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## SELF-ACTUALIZATION: UNVEILING THE NEW SELF IN CHITRA DIVAKARUNI'S *THE VINE OF DESIRE*

Ashu Manhas

Assistant Professor, GDC, Bishnah

### Abstract

The modern writer cannot evade social reality while producing some literary creation which requires some sort of impetus in the form of social situations to assume a shape. Literature and society are knitted together in a reciprocal relationship; a relationship of cause and effect. India, being a kaleidoscopic society caught the hawk-eyed attention of its writers who cannot remain aloof from this cause and effect relationship. In this context, Indian women novelists too have contributed a great extent to the literary canon of the world. The earlier women novelists have depicted the pain, agony and anguish of the women characters suffering silently due to social and cultural taboos and customs imposed upon them, but the contemporary women writers have broken these floodgates by holding high the beacon of liberty and equality and recognizing the potentials and true self of these voiceless women.

Chitra Divakaruni is one among such writers who has left an indelible mark on the literary arena of the world by winning accolades and securing a commendable place among Indian diasporic English writers. She is an expressive interpreter of the human experiences as she captures the women caught between worlds and unravels the mysteries of love and identity. Chitra Divakaruni has an uncanny knack of striking a balance between invisibility and alienation. In *The Vine of Desire*, Divakaruni presents the female point of view by delving deep into their psyche to locate how they dismantle the patriarchal constructs both in India and America. This paper aims at representing how these characters emerge as symbols of true emancipation by realizing their potential in the wider social spectrum and by discovering their personal freedom and identity leading them towards self-actualization.

**Keywords:** Liberty, Social constructs, Potential, Identity, Emancipation, Self-actualization.

Indian Women Writers of English have contributed to a great extent in its development and in giving new perspectives to Indian literature. In many earlier Indian English novels written by women novelists, women characters have been depicted as weak, feeble, sufferers and tolerant and succumbing silently to societal taboos and pressures. Whereas certain others like Chitra Divakaruni have written about the dilemmas of women in our society and explored women's subjectivity at length in order to provide vent to oppressed women voices. Chitra Divakaruni, a prolific writer voices women issues and concerns and sees her writing as "an extension of my activism, and my activism as an extension of my writing. Each enriches and helps the other" (Banerjee).

*The Vine of Desire*, published in 2002, explores the condition of women and the challenges faced by them in a patriarchal society that ensures the conditioning of women mindset from as early as childhood in order to curb their behavior with plenty of social and psychological barriers and obstruct their potential for self-actualization. Divakaruni's texts acts as a tool to penetrate through these barriers that blur the collective consciousness of the society and create a new lens through which they try to understand and reassess the identities and positions of men and women in the society. Divakaruni's women take up cudgels against the society to probe the depths of their consciousness and journey towards self-actualization. As woman is considered to be the pivot of all human relationships, her self-fulfillment is a pre-requisite for the betterment of family. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* conforms that, "For woman, as for man, the need for self-realization; independence, individuality, self-actualization— is as important as the sexual need" (282).

Divakaruni's works are a critique of human struggle leading to emancipation by achieving personal recognition and identity. A novel of cultures and characters, *The Vine of Desire* is about the lives of two women, Sudha and Anju, who knew each other intimately, a man and his desires, and a child's competent ability to adapt to new environs. Even though they were living together in a foreign land, but the situation was made so complicated by their independent desires that they had to individually battle and work out their problems to come to terms to their lives. Chitra Divakaruni's protagonists are caught in the web of juxtaposed tradition and modernity as they struggle to survive and aspire to adapt to their newly discovered world easily. Meenakshi Thapan in "Adolescence, Embodiment and Gender Identity: Elite Women in a Changing Society" published in *Urban Women in Contemporary India: a Reader* states, "Women no doubt struggle with social and familial definitions and expectations, and experience conflict and dilemmas as they struggle to redefine and shape their identities in different contexts and situations" (38).

It is significant to study and explore the social and cultural skirmishes of the women characters of Chitra Divakaruni and their constant effort to dismantle the walls of stereotypical constructs to unwind their potential and identity. This paper attempts to highlight their quest for a new definition of self and search for identity within and without the confines of tradition and society. It is a discourse that endeavours at establishing women's innate ability to help them unveil their new-self and reveal the experiences that lead to the process of self-actualization.