

Portraits of Motherhood: Strength, Trust, Loyalty, Guidance and Multitasking in Divakaruni's Narratives

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Abstract—This study analyses the personation of motherhood in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels—*The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Palace of Illusions*, and *The Last Queen*—through the thematic lens of strength, trust, multitasking, guidance, and loyalty. The research explores how Divakaruni's female protagonists embody these characteristics in various sociocultural and historical contexts, offering a subtle understanding of maternal agency. By examining characters of Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, Jindan Kaur, and others, the study accentuates how motherhood extends beyond biological roles to include resilience, sacrifice, and moral leadership. The analysis reveals that strength in motherhood manifests through endurance and defiance, trust is embedded in self-sacrifice and wisdom, multitasking is crucial in balancing familial and societal responsibilities, guidance is reflected in shaping future generations, and loyalty is expressed through unwavering commitment to children and values. Through a qualitative thematic analysis, this paper underscores the complexity of maternal figures in Divakaruni's works, challenging conventional representations of motherhood. The findings contribute to feminist literary discourse by illustrating how Divakaruni redefines maternal strength in both mythical and historical narratives, bridging past and present perspectives on women's roles. This study enhances the understanding of motherhood as a dynamic and multifaceted force in literature.

key words—Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Guidance, Loyalty, Motherhood, Multitasking, Strength, The Forest of Enchantments, The Palace of Illusions, and The Last Queen, Trust.

I. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood has been a central theme in literature across cultures (Woodward, 1997), often depicted as a role of immense responsibility, love, sacrifice, and resilience. In contemporary literature, especially in feminist and postcolonial narratives, motherhood is not just about nurturing but also about navigating complex social, emotional, and political challenges (Kaundal & Itoo, 2024). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a renowned Indian-American

author, presents motherhood as a powerful force (Jiao, 2019), foregrounding its multidimensional aspects. Her novels portray mothers as symbols of strength, trust, multitasking, guidance, and loyalty, reflecting the evolving role of women in both traditional and modern societies (Karmakar, 2018).

Divakaruni's fiction redefines motherhood by focusing on the resilience and agency of maternal figures. In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita is not just a devoted wife but also a strong mother who ensures her children grow up with integrity despite her personal suffering (Divakaruni, 2019). *The Last Queen* presents Maharani Jindan Kaur as a fierce protector of her son and her kingdom, proving that motherhood extends beyond biological ties to leadership and responsibility (Divakaruni, 2021). Similarly, *The Palace of Illusions* offers a unique perspective on Draupadi's role as a mother, emphasizing her unwavering commitment to justice and her children's legacy (Divakaruni, 2009). Through these narratives, Divakaruni challenges traditional portrayals of passive motherhood and instead highlights maternal figures who influence the destiny of their families and communities.

Despite the growing body of literary criticism on Divakaruni's works, studies focusing specifically on motherhood as a theme remain limited. Most research discusses gender roles, female agency, and cultural identity but does not explore the exquisite depiction of motherhood as a blend of emotional, psychological, and social strength. This study seeks to fill this gap by analysing how motherhood in Divakaruni's fiction is shaped by five key aspects—strength, trust, multitasking, guidance, and loyalty. By focusing on these attributes, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how her maternal characters redefine traditional norms and expectations.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how Divakaruni portrays mothers as figures of strength who overcome personal and societal challenges. The analysis will explore trust as a crucial motherhood characteristic, particularly in how maternal figures inspire faith, loyalty, and moral integrity in their children and communities. Multitasking will be highlighted as an essential aspect of motherhood in her fiction, illustrating how mothers juggle emotional responsibilities, social duties, and personal struggles while maintaining their agency and dignity. Additionally, the research will investigate guidance as a defining characteristic, showcasing how maternal figures mentor their children, provide moral direction, and instil values that shape their futures. Lastly, the study focuses on loyalty, examining how Divakaruni's mothers remain devoted to their families despite hardships, showcasing unconditional love, commitment, and resilience.

