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**EROSION OF TRADITION IN CHITRA BANERJEE'S *OLEANDER GIRL***

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Abstract

A brilliant amalgamation of an author, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American who appeared on the world literary scene during the 1990s and a professor of creative writing. The novel *Oleander Girl* vividly describes the erosion of tradition and the arrival of multi-culture and its impacts. Banerjee describes the importance of tradition and culture through the character of an old man, Bimal Prasad Roy. Multiculturalism is portrayed through the character of Korobi.

In one of the chapters of the novel *Oleander Girl*, the protagonist Korobi wears western clothes instead of the traditional dress and on seeing this, Bimal Roy tells his granddaughter that if she should go out with the same dress all will think her as a call girl. Another incident related to this erosion is that of Korobi's parents. Korobi is the illegitimate child of Anu Roy and Rob Lacey; she was born to them when they were not married. Korobi maintains the secret of her birth until she returns from America. This illegitimate cause a great disaster in her love life with Rajat and leads to Rajat's family canceling the engagement. Divakaruni describes a society predicated on self-interest, a culture built on subterfuge, gossip, one-upmanship, caste, and opinion. It was exasperating because it was real.

Keywords: *the erosion of tradition, culture, multiculturalism.*

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The novel *Oleander Girl* (2013) unveils the life of the young seventeen-year-old Korobi Roy, born to an Indian mother Anu Roy and the African Father Rob Lacey. Korobi is unaware of her mixed culture. She is raised in a traditional Bengali heritage. It was only after her grandfather's sudden death that her grandmother, Sarojini unveiled the long-hidden truth of Korobi.

The novel *Oleander Girl* renders the complex nature of love. The very beginning of the novel reminds us of the destruction of traditional values. Change remains unchanged. Today's

generation keeps on changing its mind. "Culture is defined as the complex of organized relationships, ideas, developed qualities and conceptions that exist generally in society. It acts through tradition, religious belief..." (SCA199).

The younger generations disregard their traditional values and enjoy their life on their own. In ancient days women were not supposed to wear a modern dress but nowadays their outfit is the main reason for their sufferings and the pathetic situation in our society is that they are still unaware of it. Korobi accuses her grandfather by saying that he snatched away from her simple joy in her new clothes and made her cheap and prohibit to wear the off shoulder kurta by telling her as a "call girl". The old traditional thought of Bimal Roy calls her only heiress as a call girl because he is unable to tolerate his granddaughter's costumes and this itself portrays the erosion of tradition. The generation gap and the multi-culture lead to the death of Bimal Prasad Roy.

Culture can be different not only between continents or nations but also within the same company or even family. (MSC238). Here Anu Roy is different from Bimal Prasad Roy. Even though she was the daughter of him and they belong to the same family. Our old tradition does not allow a girl child to go out of her house. But Bimal Roy, out of his tradition, sends his daughter to America for her higher studies. He had a faith towards his daughter as well as his tradition. Even she is raised in a traditional Bengali heritage; she falls in love with the African man and started to live together.

After the death of her Grandfather, Korobi knows that she has a father in America. She wanted to fulfill the wishes of her mother and she decided to go to America and try to identify her father not only for the wish of her mother but also to know about her identity. So she goes against the wish of her lover and her in-laws family.

The love between Anu Roy and Rob Lacey shows Korobi as an illegitimate heiress. Anu promises her father that she did not marry against his wish. But she loved Rob and brings Korobi to the world out of the wedlock. In order to maintain her promise, she was not married and she hides it to her family. She does not care about the child's life. She does not think how the child faces the society when she is born out of wedlock.

Marriage is considered as a sacred one, According to Hindu mythology, the bride and bridegroom promising them before the sacred fire and before the Bandit and they receive the blessings from the elders. But the multi-culture changes everything among the people's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

The strong determination of Anu causes a great disaster in the life of Korobi. She goes to America, against the wish of her Grandmother and her in-law's family. She is shattered when she knows the secret of her birth and she does not know the way to tell her secret to her in-laws family.

Marriages in India are entered into an arranged very differently from what is being done in western countries. In India marriage is not an affair of the individuals. It is a family affair and

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very much so. (SCA204). Sarojini is extremely scared of society. She thought if the society knows the secret of Korobi, that she is the illegitimate child of mixed race. It destroys the entire name and fame of the family.

During Korobi's search in America, she faces a lot of troubles. She stayed in Mitra's house who is the servant of Mr. Boses's Art Gallery. Mitra believes that Korobi is the reason for all his troubles. So he decides to take revenge on her. He becomes an observer on Korobi's search and he is the reason for all the problems faced by Korobi. She was tired of her search when she was about to lose her chastity towards one of the Robs. She is extremely scared and decided to give up her journey in this mysterious country and wants to make to Kolkata.

Korobi adapts the American culture very easily. There is a change in her mannerisms and she calls Rajat as "Baby", she had never used before, which makes him think "It's been only a few days, How did she pick up that American endearment. (OG131).

During Korobi's stay in California, she meets Vic, who falls in love with her. This made her love for her fiancé is put to test as she feels strongly infatuated to Vic. She has to decide whether she wants to stay in America or to go back to India. She realizes she can become a "new Korobi" (218) in America. Vic tells her How she can find her own identity in the following words, "You need to look away from someone else's past into your own future. You think if you learn who your father and mother were. It'll teach you who you are? But you are someone already. You'd see if you weren't so busy focusing elsewhere" (217). Finally, after the meeting between her with her father, she decides to go back to Kolkata and live with her family. She doesn't want to leave her grandmother and Rajat alone in Kolkata. She happily married and they all lived together.

Korobi's identity was closely linked with her family. In America, she decides to take control of her life and make her own decisions. "Hair belonged to Bimal and Sarojini's granddaughter to Rajat's fiancé to Papa and Maman Boses' daughter-in-law to be" (OG178). She finally proves that she has the right over her life and can make decisions for herself.

The beauty of women lies in their hair. Korobi had beautiful long curly hair. She was supposed to cut her hair in order to tackle her financial problems in the Newland, on the other hand, Korobi and Vic stayed in a motel during their journey, because of heavy snowfall. This creates a great mistrust inside Rajat. It is natural for all men to become angry when their wives or their loved one stayed with another man in a Motel during nights in a strange land. This sort of situation grows a kind of suspicion among the men and they want to prove themselves as pure to some extent.

In the words of Richard Slimbach, "Our willingness to transcend the boundaries of our inherited identity opens up to the good, the true, and the beautiful in each person and cultural tradition. (224).

The journey of Korobi undertakes by crossing cultural boundaries help her to redefine herself. The author proves through the amalgam of East and West. It leads to the creative process that brings up new cultural values. The protagonist has the qualities of both Indian and American values and enriched the identity while retaining their Indian sensibility.

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