



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Resilience in resisting spaces: Cross-cultural gender identity in “Before we visit the Goddess”

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## Abstract

“Before We Visit the Goddess” by Chitra Divakaruni is a culmination of multidimensional aspects of identity, including social, cultural, gendered, and psychological. The novel examines the cultural and sociological aspects of Indian estrangement and exile. The novel depicts the involvement of the migratory and the host in a cultural encounter that distinguishes them from one another. The paper attempts to capture how different cultures and ideologies clash to assert power, with each front trying to maintain its hegemonic stance. It further attempts to study how the literary piece stands in the oeuvre of a post-colonial discourse by analyzing narrative- A recurrent tool employed by writers to incarnate the situation of clashing powers between migrant people and their counterparts in their host country. In addition to exploring the dynamics of displaced identity, the research would further investigate the nuances of gender identity. The novel emerges as a tool to dissect the orthodox mental image of Indian women, who have frequently been correlated with obedience and submission. The current research paper applies the notion of feminine and othering as an analytical framework to highlight female characters’ struggles against subjection to patriarchal discourses. The research findings indicate that the central female characters, Tara, Bela, and Sabitri, confront masculine discourses by empowering themselves uniquely. Sabitri, for example, launches a business, Bela divorces, and Tara has an abortion. The protagonists exhibit the willpower of both a mother and a woman and a strong sense of affection, which is essential in their resilience to patriarchy and the reshaping of post-colonial feminine identity relations.

**Keywords:** Migration, Cross-culture, Othering, Feminine, Subjugation, Gender identity.

## Introduction

Globalization has constricted the world into a local sphere, leading to increased migration, a core aspect of human civilization since the era of nomadism. The understanding of modern migration is incomplete without considering its connection to colonialism. Colonizers imposed migration on colonized people to meet workforce demands in countries like Mauritius, Fiji, and Suriname. Liberalization, privatization, and globalization have intensified global migration in the post-colonial era. Moving across oceans and continents demands immense strength and resilience, as it profoundly impacts one’s identity and cultural roots. Migration creates

diasporic communities characterized by a complex blend of cultural puzzles and emotional seclusion. They persist in their perilous mission, alone, in the unknown self-imposed orbit. Diasporic authors have tried various literary works to express their cultural ties and domestic instincts. The literary canvas is filled with diasporic gemstones that vividly portray the complex lives of multiple characters. Diaspora writing is a prominent pillar of World Literature. Salman Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’ explores the scattering of people to different places and how it affects their socio-cultural, linguistic, and psychological identities. It delves into the fragmentation and reconfiguration of diasporic identities, as individuals absorb the ‘host’ culture but still feel out of place in the unfamiliar environment. The migrant identity, detached from its original context and placed in a new geopolitical sphere, experiences disorientation and a longing for its roots. This has been a common theme in Diaspora writing, but it can become monotonous. It’s time to explore new perspectives on migrant identities, such as the disconnections between home and host land, the integration of the migrant self, the ruptures caused by race, ethnicity, and culture, and the blending of foreign and native roots. These themes are gaining momentum and finding expression in contemporary diasporic literature.

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Writers use fiction to drive social change by fearlessly exploring themes that evoke compassion, pity, and sympathy. They depict the harshness experienced by individuals who are different from a particular group or community with sensitivity. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's literary works depict humanity's enduring struggle. Her celebrated fiction and mythology writings have significantly impacted the literary canon. The artist's work portrays the struggles of migrants in foreign countries as they strive for personal growth and self-improvement. The author's compositions showcase their artistic talent and creativity by exploring female self-actualization and autonomy themes. Divakaruni's works delve into migration and its effects on individuals. This theme is skillfully linked to other topics like transnationalism, multiculturalism, cross-cultural practices, nostalgia, and the quest for identity. The author's novels are cultural artifacts that can be understood using the "thick narratives" approach. These works explore various events that reveal the modern world's social, cultural, and political aspects, focusing on the experiences of Indian and immigrant communities in America (Sharma, 2021, p. 237). This article examines the clash of cultures and ideologies as they compete for power and seek to uphold their dominant positions. This study analyses the language used in a literary piece to explore its role in post-colonial discourse. Writers often use language to portray power dynamics between migrants and their counterparts in the host country. The study thoroughly examines gender identity and displaced identity. The study employs a gendered post-colonial identity framework to achieve its objective. Divakaruni's publication has generated interest among scholars in diaspora studies, women's studies, sociology, and cultural studies. There is a need for a thorough investigation into post-colonial identities. This paper explores the growth of resilient post-colonial female protagonists who have encountered intricate obstacles in their lives.

