



A STUDY OF INDIAN CULTURE AND TRADITION IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S OLEANDER GIRL

M. Brindhamani

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English (DDE), Madurai Kamaraj University,
Madurai, Tamilnadu

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Abstract:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indo-American author, a poet, a short-story writer and a novelist. Her short-story collection, *Arranged Marriage* won an American Book Award in 1995 and two of her novels *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart* as well as a short story *The World Love* were adapted into films. *The Mistress of Spices* was short-listed for the Orange –Prize. The people of India are divided into many- cultures, tradition, caste and religion. "*Oleander Girl*" is the very good example for the reflection of the Indian society. This novel depicts the theme of typical Indian culture in a detailed manner. It also deals with the theme of search for identity. The value of culture and morality take the vital role in this novel. It also persists the readers to know the values of human life and typical Indian culture.

Key Words: Culture, Tradition, Caste, Reflection, Identity & Religion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indo-American author, poet, short-story writer and novelist. Her short-story collection, *Arranged Marriage* won an American Book Award in 1995 and two of her novels *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart* as well as a short story *The World Love* were adapted into films. *The Mistress of Spices* was short-listed for the Orange –Prize.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Kolkatta in 1956, India. She has two brothers. She received her B.A from the University of Calcutta in 1976. That same year, she went to the United States to attend Wright State University where she received a Master's degree. She received a PhD in English from the University of California, Berkeley in 1985.

Divakaruni is a prolific writer who has eleven novels to her credit. She also has poetry collections like *Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991), and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997) to her credit. She has also authored short story collections like *Arranged Marriage* (1995), *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* (2001), and *California Uncovered: Stories fir the twenty first Century* (2004)

In *Oleander Girl*, Divakaruni gives the references for the child marriage throughout the character of Asif who is a servant in Raja's house and very genuine in his work. He describes his childhood life with his sister. He feels shame of child marriage in his social order. He blames his society for his sister's child marriage.

A few years later, she was married off to a man in Ghaziabad. Asif had been upset when he was informed of it. He thought she wasn't old enough to take on a wife's duties, but it was too late to do anything. The marriage had already been arranged (OG-13).

Old people of India considered themselves as the redeemer of Indian tradition and culture. Grandfather Bimal Roy could not allow his granddaughter to wear modern cloths and costumes. "No, she doesn't!" His lips were a pressed white line. "She looks like a call-girl" (28)

The people of abroad wondered about the Indian's family system which was mingled by its love, affection and sentiments. Indian parents are not similar to American parents. Likewise in "*Oleander girl*", Chitra Banerjee beautifully portrays the grandfather's love on his grandchild. It beautifully establishes the duty of Indian father on his family. "Grandfather sounds tired, Bose –babu, I'm an old man. Who knows how long I'll be around? I want to see my only granddaughter settled before I go. You'll let Korobi continue her studies after the wedding, will you not?." (22)

The people of India are divided into many like culture, tradition, caste and religion. They followed the practice that they should not permit their girl child to marry strange men. Sometimes they use their culture for their own sake. *Oleander Girl* is a good example for the reflection of the Indian society.

The ancient Indian people are the savior of Indian culture and tradition. So they do not allow others to blemish their own culture. Even, their own people are the cause for the abolition of their culture. The portrayal of Bimal Roy is the perfect typical Indianess character in "*Oleander girl*". "We'll grow old in an empty house while she is brought up in another country without culture or values," he said. 'Do you want that?'(62)

In India society, pre marital pregnancy is the sin and crime for their culture. In the name of modernity, they are not ready to follow their culture in recent days. Chitra Banerjee skillfully exposes the feeling of the society in substantiate way. "A pregnant Anu had come home to be comforted by us. Brokenhearted, she had shut herself up in the house, refusing to meet anyone, begging us not to inform anyone of what had happened." (63)

Classic Indian woman is beautifully portrayed through the character of Korobi. In Indian culture, woman has the same typical portrayal. The long hair, wearing traditional saree and ornamental golds and

wearing the bindhi in their forehead are the traditional way of portrayal about woman in Indian society.”It’s my hair, “I say defiantly. But my statement is only half-true. That hair belonged to Bimal and Sarojini’s granddaughter, to Rajat’s fiancée, to papa and Maman Bose’s daughter-in-law to-be.(178)

In *Feminine Fire*, Korobi matures as a strong individual capable of facing the vicissitudes of life just like the oleander flower which is intrinsically strong and tough despite its delicate appearance: “Because the oleander was beautiful – but also tough. it knew how to protect itself from predators. Anu wanted that toughness for you because she didn’t have you enough of it herself.”(O-G: 253).

Bimal Roy also lies all through the life of his granddaughter because he kept the secrets of her identity. If she knows that, it will bring the disgrace to his family heritage. Even he is not allowed to Korobi’s father to see his daughter. He creates the fake death certificates of both mother and daughter to belief the status of death to black father Rob. After revealing her real father, Korobi gets the statement from her real father. “Or sadder, when I received news from your grandfather that she had died, that you both had died. It seemed impossible that so much joy could vanish so quickly.”(243).

Through her revealing of past she lost the family name in the society. It gave the problem to her marital life. Indian people should not allow their own children to marry a man from another culture or race. Because it will spoil their own culture. Rajat’s family now began to rise the questions about her past. “What are you saying? Korbi’s illegitimate? How can that be? How can we have our son marry a girl of mixed blood who has, moreover, such a scandal in her past? Here we were so delighted to be making an alliance with one of Kolkata’s most respected families, and now we discover- this?” (265).

Divakaruni focuses on the values of typical Indian culture in a detailed manner. In this paper, she has portrayed the characters like Bimal, Sarojini, Maman who has played the indirect vital role. She immensely depicted the characters in realistic way.

In this novel *Oleander Girl*, Tradition and culture played the indirect vital role with the beautiful references of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The characters like Bimal Roy, Sarojini and Maman played their most important role in this novel. They have rejected the love of his daughter’s love with strange person. Bimal Roy also insisted his wife to bring up their grandchild in the traditional way.

This novel reflects the theme of typical Indian culture in a detailed manner. It also has dealt with the theme of searching for identity. The values of culture and morality take the vital role in this novel. It also persists the readers to know the values of human life and typical Indian culture. Divakaruni sculptured this novel *Oleander Girl* with the features of narrative style. After reading this novel, the readers can understand the worth of human kind and it’s heritage.

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