

Chapter 5

New Challenges and New Paradigms

Doubt is the greatest killer. Beneath her the waves are igniting, the whole ocean is diamond fire, it makes her eyes water, she starts to wipe them and realizes she cannot because she's wearing flight goggles. Blind now, she's flying by feel, unafraid (...) It was herself. Such a young, fledgling self. She does not want that any more, not now. Her life is just beginning. (VOD 370)

The present century is characterized by overwhelming challenges because the entire situation is rapidly changing on account of world-wide networking and shrinking of distances. Moving away to a new land which was mostly done in search of better prospects in the last century is now witnessing a reverse trend. "Notion of diaspora allows to connect concrete past histories of colonization to modern global phenomena of migration. This requires the intersection of post-colonialism with the politics dictated by multinational capitalism." (Ponzanesi 11) Indian women who looked at US as a land which offered, to some extent, a way to rise above the narrow constraints of tradition and culture has now gained yet another dimension. They are seen as emblems of reconciliation as they try to now negotiate between home and abroad, tradition and modernity, and of 'ethnic belonging and metropolitan fusion'.

Immigration and settlement abroad which was discussed in the context of displacement and dislocation now is debated as a point of social activism which carries with it varied experiences. "Today this new triumvirate, namely, democracy, human rights and globalization has assumed a central position in the post-modern period." (Devare 162) In the

present century, the image of women has changed from the traditional, self-sacrificing ones to independent subjects searching for their own identity.

Writers like Kamala Markandaye, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee have documented dissatisfaction with the scenario and have tried to evoke the internal psychic turmoil. Their writings are, “representation of strong heroines who rebel against the limitations placed on the lives and demands the same education and economic opportunities as men enjoy.”(Carolyn xii) Various anthologies: *The Forbidden Stitch : An Asian American Women’s Anthology* (1991) edited by Shirley Deok Lin Lim, Mayumi Tsulakawa and Margarita Donnelly, *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora* (1993) edited by Sheela Bhatt and Aarti Kohli, *Contours of the Heart : South Asians Map North America* (1996) edited by Sunaina Maira and Rajni Srikanth helped to voice the concerns of the South Asian women and in recent times *Indivisible : An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry* (2010) edited by Neelanjana Banerjee, Summi Kaipa and Preeni Sundaraligam is yet another landmark to trace the challenges facing the Asian Americans.

The key point is to retain a proportional blend of values-both eastern and western. Respect for family as an institution, mythology, folk-lores and epics propagating reverence for tradition, need for humanness and kindness as against valuing the need to be independent, assertive and straightforward is the need of the hour. Culture should be able to exercise ‘soft power’ to which people get attracted to. Modern world needs more of fusion to which Stuart Hall refers to as ‘culture of hybridity’. “As the world dissolves to homogenize the geographic silhouettes, the psychology of the West and the East needs to adapt itself to the changing reality.” (Dasgupta 25) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as a South

Asian diasporic writer has presented, to a great extent, the rise of the New Woman. Sarah Grand's coinage of the term 'New Woman' way back in 1894 led to a proclamation of women's identity. Carolyn writes, "What the New Women did share was a rejection of the culturally defined feminine role and a desire for increased educational and career opportunities that would allow them to be economically self-sufficient."(ix) In her observation on the writings of South Asian diasporic writers it has been said,

The New Women in their [South Asian Diasporic Writers] writings are not elevated on a pedestal as goddesses, but are depicted with their human flaws. Their predicaments are shown as a rite of passage as they pass through processes that symbolize transformations from restriction to freedom. (Hussain 56)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's women are both conventional and unconventional. They suffer within the constraints of traditional culture and address themselves fully to the task of making others happy but they are unconventional in the sense that they question the accepted norms of society and violate it. The conflict between the traditional woman and the image of modernity surfaces and the way the characters' sufferings prepare them towards empowerment is the main feature of these novels. Avtar Brah's description of diaspora space characterizes the situation of the women who is juxtaposed between multiple subject positions:

Multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and

tradition. (Brah 208)

She has projected the tragedy, suffering, pain engulfing the relationship because of the supposed child loss, loss of trust, infidelity and disloyalty which pose challenges but she has also highlighted the enduring spirit of human beings to fight the situations. They refuse to be 'womanly woman'. Her characters spring from the modern world and they reflect the conditions, conflicts and consciousness of not just the women but the diasporians.

Women experience abuse, tangled marriages, divorce, child abortion, poverty but their spirit to fight comes across in the novels. They never totally fail, they fall and stand. The meaning of relationships, ties, bonds and connections get transformed from being simple to complex, easy to difficult and straight to circuitous. The complex maze of perspectives, ideologies and viewpoints leave the readers thinking on the question of women identity, mother daughter relationship, immigrant experiences, multicultural society and complexities, falling away of boundaries, issue of female self-expression and inter-generational conflicts.

Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* looks back and she realizes that her birth was not welcome and that her "parents faces were heavy with fallen hope at another girl-child, and this one colored like mud." (MOS 7) She faces gender discrimination at a very early stage and though her name meant 'star of the eye', 'star-seer', 'flower that grows by the dust road' she always suffered from a 'deep wordless sorrow'. Her loneliness and her anger on being raised as a 'dark girl' made her stern and rebellious. Her life changed after her abduction by the pirates who named her Bhagyavati-Bringer of Luck but beneath the cloak of Queen of pirates, her smile disappeared. She is shown to pay a price for being revolutionary and loneliness knocks at her doorstep but eventually she does listen to her

heart and gives up her power on spices for the love of her life. She breaks the rules, steps out of the bounds of shop's confines and moves out. Her moving out of the store is, "a transgression that is necessary to effect transcultural negotiations: she moves out of herself (...) a step that is important for her in exercising autonomy and in finally coming into her own." (Oju 158)

Though women are caught in their own trap of cultural expectations, societal pressures, patriarchal authority, still they chart out a route towards establishing their own sense of independence trying to have a balance between the expectations and aspirations, public and the personal realm. On one side is Tilo who jostles with her own image but there is also Ahuja's wife who loses her identity as Lalita once she marries and comes to US. Tilo feels: "Ahuja's wife has of course a name Lalita (...) I would like to call her by it, but how can I while she thinks herself only as a wife." (MOS 14) Her dream to open her own tailoring shop and stitch and sew clothes comes to a standstill as the man whom she marries is totally against the idea of a working woman. However she is the one who in the end leaves the house, does not ask for help from her parents, calls up a women's organization, stays with them and discovers her identity. Ahuja's wife represents those women who live in the shadow of their conditioned mind set and accept everything wrong as destiny. Along with the transcending of boundaries of nation and state a change has to come from within, the battles have to be confronted at the individual level against the age old shackles of tradition and upbringing. It is not America which brings in a change in Lalita but it is her own determination to rise against injustice that speaks volumes for her.

One yet another aspect related to women comes fore through Hamida who has been divorced and stays with her brother Shamsur and has a daughter. She likes Haroun

and nurses and takes care of him after he is attacked by the miscreants. Though she does not openly acknowledge her liking for him but eventually she does agree to re-marry. Even that is a sign of courage and it requires her to go against the set norms. Parallely placed is Geeta who has been born and brought up in a very free environment in America by her parents Ramu and Sheela. She represents the modern girl of today who is intellectually gifted and tries to balance the traditional and the modern. She has frequent tussles with her grandfather because he holds age-old views but she herself does not break the rules set by her parents. Lau has mentioned that, "From the contemporary writings of the diasporic South Asian women, it appears that South Asian women of diaspora feel the tug of loyalties and confusion of identities until they learn to balance dual-identities or double consciousness, and combine those into a certain equilibrium." (Lau 253) In fit of rage and anger she moves out of the house to live-in with her Mexican boyfriend Juan but her traditional lineage does not allow her to do so. She lives with her best friend Diana and merely pretends to have a live-in relationship. Geeta symbolizes the women who are caught between two identities.

To my mind, Tilo does not discard or dump spices or in other words her tradition but she only reinvestigates her own knowledge of the spices and that probably is what Banerjee wishes to convey that one cannot create an 'artificial ghetto' and barricade oneself. It is important to integrate to avoid stagnation. Her novels reflect that the women not just empower themselves and are able to fight the challenges but in some way or the other they are the ones who provide a strong support system to their men. When Tilo cuts the seeds for Haroun, she also speaks with an inner voice, "I must press just right, split each seed exactly halfway down the middle" (MOS 113). This imagery is an indicator of the caregiver role that Tilo takes on in terms of Haroun.