Dynamic Indian women who challenge and deconstruct patriarchy are rarely found within the literary tradition (Bhopal, 2019; Hapke, 2013; Singh *et al.*, 2021; Anuar, 2022). We argue that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 2016 novel, 'Before We Visit the Goddess', reveals how Indian women challenge and redefine gender norms and limitations through nuanced and complex methods of empowerment. The female characters represent Indian women's collective consciousness and demonstrate their individual resistance to patriarchy. The story follows Sabitri, Bela, and Tara as they embark on a multigenerational quest to uncover the meaning and purpose of their lives. The novel focuses on a powerful expression of love that drives the decisions and dreams of three characters. Love is used by female characters in the novel to challenge the patriarchy and redefine themselves despite it being traditionally seen as a feminine trait. This study examines how female characters in the novel challenge, negotiate and reshape traditional gender roles (Anuar, 2022).

In the article "Gender, Resistance, and Identity: Women's rewriting of the self in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess*", Nur Ain Nasuha Anuar and Moussa Pourya Asl posit that Divakaruni's novel offers a nuanced portrayal of Indian women who challenge conventional gender roles and boundaries by utilizing poststructuralist feminist concept indicating that the three female protagonists, namely Sabitri, Bela, and Tara, challenge masculine discourses using individual empowerment strategies, such as entrepreneurship, divorce, and abortion. Shirodkar explores the framework of novel-in-stories as a means of challenging and transcending boundaries in pursuit of a transient yet mentally grounding home. In his article, Singh concludes that the novel conveys the notion of a "transcontinental sisterhood" that is imperative in the current era of globalization and widespread migration. Divakaruni's novel encapsulates the quintessence of a feminine being, endeavoring to establish a distinct identity for her female protagonists. In her research, Lata Gadtaula demonstrated how three female characters establish their subjectivity and identity across various generations and continents. She further examined male characters' influence on female characters' subjectivity in "Before We Visit the Goddesses". Zupančič examined the writer's preferred categories of individuals and their influence on human conduct, thereby facilitating an exploration of the underlying emotions. The scholar presents Divakaruni's envisioned modalities and strategies for her protagonists to surmount their insecurities, cultivate their fortitude, and confront challenges with unwavering determination and self-assurance.

As indicated by existing scholarly research, further investigation is needed in several areas that have not been thoroughly explored. Divakaruni has clearly expressed her goal to create stories with female protagonists who face difficult challenges but find positive solutions to their problems. She has discussed this intention in several interviews conducted mainly in India and the United States. In her works, the central characters often face major challenges, dangers, and uncertainty. They show personal growth by overcoming deep-rooted anxieties and insecurities that affect their behavior. This paper uses Hélène Cixous' idea of feminine and othering as an analytical framework to show how female characters fight against patriarchal discourses.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Post-colonial and diasporic situations create a contact zone for cultural dialogue. This dialogue showcases linguistic, social, and cultural hybridity, occasionally leading to conflict. The hybrid entity challenges purity norms and embraces continuous self-discovery (Lahiri, 2019, p. 60). In diasporic and post-colonial theories, hybrid entities and identities with 'impurities' are valued (Lahiri, 2019, p. 60). Hybridity is an ongoing process of constant renewal and

continuous re-creation. Cultural renewal for individuals and communities comes from interacting with other cultures. Mikhail Bakhtin identifies double voices in dialogue within creole and pidgin dialects. The presence and contestation of voices in creole and pidgin languages allow them to challenge and transform dominant structures. Homi K. Bhabha, influenced by Bakhtin's concept, applies language's dual-voiced and subversive qualities to interpret the colonial structure. He challenges the absolute authority of the colonizers in his speech. He refers to the hybrid space as a liminal, interstitial space where traces of both the original cultures can be found.

