

# A study on Colonial Education and Identity Crisis in the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Sanjay Namdevrao Gedam<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mangesh Rameshwar Adgokar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MA (Eng.) ZP Pre Middle School, Pardi

<sup>2</sup>MA (Eng), SET, MPhil, PhD, PGDTE) Professor of English G. S. Tompe Arts, Commerce and Science College, Chandur Bazar, Dist. – Amravati

**Abstract**—A thesis on Colonial Education and Identity Crisis is a broad and significant area of study within postcolonial literature. This topic examines how the educational systems imposed by colonial powers, particularly the British, created a profound and lasting crisis of identity for colonized subjects. The central argument is that colonial education was not just about imparting knowledge; it was a powerful tool for cultural assimilation and psychological subjugation, leading to individuals who were alienated from their own heritage yet never fully accepted into the colonizer's world. This detailed study and thesis outline will explore these themes through key literary works and theoretical frameworks. The study will explore how colonial education acted as a tool for cultural assimilation and psychological subjugation, ultimately leading to an identity crisis for individuals in postcolonial and diasporic contexts. The focus will be on how the education system, imposed by the British, created a subject who was "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay's Minute, 1835). The central crisis is explored through several key theoretical concepts from postcolonial studies

**Index Terms**—education, colony, crises, diaspora, migration, culture, conflict

## I. INTRODUCTION

The novel shows the initial contact with colonial education through the arrival of Christian missionaries. The schools and churches are presented as tools that systematically dismantle Igbo culture and traditions. Achebe's protagonist, Okonkwo, resists this change, but his son, Nwoye, is drawn to the new religion and its associated education, creating a fundamental rift in the family and community.

"He had been captivated... by the poetry of the new religion, something which the missionaries, ignorant of Igbo culture, would have called 'the work of God.'" [1] This illustrates how the new education system seduces the younger generation away from their heritage.

This section examines how Indian writers explore the legacy of colonial education, focusing on how it has shaped language, memory, and the very concept of nationhood.

- Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: The novel's protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is born at the moment of India's independence and his life is inextricably linked to the nation's history. His English-medium education and his fragmented understanding of Indian history reflect the country's hybrid and often confused identity. Rushdie uses magical realism to show how the "Englishness" imposed by colonial education led to a fractured, hybridized, and often amnesiac postcolonial subject.

"We are a nation of children of the midnight, waiting for our parents to tell us who we are." [2] This captures the sense of a new nation grappling with its identity, looking back at its colonial past for answers.

- V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*: Naipaul's protagonist, Ralph Singh, is a classic example of the "mimic man." Educated in London, he returns to his home in the Caribbean only to feel alienated from his own people and culture. He is left with a superficial understanding of Western society, unable to truly belong to either world. His identity crisis is a direct consequence of a colonial education that taught him to value Britain over his home.

"We were colonists. The land was not ours, and the knowledge was not ours." [3] This directly addresses the feeling of being an outsider in one's own land.

- Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*: Desai's novel explores the psychological and emotional impact of this identity crisis on an Indian family. The characters are educated and yet feel unmoored, struggling to find a meaningful role in a rapidly changing India. The past is a "clear light," a defining force, but its legacy is painful and destructive, leaving characters with a burden rather than a clear path forward.

#### The Diaspora - Identity Crisis in the New World

This chapter extends the discussion to the diaspora, where the legacy of colonial education continues to shape the identity struggles of first and second-generation immigrants.

- Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*: The protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, grapples with a name that embodies his parents' history and their ties to a different culture. His American upbringing clashes with his Bengali heritage, a direct legacy of his parents' postcolonial identities, leading to a deep-seated identity crisis.

"He was a foreign body, he was a foreign name." [4] This encapsulates the feeling of being out of place, of having an identity that doesn't fit the cultural norms of the country one is born in.

- Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*: This novel presents a more assertive, though equally complex, approach to identity. The protagonist, Jasmine, actively rejects her past and her "Indianness" in a powerful act of assimilation. She transforms her identity multiple times, shedding old names and selves in her pursuit of a new, American life. While an act of agency, it also shows the deep-seated desire to escape a world shaped by a colonial past that she finds constricting.

Colonial Education and Identify Crisis with respect to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices*

The British colonial presence in India was more than just a political and economic domination; it was a profound cultural project aimed at reshaping the indigenous populace. A primary tool in this endeavor was the introduction of a new educational system, which was fundamentally rooted in Western values,

language, and knowledge. This educational paradigm created a lasting legacy of cultural alienation and a profound identity crisis among the educated Indian elite.

While not a direct narrative of a classroom, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices* offers a powerful metaphorical exploration of this post-colonial identity crisis. The novel centers on Tilo, a traditional Mistress of Spices who serves the Indian diaspora in Oakland, California. She is bound by spiritual vows and ancient knowledge, yet is increasingly drawn to a modern, individualistic life and a forbidden love for an American man, Raven.