Even Haroun acknowledges the support of Hameeda as he says, “I have learned my foolishness. Hameeda too is scolding me.” (MOS 302) When Mohan suffers he also wishes, “Only wish Veena could be here, it would be nice to have someone’s hand to hold on to when outside the sky turns inky purple like *that* night.” (MOS 181) Though Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has portrayed people like Ahuja who physically abuse their wives but she has also shown the way in which men need the care and love of women. It is with a humanistic touch that she has suggested a need for a balanced role between opposite genders. She in a way has offered on a platter variety of characters each unique in their own way but at the same time representing the situation of many.

We see pictures of women’s strength, authority, command and influence leading to triumph of spirit, victory of emotions and accomplishment of fortitude in *One Amazing Thing*. Malathi, Mrs Pritchett, Miss Lola, Farah, Uma, Jiang, Lily, Ammi, Debbie are all symbols of strength and are self—made woman. Mrs Vani Balan and Naina, however, portray the shrewdness of a woman. Naina is compared to the “immediate intelligence of a hawk that knows how best to mortally wound its prey.” (OAT 161) Latika and Nirmala represent the submissiveness and the meekness but this is more due to their low social status and poverty. It is not that these women lack intelligence but they are the victims of circumstances. Malathi and Mrs Lola are portrayed as having the entrepreneur spirit and the will to stand on their own feet. They represent women who with their skill and business acumen are able to attain self-independence.

Malathi is able to dare and cross the boundaries, not just physical locations but even transcend the emotional barriers. Mrs Lola though is divorced twice, is not weak or laid back. In fact she not just supports herself in a big way but also many other women like

her. She is not just Lola but 'Lola with her girls'. Even Jiang had broken all rules and had become the proud manager of a shoe store back in 1960s and had loved every aspect of her work. Through Mrs Pritchett, Divakaruni has also shown that success depends on oneself, not on others. Mrs Pritchett lost her identity as Vivienne because of her failure to drive her passion into reality and not admit one's own weakness. It is the nurse in the hospital who makes her realize this. 'Stop blaming your husband (...) And yourself. Accept. Forgive. A path will open.' (OAT 174) Each woman in her own way interrogates her life.

The managerial skills, decision-making power, executive responsibilities, and supervisory talent of the women which characterize the 21st century women are all reflected in her characters. Farah and Uma represent the youth of today who are conscious, careful and concerned about their career, family and home. Farah is 'smart and secretive' and Uma comes across as calculative and practical. She is the one who takes the charge in a disastrous situation and sets the rules "no interruptions, no questions, and no recriminations." (OAT 67) Farah has got a scholarship to study in US and Uma is a teaching Assistant. Even Uma's mother is a symbol of woman empowerment. In the words of Uma, "Though she was a successful manager, fairly high up in her company, she defined herself mostly as a mother and homemaker." (OAT 195) Most of the women characters have a mind of their own. They think independently and represent the New Woman. Be it Tariq's Ammi, who is a house wife but her strength to face the crisis is commendable: "She drew on reserves of strength that I didn't know she possessed." (OAT 129) Be it Imani, who though feels cheated but maintains her self-respect and does not return to Cameron. It is Cameron who is shown to suffer from guilt and experiences nightmares, not Imani. His decision to sponsor a girl child Seva is like a step towards his liberation and salvation from guilt. Lily's

teenage angst is also her way of rebellion and revolt. “I wanted to be just sufficiently disobedient to force my parents to notice me.” (OAT 139) Though Mrs Balan has negative shades to her character but she is the one who possesses the ‘Machiavellian’s tactics’.

However, though Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has drawn the characters as strong and tough but she has not failed to comment on the attitude of the society. The way Jiang is forced to accept her fate is a question mark for everyone. By posing a series of rhetorical questions, novelist has tried to infact invite the readers into self-examination. “Did she tolerate him with resignation, because what choice did she have?” (OAT 79) Though submission on the part of Jiang can be taken to be her defeat but it is also the triumph of the spirit of adjustment, compromise and conciliation. The way she moulds herself into a new life with Curtis Chan in a new country offers a reminder of life as an assertion of identity fought through strength of character and uniqueness.

Malathi reminisces of the time spent in India where her parents only wanted her to be a bride and she in turn carried the dream of being a bride-maker. For her the only future which her parents could see for her was to marry her off. Her thoughts give a sneak peek into the world marred by the artificial concepts of outer beauty. “If they could provide her with one in which I looked better than normal, my chances of finding a husband – and theirs of negotiating a smaller dowry- would be highly improved.” (OAT 103) However her life did not end in marriage. She boldly rebelled against Mrs Balan, dared to take a step further and moved on to a new country. She is able to leave behind the stigma of dark skin and colour and carve a path for herself.

Her women characters seem to be a blend of tradition and modernity, the local and the global. Uma, for instance, has ‘surrendered to reality’ and has come to accept

that 'people ought to rise above the challenges of circumstance.' "Playing out between centre and periphery, the literatures of the diaspora naturally highlight many of the conflicts and paradoxes that characterize our "global village", proclaiming affiliation with the global while asserting their representation of the local."(Ponzanesi 10) Jiang had come to terms with her 'compacted existence' and since 'there was no necessity for her to speak English, so she let it go.' (OAT 79) All of them come across as women who try to come to terms with themselves, their community and their society through an understanding of their history. The question of choice is often crucial in the novels. Jiang had no choice but she does not fail in marriage. Lily & Uma get the choice to shape their life. Malathi also made her own choice. The dichotomy of doing by choice or by condition carries in it the whole lot of sensibilities and sensitivity.

The uniqueness of her novels is the way in which the women have been shown to live in togetherness and fight the battles of life. Relationship among women has been looked through with a kaleidoscopic view. C. Vijayshree in research article asserts, "In moments of crisis, class barriers collapse and women come together with mutual sympathy, understanding and love. A conscious inculcation of female bonding thus appears to be an important feature of expatriate women's writing." (130) The two set of characters-the older generation of Abha Pishi, Gouri Ma and Nalini in *Sister of My Heart* garner attention as all these three ladies have lost their husbands but they bring up their daughters with resilience and courage. The younger generation is of Anju and Sudha. They grow up in the company of three mothers and no fathers. All these women together formed a community of their own for their survival. Gouri Ma becomes the bread winner as she runs the book store. Abha pishi, the caretaker, and Nalini, a supporter. There is also Ramur Ma, their vinegary old

servant 'who chaperones them everywhere.' The girls Anju and Sudha thus are brought up in a house filled with 'female gossip'. The mothers did disagree on some matters but the "next day they'd be the best of allies" (SMH 136)

The mothers exercise their total control on the girls and are more concerned about reputation and status. Even in a movie the girls remembered that the mothers "sat on the outer edges, buffers between us and the world" (SMH 57) The conviction, strength and spirit with which Abha Pishi speaks seem to speak volumes on the injustice she had suffered but refuses to be bogged down yet again. The issue of gender roles seems to have been reversed in this novel. It has been mentioned, "Sudha and Anju complement each other like a male and female, the former being an emotional component and the latter an intellectual one." (Vasanthi 641)

Her novels project the mother-daughter and daughter-mother relation in such a way that each of them gets strength from each other. If the three widowed mothers lived for their daughters, even Sudha gets the strength and the will to survive due to her daughter Dayita. Analytical study reveals:

Overpowered by the torrents and tribulations of life, these women seek refuge in each other's company, compensating for their deprivation. An empathic bond, in which each acts as a mentor, guiding their destiny to a safer shore, knits their relationships together. (Singh 154-155)

The bond of sisterhood and motherhood proclaims the bonds of womanhood. They nurture with the love of being together and try to understand each other. The characters characterize the institution of marriage and family and through it the issues of identity and independence in fine tune with tradition and loyalty. Peter Nazareth's views indicate an important aspect

of her writings. He has observed,

In Divakaruni's work, despite sex, class and caste oppression, women need not end up as victims. America chips away at ossified Indian tradition, for people to see, as Krishna shows, that the imperative of life is deeper than arranged marriage. America and India are twinned. (qtd. in Kuortti 91)

Anju though is shattered but wishes to solve Sudha's problems and Sudha by sharing her daughter with Anju tries to give a lease of life to her. "Two women who have traveled the vale of sorrow, and the baby who will save them, who has saved them already. Madonnas with child." (VOD 347) Novels delve into the psychology of the women, jealousies, doubt, mistrust and the way it leads to loneliness further leading into taking decisions to be self-independent. The novel *The Vine of Desire* brings out the pain of loss, twinge of separation and hurt of doubt and disbelief. Here the narrative voice keeps shifting from the voice of Sudha to third person narration. Epistolary techniques along with written assignments voice the innermost feelings of the characters. The decision of Sudha to return to India and lead life on her own terms, Sunil's step to finally go to India to perform the last rites of his father point at the two extremes. Sunil's decision is a positive affirmation of his identity but it also serves as a denial of one's desires and the way he is forced to succumb to the demands of society.