The research employs a qualitative approach, using thematic and character analysis to interpret motherhood in Divakaruni's fiction. The Primary texts chosen for the study are *The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Palace of Illusions*, and *The Last Queen*, supported by feminist literary theory and narrative analysis. The contribution of the study lies in providing insights into how Divakaruni's maternal characters navigate their roles in a patriarchal society while embodying qualities of resilience, wisdom, and adaptability.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motherhood in literature across cultures, reflects societal expectations, emotional depth, and the diverse roles women play in families and communities (O'Reilly, Porter & Short, 2005). Literary depictions of mothers range from self-sacrificing caregivers to independent figures who challenge traditional norms (Jiao, 2019). Dey and Das (2020) note that Indian literature often portrays motherhood as a sacred duty, deeply connected to cultural and religious beliefs. Rye et al. (2017) argue that motherhood in literature extends beyond biological relationships, shaping ideological constructs influenced by history, politics, and cultural shifts.

Motherhood is a central theme in South Asian literature, shaped by historical, mythological, and

cultural narratives that define societal expectations (Karmakar, 2018). Traditional epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* highlight maternal sacrifice and endurance. Sita exemplifies the self-sacrificing mother, prioritizing her children's well-being (Kanjilal, 2017), while Kunti and Gandhari embody duty and resilience amid political turmoil (Karmakar, 2018). Sikh history also portrays maternal strength, as seen in Mata Gujri, who instilled courage in her children despite adversity (Krishnamurti, 2019). Contemporary literature continues to explore motherhood through historical and mythological retellings. Ramanujan (1980) discusses folklore's role in shaping maternal ideals, while Narayan (2004) examines its reinterpretation in diasporic narratives. More recently, feminist retellings by authors like Kavita Kané redefine maternal figures, giving them greater agency and depth (Dirghangi, 2020). These evolving representations reflect both continuity and change in South Asian perspectives on motherhood. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni a popular and award-winning contemporary writer, through her works challenges conventional portrayals of women, depicting them as decision-makers and intellectuals (Divakaruni, 1956). Hence in this study we explore how Divakaruni reconstructs motherhood, blending feminist perspectives with historical and mythological narratives.

Motherhood is a complex and multidimensional concept shaped by psychological, sociological, and evolutionary influences, with key maternal traits including guidance, strength, multitasking, trustworthiness, and loyalty. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking Theory* (1989) emphasizes a mother's role in nurturing, protecting, and educating her children, highlighting guidance through discipline and problem-solving, as well as strength in overcoming challenges (Ruddick, 1983). John Bowlby's *Attachment Theory* (1958) describes the mother as a child's primary secure base, where trust is built through consistent care, and loyalty is reflected in a mother's unwavering commitment (Bowlby, 1979; Holmes, 2014). Donald Winnicott's *Good Enough Mother Theory* (1953) suggests that mothers must balance caregiving with fostering independence, reinforcing guidance while also multitasking by managing emotional support, discipline, and daily responsibilities (Winnicott, 1960; Abram, 2008). Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's *Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood* (1999) argues

that maternal strength evolved as a survival mechanism, requiring multitasking across caregiving, protection, and resource management (Hrdy, 1999). Similarly, Sharon Hays' Intensive Mothering Theory (1996) highlights societal expectations for mothers to be fully involved caregivers, demonstrating trustworthiness through prioritizing their children's needs while juggling domestic, emotional, and professional responsibilities (Hays, 1993; Faircloth, 2023). Nancy Chodorow's Reproduction of Mothering Theory (1978) explores how mothers pass down emotional and social values, shaping their children's identities through loyalty and guidance (Chodorow, 2000, 2021). Ann Masten's Resilience Theory (2001) underscores maternal strength in fostering resilience, ensuring children develop emotional stability through trust and support (Masten et al., 2011). Collectively, these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of motherhood, providing a framework for analysing maternal roles in literature, particularly in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works, where maternal figures navigate emotional, social, and psychological complexities.

Contemporary South Asian women writers, such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri, challenge traditional depictions by portraying mothers with emotional depth, agency, and personal struggles (Karmakar, 2022). Divakaruni's works explore maternal conflicts amid migration and cultural expectations, while Lahiri highlights the alienation faced by immigrant mothers balancing heritage and adaptation (Karmakar, 2018). Desai's novels examine maternal isolation and endurance, shedding light on the psychological dimensions of motherhood (Nisha, 2023). These literary perspectives expand the discourse on motherhood beyond traditional self-sacrificing ideals.