The 'Third Space' is where cultural identity is formed through interdependence and mutual construction (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37; Lahiri, 2019, p. 63). Rootlessness is acknowledged and celebrated in the formation of this new in-between identity. The passage suggests that the space between fixed identities allows for cultural hybridity, where differences are embraced without any assumed or forced hierarchy (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4; Lahiri, 2019, p. 63). The chosen text for the study is "Before We Visit the Goddess" by Chitra Divakaruni. It explores various dimensions of identity, such as social, cultural, gendered, and psychological. The novel explores Indian estrangement and exile from a cultural and sociological perspective. It shows how the migratory and host populations engage in a cultural encounter that sets them apart. "Before We Visit the Goddess" follows three generations of women in an Indian family. The beginning of the story follows Sabitri, a poor rural woman who becomes the first in her family to pursue higher education. Her reckless decisions lead to a fragile relationship with her child, Bela. The next part focuses on Bela, who is dealing with financial problems in the United States. She reflects on her past and tries to understand why she feels disconnected from her mother. The final part follows Tara, Bela's rebellious daughter, as she learns to appreciate the selfless acts of the matriarchs in her family and understands the complex dynamics between mothers and daughters. The literary work explores complex themes of love, loss, forgiveness, and redemption, portraying the intricacies of human experience with insight and depth. Divakaruni explores the complex relationships between mothers and children and the profound impact that a single choice can have on future generations. The narrative also explores themes of socioeconomic stratification, poverty, migration, and ethnic identity.

The third space is seen as liberating for women, especially those who migrate from less developed countries. Diasporic spaces in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were fertile grounds for cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity. Power hierarchies among social and ethnic groups often lead to the development of such constructions (Lahiri, 2019, p. 76). Hegemonic groups frequently portray

marginalized groups using gendered terms. Images often emphasize the superiority of one gender, sexuality, or power while focusing on the asexuality, hypersexuality, or femininity of the other. Avtar Brah highlights the issue of "masculinity" and "femininity" on welfare in late twentieth-century Great Britain. She affirms that the belief in men as the primary earners is still the main factor in establishing and justifying male power (Brah, 1996, p. 56; Lahiri, 2019, p. 79).

The genesis of female subjectivity can be traced back to an earlier period, but it gained significant attention during second-wave Feminism. Simone de Beauvoir made a provocative assertion that "he" represents the subject, the absolute, which largely contributed to this. Meanwhile, "she" is marginalized as an outsider. Many feminists have debated the concept of female subjectivity since this assertive declaration. De Beauvoir argues that women's lack of freedom prevents them from fully understanding the importance of individualism. In addition, it is argued that women do not take a subjective position because they are labeled as 'women' by men. Even women themselves do not use the pronoun 'we' but prefer to identify as individuals within the group of 'women' (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 6). As a result, their ability to come together as a unified group and challenge established patriarchal social norms is hindered. Sonia Kruks discusses Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "situated subjectivity" in relation to the discourse on gender and subjectivity in contemporary feminism. Beauvoir's analysis acknowledges the impact of social constructs, like gender, on the self-development of women as subjects "in situation." However, she also disagrees with the idea that the self is solely a passive result of these constructs. Beauvoir argues that gender and self are socially constructed, as seen in her rejection of reducing the self to a mere "effect" (Kruks, 1992, p. 92; Gadtaula, 2021, p. 6). Society assigns gender roles based on sex. Men are often seen as the main support system for the home, providing financial stability and showing bravery in managing household matters. Women's strength and dependability in generating income is undeniable, yet they are consistently seen as inferior to men. People often feel anxious about how society views them when they go beyond accepted norms.

Kirby's view of subjectivity is based on discourse and socio-cultural context and has a three-dimensional structure. The architecture is influenced by an individual's consciousness, history, socio-cultural background, and discourse. Social relations in both physical and abstract spaces are important for developing and expressing subjectivity (Kirby, 1993; Gadtaula, 2021). Subjectivity is shaped by an individual's lived experiences in various social and cultural contexts. People come across various socio-cultural and psychological phenomena that shape their unique viewpoints. By incorporating these insights, individuals can form their own understanding of existence.

This study analyses the book "Before We Visit the Goddess" by Chitra Banerjee as a primary source to understand the difficulties faced by female immigrants in their new country. The person is caught between two opposing cultural spheres. This situation has caused their family relationships, especially with male members, to break apart. The main challenge for women in Indian society is gender inequality. There are no noticeable differences in women's experiences between their home country and foreign countries. They often feel torn between traditional and modern cultural norms (Kalaivani, 1995).

