

Moving Beyond the Confines: A Reading of Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl*

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Abstract:

'Resistance' or the act of going against the grain is an important issue in a hierarchical society, which is marked by domination and subordination. In an androcentric culture, the subaltern group (i.e. the women) seek various means and techniques to subvert the established order in an attempt to reclaim their identity. Literary representation of women's resistance to systematic and institutionalized oppression (in Indian fiction) has become an area of interest only in the post colonial/post modern era. In their fictional narratives authors like Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Namita Gokhale, Anita Desai and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni employ various overt and covert means to defy phallogocentrism. This paper seeks to study Divakaruni's Oleander Girl as an eloquent expression of feminine resistance among the younger generation who are caught in a phase of transition from the Old order to the New. Further it will examine how the protagonist overcomes the constraints of the society in negotiating her position and role within the confines of patriarchy. The author's ideological stance in redefining womanhood in the Indian context will also be discussed.

Key words: androcentric, resistance, postcolonial, postmodern, phallogocentrism, womanhood, patriarchy.

I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. --Jane Austen (Persuasion)

Women have felt the need for breaking the silence to assert themselves as early as the nineteenth century when there were no organised movements to express resentment and resistance to male authority. In a social structure marked by domination and subordination, generally, the subordinate group tends to seek an opportunity to strike at the dominant group. In the present context it is the women who have been subjected to centuries of victimization, and who now adopt various strategies of resistance to undermine male domination. No doubt with changes in the socio-cultural environs the position of women is also changing. From the muted submissive and oppressed lot she is changing over into a conscious, resistant, empowered and autonomous being. Thanks to the feminist activisms and movements that helped to bring women from the margin to the cynosure of attention. She is gaining centrality in life and literature as well. Conscious of her social, political and religious inferiority she struggles to reclaim her selfhood and identity. The dominant male culture has always overlooked the female ability to confront challenges and struggles with a fortitude and inner strength that is common to all women. Hence their contributions, sacrifices and their true potential have gone largely unrecognised. But with time they have learned to fight back. In the words of Julia Kristeva, coming out of the 'Threshold Phase' women are out in the open grappling for their 'one half of the sky'. This changing reality finds reflected in the works of writers like Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Namita Ghokhle, Manju Kapur and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. These writers form a fraternity that employs various strategies of resistance to patriarchal hegemony through their fictional narratives, thereby producing a genre of oppositional writing that not only seeks to protest but also argue the case for changes in the existing situation to

allow for empowerment. This phenomenon in literary texts is termed as 'literary resistance' as opposed to 'Resistance Literature' which stands for definitive texts produced, especially by Third World countries, which examine the relationship between literature and liberation movements of these nations. Narrativization of female resistance to the dominant ideology has existed in subtle ways in women's creative writing since the colonial days, but is more pronounced in post-colonial discourse. An interest in the study of literary representations of feminine resistance is a recent phenomenon. Probing into the semantic nature of the term 'resistance' one will inevitably come across the Latin root word 'resistere' meaning to stand against. It is an oppositional act in relation to power. Defining the term Usha Bande says, ". . . it denotes a slow but insistent, invisible but enduring behavioral strategy having the potential to dislodge the dominant structure, if not dismantle it" (1). Literary critics and scholars acknowledge the socio-cultural nature of 'resistance', arguing that domination and resistance are mutually dependent. To quote Foucault, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (95). It is actually the presence of a restrictive and dominant social structure that gives rise to resistance, and resistance emerges as a consequence of the inequitable distribution of power. Neither resistance nor domination is autonomous, and power is central to both. Therefore resistance can be defined as "the power of the subordinates" (Collinson, 180) to "tear through the fabric of hegemonic forms" (qtd. in Bande, 1).

