

## Displaced and Replaced Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices: A Critical Reading*

**A. Rameshkumar**  
Ph.D. Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Annamalai University

### Abstract

The Present research is entitled “Displaced and Replaced Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices. A Critical Reading*,” purposes to examine Divakaruni’s employment of displacement and replacement is general and women characters in particular. The research deals with Divakaruni’s fiction the mistress of spices which Divakaruni’s employment of diasporic and expatriate women work as a pattern in all her fictions. This research also explores narrative techniques employed by Divakaruni. This research investigates post – colonial scenario as used by Divakaruni in her novels. This study substantiates Divakaruni’s employment of presenting common experiences of crossing cultures, cultural cringes, cultural dualism and cultural adaptation and fragmentation of the society. The present research is a serious attempt to explore this outstanding novel from critical perspectives. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s literary oeuvre is small but it is remarkable for its seriousness of intent and solidity of substance. She views writing as a process of self discovery, has affirmed the Indian cultural identity by effecting on its multiplicity and heritage.

**Key Words:** Search for Identity, Displacement, Replacement, Diaspora, Feminine Sensibility, Cross Cultures, Cultural cringes, cultural dualism and cultural adaptation

### Introduction

The present study entitled “Displaced and replaced women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s the mistress of spices: A critical reading” is to study Divakaruni’s employment of displacement and replacement which her women undergone. Banerjee Divakaruni is so individualistic in her writing career. Her place and her identity in Indian novels is quite intriguing and raises the reader’s critical curiosity to purge the salient features of her novels, to accord him the due recognition, the present thematic study is a modest attempt in this direction. This research also explores narrative technique employed by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Divakaruni is a great post – Independence Indo – Anglican fiction writer, and in

her novels the thrust is always on social realism. This research investigates postmodern elements as used by Divakaruni. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's literary oeuvre is small but it is remarkable for its seriousness of intent and solidity of substance. She views writing as a process of self – discovering, has affirmed the Indian cultural identity of reflecting on its multiplicity and syncretism and broadened our understanding of the country's great heritage.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents her vision of life which deals with various fictional themes as alienation and involvement, East-West encounter, compromise, existentialism, materialism, quest and complacency. Through her protagonists, Divakaruni makes her readers glimpse into the confused inner self of the contemporary westernized and materialistic man who is spiritually barren. The issues that Divakaruni raises are the ones that concern the Post-colonial Indians with Western education. Her novels are structured in the immediately socio-cultural situations and are concerned with moral and spiritual problems of the contemporary Indians. They suffer from up rootedness, cynicism, evils of materialism, loss of faith and identity crisis.

### **Review of Literature**

This present study present review of literature related to the major critical works done on Divakaruni. A handful of critics are availed in the critical cannon of Divakaruni. The thesis provided the major controlling ideas of the dissertation. It also supplies survey of literature and established how the present research deviates from other critics in the appraisal of critical texts written on Divakaruni's fictions. A single attempt at a scrutiny displaced women and a replaced woman of Divakaruni has not been made and this study fills the gap. Keep in mind the paucity of critical studies and evaluations, an attempt is made in this research paper to study exhaustively. Divakaruni's employment of displacement and replacement of women in the novel *The Mistress of Spices*, the researcher has found that, there is no research done on the novel. So the present research fills the research gap and assumes its originality.

### **Displacement and Replacement**

Displacement, Diaspora, and geographies of identity challenges conventional understandings of identity based on noxious of nation and culture as bounded or discrete. The Diasporic transnational, hybrid, border, and Diasporic study explores cultural studies, postmodernism, and postcolonial theory and raise crucial questions about ethnographic methodology. This research paper examples a cross – disciplinary cultural studies and a

concept of culture rooted in lived experience as well as textual readings. In exploring histories of displacement and geographies of identity, this study calls for the reconceptualization of theoretical finalisms as modern and postmodern, colonial and post colonial. This study employs the theories like identity, home, cultural conflict and alienation to explain the after math of displacement in Diaspora and their displacement from their own native land or culture. Sometimes, it displacement arises within their native land or culture.

Indian-born women are torn between old and new world values. She uses her laser like insight and skilled use of story, plot and lyrical description to give a many-layered look at her characters and their respective world which are filled with fear, hope, and discovery. Whether in California, Chicago, or Calcutta, women learn to adapt to their new and changing culture and as a result, discover their own sense of self.

