

Exploration of Cultural Myth, History and Trauma through Dreams in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams and Oleander Girl

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a well-known Indian-American author who frequently explores issues of culture, identity, family, and women's experiences in her novels and short stories. Dreams are frequently used as a literary method in her works to portray deeper emotions, psychological states, and symbolic implications. The characters' inner problems, fears, and desires are represented via their dreams as metaphors. Divakaruni frequently explores the cultural and spiritual facets of her characters' life in her works. Exploring cultural myths, traditions, and spiritual beliefs may happen by analyzing and interpreting dreams. Dreams are so powerful that they might provide a path to characters, help them connect to their history, or uncover secrets. Dreams can hint at future happenings or express a sense of destiny. Characters may experience prophetic dreams that provide clues about their future courses; these dreams frequently influence the acts and choices they make throughout the course of the novel. Readers can gain a deeper understanding of the characters' hopes, traumas, and inner conflicts by using dreams as a window into their mind. Characters' inner ambitions, unresolved problems, and emotional battles might be revealed through their dreams. It goes without saying that the narrative structure of Divakaruni's works is influenced by dreams. Dreams can help narrators move fluidly between many points of view, locales, and eras, enhancing the complexity of her narratives. In the present study, the researcher intends to explore the comprehensive role of dreams in her novels *Queen of Dreams* and *Oleander Girl*.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, dream, trauma, history

1. Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Queen of Dreams* was released in 2004. In this book, the storyline, character development, and theme investigation are all greatly influenced by dreams. Rakhi, the main character, has the capacity to decipher dreams. She makes use of her talents to assist others in discovering the hidden messages and meanings in their dreams. Rakhi's personality trait that connects the conscious and subconscious realms enables her to help others and herself navigate the difficulties of life. Rakhi uses her dreams to examine her own emotional and psychological development. Her dreams are a reflection of her inner conflicts, ambitions, and challenges. Her dreams change as her character does throughout the book, reflecting her development and metamorphosis.

The term "psychoanalysis" refers to a body of theories used by renowned Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Many psychoanalysts, including Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, Alfred Adler, Salman Akhtar, Nicolas Abraham, John Bowlby, Ruth Mack Brunswick, Erik Erikson, and others later contributed to its development. The theories of Freud served as the foundation for psychoanalysis. The study and treatment of emotional disorders is done through psychoanalysis. It is a technique for diagnosing mental and emotional illnesses as well as for investigating psychic phenomena. It is also referred to as "depth psychology" and emphasizes unconscious mind processes.

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, suggested that dreams are a window into the unconscious mind. He held that buried desires, fears, and conflicts can emerge in dreams in a symbolic manner. Freud believed that dreams were a vehicle for the mind to process and let go of suppressed emotions, frequently masking the underlying meaning of the dream's content through symbolism. In his seminal work "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1899), he established a thorough theory of dreams. Freud introduced the idea of "dream work," which entails transforming unconscious desires into dream content that is frequently unrecognizably to the dreamer. According to this theory, repressed impulses and desires that can be unsatisfactory or anxiety-provoking in the waking world are fulfilled in dreams. The substance of the dream is a compromise between the suppressed desires and the censors of the conscious mind.

Significance of Dreams- Freud maintained that dreams conceal the true nature of the unconscious material they transmit by using symbolism and disguise. The aspects of the dream that are consciously perceived, or the manifest content, serve as a symbol for the latent content, which is the hidden, underlying meaning that contains suppressed desires and conflicts. Through the safe and controlled expression of repressed emotions and desires, dreams offer a type of emotional release and catharsis. According to Freud, dreams served as a pressure release mechanism for psychic strain. According to Freud, dream scenarios frequently incorporate memories and experiences from the past, particularly those from infancy. Investigating dream narratives may provide details about a person's past and the causes of their emotional issues. Dreams were important to Freud in his psychoanalysis and treatment work. He thought that dream analysis could reveal underlying conflicts and contribute to the therapeutic process by assisting people in understanding their psychological problems. Dreams frequently revealed thoughts and impulses that are taboo or socially unacceptable, giving people a way to examine and face these aspects in a

secure psychological setting. In Freud's perspective, dreams were crucial because they provided a window into our unconscious motivations, conflicts, and feelings. They were perceived as a channel for unconscious and conscious mind interaction, providing understanding of the intricate interplay between conscious and unconscious processes. Freud's dream theory revolutionized psychology and had a significant influence on the investigation of the human mind and behaviour.