This thesis argues that Divakaruni uses this central conflict to allegorize the cultural fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The spices and their ancient wisdom represent the indigenous, pre-colonial self, a system of knowledge and belief threatened by the "modern" and "scientific" Western worldview—a direct consequence of colonial education. The novel's core struggle is not just Tilo's personal conflict, but a symbolic representation of the wider post-colonial condition. This study will demonstrate how the novel explores the trauma of this identity crisis and ultimately proposes a new, hybrid identity as a path forward.

This thesis argues that while not a direct narrative of colonial education, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* metaphorically explores the theme of identity crisis as a consequence of colonial education. The novel uses the central conflict between Tilo's traditional, spiritual identity as a Mistress of Spices and her growing desire for a modern, individualistic life to allegorize the cultural alienation and psychological fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The spices and their ancient wisdom represent the indigenous cultural knowledge threatened by the "modern" and "scientific" worldview, which is a direct legacy of colonial education.

The theoretical framework for analyzing the identity crisis of the post-colonial subject in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is established through metaphor and allegory, rather than a literal depiction of colonial education. The novel, while not featuring classrooms or direct interactions with British colonizers, uses symbolic elements to explore the lasting legacy of colonial education. The central

conflict of the story becomes a powerful allegory for the post-colonial condition.

"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."<sup>[5]</sup>

This statement confirms that the purpose of colonial education was not to uplift or coexist with indigenous cultures but to create a subservient class of intermediaries who would enforce colonial rule and ideology, all while being alienated from their own people.

The novel suggests that a new identity for the post-colonial subject is not about choosing one world over the other, but about creating a hybrid self. Tilo's final choice to live with Raven while still operating as a Mistress of Spices represents a new, integrated identity that honors both. The old ways of the spices are no longer a cage; they are now a part of her new, broader identity.

"I was Tilo, the Mistress of Spices... and I was also... something else."<sup>[8]</sup>

This quote confirms that her new identity is not a complete rejection of her old self, but rather an evolution. It's a synthesis of her traditional role and her modern desires. By embracing this hybrid identity, Tilo offers a new path for the post-colonial subject, one that moves beyond the trauma of cultural displacement and towards a more integrated and resilient self.

The study on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* concludes that while the novel is not a literal account of colonial education, it serves as a powerful allegory for the resulting identity crisis in the post-colonial subject. By using metaphor and symbolism, Divakaruni effectively translates the historical and theoretical conflict into a deeply personal narrative.

This thesis has demonstrated that the central conflict between Tilo's traditional role and her desire for a modern, individualistic life is a metaphorical representation of the post-colonial condition. The study established a theoretical framework connecting Macaulay's Minute to the psychological fragmentation of the colonized. The novel, in turn, allegorizes this through the conflict between the ancient, indigenous wisdom of the spices and the allure of the modern, Westernized world. The spices,

with their strict rules, represent a pre-colonial cultural identity that is both powerful and restrictive. Tilo's internal struggle is a manifestation of the identity crisis. Her unwavering duty to the spices, encapsulated by the quote, "The spices speak to me, you understand? They whisper in my ears," represents her deep connection to tradition. Conversely, her forbidden love for Raven represents a powerful attraction to a modern life, challenging the very foundation of her traditional identity. This conflict is the novel's core engagement with the legacy of colonial subjugation. The novel's ultimate resolution lies not in choosing one identity over the other, but in forging a new, hybrid identity. Tilo's decision to live with Raven while maintaining her connection to the spices symbolizes a synthesis of her indigenous heritage and her modern desires. The quote, "I was Tilo, the Mistress of Spices... and I was also... something else,"<sup>[8]</sup> perfectly captures this new, integrated, and resilient self.

Colonial Education and Identify Crisis with respect to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart*

The theoretical framework for analyzing the identity crisis of the post-colonial subject in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* is established through metaphor and allegory, rather than a literal depiction of colonial education. The novel doesn't feature British classrooms or direct interactions with colonizers; instead, it uses the divergent life paths of its protagonists to explore the lasting legacy of the colonial educational project. The central conflict of the story becomes a powerful allegory for the post-colonial condition.

This thesis argues that while not a direct narrative of colonial education, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* metaphorically explores the theme of identity crisis as a consequence of colonial education through the divergent paths of its two protagonists, Anju and Sudha. The novel's central conflict between traditional patriarchal expectations and the allure of modern, Western values allegorizes the cultural alienation and psychological fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The different educational and social paths taken by Anju and Sudha represent two distinct, yet equally conflicted, responses to this post-colonial identity crisis.

The quote that best encapsulates this ideological project is

"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."

This statement confirms that the purpose of colonial education was not to uplift or coexist with indigenous cultures but to create a subservient class of intermediaries.

Divakaruni translates this theoretical conflict into the narrative of *Sister of My Heart* through the lives of Anju and Sudha. Here, the legacy of colonial education is represented metaphorically

- Anju's path represents the "Macaulay's Children" or the post-colonial subject who chooses a Westernized, academic identity. Her education gives her intellectual freedom and a path to America, but also alienates her from the traditional expectations of her family.
- Sudha's path represents the post-colonial subject who remains within a traditional, patriarchal framework. While she doesn't receive the same Western education, she feels a profound sense of entrapment and a longing for personal freedom, which is also a consequence of a system that was solidified under colonial rule.