The vast canvas of the theme helped many Indian English novelists to explore the many aspects of the inner life of man. The concepts of alienation and the search for identity entered the Indian English fiction as a strong motif in the sixties. In her fiction Divakaruni voices the concerns of the estranged and uncovers deep undercurrent of the anguish of the contemporary Indian psyche. She exposes the cultural and spiritual problems of her own countrymen. Her works, focus on the brief succinct images of women caught between the old world and the new world values, how women cope with cross cultural relationships, how women ultimately try to achieve self-esteem and autonomy denied to them within their own somewhat insular and bigoted community. Divakaruni locates her texts at the troubled intersection of female subjectivity and national identities. Her stories provide a spectrum of feminist resistances in the diaspora. They are part of a complex effort at creating a space for a female subject where she can articulate her desires.

### **Divakaruni as a Diasporic Writer**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an exponent in the realm of Diasporic Indian writing in English. She has carved her niche in the literary world as an immigrant writer. She employs her poetry and prose to form a bridge from Calcutta to Calofornia. In an interview appeared in *India Currents*, Divakaruni contends: “We, Indian – Americans, are still in an early immigrant culture. We remember the old country and lament the loss of our roots, which adds poignancy to our writing”. In fact Divakaruni in her works portray her native country, culture and the manners of people elaborately. She incorporates both the positive aspects as well as the negative aspects of India in her works.

Divakaruni's writings often centers around the lives of immigrant women. She highlights the issues of women expatriates especially their love making and relationships. She has established a centre for woman, maitri along with her friends in Berkeley. She strives for the betterment of women and she infuses confidence and courage in them. South Asian Writers have received honorable place in the American literary Tradition. Her writings are attempts to reconnect emotionally and physically to her native country with the settled country. She has explored the various aspects of tradition of her native country as well as the challenges faced by the immigrants in the adopted country. Her characters attempt to make various conscious efforts to overcome the problems of identity crisis and integration into a new continent.

The principal character called Tilo, at the moment she starts to tell her story, experience, in the course of time, several identities, or "existences." Divakaruni re-constructs them the time factor becomes closely related to the re-structuring of the notions of 'home' and 'exile' which are not to be defined purely in geographical, cultural, or political terms but rather in those of human interaction, understanding, love and friendship. The temporal borderlines of Tilo's first identity, in which she is known under the name of Nayan-Tara (Star-seer, because of her supernatural qualities), are marked by fire (fire which could not be extinguished after she has been born and fire put to the village by the pirates who come in search for her), fire being a significant phenomenon of the Hindu cosmology. The more profound insight into this imagery brings to light the nature of the main character's respective identities and their metamorphoses.

Tilo's cultural "enclosure" is rendered then in patriarchal terms. Similarly, the Indian woman can apparently be called "a mistress of spices" as she is in control of the preparation of food in the kitchen, a space intimately attributed to her. Her kitchen, nevertheless, as a space of enclosure, is a representation and symbol of her submission. This moment of interchange between the "home" and the "exile" is what Homi Bhabha's calls "unhomely" situation in which the condition of the Indian woman, hitherto hidden, is revealed, and the notions of "home" and "exile" re-evaluated. Similarly Geeta, a daughter of the exiled Indians, born to them in the USA, is reproached by her grandfather her allegedly free behavior with men: working with them till late in the evening, being brought home by them and using too much of make-up. The situation comes to a head when Geeta, believing in her parent's

tolerance, announces that she wants to marry not only out of love, but that her boyfriend is a Chicano. She meets with the absolute misunderstanding and even hostility and feels forced to leave her home.

Hybridity as an inter-cultural endeavor begins in Divakaruni's novel, nevertheless. Raven can also be perceived in terms of living in a 'Diaspora' and exile from a "home" space of his ancestors. The exile is imposed on him by his mother, who has deprived him of his roots and hidden his and her own origin from him. When the moment of revelation, the meeting with his dying great-grandfather, comes, he starts to suffer intensely. By referring to the common space of the memories of different exile groups the author deconstructs the space of the "homeland" as the one requiring ethnic purity for each such diasporic community.

Hybridity in Divakaruni is made possible only through the active venturing of the Self towards the other, no matter whether the origin of one or the other is Indian, Native Indian, American, Latino or an African American. What counts most for feeling "at home" of the Self in the novel is not a geographical or cultural emplacement/displacement of the person but human understanding, compassion, and love as prefigured by the existence on the island where no clue is given concerning identification, be it geographical, cultural, or political, either of the island itself or of the First Mother and the girls. The new order, or the "new city", is to be inhabited by the offspring of not only one-coloured couples like Haroun the taxi-driver and Hameeda, but also of hybrid unions as represented by Maya and Raven, and Geeta and her Mexican fiance Juan. Geeta herself, nevertheless, cannot be identified as just Indian anymore, "Geeta whose name means sweet song". Geeta who is India and America all mixed together into a new melody.