The complicated bond between Rakhi and her mother who also has the capacity to interpret dreams—is extensively explored in the novel, *Queen of Dreams*. The dreams they have serve as a bridge between them as well as a means of comprehending their shared past, suppressed feelings, and generational divides. The mythology, customs, and spirituality of Indian culture can be studied through the lens of dreams. Indian mythology frequently appears in Rakhi's dreams, demonstrating her strong ties to her culture and the spiritual world. In the book, dreams frequently predict future happenings and represent the psychological and emotional undercurrents of the narrative. They add to the suspense and intrigue that permeate the book.

For Rakhi and other characters, dreams provide a route to recovery and resolution. Characters address unresolved issues, face their fears, and find emotional catharsis by exploring their dreams. Dream sequences are used as a narrative element in the book to effortlessly connect the past, present, and imagination. Dreams serve as a link between various time periods and viewpoints. Rakhi is able to explore her identity as an Indian-American woman through her dreams, balancing her historical traditions with her contemporary way of life and goals. The dreams shed light on the inner turmoil she goes through while juggling her two selves.

As Freud noted in his theory, dreams are also significant in *Oleander Girl*. The main character of the book, Korobi, has a dream in which she wakes up and feels her deceased mother, who is unable to talk but steadfastly gestures towards the ocean as the sun is sinking. Korobi is aware that her mother wants her to traverse an ocean to look for something. She wants to learn the meaning of her dream after she wakes up. Her latent longing for her father, which she has repressed, drives her to journey all over America in search of him. She embarks on a valiant adventure, where she encounters numerous difficulties on the physical and mental levels. Freud believed that the unconscious still had an impact on our actions and experiences. Korobi's behaviour is influenced by her desire to discover her father.

In *Queen of Dreams*, the author employs her amazing storytelling abilities. The novel is a great read since it employs meta-narrative method and shifting points of view. Rakhi's desire to learn about her mother's past and her life in India is discussed in the book. Mother, however, has her own limitations because she interprets dreams. She keeps her daughter in the dark about her history. Rakhi and her mother serve as the primary symbols of female identity throughout the narrative. Both are Californian women who are battling against historical, cultural, and gender norms. The story opens with a dream in which a snake appears to give Rakhi's mother a chance that she had previously lost—the chance to dream and the passion that had vanished as a result of her separation from her family, friends, and roots. But in order to dream once more, she must forgo her marital gratification. Her passion for dreaming is well expressed when she addresses her daughter and says: "I don't sleep with you or your father because my work is to dream. I can't do it if someone is in bed with me." (Divakaruni, 2005, p 7). The daughter is so enthralled by the concept of dreams that she wants to learn the skill of interpreting dreams. Her mother has the ability to

assist others in living out their dreams. A child's sense of dreams is enhanced. The young daughter finds her daily routine to be so distant and enigmatic. As Rakhi matures, the desire to discover her mother's past and identity begin to emerge. About dreams, Rakhi's mother has written in her dream journals:

"The dream comes heralding joy.
I welcome the dream.
The dream comes heralding sorrow.
I welcome the dream.
The dream is a mirror showing me my beauty.
I bless the dream.
The dream is a mirror showing me my ugliness.
I bless the dream.
My life is nothing but a dream
From which I will wake into death,
Which is nothing but a dream of life." (Divakaruni, 2005, p18-19)

Mrs. Gupta only has dreams to live and die. She has the ability to help others live their dreams by dreaming their own. If she learns of a conspiracy or scheme against someone's life, she must let that individual know. She doesn't feel well otherwise. She advises an elderly woman to schedule a doctor's visit. Although the woman intends to become pregnant, Rakhi's mother has concerns about the woman's health.

With the progression of the narrative, Rakhi becomes more interested in learning about her mother's past, which is kept a secret. Rakhi feels that her mother's mysterious nature is the reason she was previously unfathomable: "When all along it was she who was unfathomable." (Divakaruni, 2005, p.95). Her mother is somehow magical to Rakhi. Her words are, "My mother has a way of knowing things." (Divakaruni, 2005, p 30). Mrs Gupta does not prefer to discuss her dreams with anyone. Perhaps the horizon she has created for herself while dreaming is one that she has barred even her husband and child from entering. She only has her dreams to keep her going. "Mere Sapno Ki Rani", which translates as "Queen of Dreams", is a popular Bollywood song that her husband used to perform in her past life. Losing her power of dreaming is equivalent to losing her sense of self. Hence, she is prepared to fly to India to reclaim her lost power which is only prevented from her pregnancy which forced her to stay in the US.

