

## **Self-asserted Identity: Decoding *Oleander Girl's* Journey towards Identity**

Ms. Aarthika M, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts and Science for Women, Coimbatore

Mrs. N. Tharanya, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts and Science for Women, Coimbatore

### **Abstract:**

*Oleander Girl* is a captivating novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It embarks on a profound exploration of the protagonist Korobi Roy on her quest for identity. The novel is set against the rich backdrop of contemporary India and continues to reveal the intricacies of migration to America. This novel brings together cultural intricacies, societal expectations, and personal revelations as Korobi navigates the challenging path towards self-discovery that is her migration to America. Her decisions challenge the norms of society and expectations of her family. However she found empowerment in her own path and embraced independence. This paper aims at exploring the delicate balance between tradition and independence in Korobi's life and further discusses the universal theme of reconciling cultural heritage with personal freedom and the impact on her evolving identity.

**Key Words:** Identity, Self-Discovery, Empowerment, Reconciliation, and Independence

Self-discovery is significant in the narrative as it transcends the individual, touching upon broader cultural and societal contexts. Korobi's exploration reflects the evolving nature of traditional values and societal expectations of conventional families in contemporary India. Her personal journey becomes an example of the larger shifts occurring within the culture and symbolizing the struggle to reconcile tradition with the desire for freedom. Furthermore, self-discovery acts as a catalyst for key events and character developments in the plot. Korobi's quest to understand herself unfolds her family secrets and adding layers of

complexity to the plot. Through deep analysis of her identity, the novel explores concepts of loss, love, and the delicate balance between tradition and independence.

In "Oleander Girl," the theme of self-discovery weaves the intricacies of narratives together. Korobi Roy's journey towards understanding her own identity is shaping the events, conflicts, and resolutions within the novel.

The significance of self-discovery is also underscored by its impact on the relationships and connections formed by Korobi. Her romantic relationship with Rajat and Christopher is influenced by the evolution of self-awareness that shapes the narration in an interesting manner. The novel suggests that true connections can only flourish when one has a profound understanding of oneself, emphasizing the interplay between personal identity and interpersonal relationships.

Exploration of the delicate balance between tradition and independence in Korobi's life

In *Oleander Girl* Korobi Roy's life unfolds the backdrop of a delicate and nuanced dance between tradition and independence. Korobi grapples with the intrinsic tension between honoring her heritage and carving out a space for personal autonomy as she is raised from a traditional family in Kolkata steeped in age-old customs and familial expectations. The novel expertly explores her journey as she negotiates the rigid expectations of tradition with an innate desire for independence. Korobi's decisions, especially those that challenge societal norms and familial conventions, become crucial moments in her quest for self-discovery. The narrative suggests that the journey towards self-realization necessitates a thoughtful reconciliation of these forces, highlighting the universal struggle to define oneself within the context of cultural heritage. Korobi's exploration becomes a poignant reflection of the broader societal shifts in modern India, where individuals struggle with the evolving dynamics between tradition and personal freedom. Through Korobi's narrative, *Oleander Girl*

reflects on the quest for balancing the timeless challenge of harmonizing tradition with the pursuit of an independent identity.

Korobi Roy emerges as a compelling protagonist in *Oleander Girl*, challenging societal norms and familial expectations with a courageous resistance that shapes her journey towards self-discovery. Her decisions, notably deviate from established norms, serve as a rebellious declaration of her individuality. Immediately after her engagement with Rajat, a wealthy groom, she decided to travel across oceans to an impossible destination that is in search of her father, only knowing his half name. In the vast country like America, finding a man knowing only his name is not a possible destination. She decided to take up the journey as she found the journey would find her who she really is.

From her unorthodox family and romantic entanglements with Rajat, Korobi's choices disrupt the status quo of the family and is challenging the deeply ingrained societal expectations. But her decisions have brought light to the path for her life. The narrative unfolds as a series of courageous acts such as, moving alone to America leaving her only grandmother alone at home that too immediately after the death of her grandfather, she went against the terms of her future in-laws, she is even ready to quit her engagement, and after reaching America she cuts her hair though for money which is not accepted by her traditional family. Korobi is fueled by an inner desire for authenticity, confronts and questions the expectations placed upon her. In doing so, she becomes a symbolic figure, representing the universal struggle of migrant women for personal freedom within the constraints of societal and familial obligations.

In this novel Korobi Roy emerges as a beacon of empowerment also as she embarks on the transformative journey of finding her own path, embracing independence. This act of self-determination paves way for personal growth and empowerment. As she navigates,

Korobi discovers her strength that comes from carving out her real identity. The pursuit of independence becomes a liberating force, allowing her to break free from the confines of expectations and embrace the autonomy to shape her own destiny. The empowerment found in forging her own path is not only a declaration of independence but also a testament to the resilience of the human spirit when faced with societal constraints.

At the heart of *Oleander Girl* lies the theme of Korobi Roy's poignant struggle to reconcile her rich cultural heritage with the pursuit of personal freedom, profoundly impacting her evolving identity. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni masterfully captures the intricacies of Korobi Roy's journey towards self-identity. The novel not only serves as a mirror reflecting the complexities of modern Indian society but also the migrants' quests for self-discovery. As Korobi navigates the labyrinth of tradition, loss, love, and family secrets, she emerges as a symbol of resilience, embodying the transformative power of embracing one's authentic identity.

In conclusion, the narrative skilfully weaves together the threads of Korobi Roy's transformative journey in the pursuit of self-discovery. Her initial struggles with the clash between tradition and modernity, intensified by the unexpected loss of her parents, become pivotal moments that propel her toward a deeper understanding of herself. Love, both romantic and familial, serves as a powerful catalyst, reflecting and shaping her identity. The revelation of family secrets acts as a turning point, liberating Korobi from preconceived notions and unveiling the authentic core of her being. The careful balancing act between tradition and freedom becomes an international concern that surpasses the particulars of her ethnic background. Readers will witness Korobi's determination, courage, and compelling journey toward choosing her own path. In addition to delivering a satisfying resolution to Korobi's personal voyage, the novel's final chapter challenges readers to consider the deep and everlasting lesson of self-discovery—the path that embodies the human experience.

"Oleander Girl" is a monument to the transforming potential inherent in the search for authenticity and the resolute fortitude found in negotiating the maze of self-discovery.

### References

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Oleander Girl*. Penguin Random House India, 2013.

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Official Website".  
<https://www.chitradivakaruni.com/>

Roy, Subhra. The Unfolding of Korobi: A Critical SAnalysis of the Gradual Growth of the Central Character in Oleander Girl. *Language in India*, Vol. 15:5, May 2015  
<https://www.chitradivakaruni.com/oleander-girl-reviews//>