Literary resistance in women's fiction seeks to interrogate gender assumptions, cultural paradigms and patriarchal values. Voicing resistance is an endeavour to be 'heard' and 'recognised' and goes a long way to end the oppression and suppression of women in a hierarchical society. According to Faith, "Feminist resistance challenges prevailing discourses and delegitimises presumptions of female inferiority in local and specific ways" (47). Literary resistance may not

dismantle the hegemonic power structure altogether, but it can definitely weaken its impact. Feminine resistance helps to reclaim women's voice and identity, and weaken the process of victimisation. Here it would be appropriate to quote Susan J. Brison who beautifully sums up the essence of the term 'resistance' as is advocated in contemporary Indian women's fiction:

“The ‘No’ of resistance is the ‘no’ of denial. It is the ‘no’ of acknowledgement of what happened and refusal to let it happen again. (qtd. in Bande , 1)

Locating resistance in fiction invariably involves a study of the narrative strategy. A resistant perspective is discernable in the use of female agency and subjectivity. Moreover the use of utopian fantasy, revisionist mythmaking and transculturalism help in voicing resistance. Resistance also works at the thematic level. An analysis of the behavioural patterns of female characters including their stoical silence, rage, rejection, defiance and readjustment provide new avenues for the exploration of feminine resistance.

This paper seeks to examine how resistance works at various levels in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's latest novel *Oleander Girl* to subvert the hegemonic cultural and patriarchal norms. The researcher intends to locate resistance in the author's persistent attempts at undermining dominant structures through the delineation of the struggles of the protagonist at negotiating life and her role within the ambit of the all encompassing patriarchy. Divakaruni is an award winning novelist and poet who has been widely published. She emerged into the literary scene with a postcolonial diasporic identity. An acclaimed and prolific writer Divakaruni is concerned more with women's issues and immigrant reality in her fictional narratives. *Oleander Girl* is the story of a young girl's search for her father. It depicts her adventures in a foreign land, vis-à-vis, the struggles of the protagonist with

herself as well as with the outside world. It is as much about the clash of values as about ways of resolving those differences. A consistently resistant attitude towards patriarchal dogmas is discernable throughout the narrative.

Korobi, the protagonist of her latest novel, comes off a traditional middle class Indian family that boasts of a rich cultural heritage. A young girl of seventeen, she has always been a conformist, happily abiding by the values of her family and society. Orphaned at birth, she has been brought up by her grandparents. Her grandfather, the advocate Bimal Prasad Roy, sent her off to a boarding school to ensure a proper education and a disciplined upbringing. He is the embodiment of the patriarchal principle, always imposing his decisions and choices on his wife, daughter and granddaughter. However, Korobi is deeply attached to her grandfather, and always holds him in high esteem, admiring him for his high principles. That is why she never complained when he arranged for extra tuitions during her vacations as she says: "I want grandfather to be proud of me." Growing up among convent nuns and visiting her grandparents during vacations offers her little scope for socialising. Thus she remains ignorant of the harsh realities of life. Her insulated life coupled with the internalisation of family values and cultural norms dissuades her from mixing freely with other boys and girls. She was hesitant to pursue her friendship with Rajat whom she met at the birthday party of one of her friends. The following line illustrates her conformity to restrictions imposed on her:

"Rajat asked for my phone number. I didn't give it. Grandfather had informed me a long time back that the daughters of the Roy family did not have boyfriends" (18).

It is true that defiance is not a discernable trait in Korobi, yet she is not a passive character. She loathes to accept things mutely and passively. The narrative provides several instances to enable the readers perceive the simmering fire of self-will (in

Korobi) that sends off occasional sparks. This comes to the surface when she argues with her grandfather about attending Mimi's birthday party :

“Three months ago, I had gone to my college friend Mimi's birthday party – a minor miracle in itself. Usually Grandfather refused to let me go out so late, but that night I'd pushed back”. (16)

She reacts in a similar manner when she comes to know that Grandfather has already finalised the date of her marriage. It surprises her that a vital decision concerning her has been taken without even once consulting her:

“I stare at him in shock. He wants us to get married in three months? . . . I stare at them all, outraged. Do they think they can pick up my life like a ball of dough and roll it into whatever shape they fancy? . . . As soon as the Mercedes backs out of the driveway, I confront Grandfather, “How could you do this without checking with me!” (22-23).