It is the women who come to the rescue of women. For instance, Sudha meets a girl Sara by chance who gives her the address of Lupe who helps her in finding a job in an alien land which marks a turning point in the life of Sudha. For the first time she is able to take a decision on her own and have her own account in the bank which gives her the strength to fight the world in her own way and no longer remain at the mercy of someone.

The need to be financially independent has been reasserted with a kind of poignancy in the novel. The letter from Pishi serves as the change which Divakaruni seems to manifest in her women. In the letter Pishi writes, "It is fine thing for a woman to have her own self-earned bank balance! If the times had allowed me, I would have liked to have one too!" (VOD 351) This note from the older generation to younger generation kind of bridges the generation gap and it also helps in arriving at some point of consensus between the traditional and the modern, the old and the new and the conventional and the contemporary. Sudha's letter to Sara also hints at this chain of events in which lie the seed for a better future. It is from a student that Sudha gets the inspiration. Her acknowledgement towards Sudha is like acknowledging the need for change and transformation. She writes, "You made me realize that even when everyone around is saying no, you can say yes." (VOD 352)

Anju's decision to be on her own also point at the acceptance of truth which she has so long been trying to avoid. She is the one who experiences pain of losing a child, goes through bouts of depression, understands her cousin and husband's attraction but remains calm on the outside. She feels and tries to battle with her inner fears but keeps moving. She in a way, "holds on to something she heard a long time ago, in another country , when she was no more than a child herself: the dead are not irrevocably dead as long as one refuses to let them go." (VOD 7)

The eerie silence and deadness in her relationship with silence which is common to so many women is not unfamiliar to her but she drags her into believing in false delusions. 'Unexpected dread' fills her heart often. The only determination of her heart comes out in the form of her writing. She writes, "I want to show them that I can survive inspite of what they've done to me." (VOD 270) and she also feels the pinch of sorrow and

tries to analyse her situation in a country into which she transported herself in the desire for independence. She transforms from self-delusion mode to self-accepting mode. Her inner voice reflects her mental state. “Has she been warm ever once since she left India (...) in her treacherously selective memory, is always bathed in sunshine the color of dahlias?” (VOD 302) The last scene of Anju and Sudha together opens up so many optimistic possibilities as Anju affirms, “I’ve learned to fly.” (VOD 368) Even she discovers her strength and instead of hanging on to a meaningless relationship moves on to accept independence in its true sense. In an interview to Uma Ganesh (2007), the author has stated that:

Values are constantly in flux (...) values shift — new things become more important and the same happens to my characters. Values that empower women have become increasingly important to me. Some things are the same everywhere though. Courage, integrity, truth, compassion. My characters struggle with trying to hold on to them. It is my struggle too. (Divakaruni)

In *The Queen of Dreams* the characters of Mrs Gupta and Rakhi do not merely have dialogic relationship with an imaginary or generalised other but also communicate through dialogue with aspects of otherness within themselves. It is a novel of self-exploration, self discovery and self-realization. The women characters are the pointers of the Indian women community jostling with the diasporic state and trying to put up with the challenges posed by a brave new world. Each woman succeeds as she tries to create her own mental space in a space which is at times unfamiliar to her.

Rakhi is a woman who has experienced troubled marriage with Sonny and is now trying to live independently, running her own Chai Shop to raise her daughter Jonaki in

her own way. She progresses from a girl trying to discover her identity to being a woman who braves all odds, sets up a business and then finally also reclaims the love of her life though it means to adjust and compromise. The 'naked destitution' of the self gives way to 'imagined revolution' in the characters. The 'charming love' for the unattainable gives way to a 'striking hullabaloo'. The 'dream interpreter' becomes a 'dream chaser' and finally a dream chaser eventually turns into a dream planner.

Mrs Gupta, Rakhi and Jonaki, the three generations, stand in contrast to each other but still they carry with them a sense of association, sameness and a bond of togetherness. They are individuals with their own aspirations but what binds them together is their inherited dreams and distant land. Rakhi stands for all the women who at some point have tried to be like their mothers but have detested and rejected their conventionality. She prefers to remain 'misunderstood'. The beauty of this character is that it is one amongst us who tries to do what she is stopped to do.

Resistance generally is one form of resentment but it also carries with it the seeds of revolution. The relation between the women and the way they help understand each other is striking. Rakhi shares a peculiar but normal bond with her mother. She remembers that her mother was loving who, "smoothed hair, hummed, indulged in bed-time ritual of story telling"(QOD 3) in a very routine and habituated way and could 'smell me the way an animal does her young' (QOD 5), was 'complete in herself' (QOD 6) and Rakhi affirms that ' I wanted to be just like her' (QOD 8). To her mother she was the 'little ostrich' (QOD 160). It is her mother who empowers her in her difficult times. She supports her when she thinks of starting a business on the recommendation of her friend Belle. According to Mrs Gupta, "Women need something of their own to make them independent (...) something to

give them a sense of self. Something to fall back on, if necessary.”(QOD 28)

Rakhi’s relation with her own daughter is also different. Rakhi romanticized her mother’s talent and aspired to become a dream-teller but when her own daughter receives the gift, she feels Jonaki has, “a terrible weight she’ll have to carry (...) by herself.” (QOD 283) When Jona falls ill it is at that particular hour that she is able to question her own role and with each role she uses a negative adjective for herself like ‘insecure mother’, ‘blocked painter’, ‘ stumbling businesswoman’, ‘ blind woman’, ‘ grudging daughter’, ‘possessive ex-wife’ which gives her a chance to assess her own shortcomings and mistakes. Her mother tried to make her understand but it is through her own daughter that she discovers the truth. Mrs Gupta’s self-analytical thoughts penned down reflect the same tone. “I was not a good mother to Rakhi. I loved her but not fully. To love someone fully is to give up self hood, and I could not risk that (...) perhaps that is why she constantly longed to understand who I am, to become who I am.” (QOD 297)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni repetitively has projected the relation of women in a significant way and the impact it creates on their lives. Brah Avtar has written,

The sign ‘woman’ has its own specificity constituted within and through historically specific configurations of gender relations. Its semiotic flux assumes specific meanings in different ‘womanhoods’ where it comes to symbolize particular historical trajectories, material circumstances and cultural experiences. (103)

Another woman who plays a significant role is Belle (Balwant Kaur) who is a friend, partner, guide of Rakhi and the camaraderie of their relationship lends a charm to the otherwise dull and boring narrative of strange stories. Both have been brought up in America

but their philosophy is different. Rakhi craves to return back to her homeland but Belle dreads even the thought of return. Rakhi all the while imagines but Belle is the practical one who always remains with her and their place of work is Berkeley, US. Together they face ‘romantic troubles’, ‘failing grades’, ‘the pressures that only Indian parents know to apply to their offspring.’ (QOD 15)

The best part of their relation is that Rakhi whole heartedly accepts Belle’s wilderness and restlessness whereas Belle keeps Rakhi grounded and positioned. They both are instrumental in running the chai shop and after her separation; Rakhi finds her confidence through this venture which she calls her ‘sanctuary’. Belle supports her during personal and financial crisis. She tries her best to overcome her grief of losing her mother. The romantic angle of Belle with Jespal ends up in a proposal of marriage to Belle but it is here that the entire gamut of emotions unfolds as she tries to analyse her own identity as an Indian or an American. The dual conflict between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ surfaces. Belle is forced to think of their relation seriously as she feels threatened by her upbringing. Belle puts this conflict as ‘irreconcilable differences’.

