



Representation of Feministic Voice in Divakaruni

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This paper explores Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) from the perspective of expatriate reality. By viewing this text from the point view of expatriate reality, our research paper explores realistically the place of immigrants in America. Our reading, from the perspective of expatriate reality, illustrates the way of life of immigrants in America, their problems and their slow merger into the American culture.

Keywords: *Expatriate Reality, Immigrants, Cultural Transformation, Diasporic, Target Culture.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Calcutta on 29th July, 1956 and settled in United States. She is one of the major novelists of the second generation immigrant women fictionists endowed with the lives of immigrant experiences, explored and expressed artistically in her novels. Her writing primarily deals with experiences of the immigrants in US.

Her works have been translated into eighteen languages including Dutch, Hebrew, Portuguese, Danish, German and Japanese and two of her novels have been adapted into films. Divakaruni's first anthology of poetry was published in 1987 and last novel *One Amazing Thing* in 2011. The works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are mainly concerned with the lives of expatriate.

2. PORTRAYAL OF THE LIVES OF EXPATRIATE/DIASPORA

The process or migration to America started in mid nineteen century has reached a new high in terms of immigrant population within a span of one hundred years. People from all over the world are drawn towards this century for variety of reasons. Though these immigrants have settled in USA, they experience a cultural transformation.

A number of diasporic writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Raja Rao, Shanta Rama Rao, Anurag Mathur, G.V.Desani, Faruque Dhondy, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherji, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others have been dealing with the issue of expatriation. Literature on diaspora has projected the experiences of the emigrants and their diverse issues poignantly. Diaspora is primarily concerned with emigration of people beyond the boundaries of their homeland due to socio-economic or political reasons. These

immigrants maintain their separateness from the host country based on common ethnicity or nationality. Though they are physically or geographically displaced, they retain their social and cultural position to the old memories of the culture which they have inherited.

3. DIVAKARUNI'S FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

Divakaruni's characters are endowed with vivid identities of expatriate life like marginalized, rebellious, docile, traditional and modern. Divakaruni's fiction including *Sister of My Heart (1999)*, *Arranged Marriage (1997)*, a collection of Short Stories, *One Amazing Thing (2011)* and *The Mistress of Spices (1997)* all deal with these different identities. The portrayals of Jayanthi in "Silver Pavements and Golden Roof" (*Arranged Marriage*), Geeta, Hameeda and Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*, Sudha and Anju in *Sister of My Heart*, Uma and Malathi in *One Amazing Thing* represent younger women of first and second generations who find their true identity in American land. Speaking about expatriate reality of Divakaruni, K. S. Dhanam in essay entitled "Negotiation with the New Culture: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's, *The Mistress of Spices*" published in *Critical Essays on Diasporic Writers (2004)* writes:

"Divakaruni's books are mainly directed the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities. She has her finger accurately on the diasporic pulse, finishing eastern values with western ethos. Her writing course with her identification is with a brave new world forging to life. Her sensitivity to contemporary voices, today's issues are threaded through with an ongoing search for identity beyond anthropology, beyond sociology and beyond academia." (62)

Divakaruni's female protagonists are memorable and real representations of diasporic Indian Women. Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices (1997)* is a genuine representative of expatriate identity, born in India, educated to be Mistress or Spices Island and finally living in America, merging herself into its culture and still retaining her individuality. Tilo, the central figure of the novel represents all expatriate paradigms.