Her Grandfather, after being satisfied that Rajat was a suitable bridegroom for Korobi, took little time to give his consent to their marriage. As for Korobi this was something beyond her wildest imagination, and she could not but comply to the wishes of her Grandfather whom she revered and loved so much.

Divakaruni makes her protagonist confront the hegemonic power structures through the assertion of her will. This assertive nature gets the better of her when she is faced with a crisis. Her world falls apart when she learns a dark secret about her parentage, after the demise of her grandfather on the night of her engagement. Her dreams of a secure and blissful life with Rajat get shattered. All these years she was brought up to believe that her mother died at childbirth , and her father , a brilliant law student , died three months earlier . It was her grandfather who had held back the truth from her all his life, and it was only on his death bed that he tried to confess it to Korobi. Her faith in her Grandfather's high

principles receives a great setback and she feels deceived .On learning from her grandmother that her father is still alive and is an American , Korobi is determined to find him out before solemnizing her marriage to Rajat Bose , the scion of Barua and Bose Art gallery. It is now that she fully realises the implication of her mother's ghostly visitation on the eve of her engagement, as she says, "Now I knew what my dream mother had wanted. She wanted me to understand that I had a future across the ocean, someone waiting there for me, although he didn't realize it yet" (69). Thus she decides to travel half the way across the world in search of her unknown father. Even though Rajat tried to dissuade her from her purpose and discourage her from consulting a private detective because "decent families didn't have anything to do with them" (70), Korobi had already made up her mind as she says : " . . . I couldn't so easily give up the possibility of finding my father, not even for the man I loved." (70)

When after meeting the detective he advised Korobi to "forget about it" (71) as it was simply impossible to try to trace a man in America without any clues that might lead to him , the protagonist remains headstrong and invincible . Without a photograph or a proper identity it would simply be a futile search. Still Korobi does not change her mind. Her stubbornness rings loud in the following lines:

"I know Rajat is right, finding my father seems impossible, but I can't give up so easily. Stubbornness rises inside me like a wall. I don't care how hard it is! I must do everything I can to find him. He's my *father*, for heaven's sake!" (71).

Even when she is told that travelling to America and hiring a detective there would "cost a lot" as she would "have to pay him in dollars" (71), she remains determined. She turns a deaf ear to Rajat's advice to "put this obsession aside" (72) and also his request: "At least wait until after we're married, Cara"(72). But

Korobi has her own logic, "I need to understand my parents' marriage before I can enter my own . . ." (72).

On realising that her identity is at stake, and having the least intention of deceiving her would be in-laws, she undertakes a journey to the other end of the world braving all dangers. Filled with a sense of compunction compounded with a terrible restlessness she refuses to comply with the advice of her near and dear ones. Neither love or assurance of her fiancé nor the pleadings of her grandmother could deter her from her purpose. She displays an extraordinary courage, confidence and determination of will in her firm decision. It is indeed quite difficult for a girl from a middle class orthodox family (who has never stepped outside Kolkata), and who is engaged to be married, to travel alone all the way to an unknown destination. She emerges as the embodiment of courage, thereby invalidating all gender assumptions. In an interview the author herself confirms this: "Perhaps what distinguishes my characters is their courage and spirit and a certain stubbornness which enables them to keep going even when facing a setback. I think this developed organically as I wrote, but also it came out of a desire to portray women as powerful and intelligent forces in the world" (n.p.). Here the author's unambiguous attempt at rejecting the hegemony through redefining womanhood is clearly perceptible. Korobi is even ready to walk out of her engagement to pursue her goal because she feared that her actions might bring disgrace to the family of her fiancé. Disapproving of her decision to travel abroad, Mrs. Bose (Rajat's mother) told her that they could not afford a scandal especially when they were passing through a hard time trying to recover the losses in their business. Moreover they did not want to lose the favour of Mr. Bhattacharya who has political connections and who has agreed to pull them out of their financial instability:

“. . .we're negotiating with him right now for him to become the chief investor in our business. There's a chance that news

like this might make him pull out of that as well. The members of his party are very conservative . . . With the election coming up, he can't afford to lose their support -- and we can't afford to lose his" (77) .