### **Diasporic Narrative of Chitra Banerjee**

Divakaruni is an award – winning novelist and poet. She is a prolific writer and her works are published in many journals. Her works are translated into many languages including Dutch, Herbrew and Japanese. This indicates her popularity as a writer. She was born in Kolkata, India in 1956 and came to the United States for her graduation. She received Master's degree in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.

As an expatriate writer Divakaruni portrays all the aspects negative and positive of her native country such as the joint family system, caste problem, preference for the male child, inhumane treatment of widows and the stipulations laid on the movement of the girls in the novel. She has come out with the conviction that the comfort the immigrant Indian women enjoy in the alien land is temporary one. Soon they can find the real situation that America is no way different from India. They are placed in the subordinate position as usual in the alien land too. Divakaruni poignantly explores the struggles of Indian women as they seek new lives in a world that would have them remain submissive. Whether in California, Chicago, or Calcutta, women learn to adapt the situation.

### **The Critique of *The Mistress of Spices: As An Indian Immigrant Novel***

Divakaruni adopts a more complex strategy for portraying Diasporic identity. She makes use of elements of the fable in order to explore the various kinds of problems encountered by immigrants who come to the promised land of silver pavements and golden roofs. The protagonist Tilo is an *Indian immigrant*, who runs a grocery shop in California. She is sent to modern day Oakland to help the immigrants with her powers, to redress a variety of problems of her immigrant customers. The spice store attracts a large group of people for whom the place is reminiscent of their home — India. The mistress feels that the Indians come to her store in quest of happiness.

Tilo is allowed to work her spells and magic on within the confines of her run down grocery store only on her Indian immigrant customers, “Tilo the architect of immigrant dream, life giver, restorer of health and hope” (88). The spice shop, where the whole Indian community converges, is like a microcosm in itself. The novel is about the familiar immigrant tales of dreams, desires, pain and struggle. Many of their immigrant dreams lie shattered in the dust, but there are some stories of success also.

The most vivid among them are the faces of four whose fates are inextricably linked with that of Tilo, the spice and spell maker: Lalita, Haroun, Geeta and Raven. Lalita, a poor immigrant was cheated when she was forced to wed Ahuja, an alcoholic who abused her and cast aside her dreams. She had an unhappy domestic life without any one’s support in an alien land. She struggled with cultural shock. With forced subservience by her often abusive

husband, she became speechless and could not express her emotions. Even her own husband was not in a position to comprehend her feelings. As she was helpless she tried to legitimize his abuse and her suffering by blaming her initial unacceptance of him.

The character, Tilo's timely intervention helped her to turn against her invalid husband. She became all the more independent to decide her future life in the foreign land. She was forced by her parents to wed Ahuja in her own motherland. And she too did not want to hurt her parents by rejecting him. She tried to be an ideal wife considering her husband everything for her. America, the adopted land changed her attitude against the domestic violence that was imposed upon her for four years. And now she was ready to visualize her dreams of setting up her own tailor's shop which was once cast aside. Tilo's words of advice gave her confidence courage and uncovered the mask of cowardice and turned her into a self-reliant person. It helped her to identify her true self. The dependent land gave her full independence and strength to struggle against the brutality of her husband. She was changed into a new woman in her new country.

Haroun, the cab-driver who fled Dal Lake where generations of his family had rowed Shikaras for tourists, landed in America as an illegal immigrant. He looked forward to riches and prosperity in the alien land. He too was such a victim as Lalita. His immigrant dream had turned out to be a nightmare initially, when he was savagely attacked by some robbers at night. But the mistress gave him the moral support. His marriage with his neighbour, Hameeda, a divorced woman from India seemed to take his life to an upward turn in this immigrant land. He started a new life in the alien land against all kinds of obstacles to be ahead on his way.

In America, he did not face any hindrance to marry a divorced woman like Hameeda who had enlightened his future in the promised land of silver pavements and golden roofs. Hameeda, a divorced lady with her daughter was isolated and rejected in her own society and her future became hopeless. But in the immigrant land, she was encouraged to pursue her education and remarry another man like Haroun who gave a new meaning to her life in the adopted land. Jagjit, the shy frightened boy was forced to face endless hostility and abuse due to his accent and turban. Eventually, the little immigrant boy ran from play-ground bullies to join the gangsters. The immigrant country, had transformed innocent Jagjit into a drug trafficker and perhaps on his way to become an armed gangster. Initially Jagjit had difficulty in finding things in a new environment. He could not assimilate the American way of life as

he was caught between two different worlds. On one side, Jagjit was troubled due to language problem in the American soil and on other side he was rebuked by an impatient mother who refused to understand her son's predicament. His parents desired to provide a better life to their son in the alien land. It came to a standstill when Jagjit tried to hide something illegal from them - such as drug and gun. He indulged in this kind of activities to protect him from the racial prejudice in America. The country, which he adopted turned to be a hostile home and led him to a hopeless future.