4. TILO IN THE MISTRESS OF SPICES

Tilo the protagonist of the novel, *The Mistress of Spices* narrates the magical use of spices for the immigrants in the first person

narrative technique. She goes on to state the power and greatness of Indian spice at the migrated land i.e. where she runs a spice shop in Oakland, California. She goes on to advice the better remedies for the immigrants in USA, as it is rightly pointed out below by Los Angeles Times:

"While she supplies the ingredients to gain a more precious commodity; whatever they most desire. For Tilo is a Mistress of Spices, a priestess of the secret magical powers of Spices." (Printed in the review on the back cover of the novel *The Mistress of Spices (1997)*)

Immigrants are new in the new land. America is a 'target culture' to them as they have migrated to America. The American culture is a new and 'external culture' for them so they are in grief as they left their mother land. They are restless in the new culture so they visit often to the shop of Tilo to find solace. This shows that the immigrants are in trouble in the new land. The psychological state of their mind is very reluctant to adjust in the new land, new culture, new land and new conditions, so they often visit to the shop of Tilo to find remedies for their livelihood in American conditions. Tilo whom they consider an old immigrant (first generation immigrant) can surely advice them (second generation immigrants) in their problems. Though Tilo suggests remedies to the immigrants to make them happy, she was and is unable to seek happiness for herself.

5. TILO-THE (REPRESENTATIVE) VOICE OF IMMIGRANTS

The very first chapter entitled after her name - 'Tilo' gives us an account of lives of the immigrant people before their immigration, their lives in the homeland. Tilo, being the first generation immigrant accounts her life in her homeland, the power of touch she has as gift by the God, the luxury of life experienced in the homeland. At shop, she has to put up with the mannerisms of Indian culture with the immigrants while she has to behave as an adopted culture with Harun. Torn between two cultures, she tries her best not to confront embarrassing situations in her family and within her community. Tilo retains her mannerisms, but she is unable to cope with Harun's demands. She advises immigrant people to adjust themselves to the situations of the new land. This suggests that all the immigrants have

been suffering with internal exile in their external country and feel alienated.

The immigrants in America are living in very poor condition. They face the havoc of poverty. In fact poverty has forced most of them to leave their homeland and settle abroad for a decent income. Through the immigrants suffer from poverty they normally do not allow their wives to work out in support of their family. Though their immigrant woman is an educated and forward, she is a victim of male dominated society. Ahuja and his wife is an evidence for this fact.

"Here is what she wants to tell me, only how can she, it is not right that a woman should say such things about her man: all day any home is so lovely, the silence like quick-sand sucking at her wrists and ankles. Tears she cannot stop, disobedient tears spilled pomegranate seeds and Ahuja shouting when he returns home to her swollen eyes" (15)

Tilo's remedy to Harun an Indian immigrant to America is very healing to him. The remedy suggested by Tilo to Harun encouraged him to manage himself to live in America, migrated land. She told fortune of Harun with his palm as below:

"It looks good, very good; great things will happen to you in this new land, this America riches and happiness and may be even love, a beautiful woman with dark lotus flower eyes" (38)

The first generation immigrants like Kapadia memsaab treat Harun a second generation immigrants subordinately. The first generation immigrants think as if they are still in India to treat the cab drivers, the second generation immigrant with humiliation. The immigrants in America always have a fear of being shot by the Natives. The attack on the Indian immigrant women by the white boys at the time of evening walk is an instance of this.

6. THE NEVER-ENDING PROBLEMS AND SUFFERING OF THE IMMIGRANTS

The immigrants have the problem of a language in the target culture. They cannot communicate with them in the proper language. Jagjit, a school going boy is the evidence of it. Jagjit who knows only Punjabi has learnt his first English word, *'Idiot, Idiot, Idiot.'* The use of language also subordinates the place of immigrants in America. Jaggi's mother uses such a language to him *'Jaggi what you meaning you don't want to go school, what for your father is killing*

himself working, working at the factory, too slaps will make you go!'. (39) At the same time the teacher of Jaggi scolds and humiliates an immigrant schoolboy in the words as; *'Talk English sonofabitch' (39)*

Jaggi a school going boy was very reluctant to go to the school because of the worst treatment of his teacher towards him as an immigrant schoolboy, Tilo offered the cardamom which will make his breath fragrant, and change the attitude of his teacher. Tilo goes on to encourage an immigrant schoolboy by suggesting him another remedy in the form of a spies called Cinnamon, friend maker, and gives strength to the immigrants by saying that Cinnamon is the destroyer of enemies and it gives strength. Jaggi merged & adjusted himself in American culture later.