The bond between grandmother, mother, and daughter is cherished across generations. Migrant women face physical and psychological stress due to cultural and generational differences, leading them to be separated from their loved ones. Their ability to face these challenges depends on their education (Mookherjee, 2015). Education is crucial for women to become self-sufficient (Suhana, 2018). Sabitri, an elderly woman living in India, and her daughter Bela, who resides in the United States, travel across borders to relive memories (Morris, 2019). Sabitri laments a past incident during her youth. Her education opportunity was hindered by her unfortunate relationships with the opposite sex, leading to the destruction of her once-promising dreams. The mother's optimism about her children has been shattered. She watches helplessly as her children leave the house without any control.

## Discussion

The narrative commences with the portrayal of Sabitri, a septuagenarian who has withdrawn from Kolkata and now resides in a remote hamlet. Sabitri, having been subjected to arduous labor for an extended period, is not only physically exhausted but also emotionally depleted. This is partly due to the geographical distance that separates her from her progeny, including her daughter and granddaughter, and the insurmountable obstacle that prevents their reunion. Sabitri is experiencing a state of emotional unrest due to the entreaty of her offspring, Bela. Through the telephone, Bela conveyed their preferred mode of interaction to intervene with Tara's decision to withdraw from higher education. As Sabitri deliberates among multiple iterations of a correspondence intended for Tara, the chronicle of her existence begins to unfurl.

After a significant delay, Tara receives the epistolary missive advocating for female education and personal autonomy. Sabitri had a cardiac arrest and passed away the same evening she wrote the letter. Ultimately, Tara helps her mother move to a senior living facility. While getting rid of a box, someone finds an unopened envelope (Divakaruni, 2016, p. 200) that was originally sent from India a few years ago. The property manager, Sabitri, compiled this envelope by gathering and sending the leaflets to the United States. Tara realizes that her grandmother tried to

make an impact on her and offers advice through the stack of loose leaves. The user now understands the importance of the information regarding her grandmother's existence. This knowledge would have been very helpful when she longed for a connection, giving her a sense of security as she faced life's challenges.

Women's empowerment is a result of resisting patriarchal structures. The literary work shows a pattern where each female character transforms, leading to self-empowerment in response to patriarchal opposition. The initial persona is Sabitri, who is affected by patriarchal norms but later defies them through 'self-actualization'- a term depicting individuation, or the process of becoming a 'self,' that is holistic (Whitehead, 2017). Durga is known as the hardworking baker in their community. The benefits of mobility, like better quality of life and more opportunities, need to be balanced with the risk of displacement. Sabitri grew up in a small rural community far from the city of Kolkata. Sabitri sought the Mittirs' help for accommodation and support while pursuing her higher education. Later, Sabitri falls in love with Rajiv, who is the Mittirs' son. Their illicit romantic relationship leads to her being estranged from the Mittir household. Sabitri goes to great lengths to achieve her dream. She quickly devises a plan to deceive her math professor, Bijan, and manipulates him to protect her future.

In order to rectify the predicament, she elects to enter into matrimony with her Bijan, who has expressed a keen fascination with her and provided her with assistance subsequent to the incident involving the Mittirs. Sabitri does not shy away from exposing the darkest recesses of her being. In her "The Palace of Illusions", Divakaruni reveals the notion of a woman's power and states- "The power of a man is like a bull's charge, while the power of a woman moves aslant, like a serpent seeking its prey. Unless you use it correctly, it won't get you what you want" (Divakaruni, 2016, p. 52). The readers never lose sight of Savitri's stratagems to yield power over her husband, Bijan (Maitra, 2016). "A sentence here, a phrase there, a small plaintive smile, the slight press of a breast against his arm. That's all it took because he wanted to give his wife and child the best of everything" (Divakaruni, 2016, p. 23). Sabitri has realized that her former paramour, Rajiv, possessed a feeble and indulgent disposition, rendering him incapable of advocating for her. In this scenario, the conduct of Rajiv's maternal figure is interpreted as a manifestation of the assimilation of patriarchal norms and values into her psyche. The manifestation of patriarchal influence is evident in the subjugation of Sabitri, whose lack of agency directly results from her impoverished circumstances. The situation resulted in her reliance on external entities, namely the Mittirs and subsequently her spouse, before his decease. The circumstances of Sabitri's life necessitate her to confront and oppose the patriarchal ideology that governs Indian women. Cécile Sauvage writes and Beauvoir quotes: "When the woman loves, she must forget her personality. This is a law



of nature. A woman does not exist without a master. Without a master, she is a scattered bouquet" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 831). Unlike Sudha from "Sisters of my Heart," Divakaruni's Sabitri defies such stereotypical notions and stands as an independent entity.