In the novel *The Palace of Illusions* Draupadi’s relation with Dhairya Ma is one of trust and sharing, her relation with her mother-in-law comes across as intriguing and questioning whereas her views on Gandhari’s decision to blindfold her eyes for the sake of her husband shows her revolutionary streak, “If my husband couldn’t see, I’d make doubly sure to keep my own eyes open.” (POI 36) She feels for Bhanumati, Duryodhan’s new wife, and she does not like the way he marries her, “I felt a stab of anger at Duryodhna for having plucked her so soon from her parents.” (POI 183) She likes Hidimba, Bheem’s first wife, who according to her, “was a tough woman who knew her own mind and followed it,

uncaring of what people might think.” (POI 247)

The way she decides to make a separate court reflects her concern for women and the desire to bring in a change in the submissive nature. She unites women to help women. She makes a court where women could come and share their sorrows. The way she connects with the younger generation and gets along with Uttara, is really commendable:

Uttara’s action galvanized us all (...) All this allowed us to set up businesses for them. In time the women’s market became a flourishing center of trade in the city (...) Hastinapur remained one of the few cities where women could go about their daily lives without harassment. (POI 325)

Her nurse Dhai Ma is her confidante and she is like a mirror to her telling the truth on her face. She unfolds the dark secrets, warns her of her short comings and speaks with a lot of penchant to advise and caution her on the dangers of her rebellious nature. She is the one who can analyze and understand her but she is a person who wishes to conform to the norms of the society therefore to her Draupadi appears stubborn and obstinate. She tries in her own way to guide her into directing her life properly. Even Draupadi never disrespects her though she knows that her path is different from hers. At this stage words of a poetess reverberate in the mind as we try to understand the mother [nurse-Dhai ma]-daughter relation. In a poem entitled *To Mother*, it is written:

Breaking out of the dam
you’ve built, swelling
in a thunderstorm,
roaring through the land,
let me live, very different

from you, Mother.

Let go, make way. (S.Usha n.pag.)

Dhai Ma's class and status, her earthiness, her bluntness, her gender-policing together make her a symbol of traditional and strong-headed woman. Dhai Ma's 'ribald jokes', her affectionate scoldings, and 'raucous curses' stay with her till her last moment. Her affection mixed with strictness goads her into moving with a precaution. At one juncture Panchaali discusses the prophesy with Dhai Ma and about its absurdness of her being married to more than one man and during their discussion Dhai Ma in her own plain speaking style hints of the reality wherein it is customarily the opposite. Among their deliberations, Dhai Ma comes to the realization that "finally I had the freedom men had for centuries, my situation was very different from that of a man with several wives." (POI 120) Dhai Ma's comment hints at the double standards of the society. Though she accepts everything as per the traditional norms and mores, Dhai Ma is a woman who has a voice as far as her decision to bring up her children is concerned.

The firmness of her character subjects Draupadi to resign her own musings at times. Dhai Ma often tried to tell her, "Don't you know, a woman must be prepared for her destiny in a different way." (POI 30) Her teachings, fears, reflections and thoughts point at the life long experience which she has of the society and its expectations from women. It is Dhai Ma who understands women better and she is the one who tells Panchaali of the power of Gandhari. Panchaali had misjudged Gandhari as a docile and an overly traditional woman but Dhai Ma says, "Don't be fooled by her quietness! She's dangerous, with more power than most people realize, and one of these days she just might decide to use it." (POI 129) Though Panchaali often shrugs off Dhai Ma's warnings as her worries but most of the

times she proves true. The observant streak in her and the penchant to comprehend things characterizes Dhai Ma's personality.

Panchaali misses her in her difficult times and Dhai Ma also draws a line of boundary between her desires and her duties. She refuses to accompany her to Hastinapur and had just said, "I'm too old for you to need a chaperone, my dear!" (POI 134) Even though when Dhai Ma is not with Panchaali, her teachings strike her back every now and then and she keeps on hearing Dhai Ma's voice in her mind as her 'bullying love'. She is the one who passes information to her when they return back to Hastinapur after Shishupal's death on the invitation of Duryodhan. The way in which she gathers tidbits from servants shows her skills of managing. She handles the critical situation also well and informs Panchaali of her being lost at a game. It is her lessons of life that teach Panchaali to be cautious and vigilant. It is her undemanding love for Panchaali and her sternness which probably helps Panchaali sail through the distressed moments. Dhai ma's views on Bheeshma Pitamaha, "A well meaning man (...) is more dangerous because he believes in the rightness of what he does." (POI 135) or her disapproval in saying, " that I would be woefully undressed for the occasion, that only old women wore white, but finally she complied." (POI 186) show her as a person with acute sense of surveillance and a keen eye of aesthetics.

Dhai Ma with her love, care, sternness and strength influences Panchaali during her early life but after her marriage, the widowed queen Kunti appears to her as mysterious, shrewd, political, baffling and complicated. Kunti is a passive but an aggressive mother-in-law who raises her sons with the sole aim of claiming back what was theirs. She has a strong hold on her sons whose words are unchallenged. As a woman, she exercises her

power over her five strong sons who look feeble before her. Her word is the ultimate dictum.

Panchaali tries to maintain a cordial relationship with Kunti but it does not seem to work out well as two strong headed women seem to clash against their own egos. Panchaali initially sees Kunti as her enemy. She calls her 'watchful' and looks at her as an 'adversary' but is able to judge her inner strength. To Panchaali Kunti had, "inner resources beyond what my eyes could see. A subtle disdain flickered under the composure that marked her face." (POI 105) She looks to her as a 'statue carved from ice'. She treats Panchaali with a disregard and even comments on her upbringing and hints at the toughness she is supposed to assume in the forthcoming years. She says, "This is all there is. This isn't your father's palace!" (POI 107) Panchaali against her wishes tries to control her anger in front of her but deep beneath it is this rejection which makes her strong. Kunti asserts her independence and values her assertiveness. Her words speak of her strength, "All through my life----even in the hardest of times-----everything I said, I made sure it was done. I told myself I'd bring you up as princes in the halls of your forefathers, and no matter how much harassment I faced, I held on to my promise" (POI 108) As a single woman battling the odds of life she comes as an example of a survivor. She had refused to succumb to the pressures of life and had fought the challenges with great integrity. Kunti does not refer to Panchaali by her name but addresses her as '*this woman*'. Though Panchaali thinks she is bold and gutsy but in Kunti's eyes she is only a princess brought up in comfort who has no idea of the hardship.

The incident which had shaken Kunti in the past is narrated by Sahdev and it throws light on the struggles and sufferings of Kunti. It was about how Duryodhan had offered a holiday at Varanavat to kill the pandavas. She had almost lost it but she fought back and said, "I've used up all my tears of my life so that they will not distract me again."

(POI 114) Kunti has a sense of political shrewdness as well. She is the one who on the advice of Vidur asks the son to make a tunnel and plans to kill Nishad. She commits this sin with no sense of guilt as for her the safety of her sons is supreme. Along with her judiciousness, she is also a woman who loves to work for the poor.

Kunti's past incidents are narrated to Panchaali which makes her admire the woman she is. Panchaali is forced to think. "Could I have made that ultimate sacrifice, taking on damnation for my children?" (POI 115) When the Pandavas go to Khandav they leave behind Kunti and at that time Kunti wishes that Dhai Ma also stays with her. Paanchali feels happy at her so called freedom but she is also ashamed of her jubilation. Panchaali at times seeks to crave for Kunti's approval and appreciation. Such is Kunti's effect that she is not able to forget her and she is forced to accept that, "Kunti was a wise woman-----wiser than me, if truth were told (...) biding her time, waiting for the mistakes she knew I'd make?" (POI 150) The news of Paachaali's comical reaction to Duryodhan's splashing in water is taken by Kunti very seriously. However, Panchaali later recognizes her mistake. "I didn't know that she was right in her misgivings. That in travelling to Hastinapur we were making one of the biggest mistakes of our life" (POI 179)

Panchaali empathizes with her and thinks, "She'd made Karna suffer, yes, but hadn't she suffered just as much?" (POI 281) She is the one who is able to understand her deep seated feelings and the anger which she has for her transforms into pity: "By some inexplicable osmosis Kunti's secret had become my secret." (POI 281) Panchaali's arrogance gives way to sympathy for Gandhari and Kunti and their sorrow unites them. It is Kunti who donates all her artifacts to help Paanchali set up a court for women. The relation might not be truly of love but there is an unsaid respect for the intimidating effect of Kunti.