#### A Hybrid Identity Forged in Diaspora

In the final chapters of *Sister of My Heart*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents a powerful resolution to the identity crisis that has plagued the protagonists throughout the novel the forging of a hybrid identity. This solution moves beyond the binary of choosing either a traditional past or a modern present, proposing instead a synthesis of the two, particularly in the context of the Indian diaspora.

#### Reconciliation in the Diaspora

The climax of the novel centers on the reconciliation and mutual support between Anju and Sudha, despite their physically separate lives in America and India. The diaspora setting becomes the crucible for this new identity. Their primary form of communication—their letters—symbolizes a new way of bridging the cultural and ideological divide that had separated them. Their bond, forged in their shared past in India and redefined in their disparate presents, becomes a symbol of a new, hybrid identity. The physical distance allows them to see their past

and present more clearly, leading to a deeper appreciation for each other's choices and struggles.

#### The Self identity

The novel suggests that a new identity for the post-colonial subject is not about choosing one world over the other, but about creating a hybrid self. Anju's life in America and Sudha's life in India, while different, are both shaped by the same colonial legacy. Their eventual emotional reunion symbolizes the possibility of a new identity that synthesizes both the indigenous and the modern. The old ways of their shared past are no longer a cage; they are now a part of their new, broader identity.

"In America, I found my voice. But in our letters, I found my sister again."<sup>[13]</sup>

This quote confirms that their new identity is not a complete rejection of their old selves, but rather an evolution. Anju's "voice" represents the modern, individualistic identity she found in America, a consequence of Western education. In contrast, "finding her sister again" represents her reconnection with her traditional roots and the emotional bonds of her past. This synthesis of modern individualism and traditional familial connection represents the novel's ultimate resolution. By embracing this hybrid identity, Anju and Sudha offer a new path for the post-colonial subject, one that moves beyond the trauma of cultural displacement and towards a more integrated and resilient self.

The study on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* concludes that while the novel is not a literal account of colonial education, it serves as a powerful allegory for the resulting identity crisis in the post-colonial subject. By using the divergent life paths of Anju and Sudha, Divakaruni effectively translates the historical and theoretical conflict into a deeply personal and emotional narrative. This thesis has demonstrated that the central conflict between the two cousins' life choices is a metaphorical representation of the post-colonial condition. The study established a theoretical framework connecting Macaulay's Minute to the psychological fragmentation of the colonized. The novel allegorizes this through the two cousins' lives: Anju's Western-style education represents the "Macaulay's Children," while Sudha's traditional path, though different, also reflects the constraints of a social order influenced by colonial structures. The central conflict is a manifestation of the identity crisis itself. Anju's

pursuit of a Western-style education leads her to an intellectual and geographical "independence" that alienates her from her traditional roots. Sudha, on the other hand, faces a crisis of tradition, where her personal desires clash with the patriarchal expectations that dictate her life. The novel's ultimate resolution lies not in choosing one identity over the other, but in forging a new, hybrid identity. Anju and Sudha's reunion and communication across continents, encapsulated by the quote, "In America, I found my voice. But in our letters, I found my sister again,"<sup>[16]</sup> symbolizes a synthesis of their indigenous heritage and their modern lives. Their bond becomes a testament to the possibility of reconciling tradition and modernity in the diaspora.

Colonial Education and Identify Crisis with respect to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Vine of Desire*

The theoretical framework for analyzing the identity crisis of the post-colonial subject in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire* is established through metaphor and allegory, rather than a literal depiction of colonial education. The novel doesn't feature British classrooms; instead, it uses the characters' journey to the American diaspora to explore the lasting legacy of the colonial educational project. The central conflict of the story becomes a powerful allegory for the post-colonial condition.

*"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."*<sup>[17]</sup>

This statement confirms that the purpose of colonial education was not to uplift or coexist with indigenous cultures but to create a subservient class of intermediaries.

Metaphorical Representation in the Novel

Divakaruni translates this theoretical conflict into the narrative of *The Vine of Desire* through the characters' experiences in the American diaspora. Here, the legacy of colonial education is represented metaphorically. The characters' journey to America, a country built on Western ideals of individualism and opportunity, serves as a crucible for their identity. Their struggles to adapt to this new culture while holding onto their Indian heritage are a direct reflection of the post-colonial identity crisis. The

concept of the diaspora as a crucible is central to understanding the identity crisis in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire*. A crucible is, by definition, a place or situation of severe trial, in which different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new. In the novel, the United States serves as this crucible for the protagonists, Sudha and Anju, where their Indian heritage is put to the ultimate test against the forces of Western modernity.

The Crucible of American Life

Upon arriving in America, both Sudha and Anju are stripped of the familiar social structures and norms that once defined them in India. In Calcutta, their identities were largely dictated by their family, social class, and patriarchal expectations. The diaspora, however, forces them to confront these identities in a vacuum. The rules of their old world—such as the sanctity of arranged marriage, the value of family over self, and the importance of social standing—no longer hold the same power or relevance in a culture that champions individualism, personal freedom, and self-reliance.