The readers observe a transformed Sabitri who exhibited fortitude in endeavoring to procure compensation after her spouse's unforeseen demise and established Durga Sweets. She diligently cultivated the shop day and night as her lifelong aspiration for the enhanced financial stability of Bela. Discovering purpose and aspiration, she no longer perceived a male presence as a requisite for her life's domination, monopolization, or advancement. However, she did experience emotional reassurance in the company of her acquaintance and subordinate, Bipin Bihari, who was employed at Durga Sweets. Sabitri has presently discovered a novel sense of purpose in her existence that cannot be solely satisfied or attained through the role of a romantic partner or spouse. She has discovered a profound objective in her existence: to perpetuate the legacy of her late maternal figure, Durga, by creating an unprecedented culinary formula without external assistance. She states affirmatively that no one could take it away from her and that's what she wants for Tara and Bela.

The adversities endured by Sabitri serve to fortify her resolve toward self-sufficiency and autonomy. The demise of Sabitri's spouse compels her to assume independence and self-reliant, as evidenced by the observations of Bipin "startled by her firm, urbane grip [...] where did a Bengali woman dressed in widow-white learn to shake hands like that?" (Divakaruni, 2016, p. 87). Despite its seemingly insignificant nature, a handshake has the potential to serve as an indicator of an individual's personality traits. She had to fight a lengthy battle with the company lawyers for compensation for her husband's tragic death in a refinery fire supposedly started by the union workers. "Later, Bela's leaving for the United States adds to this, as her daughter is her Achilles' heel" (Aunar & Asl, 2022, p. 1210). The occurrences in her life signify the demises of cherished individuals as the primary catalyst for her autonomy.

The narrative of Sabitri adeptly interweaves with the tales of Tara and Bela, such that a contemporary, discerning reader may scarcely distinguish that they are engaging with three distinct chronicles of three successive generations, each unfolding within unique temporal and spatial contexts. Undoubtedly, the amalgamation of one narrative into another elevates the second, leading it to the third and ultimately culminating in a unifying conclusion. The preservation of concealed elements within each narrative engenders a captivation of the audience until its culmination, exemplified by Tara's initial misapprehension of Kenneth's vocal identity as that of a male figure in Bela's life, ultimately revealed to be akin to a filial relationship with her mother. Similarly, Bela harbored a lifelong animosity

towards her mother, attributing culpability for the demise of her father and younger sibling, Harsha. This sentiment was laid bare upon her perusal of her mother's correspondence, prompting a sobbing reaction.

By eloping and getting married to Sanjay without her mother's consent, Bela has sacrificed her connection with Sabitri. Although Bela and Sanjay's marriage is based on shared love, a power struggle and lack of trust develop over time, forcing Bela to get a divorce against her will. According to Bela, Sanjay loves withholding things from her and decides what is best for her. Her daughter Tara disagrees with the one-sided divorce decision and feels Bela is to blame. She loses her husband and Tara in the process, so her responsibilities as a wife and mother are limited to her connection with Sanjay. However, these earlier experiences catalyze Bela's opposition to patriarchy by adopting "the feminine" and "the other," allowing her to forge a life for herself apart from her purely dependent relationship with Sanjay (Aunar & Asl, 2022, p. 1211). Despite her pursuit of a more prosperous existence in a foreign land, Bela's experience has not yielded a notable flourishing within the context of the newly established recognition of diversity in her adopted country, nor has it engendered a revitalized affection and loyalty towards her Indian heritage. She expresses a sense of regret regarding the perceived inadequacy of their lived experience compared to their prior expectations.

The cumulative effect of various challenges and difficulties gradually intensified within her, resulting in a sense of suffocation and stagnation in a lackluster existence. She admitted that everything she had tamped down, including all her disappointments since her marriage. She mentioned that she was 'stuck in a dingy flat', trapped in a dead-end job that she despised, and burdened by a significant amount of unpaid loans that seemed insurmountable, making it unlikely for her to pursue further education (Divakaruni, 2016, p. 107)

Chasing the American dream doesn't always ensure Bela a stable and secure life, which is a bitter irony. Emigrating allowed Bela to escape but also distanced her from her mother, family, culture, and roots. An elopement does not adequately represent Indian or Eastern cultures. However, it's possible to overlook this mistake because young love is often associated with immaturity and a lack of judgment. Bela couldn't escape the challenges of a broken marriage and a divided household caused by her spouse Sanjay's infidelity and their subsequent divorce. Bela had limited communication with her mother due to her spouse's disapproval and the challenges she faced as an immigrant. Despite living in the United States for many years, Bela never truly felt like she belonged. Upon her recent arrival in the United States, she was aware of the frequent gazes from individuals. Nevertheless, despite her annoyance, she accepted it as a necessary cost of living in America. Bela's

identity was disconnected from her family and cultural roots and didn't completely fit the typical American mold. She may have lacked a sense of rootedness.

