



Original Article

**QUEST FOR SELF-IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF INDIAN WOMEN
WRITERS : A STUDY**

Sri. Gireesh M. Meeshi

Assistant Professor & Head Department of English,
Siddharth Arts And Commerce Degree College Janwad Road Bidar.

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Corresponding Author:
Sri. Gireesh M. Meeshi

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Abstract:

For several women throughout various countries and societies, writing is the sole means of expressing themselves. It is also a method to maintain one's mental stability in a culture that subjects its women to many forms of suffering while simultaneously forbidding them from confidently expressing themselves. Throughout history, it has been widely acknowledged that women communicate through silence, compliance, and enduring hardship without verbal expression. Women have made significant progress in the domain of literature and writing.

Chronicling the Indian Diaspora community, the renowned novel Jasmine (1989) explores the universal experiences of this group. It delves into the complexities of identity formation and ethnic distinctions within the broader context of Indian culture. Jasmine frequently alters her name, adopting various aliases such as Jyoti, Jazzy, Jase, and Jane, depending on her residence and the individuals she resides with. Like her residence, her name is perpetually subject to flux, enduring continual metamorphosis and changes.

Keywords: Countries, societies, explores, experiences, continual metamorphosis, Diaspora

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Women are inherently born with freedom, but societal constraints restrict

their autonomy. She has assumed the role of the subordinate gender. However, their



rebellion and reconciliation are not constant and universal. The protest was expressed through various means in Indian English fiction. Female authors such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Santha Rama Rau, Bharathi Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, Dina Mehta, Ram Mehta, Indira Goswami, Mahesweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, Meena Alexander, Shobha De, Githa Hariharan, and Manju Kapur, focus on the struggles and challenges faced by women. However, Indian women novelists exhibited a higher level of introspective intensity and sincerity when exploring the women's world, surpassing their male counterparts. They aimed to embark on an artistic journey to delve into their female characters' inner thoughts and emotions.

For several women throughout various countries and societies, writing is the sole means of expressing themselves. It is also a method to maintain one's mental stability in a culture that subjects its women to many forms of suffering while simultaneously forbidding them from confidently expressing themselves. Throughout history, it has been widely acknowledged that women communicate through silence, compliance, and enduring hardship without verbal expression. Women have made significant progress in the domain of literature and writing.

There was a period when female writers were subject to disdain, and to have their writings published and read by a broad audience, they had to employ pen names or

pseudonyms to conceal their true identities. Women's empowerment through the voice of the voiceless has resulted in the emergence of a new generation of women. Within the realm of literature exist authors who transcend the role of ordinary storytellers or creators of fanciful narratives. Instead, they assume the mantle of crusaders, using their writing to foster empathy within readers towards the marginalised and oppressed.

The emergence and development of Indian women novelists writing in English is a significant characteristic. Female authors demonstrated their capabilities in the realm of literature. The literary contributions of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, and Manju Kapur have had a lasting impact on readers of Indian fiction written in English. Anita Desai is a highly distinguished Indian author who writes in English. The primary focus of Anita Desai's works is the concept of alienation, as her heroes embark on a journey of self-discovery in their quest for personal identity. Kamala Markandaya, a highly distinguished and renowned Indo-Anglican novelist, explores many subjects and characters in her novels. Her finest pieces include *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A Silence of Desire*, and *Possessions*. Nayantara Sahgal's work, *"Rich Like Us"*, showcases a captivating approach to narrative.

Many Indian women who have relocated to Western countries as professionals or as accompanying spouses have made considerable contributions to English literature within the diaspora. Their



works explore colonial and postcolonial experiences via the lens of feminine sensibility, highlighting the intersectionality of many forms of marginalisation within patriarchal constraints and the experience of being outsiders in a foreign Western society. They explore the deeper realms of women's subconscious, and a sense of longing and recollection marks their compositions.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) narrates the journey of Tara Chatterjee, who travels from India to San Francisco and then returns to her homeland. Through writing, Tara achieves independence by recalling her community's history in a socially significant manner. The story explores the themes of Diaspora and highlights the clash of cultures, emphasising the significance of transnational connections in today's globalised world.

Chronicling the Indian Diaspora community, the renowned novel *Jasmine* (1989) explores the universal experiences of this group. It delves into the complexities of identity formation and ethnic distinctions within the broader context of Indian culture. *Jasmine* frequently alters her name, adopting various aliases such as Jyoti, Jazzy, Jase, and Jane, depending on her residence and the individuals she resides with. Like her residence, her name is perpetually subject to flux, enduring continual metamorphosis and changes.

The *Namesake* (2003), Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, revolves around the issue of migration. The narrative depicts three decades in the existence of a family of Indian American descent known as the Gangulies. The story is told from the

perspectives of Ashima and Ashok, a married couple, and later their son, Gogol, who grapples with finding his identity as he embraces a new chapter in his life. Much like Bharati Mukherjee, Lahiri vividly portrays a shared experience: the quest for identification in a foreign country. The *Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai is a sprawling novel on two continents. It is set in 1980s India and focuses on the political unrest in the Himalayan area, where the Gorkha national liberation front is fighting for independence. The novel centres around Jemubhai Patel, a retired judge, and his sixteen-year-old granddaughter, who has been orphaned. It explores her romantic relationship with her mathematics tutor, Gyan.

