

EXPLORING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *QUEEN OF DREAMS*: A JOURNEY BETWEEN WORLDS.

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ABSTRACT :

In *Queen of Dreams* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the exploration of cultural identity is central to the narrative, reflecting the complex journey of first and second-generation immigrants. The protagonist, Rakhi, navigates between her Indian heritage and her American upbringing, struggling to reconcile these two identities. The novel weaves together themes of memory, tradition, and the immigrant experience, particularly through Rakhi's relationship with her mother, who possesses the mystical ability to interpret dreams. This mystical element serves as a metaphor for the elusive and fragmented nature of cultural identity. As Rakhi uncovers her mother's past and her cultural roots, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery, bridging the gap between her inherited past and her present reality. The novel ultimately portrays the duality of living between two worlds and the quest for a coherent sense of self in a multicultural society.

Keywords: Memory, Tradition, Immigrant experience, Cultural Identity, Self-Discovery.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* explores the issue of cultural identity through the characters' lives, particularly Rakhi and her family. The novel explores the difficulty of navigating two identities as Indian immigrants in America. Rakhi's battle with assimilation in *Queen of Dreams* exemplifies the conflict many second-generation immigrants experience as they navigate their dual identities. Rakhi was born and reared in America, thus she is affected by American culture, but she also feels a tug from her Indian ancestry through her family, particularly her mother.

Rakhi is frequently divided between the American lifestyle she has become accustomed to and the traditional Indian beliefs that her parents uphold. This paradox causes internal turmoil as she attempts to honour her roots while blending into mainstream American society. Rakhi's concept of self is shattered. She identifies as American, but her mother's dream interpretation and other cultural activities serve as frequent reminders of her Indian heritage. This dual identity creates feelings of not fully belonging to either culture.

Rakhi and her parents' experiences and expectations diverge, highlighting the generational gap. While her parents uphold Indian customs, Rakhi struggles to find her place within them, frequently feeling misunderstood or estranged from her cultural roots. Rakhi confronts external influences from both the American and Indian cultures. Her ethnic origin often makes her feel like an outcast in America. In contrast, within the Indian community, she may be seen as not being "Indian enough" because she accepted American ways. Rakhi's path throughout the narrative entails coming to terms with and accepting both parts of her identity. As she learns more about her mother's history and cultural legacy, she begins to reconcile her dual origins, discovering strength and coherence in her diverse personality.

In *Queen of Dreams*, Rakhi's mother's function as a dream interpreter represents the essence of Indian traditions and mysticism. This practice is firmly ingrained in Indian culture and spirituality, acting as a conduit for ancestral knowledge and cultural history. Rakhi's mother's ability as a dream interpreter represents a direct connection to Indian traditions. Her mystical practice exemplifies the depths of Indian culture, which include a strong link to the spiritual and metaphysical realms. Rakhi feels disconnected from these rituals. She was raised in America and finds it difficult to understand and relate to her mother's cultural and mystical rituals. This mismatch emphasises the difficulties that second-generation immigrants frequently have in relating to their history.

Despite her sentiments of alienation, Rakhi is strongly impacted by her mother's views and abilities. Rakhi is intrigued by the mysticism surrounding her mother's life, and it moulds her perception of her cultural heritage, even if she does not fully comprehend or accept it at first. As Rakhi learns more about her mother's past and the meaning of her dream readings, she grows to respect her cultural heritage, which she previously felt distanced from. Rakhi's quest for understanding helps her integrate her Indian identity with her American background.

Rakhi's search for identification is a prominent subject in *Queen of Dreams*, as she tries to figure out her mother's past and her cultural roots. This voyage represents her quest to create a cohesive identity that combines her Indian and American selves. Rakhi's mother, with her deep-rooted Indian traditions and mystical talents, acts as a conduit for Rakhi's cultural heritage. Rakhi's quest to discover her mother's secrets and understand her dream interpretation practice represents her desire to reconnect with her Indian heritage.

As Rakhi investigates her mother's background through journals and memories, she discovers aspects of her heritage that she had previously felt disconnected from. This exploration is both a personal and cultural journey for her, allowing her to gain a better understanding of herself. Throughout the narrative, Rakhi struggles with her dual identity, divided between her Indian background and her American upbringing. Her search for identification is an attempt to reconcile these two sides of herself, to achieve a balance in which she can honour both components of her heritage. Rakhi's sense of self becomes more integrated as she learns about her mother's life and embraces her cultural heritage. She comes to embrace the richness of her Indian background while equally embracing her American experiences, resulting in a more cohesive and balanced personality.