The importance of dreams is emphasized when she says: "A dream is a telegram from the hidden world. Only a fool or illiterate person ignores it." (Divakaruni, 2005, p 34). Using the power of dreaming to help others is a genuine and noble profession to Rakhi's mother who is deeply steeped into Indian culture and myths. She confesses: "I wanted to be an interpreter. But when I turned twelve, I grew obsessed with the idea. I saw it as a noble vocation, at once mysterious and helpful to the world. To be an interpreter of the inner realm seemed so Indian." (Divakaruni, 2005, p 35)

Psychoanalysis-The psychotherapist Sigmund Freud created a notion in the late 19th century that the content of dreams is determined by unconscious wish fulfilment. Dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious," according to Freud. According to his theory, the unconscious mind of the dreamer, notably unconscious wish fulfilment, shapes the content of dreams. He contended that

significant unconscious urges frequently connect to early memories and experiences. Freud made a distinction between the latent content, or the symbolic meaning of the dream (i.e., the underlying wish), and the manifest content of a dream (what the dreamer remembers).

In the early 1900s, Sigmund Freud, who founded the field of psychoanalysis, published a great deal about dream theories and their interpretations. He saw dreams as the expression of a person's deepest aspirations and concerns, frequently connected to suppressed childhood memories or obsessions. Dreams are essentially the stories and images that a person's imagination creates as they sleep. They can evoke feelings of joy, sorrow, or fear. Dreams can happen at any time while you're asleep. But REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which is deep, is when dreams are the most vivid. According to Sigmund Freud, dreams can be used as a window to see into the subconscious mind. He thinks they expose a person's unconscious motivations, thoughts, and desires. Freud established that people might satiate urges and desires that are deemed inappropriate by society by means of their dreams.

Dreams aid in the brain's organization of all the information it gathers during the day by assisting with sleep. The brain searches through all of this data while you sleep to determine what to retain and what to forget. There are numerous hypotheses regarding why people dream, but nobody is certain. Some studies have noted that dreams are illogical processes of the sleeping brain and have no purpose or meaning. In addition to Freud, other theorists have contributed to the development of psychoanalytic theory. Lacan reinterpreted Freud and emphasized the significance of the pre-oedipal stage in a child's life as well as object relation theory. In order to examine the conscious, unconscious, and sub-conscious mind and personality of a human being, Freud separated the human psyche into three functions and introduced the concepts of Id, Ego, and Super ego. The terms "Id" and "Ego" relate to unconscious desire and selfish and primal pleasure, respectively. "Super ego" is a reference to moral consciousness and parental ideals of right and wrong behaviour. Freud developed the unconscious theory in relation to dream interpretation in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud claimed that psychological procedures might be used to analyze dreams and expose the psychological underpinnings of a dream by applying them. According to Freud and other psychoanalytic theorists, people used to believe that dreams were connected to the world of supernatural beings. However, this theory has since revealed that dreams are actually connected to the laws of the human spirit and are linked to repressed desires that are stored in our unconscious.

Given that Mrs Gupta meets numerous dreams throughout the story, Freud's theory of dream interpretation is pertinent to her situation. Her id and ego are at odds with one another. The defusion of love into aggression, according to Freud, has not been influenced by the ego's work but rather is the outcome of a regression that has occurred in the id (Freud, 1923). Consciously or Unconsciously, Rakhi seeks her Identity in the novel emerging from her inner conflicts and desires. Freud rightly says that —Seeking refuge from the unconscious in what is scarcely noticed or unnoticed is after only a derivative of the preconceived belief which regards the identity of the psychical and the conscious as settled once and for all (Freud, 1923).

Numerous studies have been undertaken on the subject of psychoanalysis. The relationship between the characters in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* is revealed through the analysis of Sistani, Hashim, and Hamdan. The mother-child theory and their interactions are emphasized, and it

clarifies some of Jack's psychoanalytical views. The narrator and his brothers also discuss this relationship. Additionally, it examines the psychoanalytical roots of the childhood stage's psychic tensions and fears. (2017) Sistani, Hashim, and Hamdan Additionally, the study explores the many topics of incest, maternal deprivation, and autoerotic fears.