This sends Korobi in a state of intense mental turmoil, being torn between two duties – one, towards her mother, and the other towards her would-be in-laws:

"I'm torn. This is the first time Maman has asked anything of me . . . But I remember, too, my mother, my real mother . . . and her wordless pleading as she pointed across the ocean towards my father". (78)

Not intending to be the cause of their embarrassment she decides to terminate her relationship with Rajat . The decision to "release Rajat from the engagement" (79) is again a bold gesture that not only emphasizes her unconventionality of spirit but also her non-conformity to the stereotype. Very few Indian women have the guts to break off an engagement , and it is rarely to be found in her fictional predecessors . But Rajat would have none of it. He would rather postpone the marriage and wait for Korobi .

The search for her roots implies, literally as well as symbolically, the quest for identity. On the one hand it is a search for an unknown father, a father who was supposed to be dead. Her identity remains fragmented without getting to know her father. On the other it is a feminist quest for self-actualisation. Defining the term 'self-actualisation' the noted psychologist Carl Rogers states that it is a process of becoming oneself, of becoming fulfilled, of developing one's unique psychological characteristics and potentialities. Her quest for her father brings Korobi in confrontation with certain reality that forces her to know herself better, i.e., to attain self-knowledge. It gives her the opportunity to review her position in relation to her fiancé and her family. She realizes her potential to become an autonomous being capable of resisting

the decisions and choices imposed on her by the society. She has the ability to survive despite obstacles as she says, "I'm Korobi , Oleander , capable of surviving drought and frost and the loss of love" (274-275). Korobi which means 'Oleander' actually symbolises strength underneath a delicate veneer. This inner strength helps her to achieve self-actualisation .

Korobi's journey is one that leads her from ignorance to knowledge. After a frantic search in America with the help of the detective Desai and his nephew Vic, overcoming obstacles and suffering humiliation and disappointments, she is finally able to track down her father. It is from her mother's roommate, Mrs. Anand, that she comes to know that her father was Robin Lacey , a Black American . Upon meeting him she learns other certain facts about herself and her Grandfather that leave her shattered. That she is the illegitimate child of a mixed race parentage is enough to send her to a state of shock. Her mother could not marry her African American father because of a promise that she had made to her own father. Again it was equally disturbing to learn that her most revered grandfather had lied to Robin Lacey forcing him into believing that both mother and child had died at childbirth, by showing him some fake death certificates. It is natural for Korobi to feel deceived and betrayed. She was completely in the dark about these things. It is quite obvious how distraught she might be on gathering these facts:

"I'm speechless for a moment , trying to find the words to describe the shock of discovering that my beloved grandfather had lied to me all my life" (233).

Viewed metaphorically Korobi's journey is a psychological odyssey. Korobi's quest for her true identity and her subsequent conquest of her psychological inhibitions leave her transformed. From a state of blissful ignorance she moves towards a shocking revelation that enlightens her. Her quest brings her in confrontation with a stark reality that makes her skeptical

about the cultural values and customs of her society. She realises that it is the prejudices of her strict caste system and the narrow traditional outlook of the orthodox religion and society that jeopardizes human relationships for she says, "I'm not sure the city will love me back. That it will accept the secrets I'm carrying" (270). Her parents' marriage was prevented largely on account of the racial and religious prejudices. Korobi becomes disillusioned as she reviews human life and its values. She begins to view life from a new perspective and admits that it is on account of "some deeper sea change" (269) that she has undergone. That's why she says, "I'm amazed at how different the city appears. I've taken this road every year upon my return from boarding school, have looked at the same scenes. But today it's as though a cover has been whisked away" (269). As the world around her changes with the revelation of her true identity, a sense of 'self' begins to grow in her. She does not feel ashamed of her mixed race parentage nor her being born out of wedlock. Being responsible for neither the circumstances of her birth nor her racial identity, she rejects all social and cultural paradigms that victimise women. This is evident as she mentally rehearses for the impending meeting with her fiancé:

"If he isn't willing to listen when I tell him the truth, if his love can't overcome the mistrust Mitra has ignited in him, if he's unable to accept me as I am, there's no future for us" (271).

