

Culture as a Determinant of Personality: A study of Identity, Gender, and Diasporic Transformation in the Selected Novels of Divakaruni

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Abstract: This study examines in human life culture as a determinant of personality through the lens of identity, gender, and diasporic transformation in writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's selected novels. Author Divakaruni's fiction consistently portrays Indian women navigating the trauma between inherited cultural values and the demands one's own demands of western life Making her work a rich site for exploring how culture shapes one's selfhood. Drawing Novels such as The Mistress of Spices, Sister of my heart, Queen of dreams, oleander Girl, and Before we visit the God, The palace of illusion, this research investigates how one's personality is not a fixed, innate structure but a fluid construct continuously negotiated through cultural context, migration, and generational change. This study organized three interlinked concerns.

The study first examines identity formation, looking at how characters internalize, resist, or reinterpret the cultural norms handed down through family, tradition, and homeland. It then turns to gender as a culturally constructed category, tracing how Divakaruni's heroines confront patriarchal expectations around sexuality, marriage, and autonomy — expectations that shift depending on whether the setting is Indian, diasporic, or hybrid. A third strand addresses diasporic transformation, drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the third space, alongside Stuart Hall's account of cultural identity as production rather than fixed essence. Through close textual analysis, the study argues that Divakaruni portrays selfhood as culturally contingent and relational — shaped by the friction between tradition and modernity, homeland and host land, self and community.

Study argues that the diasporic people, in it women are not simply a victim of passive trapped between varied cultures. Instead, women portrayed as an active in every single individua who shapes their identity through memory, negotiation, and adaptation. Divakaruni's novels shows that identity is fixed not constantly evolving. By presenting culture, gender, and as fluid the self-changing, the research contributes to postcolonial feminist criticism and diasporic studies both. The study focuses on culture, personality, identity, gender, and diaspora.

Keywords: culture, personality, identity, gender, diaspora

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's her ability to write about cultural experiences commonly comes from her own life. she was born and raised in Kolkata before moving to the United States for higher education, she experienced the transit from Indian society to American life firsthand. Her journey personally gives her a deep understand of cultural conflict, nostalgia, and adaptation, allowing her to portray immigrant experiences authenticity. In literary studies, culture includes the beliefs values, customs, language, rituals, and social practices of a community in shared. culture play an active role in shaping characters, influencing the plot, and going meaning to the narrative rather than serving as a decorative background.

The plot and giving meaning to the narrative influencing. The historical, social, and ideological context in which a literary work is created and interpreted also reflects. culture can be understood through family relationships, religious practices, gender roles, food, languages, traditions and social institutions. culture is continuously created and reshaped through stories and everyday experiences as literary scholars argues. Writers do not represent culture merely; they also participate in constructing and transforming it. Thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said



cultures viewed as a site where power operates. Feminist criticism farther explains that culture can both reinforce systems of oppression patriarchy and provide such as opportunities for resistance and empowerment. Author Divakaruni's fiction demonstrates and experiences of women who have often been ignored.

Fernando Ortiz introduced the idea of culture as a dynamic process in his book Cuban counterpoint Tobacco and Sugar (1940). His work shows that culture changes through contact and exchange. In the context diaspora, culture does not remain the same after migration. the familiar cultural environment disappears, and traditions must be consciously preserved within families and communities once people leave their homeland.

The cultural practices gradually adapt to new surrounding as migrants settle in a new country. To suit different climates, available resources, or changing social conditions traditions may be modified. This process created a hybrid culture that combines elements of both the homeland and the host country over time. Divakaruni's novel illustrates how diaspora reshapes culture, producing new identities that connect the past with the present.

Because the culture carried abroad at is cut off from the ongoing changes happening in the homeland, it often freezes into the form it was in at the moment of departure, sometimes becoming even more traditional or nostalgic that the culture back home actually remains and at the same time, it inevitably picks up influence from the new environment, blending old customs with new circumstances. A festival might still be celebrated, but adapted to a different climate, different available ingredients, or a smaller, more scattered community. Language everywhere else. Over a generation or two, this produces something that is neither the original homeland culture, but a third, hybrid formation built specifically out of the experience of displacement.