2. Literature Review

According to McRae's research, the psychoanalytic intervention used to present the defendant's sexsomnia as dispositional was based on Freudian ideas of unconsciousness. The themes of eros and death instinct from Freud are also used by the author. According to this study, sexsomnia is motivated by suppressed sadistic desires. A prevalent type of parasomnia is sexsomnia, which is similar to sleepwalking (Hariharasudan & Pandeeswari, 2020). It happens as you emerge from a deep slumber. The study claims that neither consent to sex nor reciprocal sexual connections is the causes of sexsomnia. Mental diseases are the fundamental components of the human state when psychoanalysing sexsomnia (McRae 2019).

According to Fraiberg, Adelson, and Shapiro's research, the issues associated with damaged infant-mother interactions can be solved psychoanalytically. The ghosts in the nursery are the main topic of the study. The fate of childhood effects seems to hold the answer to the ghost story. While repression and isolation of painful affect offer the psychological conditions for identification with the betrayer and the attacker, childhood grief develops into a potent deterrent against repeat in parenting (Fraiberg, Adelson, and Shapiro 1974).

Gallop's study aptly demonstrates that psychoanalytic theory is used in literature. Lacan also emphasizes that the basis of psychoanalysis is literary analysis. The study focuses on the interpretative relationship and transference part of psychoanalysis. It aims to apply Lacan to the practice of reading literature. It also calls into question the myths that support the psychoanalytic critic's legitimacy (Hariharasudan, 2020). Under the humanistic veneer of the humanities, it is also an effort to repress the letter. According to the author, transference between the reader and the text must be examined in a Lacanian interpretation of literature. However, it would need to be quite cautious to pay attention to the particularity of that something (Gallop, 1984).

Trauma has had a crucial influence in literature and psychoanalysis, as shown by Heidarizadeh's study. The author has looked at how she perceives creation in dreams, fantasy, and the works of Margaret Atwood's protagonists. She adopts Sigmund Freud's perspective of view. Trauma from psychoanalysis has substantial, long-term detrimental effects. Traumatic experiences have an impact on the characters' minds, leaving them confused and uneasy (Hariharasudan & Gnanamony, 2017). The author also lists marital violence, bullying, bullying at school, police brutality, sexual abuse, and employment discrimination as causes of psychological trauma which affects the feelings and emotions. The analysis of Wellek and Warren demonstrates that psychoanalytical critique is concerned with the people who operate as the world's symbols. The study also states that the author's perceptions, dreams, conscious, or unconscious mind are expressed through psychological approach.

3. Discussion

In the first dream journal, Rakhi's mother expresses sorrow over her decision to go to the United States and longing to go back to India. She learns about her mother's life as an orphan, her time

spent living in the slums, her ability to tell dreams, how a woman took her to a cave where she was completely instructed in the craft, and how skilled she was.. Rakhi learns about the myths that underpin Indian society, including the one that asserts that people should learn the value of limits early on in life. They must respect and defer to their elders and also demonstrated is how gods influence a person's life. Rakhi learns that having unbridled desires and disrespecting elderly figures can lead to self-destruction from the fable of Neehar the Unlucky. Rakhi learns via the legend of King Tunga-dhwaja that reverence for both elders and gods is a significant aspect of Indian culture. King Tungadhwaaja lost his realm as a result of his disdain for the gods. Dream-tellers are subject to some limitations. The first is that they are forbidden from getting married, the second is that they are forbidden from dreaming alone, and the third is that the dream-tellers must reside close by. Mrs. Gupta begins interpreting strangers' dreams in America, but her style of dream interpretation changes since in India, dream-tellers tell their clients the whole truth, but in this unfamiliar place, she just offers them advice rather than the whole truth. Mrs. Gupta continues to yearn for the dream world and keeps the dirt she collected from the caverns under her pillow in hopes that dreams may come true for her. Mrs. Gupta's longing for the culture is evident in the *salwaar-kameez* she wears to maintain her identity and the Indian food she prepares. Freud's opinion about the culture is that —What is now holding sway in the super-ego is, as it were, a pure culture of the death instinct, and in fact it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death|| (Freud, 1923).

Similarly, the premise of this engaging yet sobering tale of *Oleander Girl* about family, marriage, and class is well-executed. Korobi is raised in Kolkata by her renowned and irascible grandfather, a famous and depressed lawyer, and her sweet and sorrowful grandma. Her grandparents are suffering from the loss of their daughter. When she meets Rajat, an affluent, trendy, and jaded college student, Korobi is a quiet, intelligent, and unworldly student. Rajat proposes to Korobi while leaving his seductive buddies behind, making her feel as though she has entered a fairy tale and foreshadowing the impending disaster. But given Korobi's steadfast search for the truth about her father and her decision to travel across severely hostile post-9/11 America, it is impossible to foresee the complexities and repercussions of the crises and challenges Korobi and Rajat will encounter.