She develops a strong sense of individualism. From a naïve, meek and sensitive girl she changes over into a bold, confident and responsible woman, sure of herself.

The protagonist's journey to America parallels the mythical journey of Ulysses. Korobi's journey to the unknown terrain and return to her homeland with profound knowledge reminds one of the adventures of the Greek hero Ulysses. Like Ulysses she ventures into the faraway land of strangers, fights

her way through perils and snares, satiates her thirst only to be enlightened with new found knowledge. One can easily perceive a reversal of the Ulysses-Penelope myth in Rajat's staying back in Kolkata to help his parents negotiate the labour unrest at their warehouse, and Korobi's braving the wider world in search of truth. It may not be difficult to locate feminine resistance in Divakaruni's brilliant technique of subversion of a popular myth informed by patriarchal ideology. The binaries of outdoor/indoor, active/ passive that correspond to the male/female dichotomy have been rejected outright in the mythical overtone of the narration.

In this narrative the author's persistent attempt has been to capture the pulse of contemporary Kolkata which is caught in the clash between the Old order and the New. That Kolkata is gradually moving towards a more flexible and unbiased cultural stance is borne out through the pages of the narrative. The transition from old to new is always marked with confusion and uncertainty. In the narrative it is Korobi who ultimately resolves all conflicts and misgivings by striking a balance between tradition and modernity. Among all characters she stands out as the agent of change. This aspect of femininity has also been pointed out by Prof. S. Parasanna Sree: "Change, it is often said, is a sign of vital growth and it is woman who is almost always working out the changes" (34). Divakaruni makes her protagonist evolve as the epitome of a culture that combines the best of both the Old order and the New. *Oleander Girl* vividly portrays the two distinctly contrasting world views represented by the Roys of 26 Tarak Prasad Roy Road and the Boses of Ballygunj. The Roys live in their crumbling ancestral house with Bimal Prsaad Roy as the patriarch. Everything about the house including its cuisine, its old car, the maid, the Nepalese gatekeeper (Bahadur), its sprawling premises speak of its adherence to the old ways. The dynamics of the relationship between Bimal Roy and his wife is a typical traditional one; Korobi's grandmother lives a life of

compliance and passive resignation, while her grandfather wields all power. Even Korobi was brought up in a traditional manner with various restrictions imposed on her.

The traditional notion of marriage being an institution of dependence, oppression and subordination undergoes a drastic revision through the portrayal of the Bose family. Shanto and Joyu (Mr. and Mrs. Bose) are the two pillars of the family business, sharing challenges and working together heart and soul for the promotion of the business. They represent the ideal couple-- caring, nurturing and understanding. The relationship is based on a mutual respect and love that is unfaltering. It is a complementary relationship. While Mr. Bose is away on business, his wife feels anxious and burdened with responsibility that she needs to tackle alone. Evidently she misses him : “The big bed was empty and cold . She longed to burrow her face in Shanto’s shoulder, confess all her anxious imaginings, have him laugh at her irrational fears” (206) . Again that she had been his ideal partner guiding him through thick and thin is borne out when the author says, “Mr. Bose is too soft-hearted, Mrs. Bose thinks . If it weren’t for her guiding his interests, people would walk all over him” (208). Clearly, the narrative perspective is not traditional as the novelist makes a realistic representation of the changing order through revising the dynamics of marital relationship .The Bose elders always work as a team whether it be within the household or in business matters. This can be well perceived in the strategy that they adopt while discussing the partnership documents with Bhattacharya : “They have decided that Mr. Bose will lead this conversation while Mrs. Bose gives him the necessary input through minute gestures they have perfected over years”(145). The first person plural “we” in the expression “We’ll think about it in the morning. We’ll figure something out”(148) adequately underscores the underlying bonding that goes a long way in revising and redefining male female syntax within the ambit of marriage . Again the novelist has