For a study like the one on Divakaruni, this is the crucial link: her characters do they abandon it for an American identity. What her novels actually depict is this diasporic remaking of culture in progress, where inherited belief and practice are tested against new circumstances and come out altered, and where personality and identity are formed precisely in that space between an original culture in progress, where inherited belief and practice are tested against new circumstances and out altered, and where personality and identity are formed precisely in that space between an original culture and its diasporic transformation.

This study investigates how identity is reconstructed through migration, how gender influences women's experience, and how diasporic transformation enables individuals to negotiate multiple cultural identities. Drawing on cultural studies, diaspora studies, identity theory, and feminist criticism, this paper traces the protagonists' journeys from cultural confinement toward self-realization. The novels under study show that personality is not fixed but dynamic, evolving through migration, displacement, family relationships, memory, and cultural interaction.

Culture is both a source of strength and a cause of conflict in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels. In her novels characters often develop mixed hybrid identities, but they never completely forgot their cultural roots. In a person's personality culture is one of the most important influences. culture shapes the way people think, behave, communicate, and understand themselves. It teaches language, traditions, customs, values, religious beliefs, and social rules from birth. Every person grows up in a cultural environment throughout their lives these continuous to influence people. Biological factors too affect personality; culture gives people the social background through which they understand themselves and the world around them.

The relationship between culture and personality has been studied by sociologist, psychologists, anthropologists, and literary scholars because of this. Anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead believed that personality cannot be separated from culture. To them every person develops within a particular cultural setting. Globalization and migration have brought people from different cultures together today. Many people try to balance their traditional culture with the new culture they experience as a result. This often creates identities that are mixed, flexible and constantly changing. The experience clearly shows in Diasporic literature. It focuses not only on



migration but also on identity, belonging, loneliness, nostalgia, and cultural change. How migration changes a person's personality while also strengthening their connection to their homeland this works explain.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an important voice among Indian diasporic writers. She writes about migration, cultural identity, family relationships, myths and women's lives. The experiences of Indian immigrants while exploring universal themes such as love, memory, belonging, and self-discovery her stories reflects these experiences. Cultural conflicts, family expectations, and identity struggles before they achieve personal growth. Divakaruni's female characters face these conflicts. Divakaruni shows that personality is not fixed through their journeys. As people interact with different cultures it changes. This study examines four novels: *Sister of my Heart*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Queen of Dreams*, and *Oleander Girl*. Shows a different way culture influences personality each novels shows. Family traditions and how they shape women's lives explored in *Sister of my Heart*. Tilo's struggle between duty and personal desires while helping immigrants preserve their culture in *The Mistress of Spices* shows. Bicultural identity through Rakhi and her mother *Queen of Dreams* examines. Korobi's journey of self-discovery across India and United States follows *Oleander Girl*. Culture is a major force in shaping personality is the main argument of this study. Emotions, decisions, relationships and self-understandings it influences. Migration encourages people to question their beliefs, develop new identities, and redefine the meaning of home and belonging at the same time.

Greater cultural pressure than men women in diaspora often experience female identity as a continuous journey between tradition and modernity, dependence and independence, and homeland and diaspora Divakaruni presents. Cultural studies, diaspora theory, feminism, and identity theory to explain how literature reflects the connection between culture and personality this research uses ideas from. Divakaruni novels highlight the powerful influence of culture and migration on identity it shows.

The identity continues to grow and change throughout life of her works. That culture plays a central role in shaping personality. It teaches people their values, beliefs, customs, and behaviour from childhood. These cultures influences continue to shape their attitudes, emotions, decisions, and relationships as individuals grow. That personality is formed through the ongoing interaction between culture and life experiences in Divakaruni's novels this study concludes overall.

Characters such as Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams* and Korobi in *Oleander Girl* question their origins and attempt to reconcile multiple cultural influences. Their search for identity reflects the broader diasporic experience of balancing tradition with modernity. Divakaruni suggests that identity is strengthened through self-discovery rather than through complete assimilation into another culture. Gender plays a central role in shaping personality because cultural expectations often differ for men and women. In many traditional societies, women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities, obedience, and sacrifice, while men are granted greater social freedom. These expectations influence personal aspirants, relationships, and opportunities for self-expression.