The second generation American-raised Geeta revealed the typical conflict between Indian born parents and their Westernized daughter. There was a clash of values between the parents and daughter. It is due to their parent's Indian mind setup which could not match American raised daughter's Westernized thought : therefore frequently resulted in conflict. As an immigrant, Mohan was estranged and racially faced a lot of discrimination in the land of adaptation. He was betrayed by the American Justice, when the thugs were acquitted. Thus justice was denied to him in the immigrant land. The nurse, like Daksha was caught in the family hierarchy of an aging mother-in-law and a husband. Even in the dependent land she was denied the real independence and could not identify her true self. Manu, a seventeen year old boy, lost himself to the cheap American culture and lost interest in the traditional values of his homeland.

The novel offers a close look at wide spectrum of Indian immigrants residing in the diaspora. For every immigrant who makes it in America, assimilation is a part of their immigrant experience. Few assimilate and prosper, and others lost their life while they struggle heroically against the odds- against everyday structural racism as well as against the concrete ceiling that prevents any upward mobility. In a diasporic context, the clash between the generations frequently results in conflict. In the novel *The Mistress of Spices* the second generation Geeta's predicament stems from the fact that she is part of a paradigmatic diasporic family where a clash between the first generation and second generation Indians is inevitable. The first generation parents are more concerned about the traditional values of their home country and ignore the feelings of their daughter. In fact, they are horrified, when she chooses to be with a Chicano man and cut her off completely. Geeta, the second generation Indian is not prepared for this volt face; she is shocked by the elements of racism that she perceives in her parents' reaction to Juan. When discussing the conflict between

generations in the American diaspora, Suniana Maria and Rajni Srikanth write. The relationship between the generations is complex and nuanced second generation Indian's.

Apart from her parents, Geeta had a clash of values; especially with her grandfather who tries to install in her some of the "sterling values" he had learned in India that are hopelessly outdated in this foreign country. For the second generation Indian, like Geeta, the questions about identity are differently poised. She challenges continuous identification with patriarchal traditions which she associates with her grandfather. Geeta and her parents differ vastly in their attitude towards American way of life. Her parents are typically rooted in their home traditions. For them it seems to be uncultured and against their stereotype Indian life style. So they find it difficult to assimilate American culture.

Geeta, brought up in America has a different outlook towards American culture. She fails to find out any difficulty in assimilating things. Still in the multi-cultural land, her values are really more traditional than her family members believe. The three generations of the Banerjee family although wage a war to defend their values, finally realize that their love and understanding for each other can overcome every barrier. The young boy like Jagjit troubled in the adopted nation, finds hard to explain things to his mother. As she could not comprehend the real problem of her son becomes a drug trafficker and finally an armed gangster. Jagjit's failure is due to lack of communication between the younger and the older generation. As Jagjit and his mother do not have genuine relationship it transforms the little innocent boy to a drug trafficker and makes his life a meaningless one. Manu, a young man of seventeen, is a senior at Ridgefield High School. His admiration for American culture led to confrontation with his first generation father who believes in the traditional value of his homeland. Manu disagrees with his father's conservative beliefs. Whereas he had a great desire to attend the school, it seems to be very uncultured and unacceptable as far as his father is concerned.

While most of the immigrants assimilate and prospers economically there are others who lose their jobs or worse, their children also. The Post-colonial Indian immigrants in United States experience intoxicating levels of freedom, but they are also struck by the insidious racism that lay beneath the surface of that liberty. It is a subtle and subversive form of prejudice. A good example of racial prejudice in the novel is Jagjit, a timid little Punjabi boy, who is estranged and racially discriminated and assaulted at school for not knowing English and for not belonging: "Talk English Son of abitch, Speak up nigger wetback asshole

(56)". To Jegjit, the country he adopts is unfriendly and he is alienated from other boys and physically harassed for the turban he wears.

The story of Mohan is equally poignant like that of Jagjit. He is also subject to undergo a severe kind of racism in his store. It leaves him crippled not only physically but also emotionally. His hopes and aspirations about this new country are smashed into pieces. Innocent immigrant like Mohan is targeted by white-teenagers in America. Eventually Mohan's miserable condition forces him to return home with a broken heart. Haroun faces an unfriendly atmosphere of hostility in his own country and therefore comes to America to build up a new future. Haroun's dream to ensure new life in this new country leaves him as a wounded creature. He is dreadfully attacked in the taxi by some robbers, which is rather an indirect kind of racial attack. But ultimately, Haroun reconstructs a new life against all kinds of hardships, thus for him the immigrant dream had come true eventually.