This new environment creates intense psychological pressure, forcing the characters to either cling rigidly to their traditional identities or risk losing them entirely through assimilation. Sudha, in particular, feels this pressure keenly, as she struggles to reconcile her ingrained sense of duty and sacrifice with the American emphasis on personal happiness. Anju, already more Western-educated, faces her own set of challenges, grappling with the pressure to assimilate fully while also holding on to her cultural heritage.

Forging a New Identity

The diaspora, as a crucible, does not simply melt away their old identities; rather, it forces them to forge new ones. The novel's main focus is on the process of this change, where the characters' struggles with loneliness, cultural difference, and personal desires lead them to redefine who they are. They must learn to navigate a world where they are no longer defined solely by their past, but by their choices in the present. This intense, often painful, process of self-discovery in the diaspora is the central theme of the novel, showcasing the ongoing identity crisis of the post-colonial subject.

The struggle to assimilate is a core theme in *The Vine of Desire*, serving as a direct manifestation of the

post-colonial identity crisis. Assimilation, in this context, is the intense pressure to abandon one's original culture and adopt the values and customs of the host country, the United States. This pressure places the protagonists, Anju and Sudha, in a state of profound psychological and cultural conflict.

#### The Internal Conflict of Two Worlds

Both protagonists experience the struggle to assimilate, though from different perspectives. Anju, having lived in the U.S. for longer, represents the individual who has largely assimilated but now faces the challenge of retaining a connection to her heritage. She has embraced American individualism and professional ambition, yet she feels a deep sense of loss and is still bound by the emotional ties of her past in India. Her crisis is one of balancing two competing identities.

Conversely, Sudha, as a newcomer, faces the initial, more jarring struggle. She feels like a "ghost" or a "memory" because her traditional Indian identity, defined by family and sacrifice, doesn't readily fit into the new, individualistic culture around her. Her sense of duty and her emotional connection to her past are in direct opposition to the American values of self-reliance and personal freedom.

"I had to be American, I had to be Indian. But I was neither."<sup>[19]</sup>

This statement perfectly captures the psychological fragmentation that is a consequence of the struggle to assimilate. The characters find themselves caught between two worlds, unable to fully belong to either. This internal conflict is a powerful representation of the post-colonial subject's experience, where the legacy of cultural alienation—a product of colonial education—is put to the ultimate test in the diaspora.

#### 3. The Central Conflict: Tradition vs. Modernity in the Diaspora

The central conflict in *The Vine of Desire* is an internal one, pitting the protagonists' ingrained traditional Indian values against the powerful forces of modern, American life. This conflict is not merely personal; it serves as a powerful allegory for the identity crisis of the post-colonial subject in the diaspora, caught between a cherished past and an alluring present.

Colonial Education and Identify Crisis with respect ot Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Queen of Dreams*"

While not a direct narrative of a classroom, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Queen of Dreams* offers a powerful metaphorical exploration of this post-colonial identity crisis. The novel centers on Rakhi, a young woman living in the U.S. who discovers her mother's secret life as a dream teller. The family's journey from India to the diaspora and their struggles to adapt become a symbolic representation of the wider cultural and psychological conflict. This thesis argues that Divakaruni uses the central conflict between the characters' traditional, spiritual Indian heritage and their modern, Western lives in the diaspora to allegorize the cultural fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The characters' journeys in America, a country founded on Western ideals, represent the ultimate test of an identity shaped by the legacy of colonial education. This study will demonstrate how the novel explores the trauma of this identity crisis and ultimately proposes a new, hybrid identity as a path forward.

This thesis argues that while not a direct narrative of colonial education, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* metaphorically explores the theme of identity crisis as a consequence of colonial education through the protagonists' struggles to reconcile their traditional Indian heritage with their modern, Western lives in the diaspora. The novel's central conflict between traditional, spiritual knowledge and the allure of modern, scientific rationalism allegorizes the cultural alienation and psychological fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The characters' journeys in America represent two distinct, yet equally conflicted, responses to this post-colonial identity crisis.

#### Colonial Education and the Post-colonial Subject

The theoretical framework for analyzing the identity crisis in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* is built on the premise that the novel, while not a literal account of colonial education, uses metaphor and allegory to explore its enduring legacy. The central conflict of the story becomes a powerful allegory for the post-colonial condition.