Gender is socially constructed through cultural practices rather than determined solely by biology. Patriarchal structures frequently restrict women's independence, requiring them to negotiate between personal desires and societal expectations. Migration may either reinforce these traditional roles or provide opportunities for women to redefine themselves. Divakaruni consistently portrays women who challenge conventional gender roles. Sudha and Anju in *Sister of My Heart*, Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*, Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams*, and Korobi in *Oleander Girl* all struggle against cultural limitations before asserting their independence. Their personalities develop through experiences of resistance, adaptation, and self-realization. Divakaruni presents women not as passive victims but as active participants in shaping their own destinies.

When people in diaspora pick up parts of a new culture while still holding on to their own- learning the language, adapting to local customs, blending in enough to function and belong, but keeping their roots intact underneath. Think of a first-generation immigrant who speaks the local language at work, follows local holidays, but still



cooks home recipes and speaks their mother tongue at home. It's addictive - you gain a new cultural layer without fully losing the old one. In diaspora life, these usually happen together over generations. First-generation immigrants often lean toward acculturation- surviving and adjusting. Their children, raised between two worlds, often live the transculturation, they're not fully from either culture, they're something distinctly their own, blending both fluidly. For diaspora people, this isn't just an academic process - it creates real friction and pain. The migrant people are too westernized for people back home, but never quite "local enough" where they live now.

Specially kids feel not fully accepted by their parents' culture, not fully accepted by the culture they grew up in. It's a constant feeling of being in-between, belonging nowhere fully. Parents who acculturated just enough to survive often want their kids to preserve the "original" culture strictly. But the kids, growing up transculturally, blend things naturally - different food, dating norms, career choices, religion.

This dynamic creates real tension: Parents feel that their culture is slowly disappearing while children are blamed just for living normally in the country where they grew up this situation creates problems in many families. People are forced by society, money or even laws to change their language, accent, name, or customs so they can get accepted or find a job people do not have a real choice many times. Feel confused, lose their confidence, and make them feel disconnected from their roots blending two cultures is not always easy. Grandparents speak the mother tongue fluently, parents know only some of it, and grandchildren may hardly understand it language is often lost over generations. Grandparents and grandchildren may find it difficult to communicate with each other is a painful loss. the local language following local customs, and trying hard to fit in even after learning, still face racism or discrimination because of their appearance, accent or name. Trying to belong does not always mean people will accept you this can be very painful. can cause stress, anxiety, depression, and a feeling of not so body truly belonging anywhere living between two cultures, family problems and discrimination lead.

In novels such as *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams*, *Oleander Girl*, and *Before We Visit the Goddess*, Divakaruni highlights how migration strengthens the emotional bond between India and the diaspora. Through these stories, Divakaruni suggests that home is not merely a physical place but a collection of memories, traditions, relationships, and cultural values that people carry with them wherever they go. She presents the relationship between India and life abroad as one of continuity rather than separation. Her novels show that migrants can adapt to a new country while still preserving their cultural heritage, producing identities that are enriched by both worlds rather than diminished by either.

Resilience, in Divakaruni's fiction, is not simply the ability to survive — it is the courage to adapt without losing one's sense of self. Her characters learn to hold their Indian cultural heritage alongside the demands of life in a foreign country, and it is this balance that allows them to work through cultural conflict, rebuild broken relationships, and gradually build confidence in their new surroundings. In the novel *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo draws strength from traditional Indian knowledge and spirituality while helping immigrants cope with their struggles. In *The Vine of Desire*, Anju and Sudha rely on their cultural values and inner strength to face emotional hardships in America.