In spite of the intoxicating level of liberty in America, every immigrant suffers untold pains of racist attack which is inevitable in the immigrant land; all these kinds of racial misgivings are a part of immigrant life. They have to struggle against the challenges in order to come to the forefront. Indian men in the diasporic society too face multiple situations of conflict such as born of generational differences; issues of acculturation in a new environment and regardless of being in America create a complex situation for Indo – Americans quite hopelessly entangled. In the novel, the traditionally oriented Geeta's grandfather feels a sort of misfit with the typical incontinences of life in America. The transition from one land, culture and environment to another at an advanced age had not been smooth for the elderly man. For him the real predicament is in fact the new civilization he interfaces with.

The mindset of the old man has a different set of expectations. Therefore, he lacks the preparedness to face or accept such a condition in a foreign land. In such cases, his life becomes a void, devoid of meaning of existence. There is no purpose or object for him to live to raise his granddaughter. Haroun, a fresh immigrant struggles with the challenges of assimilation. His initial hardships shatter all his dreams. Despite the discomfort in the diasporic land, he has been able to manage or adjust to the new Socio – cultural environment. Taking full view of the reality, he develops as much positive attitude as possible to come to terms with the changed circumstance. Finally, he feels reasonably resettled by being nostalgic about the Indian environment. Mohan is the other poor Indo-American who finds it hard to

adjust to such wasteful abundance in America. His effort to grasp the nature of the new system results in endless hardships. Even the firm – minded person like Mohan loses confidence to live alone with humiliation and injustice and he becomes weak in body and mind in the diasporic Society. Even though the young teenager Manu is exposed to the good aspects of Indian culture and tradition, he gets acquainted with the uncultured American lifestyle. All his parent's dreams about him are shattered when he loses himself in America.

For most men, life in a diasporic society reminds one of the falls of the frost in some cases and of the spring in a few cases. Such multiple reality of the Indian diaspora creates a new reality. Women from different walks of life have different opinion about the way of life in the diasporic society. Despite cross culture pressures there is a conflict of values among Indo-American women as they are not prepared to manage with the larger American system. Geeta continues to be the object of conflicting values of her mother Sheela whose misconceived effort to keep her young daughter to be “Indian” irritates the young girl. The Indian mother becomes more conservative than her husband in the treatment of her daughter. Sheela does not like the licentious living pattern of Americans and fears that her daughter would be sucked into the permissive life of the Whites when she grows. Geeta is more individualistic and independent-minded and finds it hard to sustain the traditional life style. It becomes difficult to maintain her way of life in a small isolated community.

The alien environment makes Geeta's mother worry about her daughter who might prefer a spouse from other racial community. So she insists on her daughter to maintain her Indianness and to be more tradition – bound and pliable to her. Geeta dislikes one of the undesirable characteristics of Indian culture – the caste system which has become a taboo in her motherland and not in America. Caste awareness is non – existence in a diasporic society. She adopts the American mainstream without losing her identity and retains the essence of her identity in order to assimilate with the mainstream. Geeta has blended two cultures and living styles in varying degrees even in the American mainstream, she is still intensely aware of her roots. All these clearly manifest the disconnection that exists between Geeta and her mother since both the women fail to understand each other. Daksha is family -centric and oriented to Indian culture. She has fully adopted the Western work-ethics and rigors of working life. She preserves family life by fulfilling the needs of her mother-in-law. She strives to adjust with her mother-in-law and apart from her work load; she opts for a new life

in the new country. Daksha's enriching experience of love and compassion for her mother-in-law enriches her relationship. Closeness is the essence and secret of her relationship. She is well-balanced between the work and the family. It is quite fruitful to perpetuate her relationship. It is difficult to draw a neat world map of the cultural path of Indo – American women. They might create a state of unpreparedness to face the changing times and take independent decision. Apparently they are either balanced or unbalanced in a diasporic society,

Post-colonial Indo-Americans in general, counter a pull of Indian tradition and American mainstream alternatively. So there is a natural clash between the demands of Indian culture and American system among them. Some are rebelling against the American system and trying to adopt Indian culture there. But another set of immigrants are trying to cope up with two cultures and feel a kind of disconnection with the native culture, as well as the culture of their adopted country. Manu a young teenager from Indo-American community is confronted with personal conflict rooted in his father's expectations to fit into Indian community. He is being exposed to the Western culture and as the time rolls by, he is more prone to overwhelming American influence and increasingly moves in the socializing grooves of American society. He passed most of his time outside with non-Indian friends. His father anticipates him to be homebound to avoid the American 'vices' of drinking partying and dating.