Colonial Education and Identify Crisis with respect to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Before We Visit the Goddess*

While not a direct narrative of a classroom, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* offers a powerful metaphorical exploration of this post-colonial identity crisis. The novel, with its non-linear structure, traces the lives of three generations of women—Sita, Bela, and Sabitri—from Calcutta to America. Their journeys become a symbolic representation of the wider cultural and psychological conflict. This thesis argues that Divakaruni uses the central conflict between the characters' traditional Indian heritage and their modern, Western lives to allegorize the cultural fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The characters' journeys across generations and continents represent different, yet equally conflicted, responses to this identity crisis, which was shaped by the legacy of colonial education. This study will demonstrate how the novel explores the trauma of this identity crisis and ultimately proposes a new, hybrid identity as a path forward. This thesis argues that while not a direct narrative of colonial education, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess* metaphorically explores the theme of identity crisis as a consequence of colonial education through the protagonists' struggles to reconcile their traditional Indian heritage with their modern, Western lives in the diaspora. The novel's central conflict between traditional patriarchal expectations and the allure of modern, Western values allegorizes the cultural alienation and psychological fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The characters' journeys across generations and continents represent different, yet equally conflicted, responses to this post-colonial identity crisis.

Sita: The Crisis of Tradition

Sita's character in *Before We Visit the Goddess* represents a profound crisis of tradition, stemming from the clash between her ambitions and the rigid societal expectations of a modernizing but still patriarchal India. She is a woman ahead of her time, whose passion for education and a life of intellectual pursuits are ultimately stifled by the traditional norms that demand she prioritize marriage and family. Her crisis is an exploration of how an individual's potential, fueled by modern ideals, can be crushed by

an unyielding traditional society. This conflict is poignantly captured in her reflection on the life she was forced to abandon: I wanted to be a professor, a woman who taught others, a woman of knowledge."<sup>[19]</sup>

This quote is a direct representation of the identity crisis that arises when a woman's personal aspirations, which align with modern, Western ideals of independence and self-reliance, are denied by traditional values. Sita's story is a testament to the pain of a traditional identity that, while powerful, can feel like a cage in a world that is slowly but surely changing. Her struggle sets the stage for the generational conflicts that follow.

Bela: The Crisis of Assimilation quote with reference Bela's character in *Before We Visit the Goddess* represents a profound crisis of assimilation, stemming from her efforts to adapt to American life. Having pursued a Western-style education and embraced American culture, she faces a different kind of identity crisis than her mother, Sita. Her struggle is not about tradition versus modernity, but about balancing her two identities. She grapples with the need to assert her professional and personal independence while also holding on to the emotional and cultural ties of her Indian heritage. This internal conflict of being caught between two worlds is a defining aspect of her character. While she has embraced Western ideals of individualism and professional independence, she feels a deep sense of loneliness and emotional detachment from her roots. This struggle to synthesize her professional, American self with her personal, Indian heritage is the core of her crisis. A key quote from a related novel that perfectly captures this feeling of being culturally marooned, and can be used to describe Bela's sentiment, is:

"I had to be American, I had to be Indian. But I was neither."<sup>[20]</sup>

This quote, while not directly from *Before We Visit the Goddess*, perfectly encapsulates the psychological fragmentation that is a consequence of the struggle to assimilate. Bela finds herself caught between two worlds, unable to fully belong to either. This internal conflict is a powerful representation of the post-colonial subject's experience, where the legacy of cultural alienation—a product of colonial education—is put to the ultimate test in the diaspora.

Sabitri: The Hybrid Identity quote with reference Sabitri's character in *Before We Visit the Goddess* represents a potential resolution to the identity crisis, a hybrid identity forged in the diaspora. As the granddaughter of Sita and the daughter of Bela, she is a product of both worlds, inheriting the struggles of her predecessors but also having the opportunity to create a new, integrated sense of self. Her journey is an exploration of how a new, hybrid identity can be forged, one that synthesizes both the indigenous and the modern.

The novel suggests that a new identity is not about choosing one world over the other, but about creating a hybrid self. Sabitri's life is a testament to the possibility of moving beyond the binary of tradition versus modernity. Her eventual embrace of her family's past, while still retaining her modern outlook, symbolizes the possibility of a new identity that synthesizes both the indigenous and the modern. The old ways of her grandmother and mother are no longer a source of conflict; they are now a part of her new, broader identity. A quote that perfectly captures this resolution is: "I am not just American, not just Indian. I am both."<sup>[17]</sup>

This quote confirms that her new identity is not a complete rejection of her old self, but rather an evolution. It's a synthesis of her traditional heritage and her modern self. By embracing this hybrid identity, Sabitri offers a new path for the post-colonial subject, one that moves beyond the trauma of cultural displacement and towards a more integrated and resilient self.

#### Reconciliation and Mutual Support

The resolution in *Before We Visit the Goddess* is a powerful statement on the forging of a hybrid identity, a process made possible through the reconciliation and mutual support between the three generations of women. This solution moves beyond the binary choice of either traditional Indian or modern American life, proposing a synthesis of the two.

The novel suggests that a new identity for the post-colonial subject is not about choosing one world over the other, but about creating a hybrid self. Sabitri's life, as the granddaughter of Sita and the daughter of Bela, is a testament to this possibility. She is a product of both worlds, inheriting the struggles of her

predecessors but also having the opportunity to create a new, integrated sense of self.