Panchaali is shown to be a woman who learns to acknowledge the women power. She likes Bheem's first wife Hidimba for her toughness and her uncaring attitude. She feels concerned for Bhanumati. There is also a hint by the novelist towards the dislike for child marriage and its disadvantages. Panchaali is not without envy. The woman's envy and her possessiveness are also reflected in the novel. When Arjun marries Subhadra, Krishna's sister, Panchaali is unable to accept her whole heartedly. She says,

A pang went through me (...) And though one part of me sympathized with Subhadra's fear, the other part raged that she had so easily and thoughtlessly gained what I in spite of all my renown as the chief queen of the Pandavas would never possess. And so I turned from her, making deliberate, cutting remarks about seduction and betrayal until she was reduced to tears. (POI 152)

At one stage Panchaali even accepts, " Distance is a great promoter of harmony: a fact that women who find themselves in situations similar to mine should keep in mind (...) Though no one could accuse her of weakness, she was more pliant than I." (POI 153) It is tough to balance the conflicting passions and demands however still Panchaali is shown to be friendly with women of all ages, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni through Panchaali has brought in the importance of sisterhood for survival in the patriarchal world. In her essay on "*What Women Share*" (2007) the novelist has written:

Even when we disagree with each other, we often know what the other is going to say before she shapes the words (...) we're sometimes furiously competitive and bitchy and exasperated. But ultimately we can be ourselves with each other. Ourselves with all our imperfections. Ourselves

uncomplicated by all the emotions that complicate our other relationships: duty, lust, romance, the need to impress or control. We can be women and know that, as women, we can understand. (Divakaruni)

Panchaali is shown to feel for the women and understands their plight as she voices her internal feelings. “I knew how it felt to be helpless and hopeless.” (POI 323) She unlike other women refuses to engage herself in self-pity and transforms Hastinapur into one of the few cities, “where women could go about their daily lives without harassment.”(POI 325) Panchaali’s last journey into the Himalayas is her journey on a path which “no woman had ever attempted” (POI 343) and that she does it from the very beginning. She herself ponders:

But what was the alternative? To sit among bent grandmothers, gossiping and complaining, chewing on mashed betel leaves with toothless gums as I waited for death? Intolerable! I would rather perish on the mountain. It would be sudden and clean, an end worthy of bard-song, my last victory over the other wives (...) How could I resist it? (POI 343-44)

Her undying spirit and unfathomable desires still linger in the last words. Her emotions, passion and energy coupled with experiencing challenges portray the brilliant and strong character. She enters into another world and her sense of satisfaction is highlighted as she marvels at the other world, “The air is full of men – but not men exactly, nor women, for their bodies are sleek and sexless and glowing. Their faces are unlined and calm, devoid of the various passions that distinguished them in life.”(POI 358) Her death frees her from the shackles of gender and search for self and identity, “I am beyond name and gender and the imprisoning patterns of ego. And yet, for the first time, I’m truly

Panchaali.” (POI 360)

Draupadi’s journey from struggling alone in the beginning and towards the end gaining momentum through the combined efforts of other women is a journey of human civilization to adjust, accommodate, learn, reject, compromise, accept and then later even if need arise revolt and rebel to create an uprising. The prerequisite of any resurrection & struggle is the will to fight against all odds. Draupadi by uniting the people challenges the traditions and fights the weaknesses. The focus is on motivating women to be self-reliant and independent.

Entire epic of the Mahabharata has been seen from Draupadi’s point of view. The story of Draupadi is of a particular time in history but her experiences match with the women of today which make her timeless and everlasting. Draupadi tried to dissolve her own boundaries and thereby proved to be a person with pride, sharp intellect and strong will. *Mahabharatha* has been used as an agent to force the humans to think about the divine, forces of the destiny and also interrogate their own fallacies. Becoming self-aware is important. The exoticism of bygone ages stand opposite to the familiar and the real world but it intersects and collates to reflect the condition of women. As a girl, Draupadi believed that she can control the system but most of the time she failed. She has her own set of victories as well. Regrets, unhappiness, failures mark her journey but self-fulfillment and self-realization also co-occur. She passes through stages of disbelief to reach a stage of acceptance and understanding. In her talk with Priyadarshini (2014) the author has mentioned,

I want people to be sensitive about how women feel and think. Panchaali is an extremely intelligent woman but she has been kept in the background. I

want my books to force readers to recognise the fact that a woman is a human being just like them. (Divakaruni)

Draupadi in her own words narrates her birth from a sacrificial fire, her loneliness in childhood where she always lived under the shadow of a prophecy, her tricky marriage to five men, her desire to have her own home, her freedom and honour stripped in public, grim war and a lonely death. However, behind all her narrations is the need to be independent, assertive and not give up. Her fearlessness, adventurous spirit, commanding attitude and action oriented thinking come to the fore. Though all the external forces are against her but her internal will power opens options for her at times.

The way Draupadi rebels and withholds against the authority of men highlights the New Woman who asserts her own point of view and refuses to plainly accept everything. She at one point says, “—And who decided that a woman’s highest purpose was to support men (...) A man, I would wager! Myself, I plan on doing other things with my life.” (POI 26) She supports but also rejects, stands by but also has the skill to oppose. She takes the charge and tries to lead the team of men. She knows her strengths and makes full use of it. Draupadi likes to acknowledge herself and never undermines her identity in relation to her five husbands. She says,

—I’d played a crucial role in bringing them to their destiny. I’d shared their hardship in Khandav. I’d helped them design this unique palace which so many longed to see. If they were pearls, I was the gold wire on which they were strung. Alone, they would have scattered, each to his dusty corner. (POI 151)

She tries to re-interpret, re-evaluate and re-define the course of her life. In a research work

entitled *Agency, Narrativity, Gender in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's - The Palace Of Illusions* it has been mentioned:

Draupadi, in Chitra Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, journeys from being a woman repeatedly made the subject of narration by patriarchal narratives to becoming a woman who subjectivizes narration itself, in the process, overthrowing the narratives that have constructed her womanhood through centuries. By becoming both the narrator and agent of action, Divakaruni's Draupadi recovers the voice of womanhood. (Nair 156)

As a woman novelist, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has highlighted the need to understand the power which resides within each woman and rise above the shackles of tradition to give a purpose to life. The story of Draupadi retold through her own voice voices the voice of women and it is like a call to understand and analyze the shortcomings of succumbing. Suffering and living in despair is also a kind of vice. It is important to stand against injustice. This novel is about a woman trying to fight in a man's world which still has relevance in this war torn world.

Draupadi is shown to be strong headed but at the same time she has the womanly qualities of adjustment, caring and is able to mingle and assimilate in almost every circumstance. She plays all the roles of a wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law with devotion. No where do we see her compromising her dignity. Even though she loves Karna but she never makes an attempt to leave her five husbands. She stands by her five husbands during the period of exile. Though brought up like a princess, willingly renounces royal treatment and lives in a small hut, cooks food but rejects to be insulted. Her failures, sorrows, sufferings do not make her weak but she stands tall with her head held high in all

circumstances. She feels, “The more people dissuaded me, the more determined I became. Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the boundaries society has prescribed for women.” (POI 343) Her evolution from a girl born from fire to a woman fading in fire is significant.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has brought in all kinds of women with different personality traits and has proved the dictum that, “To write from a diasporic consciousness is to chronicle an uneasy world and yet to assert a complex agency and rationality, both artistic and political.” (Deshazer 33) Submissive, traditional, conservative, rigid women have been placed alongside strong-headed, straight-forward, commanding, and strong women. Though Dhai Ma is traditional but she is not weak. Though Kunti has guilt but she is a woman who seeks to take revenge. Gandhari though is a dutiful wife but she is also a woman of power who tries to protect her son at all costs. The paper entitled *A Palace of Her Own: Feminine Identity in the Great Indian Story* has been concluded by mentioning that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has made:

The question of female agency a more complex one. Resisting simplifications of matters which have fascinated audiences for over 2000 years, the great Indian story reminds us of many aspects of human nature and also of the fact that (...) How deep is gender? Is it skin deep, superficial, or truly deep, essential? (Hoydis n.pag.)

Oleander Girl is another novel by which the novelist is able to chart a journey of a girl brought up with a traditional mind-set into a frame where she supersedes even her expectations from herself. She refuses to be taken for granted. “Do they think that they can pick up my life like a ball of dough and roll it into whatever shape they fancy.”