articulated the need for a subtle reversal of gender specific roles in keeping with the changing times when she says that Mr. Bose is “the gourmet cook of this household and the architect of tonight’s dinner”(141) or when she depicts Mrs. Bose skillfully chalking out business strategies by “wooing Utsab Lal , a young abstract painter” or “cajoling” a prospective buyer “to give her two extra weeks” (209) for delivery of goods . The sophisticated lifestyle of the Boses , their connections with influential people , political maneuverings , throwing parties at the Grand Hotel , fixing Italian dinner for guests is a stark contrast to the conservative ways and values of the Roys .

The protagonist Korobi is caught in a clash of values . She represents the dilemma of the younger generation, who feels the urge for change and at the same time the need for preserving one’s culture. Not unlike Divakaruni’s other protagonists she is invested with a positive energy, inner strength and intelligence that gets the better of her . A study of Divakaruni’s fictional world would confirm how the heroines are allowed to make their own choices and assert their will in their battle against some baseless social taboos and traditions . Though they are not informed with radical ideas to change the existing social order, they are enabled to transcend their predicament to emerge as liberated individuals. Korobi is no exception. She is brought up in the old value system that requires a complete compliance to the societal norms . When thrown into the vortex of conflicting and diverging values she begins to review the old order. On learning the truth about her birth and her father, she neither squirms away from reality nor endeavour to deceive others with any artifice. She exhibits fortitude and courage in her acceptance of the truth. Though shattered, initially, she is quick enough to regain her composure : “I don’t allow myself to get upset” (272) . Again on returning to Kolkata when she receives a cold welcome from Rajat’s family and is accused of deception she immediately breaks off the engagement: “I pull the engagement ring from

my finger, set it on the table .Goodbye Rajat . I walk, one precise foot after another , to the door . When I reach it , I say , without turning , ‘Call Desai . He’ll tell you.’”(275) . Her body language and the firmness in her tone is a clear indication of her transcendence . Her decision to live life on her own terms demonstrates her radical feminist stance . It suggests her liberation from the suffocating and stupefying confines of an androcentric and male culture . Evidently this is a gesture of rebellion against patriarchy. She has no qualms about who she is , and if anybody finds it disgraceful and accuses her of concealing facts then it is their problem . This is the ideological stance that is transpired through her action. She goes back to college and resumes her studies.

Finally when after a long silence all misunderstandings (that caused them to drift apart) are sorted out, Korobi and Rajat get married. But this is not to be misrepresented as an act of passive resignation (of Korobi) of adhering to the established order. But a more insightful reading would rather reveal that Korobi had exhibited a resistant attitude throughout and even her decision to marry on her own terms is the outcome of her assertive will. What is to be noted in this context is that she marries into the Bose family which is itself the embodiment of the new revised order. So her alignment with the Boses indicate a positive change in the existing order . Secondly she displays a strong individualistic mind in her decision to have an unceremonious marriage. It is not the outcome of a sudden whim of Korobi, rather it is based on reasons that cannot be brushed aside as irrational. As money was short on both sides it was unnecessary to indulge in extravagances. Surprisingly her in-laws complied to her decision. So the marriage was solemnized in the family temple with the bride and groom in simple traditional attires:

“ . . . because of the couple’s wishes , here they are in this crumbling temple , dressed in simple silk , not one designer label among the lot of them . The bride wears only the

diamonds the Boses gave her for the engagement. The gorgeous dowry pieces belonging to Sarojini that Mrs. Bose had so admired at the engagement ceremony had gone. Sold . . . But Korobi had merely shrugged. They were too heavy, she said” . (284-285)