Living between two cultures is emotionally difficult for many people in diaspora. That they are losing their own culture, while children are criticized for adapting to the culture of the country where they grow up Parents often feel. This creates tension in the family. Pressure to change their language, accent, name or customs so they that they can fit into society many migrants also face. It can make people feel ashamed, lose confidence, and become disconnected from their roots as this is not a gentle change. The younger generations may slowly forget their mother tongue as time passes. Grandparents speak it fluently, parents understand it but many do not speak well, and grandchildren may hardly know it. Families sometimes struggle to communicate with one other because of this. The local language and culture, many migrants still experience racism, discrimination, or exclusion because of their appearance, accent, or name even after learning. They often feel that they do not truly belong anywhere as a result. Constantly switching between two cultures living in them, dealing with family expectations and



discrimination can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and a feeling of cultural homelessness - the feeling that no place completely feels like home. For migrants, they are survival strategies shaped by pressures, loss and the ongoing search for belonging therefore acculturation and transculturation are not just cultural changes.

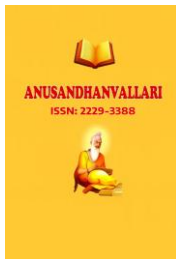
Identity is never fixed in Divakaruni's novels. As people balance their memories of their home culture with the new, they live in it keeps changing. Neither completely Indian nor American her women characters are. By living between both cultures, they develop a new identity. Difficult and confusing life between two cultures may, but it also helps them grow and become stronger. The feeling of displacement does not only suffer also a pain of leaving home, they help the characters discover their true selves.

Even more complex the gender makes. begin with traditional family and cultural expectations most women in the novels. They start questioning old beliefs, become more confident, and create their own identity as they move to a new country and face new experiences. they do not become completely free overnight their journey is not easy they do. they constantly try to balance their cultural values with their personal dreams instead. True strength does not come from forgetting one's culture the novel shows. It comes from learning how to carry that culture in a new way. the diasporic experience is not only about loss. it is also about change, growth, and creating a new identity. culture is something they reshape through new experiences, relationships, and different environments is not something people simply inherit. their identity becomes mixed and enriched by both cultures as a result. Technology also plays a small but important role. migrants stay connected with their language, food, family, traditions, and community through phones and the internet, even when they live far away from home today.

Postcolonial theory matters for diaspora because it explains people migration and their experience in displacement. It's historical. The root causes are most diasporic movements trace back to colonial economic extraction, border-drawing, and labour systems. History names that theory postcolonial theory of treating migration as neutral.

The colonial of race, language and culture didn't end with independence. Those people followed migrants into the host countries, shapes who gets treated as and belonging and who doesn't. The postcolonial lens explains why a diasporic subject in London or New York still faces racial hierarchy rooted in empire. Diaspora Transnationalism is entirely different from Diaspora. Theorist in 90's mostly most intelligently talked about the difference between Diaspora and Transnationalism. In 90's Diaspora People felt 'unhelpful' because of lack of technology. Now-a-days technology is playing a great role in Transnationalism People from every else can connect with everywhere. May be connection between family role, economic, cultural changes etc. The development of technology paves a way for these migrant, immigrant, Transnational people who were lives everywhere around the globe. From modern times has enriched our lives by preserving knowledge, reflecting culture, providing entertainment, fostering artistic expression, offering social commentary, facilitating communication supporting education, inspiring individuals, promoting empathy, and contributing to the education of language. Modern technology provides writers with tools and resources to write more efficiently, access information easily, collaborate with others, publish their work independently, promote themselves and adapt to changing the writing process and expand opportunities for writers to share their stories and ideas with the world.

Tools help authors write more effectively create attractive marketing, connect with readers on social media, self-publishing their work, and reach a broader audience through digital marketing. They make it easier for authors to write and successfully promote their less books. Modern advancement has made literary translation more accessible and efficient enabling the global dissemination of literary works~ world by bringing diverse voices and stories to a broader scale readership. Modern technology provides a critical lens through which to analyse and understand the complex and evolving relationships between technology and gender in contemporary society norms, identities, and inequalities. Technology has both positive and negative impacts.



Technology has become something like a bridge that never fully collapses, even when the physical distance stays the same. For people living far from where they were born, a phone isn't just a phone anymore. It's a small window that stays open to a mother's kitchen, a grandfather's voice, a language that might otherwise fade. Video calls carry the ordinary moments that used to be lost to distance. Someone in Toronto watches their niece take her first steps in Lagos in real time. A daughter in London listens to her mother cook over video, the phone propped against a spice jar, the sound of oil sizzling somehow more comforting than any postcard could ever be. These aren't grand gestures. They're small, repeated acts of presence that add up to something that feels like staying connected, even from thousands of miles away.