While Manu, being an adolescent, hates his Indian heritage and adds pressure to his father making it almost too tough to bear. He does not feel lost in a foreign land, because America is his home now. He is confident and competent to deal with the larger American system by breaking away from the Indian mode of his parent's life style. His father faces the deep – seated problems of his son in the American society such as alcohol, drugs and premarital sex which are taboos in Indian community. He has non – stop worries about his son who fails to realize the functional role and emotional aspects concerning his community. The conflict of father versus son results in endless disconnection between them both. Usually on Mondays the store is officially closed as it is the mother's day. It is the day for the mother to be with their daughters. Unusually an American comes to her shop in the daylight. Tilo gives him chanaachur, kalo mariachi and peppercorn as he looks sad.

The American told her about his father, a quiet man who worked in a oil refinery in Richmond. His mother is a nice woman, who always keeps the home clean. They live in a

small house on the edge of a rundown neighborhood. Basically his father was an orphan and he married his mother who was a waitress. The American has a great admiration for his mother as she always dressed herself neatly like a movie star and her name was Celestine. One day a man came to his house in a weekday and called his mother by her old name Evvie. They both began quarrelling. Next morning his mother took him to the small clapboard house. There they saw an old man in bed, who was supposed to be his mother's grandfather. Before he left the store, the American told Tilo that his name was Raven and he was embarrassed by his American name.

Raven left the store, she felt the warmth of her American friend. Accidentally she saw the headlines in the old newspaper "Dotbusters Go Free". As she never reads newspaper that is delivered to the store weekly, events in the outer world are nothing to do with the mistress. But by reading the headlines she now understands the important events that happen around her. After some days she receives a letter from Raven in which he requests Tilo to accompany him the next day to the place he loves. That night, Tilo applies some spices on her face in order to look young. Next morning the American arrives with a beautiful gift a white dress. Although she refuses it first, later she accepts to wear it. Now Raven takes Tilo with him to the Pacific beach where they have their wine. For Tilo it is totally a different experience. Raven continues his story. He told her that his mother was a granddaughter of the old man. But she left him and married his father. The old man showed him some rare pictures, including the picture of Raven playing baseball. The old man then held a bird in his hand, all on a sudden it disappeared and now Raven felt a kind of power in him. Later, he was taken away by his mother. Slowly Raven began to hate his mother, because he thought she was a great hypocrite who used to pretend before everyone. Basically she imbibed the Indian culture, but refused to reveal it. Raven was angry with his mother as she was the reason for losing the bird that day. Due to the halter towards his mother he started moving with bad friends. So the principal complained to his mother about her son. Although she scolded and warned him, she never informed his father. Both of them used to pretend before his father as if nothing has happened one day his father died in an accident. His mother cried as if her own life ended. Raven was shocked and after the death of his father, he started loving his mother. When Tilo saw the bargain village girls in the beach, she was afraid that they may recognize her.

When Tilo enters her store the next day she has new promise with her. The shampati fire-whispers therefore warn her that within three days, she must return to the island from

America as she had broken many rules. She is told that she should not prefer Redchillies because the city is already filled with anger. But Tilo thinks that Redchilli is the final remedy. There are only two more days left for her, to return to the island. So she is busy in her work. Now comes Raven to the store, but she never reveals to him that she is going out of business. Raven tells her that after his father's death things had changed a lot and, slowly his grandfather's power came to him after his death. Although Raven and his mother were separated after his father's death, she used to write him letters, but he never wrote back to her. Later, he joined army and then went to business school. He began to earn more money used to send certain amount to his mother. After sometime he lost his connection with his mother. Without his mother, his golden life seemed to lose some of its glitter and boredom encountered him. One day, his Indian friend gave him a mushroom, which was as safe as mother's milk. But it was poisonous, so he was admitted in the hospital and luckily he was saved. He had a terrible dream on that thirsty night. He stood in a hill of ashes and felt the earthly paradise. When he opened his eyes, he was in California and the dream meant that there is a woman down in Oakland called Tilo who will help to regain the earthly paradise. Now Raven asks Tilo to accompany him and help him to regain the earthly paradise.

The bougainvillea girls in miniskirts come to her shop and tell her that they have to do something ethnic in their office. So Tilo suggests vegetable pub and Raven suggests crispy papads and mango nectar that go great with the dish. So the girls really love Raven very much and give him their visiting card. When everyone leaves the shop, she thinks of Raven and the bougainvillea girls. She is little jealous also. Tilo asks Makaradwaj King to give her a spice that will make her more beautiful for one night so that Raven will not think of other women in his life. Next morning when she wakes up, she looks very bright and beautiful. As it is the last day she is busy in the store and there are a lot of customers coming for purchase.

