

DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S THE MISTRESS OF SPICES

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Dr.P.NAINAR SUMATHI

*Assistant Professor, Department of English
National College, Tiruchirapalli*

The experience of migration and living in diaspora have produced plethora of studies on the recent post-colonial literature, criticism and theory. The immigrant issues problems have being explored by diasporic writers like Hanif kureishi, Bharathi Mukerjee, Amitav Ghosh, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others in their works. In recent years much critical interest has grown in the writings of Indian immigrant writers settled in the U.S. They raise their voice against the mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the dislocated people from their homeland India .Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni the Bengal born writer immigrated to the U.S. is one of the fore most writers of the Diasporic literature. She often focuses on characters balancing two worlds, particularly Indian immigrants struggling for peaceful life in America. The United States of America a land of opportunities and a culturally pluralistic society is no exception to it. It is land that opens up avenues for all those immigrants who initially seek their economic condition. The aspiring and ambitious individual uproot themselves from their cultural moorings and migrate to countries which promise them better living condition and comforts. The immigrant who carries dreams of aspiration also carries with him his nature identity. His reluctance to shed his identity makes it difficult for him to get assimilated in his new home. The natives too are not ready to accept him without any reservation. This harsh reality, besides causing innumerable problems to the co-migrant, leads to various tensions in the social fabric. Divakaruni's books are directed to women of all races and faith who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their culture and religion. The novel *The Mistress of Spices* has been projected in Divakaruni,s bestselling novel written in a unique style that blends prose and poetry, magic and reality was named one of the top 100 books of the 20th century by the San Francisco Chronicle. Divakaruni's comments, "I wrote the book in a spirit of play, collapsing timeless one of myth in my attempt to create a modern

fable."(Video:PBS Interview on Sister of My Heart, Mistress of Spices, and Creative Writings). She states: My characters struggle in the balance family responsibilities and individual happiness which is in a way, at the centre of the conflict between our Hindu culture ,which always shows the mother as the giver, as the nurturer as sacrificing herself for the good of the family and the western concept of self happiness.

The mistress of spices is a unique blend of prose and poetry, as Laura Merlin in a review in World Literature Today says "in this exuberant first novel builds up an enchanted story upon the fault line in American identity that lies between the self and community" (Review of *The Mistress of Spices* The world Literature Today, 207).Magical, tantalizing and sensual *The Mistress of Spices* is the story of a young woman born in another time, in a faraway place, who is trained in the art of spices and or claimed as a mistress charged with special powers. Made immortal in an initiation by fire, she travels to modern-day Oakland and begins to administer her curatives. An unexpected romance confronts her with choice between her supernatural existence and the vicissitudes of contemporary life. It is a spell-binding and hypnotizing tale of joy and sorrow and women's special powers.

The Mistress of Spices a combination of myth and romance. She recreates a world of mythology in which spices play a significant role in the life of the protagonist and the lives of the immigrants. Her cultural past enables her to create this world of mythology. The flourishing myths ,legends and folk tales offer the essential ingredients for perfect setting for a fairy tale. Divakaruni focuses on the conflict between the Indian and the American culture and the experience the Indians undergo in America in her writings. At the very beginning of the novel, Divakaruni describes India as a "land of ardent poetry and aquamarine features"[MS3]. This sums up the exotic picture of India seen through the eyes of the westerner. *The Mistress of Spices* tells the story of magic in spices as wielded by a masquerading of old woman who in reality is young and full of vigour.

The name Tilo is short for Tilottama, named after the sun burnished sesame seed, spice of nourishment and she has been blessed by the old one as "Remember , you are not important .No mistress is What is important is the store and the spices" [MS5]. Tilo born as Nayan-Tara began to foretell what would happened predict what would have happened. She could know who stole Banku, the water carrier's buffalo, which servant was sleeping with her master, where the gold was buried under the earth, why the weaver's daughter stopped talking, how to find jamindar's lost ring and also warned the village headman of the floods before they came.

Gifts came from all sources and Tilo led an affluent life. People from every walk of life praised her. One day the pirates came to know of her they raided and pillaged and burned the huts. Tilo tried to stop them and cried out all the charms and made the signs of power to stop them. In the end they carried her through the burning village . She was dazed by shock and shame also by the new helplessness. The pirates chief named her

'Bhagyavathi', Bringer of luck. She became the queen of pirates . She let her pirates to fame and glory but she had secret pain in her heart.

