dilemma.

If she decides to follow the traditional way of thinking which she has been taught by her family, she will have to go for an abortion which is the most serious crime of twenty first century. One feels that female feticide which was prevalent in the past was not so planned as compared to today’s time. The most sacred and affectionate place for a child is mother’s womb but mother is forced to murder her own part by the orthodox family.

Mrs. Sanyal who is mother-in-law of Basudha does not want her first grandchild of Sanyals to be a girl. She considers it a disgrace for the family. One is reminded again of the torture which a daughter-in-law
has to undergo to refuse or overcome such a disdain situation because at her home, she was never given a chance to decide upon her own destiny.

She was forced to do things which she did not prefer because of traditional thinking. Basudha is tormented of the thought of killing her daughter. But if she runs away from her in-laws place, she has no place to go as a refugee. Her mother had told her on the phone not to go against the wishes of Mrs. Sanyal. "Mother picked up the phone. When I told her, she said I mustn’t leave, absolutely not. My place is with my in-laws, for better or worse" (60).

In America, Indian immigrants do not face such problems of female infanticide. Girl child is given equal status as the boy child. Politically, socially and economically boy and girl are treated at par. Indian immigrants are not biased towards their daughters. They welcome the girl child. The Indian immigrants pay attention and bestow love and affection to the girl child.

The second generation Indians, who are born in America, consider themselves more of American than of Indian. The reason to it could be that they want to
merge in the American environment like their other American friends. Second generation Indians though long for India, are not for some traditional value but as a fantasy land. Daughters born in the U.S.A. have the same kind of respect in the family like her brothers. They have equal opportunity at house and out.

Daughters are given equal rights, decision making and they do not have identity crisis even. Daughters who are brought up with broad-minded parents have no problem in making decision of their own. Parents respect their decisions which are made by daughters. Daughters have their parents as a refuge, whenever they are in need of any kind of support.

Divakaruni has painted such characters like Rakhi in her novel *Queen of Dreams*. When she decides to divorce her husband, she does not face any identity crisis. Rakhi, who is a painter, has a house and restaurant of her own. She is financially independent and can bring up her child Jonaki on her own. She gets approval from the court to be a single mother and brings up her daughter.

Her mother Mrs. Gupta does not compel her for divorce. Daughters in America are respected for their
decision making which ultimately helps them to be prepared for the greater responsibilities in their lives. Indian daughters living in America want to follow their mothers’ footsteps as there is lack of orthodox, traditional approach towards the social dogmas. The concept of following mother's dictums is of no harm to the daughter.