(OG 22) She asserts her decision very strongly, “I refuse to start my married life with a sword hanging over my head, I’ll meet with your mother tomorrow.” (OG 73) She loves Rajat deeply but she is even ready to cancel her engagement. “I’m tired of people treating me like a charity case.” (OG 83) To raise the money in America for her travel she gets her hair cut and that becomes a symbol of her strength. “A mass of curls, barely reaching my shoulders, have transformed into a stranger, glamorous and a little dangerous.” (OG 165) Her name itself is suggestive. “I’m Korobi, Oleander, capable of surviving drought and frost and the loss of love.” She is tough and beautiful. She emphatically says, “I love my mother. But I am not her. My journey has taught me that.” (OG 280)

Her novels exhort the readers and especially women to delve into the theme of survival. Her *One Amazing Thing* breaks the binaries of a repressive India, discusses analytically the liberatory space that is provided by the American geography and the promise of the ‘American dream’ and it leads the readers to an ‘open world’ with dissolved boundaries and acceptance of diversity. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels in other words have become a vehicle for ‘shedding swallowed stones’ which Meena Alexander recommends in *Fault Lines* or it also speaks about ‘stepping away from her inherited weights’ as suggested by Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine*. It also reaffirms the statement, “The postcolonial and migrant novels are seen as appropriate texts for such explorations because they offer multi voiced resistance to the idea of boundaries and present texts open to transgressive and non-authoritative reading.” (Boehmer 243)

Displacement as represented by many theorists doubly marginalizes women but even the role of a man or the pre-set assumptions associated with a man’s role also undergo a change. In the context of rising globalization, breaking of families into single

units, and exposure of Western world view, one finds the shift in men's role from a strict disciplinarian and authoritative figures towards more accommodating, supportive and adjusting partners. Another significant quality of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel is the way she has analyzed not just the relation between women but also brought in the importance of man-woman relationship and one can see a paradigmatic shift in the roles. It is her approach towards her male characters that make her look quite humanistic. Men are shown with all their human frailty but they also stand as supporters of women thus shining as examples of post-modern man who play different roles with a penchant. From a modern feminist perspective she does believe in the powerful women but equally acknowledges the role of men:

The 21st century man has the legacy of a pluralistic society that more and more values respect for individuals over subordination to roles. This allows the ongoing displacement of role expectations with the creation of responsible individuality, a promising feature for a society that values diversity and builds creatively upon it. (Munhall 27)

The way in which she has highlighted the power and equality as a need for a woman she has also emphasized the same for men by making them powerful and powerless at times.

A striking thing about her novel is that unlike the contemporary novelists of her time, Divakaruni has shown the softer, flexible side of man who do not stand as symbols of male chauvinism but are indeed the greatest supporters and strength of their women. Their identity is not that of stereotypical Indian male patterns but one can mark that they seem to have rather adapted to the American context and western society. The words of Meenakshi Thapan convey this sense as she has remarked,

Identity is not a finished product, it is rather a social construction (...) The representation of identity therefore is an ongoing process, since immigrant identities are continually transformed by the journey; their subjectivities being recomposed in 'different practices and sites of experience'. (Thapan 29)

The emphasis is on women characters but it also charts the way women gain strength and support from the men around them who play an instrumental role in their lives.

In the novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, along with the women characters, the men too who visit her store symbolize the varied aspects which the diaspora has to face. On top of the list is Haroun who is from Kashmir and used to row boats in Dal Lake. It is because of the terrorist attacks that he is forced to move away but the irony is this that even in America he becomes a victim of racial discrimination and is attacked by the group of people who render him fractured and broken. His is a case of forced migration. His struggle to make his living in a new country continues as he keeps changing jobs. He shovels coal on ship, works in a car shop, drives Rolls of Mrs kapadia but finally becomes a taxi driver. He visits Tilo to share his happiness as he believes that happiness only can be shared with one's own people. "I see that a joy does not become real until you share it with someone dear, and in this far country who else do you have." (MOS 29) The pangs of separation from relatives and friends pinch the people and it strikes their consciousness.

Another teenager is Manu who is 17 years old and works hard to live up to the American dreams. He does not shy in doing odd jobs like cleaning bathrooms just to buy a brand of Nike. The problem with the older generation in America is that though they have moved but their ideology does not change and the result is that their children have to face

the consequence. When Manu expresses his wish to go to the 'prom' he is refused just on the ground that, "All that drinking whisky-beer and dancing pressed up against cheap American girls in mini skirts, what are you thinking of." (MOS 79) They fail to realize the problems of their children and thus the older and the younger generation come face to face with each other. The question is who is responsible for this tussle? Isn't there a need to change with the changing environment? The father is frightened that he would lose his son to America but the dilemma of son is that he would lose his entire life if he does not mingle with his peer group:

This issue on the one hand, develops the tension between the desire for assimilation and the need for ethnic identity in the younger generation; on the other hand, it creates a conflict between generations, between mothers and fathers who want to maintain cultural ethnicity and the children who want freedom to be more American. (Mandal 12)

Raven with whom Tilo falls in love lingers in self-doubt and deplors his identity but even after earning a lot he is unable to reach his mother. It is at this moment that Tilo comes in his life and their union projects the acceptance of one's own identity with a mirror image of the self hanging on one's own conscience. Their relationship is also a product of illusionary attraction "Each of us loving not the other but the exotic image of the other that we have fashioned out of our own lack." (MOS 310) So this relationship at a deeper level even examines the cross-cultural and cross-world relationship eventually dealing with the idea of 'diasporic positioning' where communities meet within the host country.

Her novels *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* focusses on the

relationship between women but they also give a glimpse into the unavoidable and difficult circumstances where relationships are put to test under the fire of situational crisis and the way past comes to haunt the present lives of the characters and transforms their future course of action. In case of *The Vine of Desire* the man who stands out is Sunil who plays different roles of a husband, lover, father (assumed role), son, manager with a skill beyond his capacity. He tries to balance his own desires with his roles. He sacrifices his own expectations many times in his bid to balance his family. He tries to stop Anju most sympathetically from inviting Sudha over to US but when she takes the decision of inviting her, he does not oppose but tries to build his own barrier to save himself from morally going wrong. His sensitivity and child like quality becomes apparent by the way he cuddles, plays and fondles with Dayita. He baby sits Dayita and Anju observes that when Sunil is with Dayita, “all the bitterness falls away from him (...) Boyish and excited and tender.” (VOD 30)

His words spoken to himself bring out his deep seated thoughts, “I could be the man who’s lost his voice and you the child who finds it for him.” (VOD 48) In a nostalgic mode in an imaginary conversation with Dayita he remembers himself as ‘a scabby boy’ who pestered his mother to give him the money to see theatre in school days and always thought that his mother ‘would provide what I needed’. The actors looked to him like Gods and in his childhood he dreamt of becoming an actor and then later thought of becoming a judge presiding over criminal cases. He remembers the play *Macbeth* which had left a great impact on him and the way he kept dreaming of a man stepping through a bog. He relates his own life to that of Macbeth.

Sunil’s conversation with the child Dayita is infact a conversation with his

own self and it hints at the internal conflict he faces, “I guess there are things you can do to stop yourself into the bog. But most of us don’t see them until we’re in up to our armpits. Maybe that’s what happened to O.J., too.” (VOD 122) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has cited the case of O.J. Simpson’s trial to give the entire episode a contemporary touch and has reflected on the psyche of Sunil who understands his weakness, confronts it but is unable to stop himself from falling into a bog. Sunil’s overrated interest in the trial of O.J. Simpson is a way of trying to find answers to the innumerable questions haunting his mind.

Sunil plays the role of a husband not in the conventional way but in the most contemporary way. He readily extends help in the kitchen and is never shown to be complaining. He is unlike his father who is a male chauvinist and never respected his wife. His cold relationship with his father points at his changed ideology. However when he learns of his father’s serious illness he acts like a ‘solid worker, tenacious as a bull-dog’ and uses work like a ‘cough syrup, to suppress the symptoms’ (VOD 308) He loves his mother and just to please his mother, he visits India and performs the last rites of his father. Even after a rift with Anju he continues to help and meet Gouri ma and the mothers. Though he is the one who offers to get a divorce from Anju, he also understands his sense of responsibility. He writes to her that he would continue to provide financial support to her even after divorce. He cries and does not hide his emotions.

Sudha and Sunil’s complex relationship lays down to rest the dictates of norms and mores. He succumbs to his desires and pays for it. His fascination for movies, his love for pets like rabbit and his dream of an eagle in his childhood is unfolded in the assignment written by Anju. It indirectly voices the intricate and compounded personality of Sunil. Anju on behalf of Sunil writes:

I tried to shore up my wife; I tried to salvage my waterlogged career. I tried to cut loose from anger and make do with what life had seen fit to leave me (...) Then she [Sudha] came back to my life (...) I, Sunil, kicked off morality and obligation like a pair of worn- out shoes. (VOD 166)

Anju's inner voice also reflects at all the attempts Sunil makes to build his family and home but somehow gets shattered under the pressure of circumstances and desires beyond his control. Divakaruni has presented in the picture of Sunil, a man, who possesses his own weaknesses and stumbles. He is not heroic but suffers from moments of anxiety and his sensitivity and emotional side creates a sense of pity for him rather than anger.

He keeps running away from reality. His journey to US also is an escapade because he wishes to live on his own terms but when he loses his child though he is unable to say anything, something within him also dies. Dayita brings back to him his lost childhood and Sudha almost proves the opposite of Anju. In a way Sunil is the epitome of strength and weakness, courage and cowardice, desire and dreams. He seems to be an embodiment of virtues and vices which makes him human.