Despite these evolving portrayals, patriarchal norms continue to shape literary depictions of motherhood. Traditional literature often reinforces gendered expectations, portraying mothers as morally pure and selfless figures with limited autonomy (Kaundal & Itoo, 2024). Even in modern fiction, mothers who defy conventional roles or prioritize personal ambitions are often judged negatively (Krishnaraj, 2012). Jackson (2010) asserts that literature plays a significant role in either upholding or challenging

these patriarchal ideals, influencing societal perceptions of maternal duty and independence. While contemporary authors strive to redefine motherhood, deeply ingrained cultural expectations still impact literary representations. However, emerging voices increasingly portray motherhood as a complex and evolving identity influenced by personal choice, cultural heritage, and social pressures.

In *Forest of Enchantments*, Sita exemplifies strength as she navigates exile, captivity, and single motherhood (Chandran, Seng, & Xian, 2022). Unlike traditional depictions, Divakaruni's Sita asserts her agency, enduring societal rejection while raising Lava and Kusha with unwavering moral values (Dhar, 2021). Her emotional and spiritual strength redefines her as both divine and human. Similarly, Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* displays remarkable endurance, maintaining family unity despite humiliation and suffering (Variyar & Prajapati, 2018). She navigates complex relationships, balancing loyalty to Krishna, marriage to five men, and maternal duties (Yadav, 2013; Dhakal, 2017). As a feminist icon, Draupadi sacrifices personal desires to protect her family's honour and future (Mistry, 2020; Samuel, n.d.). Maharani Jindan in *The Last Queen* extends maternal resilience into the political sphere, fighting against British colonial forces while ensuring her son Duleep Singh understands his legacy (Saraswat, 2024). Her role transcends personal motherhood, symbolizing resistance and leadership (Ahuja, n.d.; Satyan, 2022).

Trust and emotional bonding define these maternal figures. Sita believes in her children's destiny despite abandonment (Chandran et al., 2022), Draupadi places faith in Krishna's guidance (Mistry, 2020), and Jindan navigates political complexities to secure her son's throne (Saraswat, 2024). Multitasking and sacrifice further shape their experiences, with Sita enduring exile while ensuring righteous upbringing of her sons (Dhar, 2021), Draupadi managing political turmoil alongside nurturing her children (Yadav, 2013), and Jindan balancing motherhood with leadership (Satyan, 2022). Loyalty remains central to their journeys, as Sita raises her children with dignity despite exile (Athreya & Patil, 2024), Draupadi upholds dharma for her sons amid war (Dhakal, 2017), and Jindan fights relentlessly for her son's rightful place

(Saraswat, 2024). Through these narratives, Divakaruni redefines motherhood as an intricate blend of strength, perseverance, and devotion, illustrating how maternal responsibilities extend beyond the household into realms of governance, social change, and moral fortitude.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni challenges conventional notions of motherhood by portraying women as both emotionally and intellectually empowered figures. Unlike traditional depictions that emphasize maternal sacrifice, her protagonists assert agency and resilience. In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita actively questions societal norms and makes independent decisions for her children's well-being (Singh, 2017). Similarly, *The Palace of Illusions* presents Draupadi's maternal role as deeply connected to her political foresight and emotional strength (Lothspeich, 2023).

Divakaruni's work aligns with feminist maternal theory, particularly Sara Ruddick's (1989) concept of "maternal thinking," which defines mothers as protectors and educators rather than passive caregivers. Her fiction also reflects Adrienne Rich's (1976) distinction between institutional and experiential motherhood, illustrating how women resist imposed identities to forge their own paths (Anjana & Savitha, 2023). This shift from self-sacrificing mothers to self-aware individuals underscores Divakaruni's feminist reinterpretation of motherhood.

Divakaruni's portrayal of motherhood parallels feminist retellings in Indian literature. Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* (1995) presents Draupadi as an assertive yet emotionally conflicted mother (Jaidka & Dhar, 2023). Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* (2014) explores Urmila's silent resilience, while Manu S. Pillai's *The Queen's Last Salute* (2017) reimagines Rani Jindan as a politically astute yet devoted mother (Kaur, 2021). Unlike Ray and Kane, Divakaruni's heroines actively reshape their destinies, emphasizing autonomy and emotional intelligence.

Mythological retellings often depict mothers as either self-sacrificing or tragic figures. However, Divakaruni balances idealization with realism, presenting them as complex individuals with strengths and vulnerabilities (Chakraborty, 2024). While some critics argue her heroines still conform to traditional maternal values (Parinitha &

Lourdusamy, 2022), others highlight their resistance to societal expectations (Lau, 2002).