Additionally, the novel presents a parallel narrative that follows Jemubhai's cook and his son, Biju, who travels to America to pursue his dreams of success but ultimately finds himself working in unsanitary basements and kitchens in New York City. Desai critically examines the phenomenon of consumer-driven diversity in the Western world. She harbours scepticism towards economic globalisation as a means of achieving prosperity for the oppressed.

Difficult Daughters (1998) by Manju Kapur is a historical account of the events that occurred in the 1940s. Virmati, the protagonist, develops romantic feelings for her neighbour, an intellectually accomplished "Professor" who is already wedded. Virmati travels to Lahore to pursue advanced education. During her time in Lahore, she forms a friendship with Swarnalata, who happens to be her flatmate.



At that moment, she became aware that she was in a confined or limited situation. The ladies of Lahore were imbued with a strong desire for freedom. Women actively participated in political activities, conferences, demonstrations, and rallies. Kasturi, the mother of Virmati, is frequently involved in spinning. On Mahatma's birthday, the entire family participated in turning and continued to do so during the morning.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American author and poet. She holds the position of Betty and Gene McDavid Professor of Writing at the University of Houston Creative Writing Programme. Divakaruni's literary works predominantly take place in India and the United States, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of immigrants from South Asia. She is a versatile writer that caters to both children and adults. Her published works encompass various genres, such as realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, and fantasy. Divakaruni's literary works extensively explore the immigrant experience, a significant and recurring issue within American society. Divakaruni's departure from India prompted her to reassess the culture of her nation, particularly its treatment of women.

Arranged Marriage, a book she authored, has been honoured with an American Book Award. It comprises a series of short stories about Indian women torn between two distinct cultures. The novel "The Mistress of Spices," acclaimed as one of the finest literary works of the 20th century by the San Francisco Chronicle,

features the protagonist Tilo, who supplies spices not just for culinary purposes but also to alleviate the longing for home and the sense of displacement felt by Indian immigrants visiting her store. Divakaruni's writing endeavours to foster unity among individuals. She is determined to eradicate misconceptions and prejudices. Her intention in her writing is to eliminate the divisions that exist among individuals from many backgrounds, communities, and age groups.

Before embarking on her career as a fiction writer, Divakaruni had already gained recognition as a highly regarded poet. She composes poetry covering diverse topics, particularly emphasising the immigrant experience and South Asian women. She portrays the experiences and challenges women face in their pursuit of self-discovery. Divakaruni frequently focuses on the experiences of female immigrants in her literature. Her attraction to women developed after she departed from India. While attending Berkeley, she actively participated in a women's centre and had a keen interest in assisting victims of domestic violence. Subsequently, she initiated the establishment of "Maitri" alongside a circle of acquaintances, which ultimately prompted her to author Arranged marriage, a literary composition encompassing narratives about the maltreatment and bravery of immigrant women. Divakaruni acknowledges this fact; "I prioritise my thoughts and personal experiences, staying authentic to what I believe is genuine and accurate. I am aware that my truth may not align with others' perspectives. However, I believe everyone must acknowledge that every truth holds



significance. When writing, it is problematic to have a predetermined agenda. Instead, the focus should be on sincerely conveying an important story, ensuring a space in the world for it." (Divakaruni 91). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is renowned for depicting Indian women who have migrated to another country. Divakaruni was born in India and later immigrated to the United States of America. She draws upon her experiences and those of other immigrant Indian women to create novels and poetry. 2002, she authored "Neela, Victory Song" and followed it up with "The Conch Bearer" in 2003. These two are suitable for children. Furthermore, she authored numerous literary pieces targeted towards adult readers. The poems "The Reason for Nasturtiums" (1990), "Black Candle" (1991), and "Leaving Yuba City" (1994) are all examples of poetry. "Arranged Marriage" (1995) and "The Unknown Errors of Our Lives" (2001) are collections of her short stories. Her best-selling novels include *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), and *Queen of Dreams* (2004). The novel "The Mistress of Spices" was transformed into a film, while "Sister of My Heart" was adapted into a television series. She was the recipient of numerous accolades and incentives. The accolades received include the Memorial Award in 1989, the Writing Award in 1990, Poetry Prime and Pushcart Prime, the American Book Award in 1996, and the California Arts Council Award in 1998. "The Forest of Enchantments" (2019) and "Before We Visit the Goddess" (2016)

are Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's most recent novels.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a prominent South Asian writer in English who belongs to the generation of young Indian writers who emerged on the literary scene after Salman Rushdie. Her postcolonial diasporic identity sets her apart and is well recognised. Having spent more time residing outside India than within it, she has been acknowledged as an Asian American writer, embracing a hybrid identity and producing partly autobiographical literature.

Most of her narratives, which take place in the Bay Area of California, centre around the encounters of immigrants to the United States. These individuals' perspectives are hardly represented in the works of other Indian authors writing in English. Divakaruni's work has been included in over fifty prestigious publications, such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*, and has been included in more than thirty anthologies. Her writings have been translated into eleven languages: Dutch, Hebrew, Portuguese, Danish, German, and Japanese.

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