Most of the immigrants working at turbaned coolies, garment factories and always used to drink wine. Due to their shabby and dirty appearance, the Native Americans used to scold them as

"Bloody buggers Hindustani, Fucking Dothead, Paki go home." (54)

These Natives always use to scold the immigrants like *"Bastard foreigner taking over the country stealing our jobs." (62)* The immigrants are also tired of their jobs. When Arjun Singh, an immigrant worker won the lottery and the next day he went into his office and told his boss *"I spit on you and your job, your job, your job!" (71)*

The immigrant women in America have always been treated by humiliation. They are suffering at double level, first in the hands of their husbands at houses and second by the American natives for their dark skin. Hence, Tilo wishes to buy a Barbie doll with American skin, by this she could have a whim of being Americanness so she says that *"I wish for that American skin that American hair those blue blue American eyes so that no one will stare at me except to say wow." (63)*

Though the immigrants have migrated to America from the other countries they have now settled in America. They wish to be American. Kwesi, a *papad* seller in America was expressing his being Americanness. His sense of belongingness in the words as below:

"American I too am looking, I thought all my looking was done when I found the spices but then I saw you and now I no longer know!" (69)

Migrated people normally do not want to forget Indian culture in the beginning. Daksha says

"Aunty today is ekadasi you know, eleventh day or the moon and my mother in law being a widow must not eat rice. So I thought may be some cracked wheat to make a dalia pudding for her and as long as I was here, might as well pick up some of your methi, my husband is so fond of methi parathas." (80)

This shows the cultural transformation among the migrated people in America. The new generations tried to accept new culture immediately. However there is a slow transformation of the culture among the old generations. Thus immigration is a natural phenomenon. In human migration two unique factors need to be recognized: migration does not mean the mere physical movement of people. Migration carry with them a sociocultural baggage which among other things consists of a predefined social identity, a set of religious beliefs and practices, a framework of norms and values governing family and kinship organization, and food habits and language. The researchers in this article tried to focus on three aspects mainly. The first is that overseas Indians tend to recreate Indian social structure wherever they go. The second is that they tend to hold fast to their native culture in their lands of adoption. The third is that their mode of adaptation is marked by a clear preference for cultural assimilation.

7. CONCLUSION

The Mistress of Spices is narrated in a first person singular narration. Tilo, the Mistress of Spices narrates the story. The first chapter is entitled after the name of the protagonist Tilo, while other chapters after each Indian Spices. The immigrants have different problems. Tilo provides a remedy to the each immigrant prescribing a certain spices as a medicine. The spices, though does not seem a pharmaceutical medicine, it proves to be a mental, medicine to the immigrants. The present article not only tried to explore the recurring problems, dilemmas and sufferings of the Indian immigrants in America but also attempts and encouragements to the other immigrants to manage and merge themselves in the alien culture. The immigrants have been suffering into internal exile in their adopted country and feel alienated. The present novel brings out diverse interpretations on the immigrants and their problems like suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race,

culture, gender, nationality and place. Immigrant issues are discussed from the individual and realistic viewpoint and then magnified globally.

Divakaruni deserves acclaim in being able to delve into the characters' responses to situations that are beyond their control. She is certainly one of the observant writers who have succeeded in opening fresh grounds in analyzing and probing into this area of study. Hence, by using a specific spice the protagonist helps the immigrant customers to overcome their difficulties in the alien land. This is a work by the author who lives in a foreign locale, but still retains her countries passport, to shuttle characters in her works between her homeland and a foreign country. As Bhabha opines:

"The study of immigrant literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of otherness. Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, their colonized or political refugees- those border and frontier conditions- may be the terrains of immigrant literature." (12)

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