Cultural transmission across generations is an important issue in *Queen of Dreams*, as it demonstrates how cultural identity is passed down and negotiated throughout time. Rakhi's relationship with her mother is essential to this storyline. Her mother, a bearer of Indian customs and mysticism, embodies the cultural knowledge and heritage that Rakhi receives, although indirectly. Rakhi learns about her ethnic background from her mother's diaries and dream interpretations. This learning process represents how cultural beliefs and practices are passed down, which frequently requires effort and openness from the younger generation to grasp and appreciate. Rakhi's job as a mother emphasises the continuity of this transmission. She faces the problem of passing on her Indian background to her child while maintaining her American identity, emphasising the continual negotiation and adaptation of cultural identity. The story demonstrates that cultural transmission is a dynamic process that requires reinterpretation and adaptation. Each generation interprets and integrates its legacy in ways that are relevant to its current circumstances.

In *Queen of Dreams*, the immigrant community plays an important part in exploring themes of belonging and alienation, revealing that cultural identity is a battle for both individuals and groups. Rakhi and her family find solace and common ground in the immigrant community. This collaborative setting assists individuals in navigating their dual identities and provides a sense of belonging in a foreign land. Members of the community experience similar issues about integration, cultural preservation, and identity conflicts. These shared problems demonstrate that the search for cultural identity is a common experience among immigrants.

Community gatherings and cultural events help to preserve Indian customs while also providing an outlet for people to express and enjoy their ethnicity. These rituals help people stay connected to their roots and cultivate a sense of community. Despite the support, there are times when people feel alienated, both inside and outside of the group. Rakhi, for example, feels detached from the traditions of her elders and, at times, from American society as a whole, demonstrating the multifaceted difficulties of identity. The combined experiences of the immigrant community demonstrate how personal travels and communal interactions build cultural identity. The community's role in preserving and modifying cultural practices shapes how people understand and express their identities.

In *Queen of Dreams*, the post-9/11 environment has a tremendous impact on the characters' explorations of cultural identity, adding urgency and complexity. Immigrants, particularly those from South Asia and the Middle East, have come under increasing suspicion and scrutiny since the September 11 attacks. This external pressure exacerbates the protagonists' already difficult issues with cultural identification, leading them to confront stereotypes and biases. The novel depicts the increase in xenophobia and prejudice that immigrants face in the post-9/11 era. These experiences with prejudice exacerbate emotions of alienation and call into question the protagonists' sense of belonging in America.

The increased tensions push Rakhi and other members of the immigrant community to reconsider their place in American culture. The combined demands of fitting in while dealing with discrimination lead to a deeper identity crisis as they struggle to reconcile their American and ethnic identities. In response to animosity, community relationships are being strengthened. The immigrant community serves as a source of support and solidarity, assisting individuals in navigating new challenges and strengthening cultural bonds. The post-9/11 setting forces characters to reinvent their identities more assertively and deliberately. They must strike a balance between the necessity for cultural preservation and the realities of living in a society that regards them with distrust.

Queen of Dreams uses its characters' personal and familial experiences to dive into the larger issue of cultural identity, demonstrating the difficulties and riches of living across cultures. This battle with assimilation is a heartbreaking representation of many second-generation immigrants' experiences as they traverse the complicated landscape of living between two cultures. The novel, through her mother's role, investigates how traditions and cultural practices may both challenge and enrich the identities of second-generation immigrants, ultimately leading to a better knowledge and acceptance of their ancestry. Rakhi's journey exemplifies the broader experience of second-generation immigrants who struggle to reconcile their ancestral traditions with modern realities, resulting in an identity that combines the best of both.

This topic emphasises the need of preserving cultural continuity while also allowing for evolution and personal relevance, which ensures that cultural identity remains lively and meaningful over time. Overall, the novel depicts the immigrant community as an important backdrop for investigating the varied nature of cultural identity, demonstrating that belonging and alienation are profoundly intertwined sensations experienced by many. Overall, the post-9/11 backdrop heightens the novel's themes of cultural identity, belonging, and alienation, emphasising the characters' endurance and flexibility as they negotiate a more hostile and harder environment.

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