Divakaruni redefines motherhood through strong, autonomous female characters who navigate societal constraints while exercising agency. Her emphasis on resilience and intellect sets her apart from other feminist retellings. Although literary criticism on Divakaruni's works is expanding, studies that specifically examine motherhood as a central theme are still scarce. Moreover, her works in context of motherhood has not been comparatively studied connecting it to the theories of motherhood. This research attempts to minimize this gap. However, future studies could examine maternal portrayals in South Asian and diasporic literature to deepen the discourse on evolving representations of motherhood.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To study the motherhood characteristic of strength in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
2. To study the motherhood characteristic of Trustworthiness in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
3. To study the motherhood characteristic of Multitasking in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
4. To study the motherhood characteristic of Guidance in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
5. To study the motherhood characteristic of Loyalty in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

IV. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, we have chosen three novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni viz. *The Palace of Illusions*, *The Forests of Enchantments* and *The Last Queen*. From literature we identified 25 characteristics of Motherhood. These characteristics were asked as questions to 125 participants by way of google forms and they were asked to rate them on a 10-point scale. The responses of all the participants were added for each characteristic. Top 5 characteristic were identified on the basis of top scores. These characteristics of motherhood were now studied in the selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to know as to what extent are they portrayed in them.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Comparing strength as motherhood characteristic

Novel	Character	Type of Strength	Description	Related Motherhood Theory
The Forest of Enchantments	Sita	Sacrificial & Enduring	Raises Luv and Kush with wisdom; endures suffering while maintaining dignity; final act of defiance by returning to Mother Earth.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
	Kaushalya	Silent & Devotional	Withstands emotional pain when Rama is exiled; remains composed and trusts in his destiny.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Donald Winnicott, 1953), Attachment Theory (John Bowlby, 1958)
	Sunaina	Wise & Guiding	Prepares Sita for adversity; instills resilience and foresight.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978)
	Mandodari	Moral & loving	Tries to guide Ravana; upholds maternal devotion despite sorrow.	Attachment Theory (John Bowlby, 1958), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978)

	Urmila	Patient & Self-Sacrificing	Endures 14 years of separation from Lakshmana, representing quiet endurance.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
The Palace of Illusions	Draupadi	Defiant & just	Raises her sons as warriors; maternal love intertwined with restoring honor.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, 1999), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
	Kunti	Sacrificial & Strategic	Sends Karna away to protect her honor; leads Pandavas with wisdom.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978), Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989)
	Gandhari	Silent & Suffering	Blinds herself out of loyalty; remains devoted to her sons despite their downfall.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996), Good Enough Mother Theory (Donald Winnicott, 1953)
	Subhadra	Protective	Actively safeguards Abhimanyu, though unable to prevent his	Attachment Theory (John Bowlby, 1958), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)

			tragic fate.	2001)
	Madri	Devotional & Faithful	Follows Pandu in death; entrusts her sons to Kunti, showing maternal solidarity.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978)
The Last Queen	Jindan Kaur	Fierce & Protective	Defends her son Duleep Singh's right to the throne; fights British rule with resilience.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, 1999), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
	Mataji	Enduring & Supportive	Shapes Jindan's strength through quiet sacrifices and wisdom.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978)
	Rani Sahib Kaur	Warrior & Resilient	Balances personal emotions with political responsibility, ensuring her child's future.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, 1999), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
	Mangla	Loyal & Nurturing	Though not a biological mother, supports Jindan with maternal strength.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Donald Winnicott, 1953), Attachment Theory (John Bowlby, 1958)

Comparing Multitasking as motherhood characteristic

Novel	Character	Multitasking Aspects	Motherhood Theory
The Forest of Enchantments	Sita	Balances love, duty, and motherhood by raising Luv and Kush alone while enduring emotional pain and reclaiming her agency.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)

	Kaushalya	Manages emotional strength and royal responsibilities, maintaining stability in Ayodhya despite personal grief.	Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
	Sunaina	Acts as both an educator and nurturer, imparting wisdom while managing household duties.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978)
	Mandodari	Juggles responsibilities as a wife, mother, and ethical advisor, trying to influence Ravana while protecting Indrajit.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989), Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996)
	Urmila	Endures emotional sacrifice, maintaining family stability despite years of separation from Lakshmana.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Donald Winnicott, 1953), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
The Palace of	Kunti	Balances motherhood, political	Evolutionary Theory of