The other men in the novel are Ashok who follows Sudha till US and is ready to finally accept her as a widow with her child. Then there is Lalit who proves to be a good friend whose humorous anecdotes and jokes fill Sudha's life with a little pleasure. He is the man who is well educated, a surgeon, by profession and extends a helping hand to Sudha. He comes across as a humorous, confident, daring guy who wishes to marry Sudha but values the wishes of the woman he loves utmost. He represents the second generation immigrant and for him money does not promise happiness.

There is a minor character Trideep who is a migrant from India and whose

father is paralysed but has his own bit of struggles. His journey from a boarding school to IIT Kharagpur and then to a graduate school in US defines his life of materialistic success coupled with hard work. He had invited his father over to US in his attempt to bridge the gap and in the initial days even the old man “wanted to try everything. Like America was a great big toy-store, and he was a kid...” (VOD 237) However later his unhappiness furthers the distance between son and father. Trideep knows that, “His father closes his eyes because he can’t stand to be here. In this bed, in this country, all which is alien to him.” (VOD 278) but he feels helpless as there is no one in India to look after him. The way he deals with his wife Myra shows the way he balances love and family and though gives an appearance of an unruffled person is a person with a heart who feels, cares and is concerned about his father.

In the novel *The Queen of Dreams* is Mr Gupta who plays a submissive husband but comes across as a loving and caring father especially when his wife dies. He dons the role both of a mother as well as a father. His submissiveness is not his weakness but his compromise as a man to keep his family going. Generally the tendency is to show a compromising streak only in the female characters but Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni succinctly points out the sense of adjustment prevailing in both female and male characters. Mr Gupta as a father is not the usual autocratic male. He does not mind cleaning up the kitchen. Rakhi herself felt, “He was the tidy one in our household, the methodical one, always kind, the one with music- My mother-secretive, stubborn, unreliable-couldn’t hold a tune to save her life.” (QOD 8)

As a young man he is a passionate striker with a desire to make it big. He does not mind doing odd jobs. From the age of fourteen he had worked in a snack shop and for all the while he never allowed his real identity to surface. After moving to America he

worked as a janitor in a hospital, a slot-machine repairman in a casino which shows his knack for adaptability and flexibility. There is no where rigidity. The drinker, singer, skeptic remained hidden inside him and he never believed in dreams but later is able to make her daughter's dream come true. The strength of his character comes from the hard work and perseverance which he has always shown. He neither breaks nor allows anyone to break.

After his wife's death he realizes that his daughter needs his guidance. It is he who interprets the Dream Journals for Rakhi and in a way help her discover the secret 'self' of her mother which she had thought had eluded all her life. Father becomes a bridge between the mother and daughter, a channel between dreams and reality and establishes an association of past and present. They share the story of the past and by it succeeds in creating "something that stretches trembling like the thinnest strand of a spiderweb between them." (QOD 171)

All through her life Rakhi had wished to be told a story by her mother but she always managed to deny this by in return asking Rakhi to tell a story and when father shares the stories it somehow contributes to her basic need for belonging and continuity thus helping her to reconstruct her sense of ethnic identity. Avtar Brah in her book has written that identities are "constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively." (Brah 183) They decide to reopen the store and through it reopen a relation which had got folded and she feels "something else is being resuscitated-between her and her father." (QOD 171)

His shaping and frying of the 'pakodas' are in a way an attempt to reshape the life of Rakhi and it is then that Rakhi feels that " my chameleon father is turning out to have a few surprises in him, too." (QOD 161) He had always remained in the background

and Rakhi had never admired him but eventually the other side of her father comes to the fore as she tries to build her business. His idea in starting the venture as a place where the people could play music, have buffet gains a lot of recognition. Rakhi feels attracted towards his father and she starts liking him as she 'peels away' the old label. His presence becomes 'calming' for her and his effort like a 'shield' to her.

Another male character is Sonny who has a troubled relationship with his wife but he too is a sensitive father and a devoted son-in-law. Sonny bears with the anger of Rakhi, understands her conflicts and tries to patch up by also apologizing. The way in which he does not mind to call up Rakhi to nurse their sick daughter shows his love and sympathetic attitude. He cares for Jona without boasting or complaining. He deals with his daughter Jona like a buddy. Jona herself says, "Sonny says I'm all grown up now, and we're friends more than father and daughter, so I can call him by his name." (QOD 58) The way in which Jona and Sonny bake pancakes together hints at the dissolving of barriers. Even after separating from Rakhi, he continues to meet Mrs Gupta whom he treats not just as his mother-in-law but as a mother. It is Sonny who takes Rakhi's mother to the doctor as an adorable son and tries to keep her happy by bringing in the latest Hindi movies.

Mrs Gupta has utmost faith in him and in her own way she tries to show Rakhi her carelessness. Through the movie 'Shangri-la' Mrs Gupta tries to instill in her daughter a lesson for life, "we, too live in Shangri-las (...) we don't realize how special they are, or what they are protecting us from. We're too busy hankering after what we don't know." (QOD 80) Later Rakhi too is shown to admit the generous and giving nature of Sonny. She praises Sonny for she believes that it is he who humbled her and "make her see invisible things about herself." (QOD 12) Sonny proves to be a motivator. He acknowledges

the talent of his wife and appreciates her paintings. It is he who made her take her art seriously. Rakhi as a single mother fights all odds and tries to deal with the situation in the absence of a husband but the dilemma of a single mother has also been penned to point out the importance of relationships. Rakhi admits, “All this time I told myself I’d be fine alone, I’m tough, I don’t need anyone. But I’m not fine-and I’m not as tough as I’d like to believe I am. I want to be loved by a man...” (QOD 101) When Rakhi is mournful, Sonny tries to be with her and is more considerate than ever before. It is because of the consistent efforts of Sonny that Rakhi finally accepts her ‘curnudgeony self’ and tries to be a little more flexible.

Then there is Jespal who is a lover, a friend, and a guide to Balwant. His is a minor character and he represents the youth brought up in US. Both of them belong to the same community but he lives more according to the Granth Saheb but she does not accept it. This couple represents the diverse effect of globalization and migration. Jespal and Belle serve as a backdrop for the paradoxes of love and companionship. It is he who has to face the wrath of the Americans especially because of his turban. He lies shattered and questions his self and identity. Belle is not able to accept Jespal’s proposal for marriage because she feels the ideology with which they have grown is different. She is more of American and he still a desi.

A subtle and a remarkable observation in the case of Draupadi as presented in *The Palace of Illusions* is that she engages and gets the support of her life from her brother and her friend Krishna. She is almost incomplete without them and as an emotional anchor, Krishna helps her to understand situation in a better way. Though she has a good relationship with Dhai Ma but the support of Krishna is what she always looks for. Though Draupadi does not like the discrimination meted out to her but still she acknowledges,

My years in my father's house would have been unbearable had I not had my brother. I never forget the feel of his hand clutching mine, his refusal to abandon me (...) We shared our fears of the future with each other, shielded each other with fierce protectiveness from a world that regarded us as not quite normal and comforted each other in our loneliness. (POI 7)

Draupadi has acknowledged the power of a man as a healer, "If what I felt for Karna was a singeing fire, Krishna's love was a balm, moonlight over a parched landscape." (POI 356) She values Dhri who has the 'ability to understand her without words', Krishna whose "laughter helped lessen the gravity of her problems." (POI 128) It is just by remembering Karna that she gets a power indescribable. She says, "None of them had the power to agitate me the way the mere memory of Karna did." (POI 213)

Draupadi struggles for harmonious survival. Her struggle is not just against patriarchy but also against the increasing materialistic demands. Skepticism, disillusionment and disappointments characterize this age and Draupadi with her vulnerability displays all of it. Men are shown to be sensitive to a woman's needs though they are also projected as ruthless and careless to the feelings of women many a times. On one side is Duryodhan who shames her in the palace and there is also her husband Yudhishtir who loses her in gamble but men are shown not merely as exploiters but even as protectors. Bheem kills keechak as he tries to seduce her. The stoutest and the sturdiest Bheem is shown to be caring for Draupadi-very much like the macho man of modern times who is a complete man in all respects. She says, "He would hover around the kitchen, fetching water, breaking branches into firewood, fanning me with palm fronds, chopping vegetables into meticulously tiny pieces. If I'd allowed it, he would have happily taken over all my chores." (POI 211)

The role reversal which Bheem engages in, points at the need of the role reversals in modern society to value the individual and not just categorize people into man and woman. The mythical characters which the people idealize in are shown to be simple human beings performing household chores. Divakaruni through Draupadi's words have probed into the irrelevance of disparity of work and discrimination on the basis of gender created by society. Her male characters have been penned with dexterity and to a certain extent they signify the definition of 'real man' given by L.W. Francisco III,

He is powerful, yet passionate. He is dominating, but not overbearing. He controls his anger and is never violent. He is decisive, but he is not a dictator. He knows what he has to do and does it with excellence. He is fun but he is not a fool. He is a provider and protector, but never a slacker. He is up to a challenge; it inspires him. He's willing to take the hit and stand alone if necessary. He's not a whiner but a winner. (30)

The beauty of relationship is in sharing the responsibilities and valuing each other as a person. Men are not rejected or shown in a bad light but along with chauvinism their concern, care and love has also been brought out. She enjoys equal rights with her five husbands most of the times and she refuses to be bogged down by the discrimination based on people's expectations of her. The men remain as 'shadowy figures' and the lady in command is Draupadi. They are strong and robust but are sensitive and caring also. It is through these subtle and minute details given through Draupadi that Divakaruni indulges in modernistic and humanistic interpretation of the epic-story.