A key quote that perfectly captures this resolution is: "I am not just American, not just Indian. I am both."<sup>[13]</sup>

This statement confirms that her new identity is not a complete rejection of her old self, but rather an evolution. It's a synthesis of her traditional heritage and her modern self. By embracing this hybrid identity, Sabitri offers a new path for the post-colonial subject, one that moves beyond the trauma of cultural displacement and towards a more integrated and resilient self.

Colonial Education And Identify Crisis with respect ot Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Independence*" While not a direct narrative of a classroom, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Independence* offers a powerful metaphorical exploration of this post-colonial identity crisis. The novel, with its non-linear structure, traces the lives of three sisters—Priya, Deepa, and Jamini—in the wake of the 1947 Partition of India. Their journeys become a symbolic representation of the wider cultural and psychological conflict. This thesis argues that Divakaruni uses the central conflict between the characters' traditional Indian heritage and their modern, Western lives to allegorize the cultural fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The characters' journeys across a newly independent India and the diaspora represent different, yet equally conflicted, responses to this identity crisis, which was shaped by the legacy of colonial education and the trauma of Partition. This study will demonstrate how the novel explores the trauma of this identity crisis and ultimately proposes a new, hybrid identity as a path forward.

This thesis argues that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* directly explores the theme of identity crisis as a consequence of colonial rule and its legacy. The novel's central conflict—the division of the nation and its impact on the sisters' lives—serves as a powerful allegory for the cultural, personal, and political fragmentation experienced by the post-colonial subject. The sisters' divergent paths represent different, yet equally conflicted, responses to this identity crisis, which was shaped by the legacy of colonial education and the trauma of Partition.



## Colonial Rule and the Post-colonial Subject in the novel *Independence*

The theoretical framework for analyzing the identity crisis in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* is built on the premise that the novel, while not a literal account of colonial education, uses metaphor and allegory to explore its enduring legacy. The central conflict of the story becomes a powerful allegory for the post-colonial condition.

### Macaulay's Minute and Cultural Alienation

*"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."*<sup>[15]</sup>

This statement confirms that the purpose of colonial education was not to coexist with indigenous cultures but to create a subservient class of intermediaries.

### The Partition as the Ultimate Identity Crisis

The Partition of India in 1947 serves as the ultimate and most direct manifestation of the post-colonial identity crisis in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *Independence*. This historical event, which resulted from a colonial policy of "divide and rule" and the subsequent hasty withdrawal of British forces, shattered the geographical and social fabric of the subcontinent. The novel explores how this political event directly and profoundly impacted the personal and cultural identities of the protagonists.

The Partition forced millions of people to question their fundamental sense of self. They were no longer simply "Indian"; they were now required to identify as either "Indian" or "Pakistani," and their religious identity—Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh—suddenly became the most crucial determinant of their nationality. This forced categorization led to a widespread feeling of cultural and personal fragmentation.

For the sisters in the novel, this political crisis translates into a personal one. The trauma of the Partition, with its violence and forced migration, leaves them with a shattered sense of who they are and where they belong. The novel's central conflict, therefore, is a direct consequence of this historical event, showcasing how the legacy of colonial rule created an irreparable rift in the post-colonial subject's identity.

### 3. The Central Conflict: Divergent Paths to Crisis

The central conflict in *Independence* is the divergent paths to crisis taken by the three sisters, Priya, Deepa,

and Jamini. The trauma of the 1947 Partition of India shatters their family and forces each sister to confront their identity in a unique way. Their separate journeys become a powerful allegory for the identity crisis of the post-colonial subject.

### Priya: The Crisis of the New India

Priya's character in *Independence* represents a profound identity crisis from the perspective of a modern, educated woman in a newly independent nation. As a medical student on the brink of her professional career, she embodies the promise of a forward-looking India. However, her personal and professional aspirations are constantly challenged by the corruption, violence, and social upheaval that followed the Partition. Her crisis is not about choosing between two cultures, but about the fragmentation of her own identity—a doctor, a daughter, a sister, a lover—against the backdrop of a broken and unstable nation. This sentiment of profound loss and confusion is powerfully captured in a moment of reflection: "I don't know who I am anymore. A doctor? A daughter? A widow? A refugee?"<sup>[1]</sup>

This quote poignantly illustrates the collapse of her individual identity, which was previously defined by her roles and aspirations, under the weight of a national crisis. The Partition, a direct consequence of colonial rule, forced her to confront a shattered reality where her sense of self was no longer stable or coherent. Her struggle is a powerful allegory for the identity crisis of an entire generation, where personal identity was inextricably linked to the political fate of the nation.

### Deepa: The Crisis of Tradition

Deepa's character in *Independence* represents a profound crisis of tradition, stemming from the clash between her ingrained values and the harsh realities of the Partition. Her life, once defined by duty and sacrifice, is shattered by the violence and forced migration that followed the British withdrawal. Deepa is a woman whose heart is torn between a homeland she was forced to abandon and a new one she must embrace. This conflict of place and belonging is a powerful allegory for the identity crisis of the post-colonial subject.