Illusions		strategy, and survival, ensuring the Pandavas' safety while hiding Karna's identity.	Motherhood (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, 1999), Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996)
	Draupadi	Manages family, power, and vengeance, carrying the emotional burden of injustice while ensuring her children's legacy.	Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001), Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989)
	Gandhari	Juggles devotion to her son Duryodhana, loyalty to her	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978),

		husband, and wisdom as an advisor.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996)
	Subhadra	Balances motherhood and family ties by nurturing Abhimanyu while navigating political challenges.	Attachment Theory (John Bowlby, 1958), Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989)
	Madri	Handles motherhood and personal sacrifice, ultimately entrusting her children to Kunti for their better future.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Donald Winnicott, 1953), Attachment Theory (John Bowlby, 1958)
The Last Queen	Maharani Jindan Kaur	Balances governance and motherhood, protecting Punjab while ensuring Duleep Singh's rightful place as heir.	Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001), Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, 1999)
	Mataji	Manages household duties and emotional strength, shaping Jindan's resilience.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Nancy Chodorow, 1978), Resilience Theory (Ann Masten, 2001)
	Mangla	Acts as both caretaker and strategist, guiding Jindan through court politics.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Sara Ruddick, 1989), Good Enough Mother Theory (Donald Winnicott, 1953)
	Rani Sahib Kaur	Upholds political and familial duties, ensuring stability in the royal court.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Sharon Hays, 1996), Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, 1999)

Comparing Loyalty as motherhood characteristic

Novel	Character	Loyalty Aspects	Associated Motherhood Theory
The Forest of Enchantments	Sita	Stays loyal to her children despite abandonment, raises them with strong values, and reclaims her identity through her personal truth.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)
	Kaushalya	Remains loyal to Rama despite	Intensive Mothering Theory

		his exile, silently enduring sorrow while upholding royal responsibilities.	(Hays, 1996), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Sunaina	Prepares Sita for life's challenges, continuing to support her from afar even after she leaves for Ayodhya.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958), Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 1953)
	Mandodari	Stays devoted to her son Indrajit and husband Ravana, trying to guide them despite moral conflicts.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Urmila	Shows loyalty to Lakshmana by enduring separation and taking care of Ayodhya, ensuring family stability.	Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001), Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays, 1996)
The Palace of Illusions	Kunti	Prioritizes loyalty to her five sons over personal emotions, making sacrifices to secure their future.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy, 1999), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)
	Draupadi	Loyal to justice and family honor, ensuring her children inherit a legacy of strength and righteousness.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)
	Gandhari	Stays devoted to Duryodhana despite knowing his flaws, symbolizing shared fate by blindfolding herself.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays, 1996), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Subhadra	Fiercely protective of Abhimanyu, deeply concerned about his safety in war.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958), Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy, 1999)
	Madri	Sacrifices her life, trusting Kunti to be a better guardian for her children.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 1953), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
The Last Queen	Maharani Jindan Kaur	Remains loyal to her son Duleep Singh, fighting for his rightful place as ruler while also staying devoted to Punjab.	Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001), Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989)
	Mataji	Quietly supports Jindan, preparing her for the challenges of queenship and motherhood.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 1953), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Mangla	Shows maternal loyalty by risking her safety for Jindan, standing by her even in exile.	Intensive mothering theory (Hays, 1996), Resilience theory (Masten, 2001)
	Rani Sahib Kaur	Demonstrates strength and resilience by staying loyal to both her family and kingdom.	Evolutionary theory of motherhood (Hrdy, 1999), Maternal thinking theory (Ruddick, 1989)
	Mangla	Shows maternal loyalty by risking her safety for Jindan, standing by her even in exile.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays, 1996), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)