At last when the day is over and all the customers are gone, she puts on the dress Raven gave her and she looks pretty, young and ageless. Finally Tilo leaves her domain, the beautiful, organized spice store in order to fulfill individual desire. Tilo's transformation of her body is due to her desire to have a sexual relationship with Raven out of the institutional sanctions, and go against the laws of the order of mistresses. Now, she is in touch with her own sexuality. She can no longer assuage others' pains or even see into the future but she can live the life of a young woman. But Tilo feels so guilty and worried about her act. At the end of the third day, she makes a pyre in the centre of the room and sprinkles sesame the spice that protects her through her long journey. Tilo sits in the centre on the pyre of spices and

holds a single chili in her hand and she is chanting the words repeatedly but nothing happens. It seems that she is doomed to live in this pitiless world as an old woman without power and livelihood like Tilottama, dancer of Gods. Tilo undergoes a silent kind of punishment. Now she hears the sound of tremors of earthquake. She thinks that the quake will kill her. In an unconscious state, Tilo thinks that she is dead. She cannot comprehend whether it is a spice's game or the first mother's. She hears the whisper that tells her that she had accepted the punishment without battle. It is therefore more than enough for her. Raven comes to rescue Tilo. She is lying naked betwixt the debris. After seeing her condition he is scared for the first time in his life and he cannot think his life without her. He carried her inside the car, but unfortunately the car hit the road moving north and finally reaches the Richmond Bridge and the paradise.

Tilo is very upset and regrets deeply for all those who suffer in the burning city. Now she likes to return to Oakland as she cannot just leave such suffering behind. On hearing this, Raven is shocked and tells her that all these days she lives for others and now, it is time to live for her. Raven is all the more frustrated. Tilo tells him that others' happiness is more important than her own. She asks him to help her find a new name. Raven christens her Maya meaning Illusion, Spell, enchantment, or the power that keeps the imperfect world going day after day. Tilo becomes Maya, the young woman who has abandoned her special powers and conjures her new home through an act of cultural translation.

### **Narrative Techniques in *The Mistress of Spices***

The novel *The Mistress of Spices* adopts a more mature structural configuration in order to discuss the Post-colonial Indian diaspora. Each chapter contains detail about an individual, about a cultural encounter; the stories are then braided together in the novel. The form of the fable is effectively used in the novel, The "Fabulous" world of the mistress imparts a surreal quality to the novel; the order of the mistresses is and is not patriarchy; the structures overlap and specific histories coincide. The novel is cloaked in fantasy and the prologue, with its strong poetic overtone convinces us that this is literature of fantasy. However, a strong undercurrent of realism runs from the very beginning of the novel and becomes manifest later on. What is astounding is that this fantasy and reality never jar on our senses. Divakaruni modifies the ancient Indian legends and the myth of the bird Shampati, which like the phoenix rises from the ashes. The legend of Shampati as a dominant theme holds the story together. As the novel progresses, the fantasy element diminishes and the

realistic nature becomes prominent. The plot of this novel is engaging enough and the introduction of a potential romantic partner for Tilo is a little contrived. It seems that her own story is enough, without the introduction of a character from other mythical tradition.

The tone and the style of the novel are carefully balanced between the fabulous and the concrete. This magical realism is not the least distracting. The real battered wife easily occupies the same page as the whispered messages of the spices. Tilo is just a skilled, traditional healer, dispensing herbal remedies to the credulous and skeptical alike. The mention of traditional Hindu deities and myths further contributes to the legendary quality of the tale. The novel conveys a sense more of dramatic fiction than of mysticism or science – fiction. This novel is a blend of magical realism with ancient Indian lore and is reminiscent of the great Latin and South American legends. Divakaruni in this novel bridges the purely realistic world and the mythic one. It is a depiction of the harsh realities of inner-city life mixed with a sense of the mythical world. It also involves a bridging of barriers not only boundaries between life and death but between everyday world and the mythic one. The realistic part of the novel reflects the atmosphere of contemporary urban American life, it also offers a window to the multicultural world of the Immigrants who suffer and struggle in the diasporic society. The narrator Tilo has got a mythical significance. Tilo, short name for Tilottama is the most beautiful Apsara of Rain God and the most elegant dancer in Indra's court. When Brahma was making Tilottama to be the chief dancer in Indras court, he warned her never to give her love to any man but only to the dance. But Tilottama disobeyed and had a fall. She was banished to earth to live as a mortal for seven births - seven mortal lives of illness and age. In the same way, Tilo, the narrator of the novel disobeyed and lost her spell. She allowed herself to transgress the taboo of loving a mortal, which would cause her to lose her divine existence. Tilo's name has got yet another mythical significance. It refers to the sesame seed which under the sway of plant Venus turns, gold-brown when touched by flame. Mothers pray for their girl children to have noses shaped like the flower of sesame. Tilo, which is grounded into paste with sandal wood, cures diseases of heart and liver. Tilo, when fried in its own oil, restores luster and restores lost interest in life. Tilottama like the seed becomes the life – giver and restorer of health and hope. Eventually Tilo changes her name to Maya, the Hindu term defining the everyday world of desire, pain and joy the world of illusion, a place of inevitable sorrow from which man is trying to escape.