Sanjay showed love to his partner, took care of her during pregnancy, and formed a unique triad with Bela and Bishu (Sanjay's confidant). Over time, Bela discovered their involvement in illegal activities like document forgery and other unlawful practices. Bela saw Bishu as a rival in her quest for her spouse's affection. Bela felt insecure when she saw how completely Bishu influenced Sanjay. She aimed to free Sanjay from Bishu's influence. She hires Bishu to make Sanjay jealous and strengthen their growing intimate connection. Bishu left their company due to Sanjay's manipulation, leading to Bishu's work suspension. Sadly, Bishu passed away within two years of leaving.

The examination of the character Bela may be analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of Cixous' "the feminine" and "the other." Following her divorce from her spouse, Bela commenced independent living with the aid of alimony. However, after Sanjay declared bankruptcy, Bela was left destitute. Like Sabitri, the individual in question ardently adopts the practice of culinary arts and regards it as a platform to commence anew and express her affection and self-respect. As emphasized by Tara, Bela's daughter, culinary pursuits have constituted a substantial component of Bela's existence. Through the establishment of Bela's Kitchen, Bela engages in the process of cultural reconnection, wherein she shares traditional Indian recipes to rediscover her cultural heritage, personal identity, and sense of self. Despite Sanjay's involuntary dissolution of Bela's marital union, the arduous experience catalyzes her emancipation as she acquires the ability to subvert the gender norms imposed upon women in India.

Bela's resistance against patriarchal norms manifests through her autonomous pursuit of financial independence and proactive engagement in self-determination. In addition, Bela is inclined to embrace the feminine and the other by resuming her dancing activities after her estrangement from her spouse, Sanjay. During her earlier years, she exhibited a fondness for the art of dance. Despite suppressing her longing, she never fully relinquishes her pursuit of her beloved in the United States. Bela endeavors to realign her life's focus towards her intrinsic values by recognizing her profound affection and aspiration for the art of dance.

The three narratives of these female individuals share a commonality: they were subjected to betrayal by their male counterparts. Similar to her grandmother Sabitri, Tara experiences emotional distress. During her unexpected arrival at Robert's flat with Mrs Mehta, the subject discovered her beloved partner, Robert, in the company of another female individual. The recollection of her mother, Bela, failing to harbor any suspicion towards her father throughout their twenty-one-year matrimony is

firmly ingrained in her memory. He abruptly disclosed his extramarital affair during breakfast on a particular day while she served him a crispy dosa. Bela was approached with a nonchalant demeanor, resulting in a lack of comprehension regarding the subsequent abundance of information.

After finishing her education and her parents' divorce, Tara quickly left her family home and cut ties with her relatives. Tara chose not to seek solace and companionship from her mother to cope with their shared ordeal. The narrative clearly states that Tara has cut off contact with her parents. The person blames their father for the end of their marriage and holds a strong resentment towards him. Tara has no knowledge or recollection of her grandmother Sabitri, who is Bela's mother. Bela's attempt to embrace an American lifestyle ended up alienating her and her daughter from her mother.

Tara was unable to develop genuine relationships with her biological mother and father. Tara unknowingly seeks guidance and support from older family members, as shown by her ability to connect with two strangers: Mrs. Mehta, whom she met while house-sitting, and Mr. Venkatachalapati, whom she drove for while working at a driving agency. Furthermore, the protagonist's efforts to connect with elderly Indian individuals could reflect her strong desire for a cultural connection that can provide guidance and comfort during times of loss and inadequacy. Tara had an unintended pregnancy in her early adulthood and had to undergo a termination. In a state of distress and desperation, she tries to reach out to her mother but ultimately decides not to at the last moment. The Indian community values strong family support systems and familial bonding as traditional values. However, the mobility that led Bela to embrace an immigrant lifestyle also resulted in a lack of strong support for her and her daughter during challenging times.