In fact, Korobi's personality represents a triumph over the divisions and chasms that mankind have wrought in this world. She is a pious representation of her parents' love, Rob and Anu. Korobi is the epitome of triumph; it takes incredible fortitude to choose to embrace the truth over a lie, bravery over fear, acceptance over despair, and humanity over narrowly defined ideas. In this novel, Chitra Banerjee raises her characters to a position from which they may view the world more clearly. Rajat embraces Korobi's identity as a person of mixed race and the terrible reality of her illegitimate paternity with a big heart, and Grandma lets Korobi discover the truth about her parents' relationship. The tale of Korobi's quest to understand herself is presented in *Oleander Girl*. She demonstrates incredible bravery in tackling life's challenges and bravely handles every scenario. Chitra has demonstrated how to cope with sadness and put our broken bits of life back together. According to the author, there are moments when you must travel through grief to get to the other side. Detours are not an option. She reveals the true essence of life in her book.

In *Oleander Girl*, Korobi is a modern heroine a blend of Indian values and American frankness. She does not believe in mixed relationships. She wants to confess about her origin to her fiancé even at the cost of her desertion but she cannot compromise with a life where there is no love. That's why,

when Rajat with her mother, suspect that she was deliberately concealing her reality by not informing them on phone, she leaves off and moves on. She is a new woman who despite varied oppositions, wants to look for her identity and feels so connected to her mother by a dream and a love-letter written by her mother to her father. She is not at all a stereotyped female, born and brought-up in Calcutta with narrow mindedness. Rather, she is a woman, who knows the demands of her identity. She was ready to face any consequence in her mission to search for a parent. She even sells her long hair to continue her search. The novel is replete with images and symbols. Temple is a very significant historical and political motif, and finally a spiritual motif. We witness a big heart change in Mr. Bhattacharya who wants to improve the villa condition by bearing the plumber cost etc. Rupa also vowed not to marry anyone in America, standing in temple, which finally led to her tragedy and Korobi's hidden identity. This novel also brings forth cultural openness of America in behaviour of Vic and Rob. Temptations are always there to stray one from his intended path but only true love succeeds finally. There is no substitute of love. Love is always unconditional. When Rajat shows interest in knowing any evidence, love moves off. But he finally realizes his mistake and patches up with Korobi. Mother, who had been voiceless in Korobi's dream, finally gets the voice with her daughter's boldness and 'toughness'. On her wedding day, she receives a parcel of her mother's poems- the best gift-a father could offer to a daughter. She discloses the secret of letter and dream only to her father. The novel not only gives a heart-rending quest of a girl for her lost parent but also talks of many issues like class difference, racial conflict, 9/11 tragedy, Hindu-Muslim riots. Chitra Banerjee is the master of story-telling. She does it effortlessly. In this novel, she adds a suspense which is maintained till the last chapter. Being a Bengali writer, her love for Kolkata is visibly exhibited in this novel. Places in America and India become alive on the pages of the novel. But her love for Kolkata, brings Korobi back to home, to Rajat. Even after Vic's proposal, she knows that there is no retreat in few cases. Apparently, her decision to find her origin seems to be very irrational choice, even to readers who also start feeling that why at the cost of Rajat and his family. But it cannot be denied that the inspiration of her search was her dream which was a vital connection to her mother. Being an orphan child, she progressed on the path of discovering her 'self' her identity in relation to her parentage. She wanted to discover the hidden truth of her life. Relying on her dreams, she was able to discover the hidden secrets of her mother's life too. And finally, a daughter found solace in the poems of her mother. She read one of these poems to Rajat on her flower-filled bedroom:

*He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroys;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.* (Divakaruni, 2014, p. 288)

4. Conclusion

Thus, the current study focuses on the characters' psychoanalytic viewpoints in the novels. Both the novels are examined in light of the psychotherapist Sigmund Freud's theories, techniques, ideologies, and approaches. The artistic characters created by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in particular, the protagonists' mental trauma and their difficulties of integrating into another society, are powerfully depicted by relating the theories of Freud. The present study analyses the difficulties, attachment, and psychic level of the characters in addition to the sorrows and mental anguish of Rakhi, her mother, and Korobi as discussed in the paper. Expectation vs reality, the characters'

innate proclivities, and the difficult circumstances in the foreign country all have an impact on their conscious and subconscious states of mind.

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