The entire battle of kurukshetra is fought by the Pandavas to restore her lost glory. Yudhishtir even after winning, seeing the plight of the widows suffers from pangs of

guilt and goes into depression. On the coronation day Draupadi finds it difficult to enter the throne room as she is reminded of her humiliation but she also realizes that it was more painful for her five husbands as it reminded them of their weakness. Divakaruni has delicately balanced the feelings of guilt and shame and shown both men and women in a humanistic light. The novelist is not just trying to create awareness among women to become self-aware but has also tried to emphasize the need in the men to be more sympathetic, sensitive, kind and caring towards women.

She has also shown men putting everything at stake to once again win back Draupadi's honour which almost balances the ruthless and the protective approach. Bhima's terrible oath that he would help avenge Draupadi's lost honour, Krishna's consolations and rescues, the way Bheem and Arjun humiliate Jaydrath who had abducted her and the way Bheem crushes Keechak to death all point at the role of men as supporters. The novel celebrates the spirit of woman and her unquenching thirst to assert her identity but it does not demean the value of man.

In the similar vein, the character of Cameron in *One Amazing Thing* has not been able to forgive him even after thirty years. Cameron though a soldier on the battle ground is a soldier fighting the emotions of life within. The nightmare he sees of a 'tiny child afloat in an oval room' and the way he lies 'curled on the table' is indicative of the sensitivity trapped inside a strong man. It is he who manages, directs and supervises but at times fights the guilt and pangs of separation. Imani's curse: "No matter where you run" catches the deep seated thoughts from which Cameron finds it difficult to escape.

Jiang is supported by her father. It is her father's deep respect and faith in her that lets her take the charge over his shoe store. "Her father had taken Jiang's side, the way

he had ever since her mother died when Jiang was five...” (OAT 69) He is happy to be a ‘soggy noodle’ in the hands of his daughter. Even the man with whom she falls in love admires her sense of independence. The man with whom she is forced to marry, Curtis Chan, also comes across as a practical man and not an imposing one. Lily is driven to a world of happiness by the motivation of her brother Mark who recognizes her talent of flute playing. “Lily, you have a gift. You can’t waste it (...) At first, I refused, Mark can be persuasive.” It was because of her brother that she became a subject of admiration.

Mr Pritchett though is having a troubled relation with Mrs Pritchett and although she feels that he lacks romance and passion, we find that he cares for her and is ready to travel to India just for the sake of his wife. Even Tariq is seen to be admiring Farah’s intelligence. ‘She needed to see what made America *America*.’ (OAT 31) Ravi, the son of Mrs Balan, though is shown to succumb before the pressure tactics of her mother, still values the simplicity and conviction of Nirmala and does not care about caste or social status, names the school after his mother as a mark of respect. Mr Pritchett’s story of his longing for love from parents, tragedy of the kitten makes him a pitiable character. As readers, we feel it is not his lack of concern but his past experiences which had made him ruthless in the eyes of his wife. He never dared to speak openly. Though she accuses him of being unsentimental, he gives a ‘feeling of a wound not yet healed’ and ‘she was filled with sorrow and anger: sorrow for the boy he had been and anger because he had not ever trusted her with the truth.” (OAT 102)

Mangalam with all his weaknesses-an adulterous affair with Malathi, marriage with Naina for money, love for Latika, flirtatious engagements is the man who engages in self reproach.“I started the cycle of wrong doing (...) Karma’s wheel is

intricate.” (OAT 164) The men in her novel are caring, considerate, sensitive on one hand and stiff, hard and solid on the other. They are shown to cry, reprimand themselves and experience emotional conflict. Though Mangalam voices his chauvinistic attitude but on the whole he comes across as a person with a thinking heart. “Apologize to a woman and she would gain the upper hand. Mangalam knew better than to let that happen.” (OAT 55)

In case of Uma’s boyfriend Ramon the good thing is that with him she feels that ‘he could fix anything she broke’ and that ‘she had not cherished him as he cherished her’. The men are not shown to be commanding but co-operating, they are not authoritative but vulnerable. The relationship of Uma’s father and mother projects a sense of compromise and adjustment on both sides. For the sake of their children, they manage to keep their differences behind. It is only when Uma’s father makes a call that Uma is able to realize the truth. So it is not just the woman in her novels who are shown to suffer and adjust but even the men.

There is a balanced perspective on human relationships. For her it is not just man-woman relationship that matters but stress is laid on having a better rapport. Most important in her case is the dignity of a person as a human being. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s views almost echo with the following thoughts:

Gender relations mean going beyond feminism, in the sense that one may understand what are the cultural norms which denigrate woman and do not give woman an identity; a voice of her own and the rightful status of even being a human being with dignity. Gender relations are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience. Gender relation is a category – meant to capture a complex set of historically variable, social processes. (Singh 22)

The role of man as a lover, father, husband, son have been placed parallel with the role of a woman as a beloved, mother, wife and daughter. Emotions, sentiments, passions, excitement, zeal are much the same which makes them human. *One Amazing Thing* reflects the need to be self-judgmental and self-analytical leading to self-awareness. The passion with which each character pours out the truth is an attempt to self-discovery. Uma for instance says, “My withholding was a worse kind of betrayal, a betrayal of the self.” (OAT 206) The men shoulder the responsibility with women and are assimilated into the acculturation process.

Even in *Oleander Girl*, we can see the same. Korobi is brought up by her grandparents and she remarks, “ He was to me father and mother rolled into one, and the thought that I had distressed and disappointed him made him burst into tears.” (OG 2) The grandfather is from the old school of thought and he is very dominating but still there is a softer side to him. There is Rajat with whom Korobi gets engaged who lets Korobi be what she is. “Rajat loves me just the way I am, that he never wants me to change.” (OG 4) and that, “He makes me laugh more than anyone else ever has.” (OG 34) He is kind and considerate and respects women. He shares a unique bond with his mother-in-law, “He ended up sitting on Sarojini’s bed for a half hour, touching each piece, listening to its story.” (OG 9) Rajat though is strong but cries at the very thought of Korobi leaving him. He has been painted with all his weaknesses. “I want to be a good person-like you. But I’m not skilled at handling temptation. What if I backslide? What if I do something stupid? ” (OG 85) On the other hand when Korobi travels to US, there also she is helped by Vic who makes her realize her strength. “ But you are someone already. You’d see it if you weren’t so busy focusing elsewhere.” (OG 217) So the point which comes across is that in the

present century, the focus is on understanding the need for shouldering each others responsibilities. Yasmeen has made a study and she has written, “Liberal and unconventional ways of life are desired to avoid those problems within traditional society where self-willed and individualistic women often face suffering.” (Hussain 55)

Displacement and migration across geographical boundaries which are aggravated by war, terrorist attacks, and national upheavals overlap the triangle of the personal and the political. The multiple voices in her novels lay stress on relationship between individuals and it also helps in establishing a relationship amongst the individuals. “These writings fracture geographical and ideological boundaries in the search for new paradigms of expression and subjectivity across diasporas wide expanse in a never-ending process of redefinition and re-articulation.” (Mehta 27) What we find in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels is that her characters indeed are caught up in the usual patterns of displacement. They do suffer from pangs of separation, dilemma and confusion but their displacement works as a positive stimulant. They don’t get bogged down by the pressures of new environment but by making an attempt to acclimatize themselves, they are able to assert their identity. They are very much contemporary in their thoughts and voice the need for self-assertion, independence and a respect for each other as human beings. It is aptly put by the novelist: “Sometimes the only way to healing is through the corridor of pain.” (SMH 290)

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