Divakaruni makes use of the myth of Sea – Serpent, which sleeps all day in caves of coral, and ascends to the surface only when Dhruva star of the north, pours its vial of milk –

light over the ocean. Its skin like molten gold and the rippled tongue like the polished silver are seldom seen by the mortal eyes. Another myth is shampati, a bird which although divided into conflagration comes alive from ashes which coincide with Tilo and Raven. Divakaruni makes use of the folk tales which she has remembered from her childhood, such as the sleeping city under the ocean and the speaking serpents. But she has changed them almost completely in the novel of the spices. She refers to the speaking serpent as a fantastic creature that periodically makes prophecies in the novel. The speaking serpent has a different kind of magic and it represents the grace of the universe, and it is not governed by logic but come to the mortal as a blessing.

Divakaruni's spices are used metaphorically but not just flavors. They have magical powers and they provide remedies for physical maladies and cures spiritual ills. Turmeric is one of the auspicious spices among them. Sunday is a special day for turmeric and it is used to smear on the heads of new burns for luck. It is also used as an ointment as it has also got a meditative power. Some other spices are lotus root for lifetime passionate love and sesame, the protector of long journey. These spices play a significant role in the novel, but they have to be used carefully, as their misuse could be dangerous. All these myths, folk tales and secret of spices contribute to the Indianness of the novel. Tilo's life in the island is different from the ordinary life of other people. She follows different set of rules. According to her, mistress of spices must feel other's pain; Mistress must leave her own passions behind; Events in the outer world are nothing to the mistress. The narrator Tilo portrays the magical power of the different spices and her life in the island is highly magical in outlook.

Divakaruni explains that "The book is a metaphor" and the characters are metaphorical. But they are also realistic and very human. They exist on both levels at once (149). Tilo, for instance, is her own person but she is also a metaphor for the struggle between social responsibility and personal happiness. The novelist also makes use of plenty of similes throughout the novel. Each chapter is filled with rich similes that make the novel highly lyrical. The readers really enjoy the different variety of similes. Divakaruni uses pomegranates very often in her similes: "Disobedient tears like" (15) / "Warm rain fell like pomegranate seeds" (54) / "My heart breaks open like pomegranates" (231). She offers some wonderful similes in the novel: Angry words like buzzing bees hide the honey underneath (135) / Tongue that could lash like lightning (52) / The little hairs on chest crisp as grass (113) Heart worrying its bars like a caged animal (141). These similes enrich her novel. It is comprehensible and highly attractive. The author makes use of some excellent images.

Among them are the images that illustrate fog when it is surrounded by the mistresses, “Cleaving through the milk –thick fog their edges hard and shining” (53).

### Conclusion

The novel is a fable that ends with the moral note from the narrator Tilo. she is drawn towards the mortal Raven, at the end she corrects herself. It ends with the note that the human need for love and inter connectedness enhances not only the individual, but enriches society and ameliorates many of its sorrows that leaves the reader with both joy and hope. The novel *The Mistress of Spices* is written in the first person narration. Tilo is the narrator, who narrates past and present actions alternatively and it is a mixture of reality, myth and fable. Thus, the author wants the novel to work on several levels simultaneously. It is a story of passion and magic. It draws heavily on the author’s own experiences as an immigrant.

Divakaruni also recognizes the positive aspects of traditional culture and the value it places on family and community. The author likes her fiction, walks a careful line between the two worlds. she sometimes finds herself struggling to balance the demands of family and career, tradition and modernity. This is the predicament not only of the novelist but all the Post – colonial immigrants settled in alien countries. The Post –colonial Indo – Americans in the novels of Divakaruni in general fail to work as a cultural link between the homeland and the host land to create a constructive or conjunctive tripod. They do not mature enough to distinguish between the good and the undesirable features of both the American and Indian system. They therefore are unable to adjust either with the alien people or their culture.

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