Though the Boses have liberal views and profess modernity through their actions and lifestyle, they are not without shortcomings. But Korobi acting as a catalyst cures them of their follies through her firmness of will and decision. She has no fascination for a high profile lifestyle. And it is her simplicity that is eventually acknowledged and appreciated as a positive trait even by the snobbish Mrs. Bose who valued social status, family name and sophistication the most. She now feels that Korobi is “a good soul . . . A little simplistic perhaps, but honest, and kind” (285). She also admitted to herself that “the girl was courageous, too, going all across America like that”(285). After incurring loses in business the Boses “cut down on their lifestyle” , preferring a “Toyota” instead of a “Mercedes” and give up their “coveted club memberships” (285) . The wedding reception is held at a “small, classy restaurant in South Kolkata”(286) with “ only fifty of their closest friends invited” . And Mrs. Bose finds it rather atonishing to “discover” that she actually “doesn’t care” if the “uninvited are gossiping” (286) .

The author’s ideological position comes to the fore as she allows Korobi to make choices yet remain rooted in her culture . Korobi neither rejects the hegemonic institutions (of marriage and family) nor accepts them as they are . She does not forsake her Indianess to adopt Western ideals. Neither does she adopt a non-conformist stance. She could have accepted her father’s proposal of beginning a new life in America, but she declines. She does not desert her grandmother to seek her happiness. Even Vic, who is the embodiment of American values, fails to persuade her and convince her to give up her old values to begin anew. She herself admits that “I can’t deny that America’s siren song had pulled at me. But I came back, of my

own choice. Surely that counts for something . . . Vic. His name pulses warm in my chest. I can't deny the attraction that bloomed briefly between us" (280). Evidently the narrational attitude is not to endorse a radical feminist ideology which is grossly incongruous in the Indian context. Rather Korobi negotiates her position and space within the patriarchal order, and her inner strength empowers her enough to revise the dynamics of familial and marital relationship . Contrary to her western counterparts she acknowledges the significance of family ties . She remains dutiful to the elders but not at the cost of compromising her individualism. This is symbolically represented by her decision to stay on in her ancestral house, and simultaneously work with Rajat in their business. Her grandmother, Sarojini , confirms this when she says , "They've decided to live with me in this house , which we will not have to sell , after all"(284). This is also conveyed by the omniscient narrator: "Rajat's flat has been sold. Rajat and Korobi insisted on it, saying they would rather live with Sarojini , they didn't want her to be alone n this big house"(286) . Thus she is enabled to enter into a relationship where she can preserve individuality and independence. She would contribute to the Boses' family business by helping Rajat design their new website. Being enabled to strike a balance between tradition and modernity she emerges as the prototype of the Indian version of the New Woman . In this context it would be appropriate to quote Neeru Tandon's definition of the New Woman:

"The emerging 'new woman' is contemplative about her predicament and chooses to protest or fight against the general, accepted norms and currents. What is new and different about these women is that they are prepared to face the consequences of their choices. Their protest is not for equality only but for the right to be acknowledged as individuals –capable of intelligence and feeling. They do not look for freedom outside the house but within too . . . She is new in the dimension of time . . . Thus the Indian woman , as

appropriately presented in the modern and postmodern fiction written in English by the Indian novelists , behaves unlike her Western counterpart in her evolution from the 'feminine' to the 'female'. She is progressive and conscious of her rights like the contemporary Western counterpart, but she quickly compromises to the fact that a woman's real position lies within the family-unit with her male counterpart, which she must sustain and protect and not ignore or neglect due to the false notion of being 'liberated'" (127).

The novelist's unambiguous and earnest attempts at fostering the positive aspects of Indian culture is ostensible in her protagonist's reverence for elders , and her wonderful ability at forgetting, forgiving and moving on. At the same time Divakaruni articulates the need for change in traditional outlook and beliefs in certain dogmas that may jeopardize human relationships . The novel which ends on an affirmative note breathes of resistance that works in various overt and covert ways to bring about flexibility in an existing order.

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