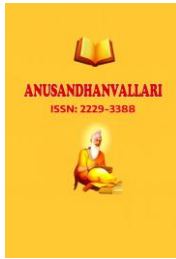
Social media play its own quiet role too. A person scrolling through photos from a cousin's wedding back home doesn't feel entirely absent from it. News from the homeland arrives instantly instead of weeks later through letters or expensive phone calls. Even arguments about politics or football happen in real time now, in group chats that stretch across continents, keeping people emotionally tethered to debates and celebrations they'd otherwise only hear about second hand. Money and care move faster too. Sending remittances home used to mean long waits and middlemen. Now it can happen in minutes, which matters enormously when someone needs help urgently whether it's a medical bill or a child's school fees. That kind of instant support changes what it feels like to be far away. Distance no longer means helplessness.

Language and culture find new life online as well. Diaspora communities build podcasts to keep their mother tongues alive in children who've never set foot in the home country. Cooking videos, folk music, and religious streams all become quiet forms of inheritance, passed down not through physical presence but through a screen. There's something bittersweet in all this. Technology doesn't erase the ache of separation, but it softens it. It doesn't replace being there, but it makes being away feel a little less like disappearing. For many people living between two worlds, that daily thread of connection through a screen isn't a substitute for home. It's simply how home keeps reaching them.

This study set out to explore how culture shapes personality, and in doing so, it has shown that identity is never something fixed or inherited in a simple, straightforward way. Through the selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, it becomes clear that culture works like an invisible hand, quietly moulding the way her characters think, feel, love and struggle. Whether it is Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*, Sudha and Anju in *Sister of my Heart*, or the many women who move between India and America across her fiction, each character carries the weight of becomes the very fabric of who they are. What emerges most powerfully from this study is that identity for the diasporic individual is never a finished product.

Identity, in Divakaruni's fiction, is always in motion — always being negotiated between memory and present reality, between the culture left behind and the culture being adapted to. Her women are not simply Indian or simply American; they are something else entirely, formed in the friction between the two. This in-between space, often uncomfortable and disorienting, is also where personal transformation happens. Pain and displacement, rather than being purely destructive, frequently become the very conditions through which her characters grow into fuller versions of themselves.

Gender adds another layer of complexity to this process. The women in Divakaruni's novels typically begin bound by traditional expectations, shaped by patriarchal structures rooted in their culture of origin. Yet as they migrate — both physically and emotionally — they begin to question, resist, and eventually redefine what it means to be a daughter, a wife, a mother, or simply a woman with desires of her own. This journey is rarely easy or complete, and Divakaruni does not offer her readers a simple narrative of liberation. Instead, she shows an ongoing tension between cultural loyalty and personal freedom, suggesting that true empowerment lies less in escaping one's cultural inheritance than in learning to carry it differently. The diasporic experience portrayed across these novels is, in the end, not a story of loss alone it is equally a story of reinvention. Culture becomes something her characters



actively reshape as they move through new environments and relationships; it emerges layered and hybrid, formed through negotiation rather than simple inheritance.

Technology plays a quiet but meaningful part in this same process today. Just as Divakaruni's characters carry their culture within them as they cross borders, modern diasporic individuals carry culture through screens, staying connected to language, food, family rituals, and community even while living far from home. Technology does not erase the tensions between old and new identities that Divakaruni writes about, but it does offer new tools for managing them — allowing culture to travel more easily, and identity to remain in dialogue with its roots even across great distances.

This study affirms that culture is indeed powerful determinant of personality, but not in a way that traps individuals within a single, unchanging identity. Rather, through the lens of Divakaruni's fiction, culture is revealed as something fluid and generative, something that shapes people even as they, in turn, reshape it. Identity, gender, and diasporic transformation are deeply intertwined, and together they tell a larger human story about how people carry their pasts with them while still finding the courage to become someone new.

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