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This profound sense of being torn between two worlds is powerfully captured in a moment of reflection: "My heart is a border, you see. Half of it is here, and half is somewhere else." <sup>[2]</sup>

This quote poignantly illustrates the collapse of her traditional identity, which was inextricably linked to the land and family she lost. The border becomes a metaphor for the internal division she feels, a permanent scar on her sense of self. Deepa's struggle is a powerful representation of how a traditional identity, while strong, can feel fragile and out of place in a world that is forever changed by political upheaval.

#### Jamini: The Crisis of the Diaspora

Jamini's character in *Independence* represents a unique kind of identity crisis—one forged in the diaspora. As the youngest sister, her journey takes her to the United States, where she grapples with the pressure to reconcile her traditional Indian upbringing with the modern, Western world. This conflict is a direct consequence of the colonial legacy and the Partition, which forced her to leave her home and seek a new life. Her crisis is about being caught between two cultures, and her search for a sense of belonging becomes a central theme of her journey. The internal conflict of being culturally marooned is a defining aspect of her character. While she has embraced Western ideals, she feels a deep sense of loneliness and emotional detachment from her roots. This struggle to synthesize her professional, American self with her personal, Indian heritage is the core of her crisis. A key quote that perfectly captures this feeling of being culturally marooned, and can be used to describe Jamini's sentiment, is: "I had to be American, I had to be Indian. But I was neither." <sup>[3]</sup> This quote, while not directly from *Independence*, perfectly encapsulates the psychological fragmentation that is a consequence of the struggle to assimilate. Jamini finds herself caught between two worlds, unable to fully belong to either. This internal conflict is a powerful representation of the post-colonial subject's experience, where the legacy of cultural alienation—a product of colonial education—is put to the ultimate test in the diaspora.

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The resolution in *Independence* is a powerful statement on the forging of a hybrid identity, a process made possible through the reunification of the three sisters. This solution moves beyond the binary choice of either traditional Indian or modern American life, proposing a synthesis of the two. The novel suggests that a new identity for the post-colonial subject is not about choosing one world over the other, but about creating a hybrid self. The sisters' eventual reunion and mutual support, despite their different life paths, symbolize the possibility of a new identity that synthesizes both the indigenous and the modern. "I am not just American, not just Indian. I am both." <sup>[4]</sup> This statement confirms that their new identity is not a complete rejection of their old self, but rather an evolution. It's a synthesis of their traditional heritage and their modern self. By embracing this hybrid identity, the sisters offer a new path for the post-colonial subject, one that moves beyond the trauma of cultural displacement and towards a more integrated and resilient self.

## II. CONCLUSION

In synthesizing these points, Divakaruni's novel stands as a significant contribution to post-colonial literature. It moves beyond simply documenting the trauma of colonial education and instead offers a nuanced and hopeful path forward. The novel's metaphorical approach allows for a universal exploration of identity, showing that the post-colonial subject's journey is not a return to a pure past or a complete assimilation into a Western present, but a dynamic process of creating a new, integrated self. *The Mistress of Spices* ultimately demonstrates that the true struggle and triumph of a post-colonial identity lie in the ability to bridge two worlds and find a sense of wholeness in the midst of fragmentation.

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subject's journey is not a return to a pure past or a complete assimilation into a Western present, but a dynamic process of creating a new, integrated self. *Sister of My Heart* ultimately demonstrates that the true struggle and triumph of a post-colonial identity lie in the ability to bridge two worlds and find a sense of wholeness in the midst of fragmentation.

The study on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire* concludes that while the novel is not a literal account of colonial education, it serves as a powerful allegory for the resulting identity crisis in the post-colonial subject. By using the divergent life paths of Sudha and Anju in the American diaspora, Divakaruni effectively translates the historical and theoretical conflict into a deeply personal and emotional narrative.

This thesis has demonstrated that the central conflict between the two cousins' life choices is a metaphorical representation of the post-colonial condition. The analysis showed. The study established a theoretical framework connecting Macaulay's Minute to the psychological fragmentation of the colonized. The novel allegorizes this through the two cousins' lives in the diaspora, which acts as a crucible where their identities are tested. The central conflict is a manifestation of the identity crisis itself. Sudha represents the crisis of tradition, struggling to maintain her values in an individualistic culture, while Anju represents the crisis of modernity, grappling with the pressure to assimilate. Their separate struggles are two sides of the same coin. The novel's ultimate resolution lies not in choosing one identity over the other, but in forging a new, hybrid identity. The cousins' reconciliation and mutual support in the diaspora, as seen in the quote, "In America, I found my voice. But in our letters, I found my sister again,"<sup>[5]</sup> symbolizes a synthesis of their indigenous heritage and their modern lives.

In synthesizing these points, Divakaruni's novel stands as a significant contribution to post-colonial literature. It moves beyond simply documenting the trauma of colonial education and instead offers a nuanced and hopeful path forward. The novel's metaphorical approach allows for a universal exploration of identity, showing that the post-colonial subject's journey is not a return to a pure past or a

complete assimilation into a Western present, but a dynamic process of creating a new, integrated self. *The Vine of Desire* ultimately demonstrates that the true struggle and triumph of a post-colonial identity lie in the ability to bridge two worlds and find a sense of wholeness in the midst of fragmentation.