Tara's upbringing was completely Westernized, leading to a lack of understanding or appreciation for her heritage, customs, principles, and identity. Parents are responsible for teaching Indian values and culture to their children. Tara strayed from the path of righteousness in her formative years due to a lack of grounding elements, which prevented her from establishing a strong foundation for a life guided by ethical principles. Tara has not shown any interest in exploring or acknowledging her ancestral roots. Her nationality is undoubtedly American, but one's roots and lineage are permanent. The exploration of the approach to the heritage theme is complicated because Tara, an American who presents herself as a typical young American woman, feels pressured by her colleague Blanca to acknowledge her Indian heritage. However, Tara has never been to India and has no desire to do so. Blanca's insistence complicates Tara's nuanced relationship with her cultural identity.

Appiah's work emphasizes the significance of recognizing and embracing cultural heritage while also encouraging the creation of new customs and traditions in different geographical settings. However, Tara consistently avoids doing so. Tara feels deeply saddened by her limited exposure to the richness and beauty of her Indian heritage. As a symbol of womanhood, Saris are often passed down through generations of Indian women, representing their strong family ties. The practice is a customary and admirable aspect of Indian civilization. Tara didn't fully understand the profound significance of her mother's gesture. Unfortunately, a lack of character development hinders the character's potential to revitalize their identity and reconstruct their personality. However, it could be argued that the mobility that led Bela and her mother to immigrate to the United States had unintended consequences for them. Tara's poor cultural upbringing has hindered her ability to fully embrace and engage with her heritage and ancestry from a young age and into adulthood. She showed complete detachment from India and its culture. Tara's ability to create new cultural expressions and honor her family's customs was hindered. The character seems to represent rootlessness and struggles to establish a sense of belonging as a cosmopolitan.

Tara and Bela's relationship is revitalized by sharing intimate truths and facing uncomfortable realities triggered by a letter from Sabitri. Sabitri, who had always wanted to connect with her daughter and granddaughter, was finally able to do so through letters on her last day alive (Mookherjee, 2017). The author recounts her life's journey, highlighting the challenges she faced and the accomplishments she attained. She openly shares undisclosed secrets without holding back. The author acknowledges that Tara may not fully relate to the letter, but hopes that she can still gain valuable insights to improve her well-being. She died soon after finishing the correspondence. Despite her declining health and fading memory, she is determined to share the secret of a meaningful life with her estranged daughter and granddaughter. Understanding that self-actualization is the key to success and happiness takes a lifetime to achieve. The speaker promotes self-actualization as the ultimate goal, claiming that achieving this state brings unmatched fulfillment.

## Conclusion

Reconciling with feminine desire catalyzes the development of one's identity and self. This rejuvenation of the feminine component results in the subjective experience of a personal "other" unique to the individual. Upon analyzing the female characters, it can be observed that their subjugation is subsequently met with opposition against patriarchal structures through self-empowerment. The attainment of this state is accomplished through a critical evaluation of prior experiences and a subsequent re-establishment of a connection with the feminine, which affirms feminine

yearnings from an internal perspective. The initial step towards resistance against the patriarchal paradigm involves the recognition of its pervasive impact, which is subsequently followed by the deliberate cultivation of an emancipated self.

Bela's divorce led to her transformation and self-discovery, symbolizing the power of feminine writing. She redefined herself, gained independence, and pursued personal growth. Tara achieves a metaphorical reconfiguration of self and identity by embracing motherhood and accepting herself. Tara overcomes her regret of terminating her pregnancy by conceiving and delivering another child. The female protagonists demonstrate strong feminine agency and maternal instinct, which drives them to defy patriarchal norms and reshape their identities.

Chitra Banerjee skillfully weaves the narrative between two nations and her cast of characters. The author focuses on individuals' challenges but portrays them as resilient and confident. These fearless women show no fear in the face of challenges. People strive to achieve their goals and make progress by adjusting them to fit the current situation. The familial relationships among these characters are contradictory. Maternal affection is considered the highest form of love, but the female offspring in this area lack the feeling of being cherished. Moreover, it enables their involvement in a web of physical complications that contribute to their mental distress. Migration and estrangement from family can lead to a fragmented sense of self, causing a longing for love and care. Choices shape a person's life path. Ultimately, when individuals actively engage in their own lives, it helps to strengthen the connection within their relationships.

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