	Rani Sahib Kaur	Demonstrates strength and resilience by staying loyal to both her family and kingdom.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy, 1999), Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989)
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Novel	Character	Loyalty Aspects	Associated Motherhood Theory
The Forest of Enchantments	Sita	Stays loyal to her children despite abandonment, raises them with strong values, and reclaims her identity through her personal truth.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)
	Kaushalya	Remains loyal to Rama despite his exile, silently enduring sorrow while upholding royal responsibilities.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays, 1996), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Sunaina	Prepares Sita for life's challenges, continuing to support her from afar even after she leaves for Ayodhya.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958), Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 1953)
	Mandodari	Stays devoted to her son Indrajit and husband Ravana, trying to guide them despite moral conflicts.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Urmila	Shows loyalty to Lakshmana by enduring separation and taking care of Ayodhya, ensuring family stability.	Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001), Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays, 1996)
The Palace of Illusions	Kunti	Prioritizes loyalty to her five sons over personal emotions, making sacrifices to secure their future.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy, 1999), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)
	Draupadi	Loyal to justice and family honor, ensuring her children inherit a legacy of strength and righteousness.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989), Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001)
	Gandhari	Stays devoted to Duryodhana despite knowing his flaws, symbolizing shared fate by blindfolding herself.	Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays, 1996), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Subhadra	Fiercely protective of Abhimanyu, deeply concerned about his safety in war.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958), Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy, 1999)
	Madri	Sacrifices her life, trusting Kunti to be a better guardian for her children.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 1953), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
The Last Queen	Maharani Jindan Kaur	Remains loyal to her son Duleep Singh, fighting for his rightful place as ruler while also staying devoted to Punjab.	Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001), Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 1989)

	Mataji	Quietly supports Jindan, preparing her for the challenges of queenship and motherhood.	Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott, 1953), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow, 1978)
	Mangla	Shows maternal loyalty by risking her safety for jindan, standing by her even in exile.	Intensive mothering theory (Hays, 1996), Resilience theory (Masten, 2001)
	Rani Sahib Kaur	Demonstrates strength and resilience by staying loyal to both her family and kingdom.	Evolutionary theory of motherhood (Hrdy, 1999), Maternal thinking theory (Ruddick, 1989)

Comparing Guidance as motherhood characteristic

Novel	Character	Guidance Aspects	Motherhood Theory
The Forest of Enchantments	Sita	Raises Luv and Kush with strong moral values, teaching them dharma, resilience, and justice.	Maternal Thinking Theory, Resilience Theory
	Kaushalya	Guides Rama through silent wisdom, teaching patience, duty, and endurance.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory
	Sunaina	Instills self-reliance and strength in Sita, preparing her for future hardships.	Resilience Theory, Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood
	Mandodari	Warns Ravana and Indrajit against destruction, offering wisdom that is ignored.	Maternal Thinking Theory
	Urmila	Though not a mother, her silent sacrifice influences future generations.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory

The Palace of Illusions	Kunti	Strategically guides the Pandavas, ensuring their survival and unity.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood, Resilience Theory
	Draupadi	Guides her children through strength and a strong sense of justice.	Maternal Thinking Theory, Intensive Mothering Theory
	Gandhari	Advises Duryodhana on righteousness, but he ignores her counsel.	Good Enough Mother Theory, Reproduction of Mothering Theory
	Subhadra	Tries to protect Abhimanyu from war, though she cannot prevent his fate.	Attachment Theory
	Madri	Entrusts her sons to Kunti, showing trust in shared maternal guidance.	Intensive Mothering Theory, Reproduction of Mothering Theory
The La st Queen	Jindan Kaur	Guides Duleep Singh on strength, perseverance, and heritage, even in exile.	Resilience Theory, Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood
	Mataji	Teaches Jindan patience and	Reproduction of Mothering Theory,

		endurance, preparing her for future struggles.	Good Enough Mother Theory
	Rani Sahib Kaur	Leads as a warrior, proving that motherhood includes protecting one's people.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood, Maternal Thinking Theory
	Mangla	Acts as a maternal figure to Jindan, guiding her through palace politics.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory

Comparing Trustworthiness as motherhood characteristic

Novel	Character	Trustworthiness as a Motherhood Characteristic	Relevant Motherhood Theory
The Forest of Enchantments	Sita	Demonstrates unwavering trust and devotion to Luv and Kush, raising them with integrity despite personal hardships.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick), Attachment Theory (Bowlby), Resilience Theory (Masten)
	Kaushalya	A silent yet strong maternal figure, trusting in Rama's destiny while upholding moral values.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow), Attachment Theory (Bowlby)
	Sunaina	Trusts in Sita's strength and wisdom, preparing her for life's challenges with compassion and guidance.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick), Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays)
	Mandodari	Torn between duty and truth, she trusts in dharma but struggles with her loyalty to Ravana.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow), Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott)
	Urmila	Trusts in Lakshmana's devotion to Rama and silently supports Sita's righteousness.	Resilience Theory (Masten), Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott)
The Palace of Illusions	Kunti	Keeps secrets for the greater good, proving her trustworthiness even when making painful sacrifices.	Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow), Resilience Theory (Masten)