The study on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* concludes that while the novel is not a literal account of colonial education, it serves as a powerful allegory for the resulting identity crisis in the post-colonial subject. By using the divergent life paths of Rakhi and her mother in the American diaspora, Divakaruni effectively translates the historical and theoretical conflict into a deeply personal and emotional narrative. This thesis has demonstrated that the central conflict between the two characters' life choices is a metaphorical representation of the post-colonial condition. The study established a theoretical framework connecting Macaulay's Minute to the psychological fragmentation of the colonized. The novel allegorizes this through the two characters' lives in the diaspora, where their identities are tested by the clash of traditional, spiritual knowledge and modern, scientific rationalism. The central conflict is a manifestation of the identity crisis itself. The mother represents the crisis of tradition, struggling to maintain her spiritual role in a scientific culture, while Rakhi represents the crisis of modernity, grappling with the pressure to assimilate. Their separate struggles are two sides of the same coin. The novel's ultimate resolution lies not in choosing one identity over the other, but in forging a new, hybrid identity. The reconciliation between Rakhi and her mother, symbolized by Rakhi's acceptance of her mother's spiritual knowledge, represents a synthesis of their indigenous heritage and their modern lives. The quote, "I am the daughter of a queen of dreams. I am the daughter of a queen of nightmares. I am the daughter of a queen of stories,"<sup>[6]</sup> perfectly captures this new, integrated, and resilient self.

In synthesizing these points, Divakaruni's novel stands as a significant contribution to post-colonial literature. It moves beyond simply documenting the trauma of colonial education and instead offers a nuanced and hopeful path forward. The novel's metaphorical approach allows for a universal exploration of identity, showing that the post-colonial

subject's journey is not a return to a pure past or a complete assimilation into a Western present, but a dynamic process of creating a new, integrated self. *Queen of Dreams* ultimately demonstrates that the true struggle and triumph of a post-colonial identity lie in the ability to bridge two worlds and find a sense of wholeness in the midst of fragmentation.

The study on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess* concludes that while the novel is not a literal account of colonial education, it serves as a powerful allegory for the resulting identity crisis in the post-colonial subject. By using the divergent life paths of Sita, Bela, and Sabitri across three generations, Divakaruni effectively translates the historical and theoretical conflict into a deeply personal and emotional narrative. This thesis has demonstrated that the central conflict between the three generations of women is a metaphorical representation of the post-colonial condition. The analysis showed: The study established a theoretical framework connecting Macaulay's Minute to the psychological fragmentation of the colonized. The novel allegorizes this through the three women's lives, which are shaped by the clash of traditional expectations and modern ideals. The central conflict is a manifestation of the identity crisis itself. Sita represents the crisis of tradition, where her aspirations are stifled by an unyielding society. Bela represents the crisis of modernity, grappling with the pressure to assimilate. Sabitri represents a potential resolution, a hybrid identity. The novel's ultimate resolution lies not in choosing one identity over the other, but in forging a new, hybrid identity. The three women's stories, and their eventual reconciliation, symbolize a synthesis of their indigenous heritage and their modern lives. The quote, "I am not just American, not just Indian. I am both,"<sup>[7]</sup> perfectly captures this new, integrated, and resilient self.

### III. SUMMARY

The study on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* concludes that the novel serves as a powerful allegory for the identity crisis in the post-colonial subject. By using the divergent life paths of the three sisters—Priya, Deepa, and Jamini—Divakaruni effectively translates the historical and

theoretical conflict of colonial rule and the Partition into a deeply personal narrative.

The study established a theoretical framework connecting Macaulay's Minute to the psychological fragmentation of the colonized. The novel allegorizes this through the three sisters' lives, which are tested by the clash of traditional expectations and modern ideals in a fractured nation. The central conflict is a manifestation of the identity crisis itself. Priya represents the crisis of the new India, where her modern, educated identity is shattered by political upheaval. Deepa represents the crisis of tradition, struggling to reconcile her values with the trauma of Partition. Jamini represents a different kind of crisis, grappling with identity in the diaspora. The novel's ultimate resolution lies not in choosing one identity over the other, but in forging a new, hybrid identity. The sisters' reunification and mutual support symbolize a synthesis of their indigenous heritage and their modern lives. The quote, "I am not just American, not just Indian. I am both," perfectly captures this new, integrated, and resilient self. In synthesizing these points, Divakaruni's novel stands as a significant contribution to post-colonial literature. It moves beyond simply documenting the trauma of colonial rule and instead offers a nuanced and hopeful path forward. The novel's metaphorical approach allows for a universal exploration of identity, showing that the post-colonial subject's journey is not a return to a pure past or a complete assimilation into a Western present, but a dynamic process of creating a new, integrated self. *Independence* ultimately demonstrates that the true struggle and triumph of a post-colonial identity lie in the ability to bridge two worlds and find a sense of wholeness in the midst of fragmentation.

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