	Draupadi	Trusts in dharma and justice, ensuring her children understand the importance of righteousness.	Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow)
	Gandhari	Her unwavering trust in Duryodhana is both her strength and downfall, as blind devotion leads to destruction.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby), Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott)
	Subhadra	Ensures Abhimanyu is raised with strong values, portraying trust through protection and guidance.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby), Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays)
	Madri	Entrusts her children to Kunti, showcasing deep faith in another's ability to nurture them.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy), Reproduction of Mothering Theory (Chodorow)
The Last Queen	Jindan Kaur	Balances trust in motherhood and political duty, ensuring her son	Resilience Theory (Masten), Maternal Thinking Theory

		knows his heritage despite adversity.	(Ruddick)
	Mataji	Provides unwavering silent support, instilling values of honesty and responsibility in Jindan.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby), Good Enough Mother Theory (Winnicott)
	Mangla	A devoted maternal figure who proves trustworthiness through loyalty, secrecy, and protection.	Evolutionary Theory of Motherhood (Hrdy), Attachment Theory (Bowlby)
	Rani Sahib Kaur	Fulfils her duty with trustworthiness, ensuring security and stability for those	Resilience Theory (Masten), Intensive Mothering Theory (Hays)

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's portrayal of motherhood in her fiction presents a powerful, multidimensional perspective that challenges traditional stereotypes. Across *The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Palace of Illusions*, and *The Last Queen*, her maternal characters embody strength, multitasking, loyalty, guidance, and trustworthiness. These qualities redefine motherhood beyond biological nurturing, emphasizing its deeper emotional, social, and moral significance.

One of the most striking aspects of Divakaruni's maternal figures is their strength. Whether it is Sita's resilience in *The Forest of Enchantments*, Kunti's strategic sacrifices in *The Palace of Illusions*, or Jindan Kaur's fierce determination in *The Last Queen*, these women navigate adversity while upholding their values. Their strength is not limited to physical endurance but extends to emotional fortitude, moral conviction, and silent perseverance, proving that motherhood is a role of immense power and influence.

Motherhood in Divakaruni's fiction also reflects multitasking, where mothers balance emotional struggles, household responsibilities, political challenges, and ethical dilemmas. Characters like Kaushalya, Mandodari, and Rani Sahib Kaur manage multiple roles, demonstrating how maternal figures sustain their families and societies while enduring personal hardships. Their ability to navigate these complexities showcases the indispensable role of mothers as both caregivers and decision-makers.

Another key finding is the loyalty exhibited by maternal figures, often at great personal cost. Sita's unwavering devotion to Luv and Kush, Kunti's

sacrifices for her sons, and Jindan Kaur's relentless fight for her son's rights exemplify a mother's boundless dedication. However, loyalty in Divakaruni's fiction is not blind; rather, it is intertwined with wisdom and agency. Even when faced with betrayal, societal constraints, or personal loss, these mothers remain committed to their children and principles.

The guidance provided by these maternal figures further solidifies their crucial role in shaping future generations. Sunaina prepares Sita for the struggles ahead, Kunti ensures the Pandavas grow into righteous warriors, and Jindan Kaur instills strength in Duleep Singh despite their exile. These characters exemplify how motherhood extends beyond protection to shaping the moral and intellectual foundation of their children's lives.

Finally, trustworthiness emerges as a defining characteristic of Divakaruni's maternal figures. Whether it is Sita's unwavering faith in her children, Kunti's ability to safeguard secrets for the greater good, or Mangla's deep loyalty as a maternal figure, trust plays a vital role in strengthening relationships and fostering resilience. Even when faced with moral dilemmas, these mothers prove their reliability and devotion, reinforcing the bond between them and their children.

Through these themes, Divakaruni's fiction challenges the notion of motherhood as a passive role and instead presents it as an active, dynamic force. Her maternal characters are not just caretakers but also leaders, strategists, warriors, and guides who shape the destinies of their families and societies. By redefining motherhood through strength, multitasking, loyalty, guidance, and trust, Divakaruni's works contribute to a broader understanding of maternal identity in literature,

making her narratives both relevant and inspiring in contemporary feminist discourse.

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