Tilo's mystic ways continue and she is helped by snakes, oldest of creatures, closest to the earth mother, all sinew and glide against her breast "Always I have loved them"(MS21) says Tilo. The snakes wanted her to be sarpa kanya, snake maiden. But Tilo was fascinated by the spice island when Tilo shooked her hand with the Old one, it was received calmly by the Old one. The hands should know to sing to the spices. Tilo's hands were the only one in which the spices would sing back. She has to pass through the ceremony of purification. The serpents warned her "you will lose everything, foolish one, sight, voice, and name, perhaps even self "(MS25). Tilo is transmigrated in to the body of an aging woman who run an Indian grocery store." wise woman shaman herb healer, come to make things right" (MS28). Tilo is allowed to work her spells and magic only within the con fines of her rundown grocery store and only on her Indian immigrant coustomers.Tilo must remain aloof and refrain from any human touch. She states: "I Tilo architect of the immigrant dream" (MS29). She is the life giver, restorer of health and hope. Here Divakaruni weaves compelling stories of adventures, defeats and triumphs in the lives of characters that populate her store and her novel.

Divakaruni's inquiry in to transculturalism is at once allusive subtle and lyrical which cuts through the Indian stereotypes and presents the reader with powerful allegories of transformation and change for example "Daksha to whom no one listens so she has forgotten to say "No" (83) is the workhorse in the family hierarchy of an aging mother-in-law and a husband who will not help around the house. Daksha is the nurse in the AIDS ward.Tilo ministers Daksha through her spices, "Dhaksha here is the seed of black pepper to be boiled whole and drunk to loosen your throat so you can learn to say "NO" that ward so hard for an Indian woman".

The story of ten and a half year old Jagjit who is trautamatised at school, "Talk English son of a bitch", shows the cultural trauma the young boy undergoes. At school he is physically harassed for wearing a green turban and his long uncut hair. His mother always shouts at him for having spoiled his dress. So Tilo decides to play on him cinnamon to tuck unseen in his turban. It will make all things easy. It is the destroyer of the enemies.

Mohan is contrast to Jagjit. Mohan is yet another victim of violence in America. We see racial discrimination spreading when Mohan is brutally attacked by the skinheads while closing his restraint for the night. The ruffians scream at him, "son of a bitch Indian should a stayed in your goddamn country" (MS170). Thinking of Mohan Tilo muses "O Mohan broken in body broken in mind by America" (MS172). Betrayed by American injustice Mohan smashes everything in sight and returns to India a broken man.

Haroun, a driver wishes Tilo to read his palm.Tilo unravels the American dream and says "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" (MS28). She administers kalojire, spice of the dark planet ketu, protector against the evil eye for Haroun to cover what fate has written for him.

The Indian –American tangle of culture is well shown in the episode of Geetha and her grandfather. The touch of Indianess is largely seen in the language of the grandfather. That Geeta, how much make-up she is using all the time. Uff in my days only the English and the prostitutes were doing that. Good Indian girls were not ashamed of the face God has given them. You cannot think what all she is taking with her to work.....listen to what she is doing this last weekend. Bought a new car for herself, thousands and thousands of dollars it is costing..... (MS86). the grandfather is shocked when Geetha cuts her hair short, the hair being the essence of womanhood. Geetha replies "oh grandpa I need a new look" (MS89). She speaks about her love for Jaun Condero who is chicano. She is also ready to move in with him. The response of the grandfather is that he begs his son Ram to get a ticket to India. He is ready to bear severe pain from cramps which occurs due to the spices ministered by Tilo, to make his granddaughter come home. Geetha feels that she can make her parents agree for Jaun Condero since he is "real interested in Indian culture and especially our food. I cook it every once in a while at his apartment. You know Mexican cook with a lot of the same spices as we "(MS145).But the Indian spice work their magic and Geetha is reunited with the family. Spices play a crucial role as the whole novel is the spun out of them. The innovative method of introducing each chapter with the name of the spice, their origin and the myth concerned with reinforces the symbolic and spiritual qualities associated to spices in Indian culture and tradition. Every spice in the novel is endowed with human quality and Tilo uses them as the remedy for problems faced by the expatriate community.

Every character thus tries to fulfil their dreams and wishes either being successful or crumbling in their attempt. Each character is caught in a web and is helped by Tilo and her spices. Tilo the protagonist is forced to choose between the supernatural life of an immortal and vicissitudes of modern life. She is considered a witch woman with magical powers. She is portrayed as a living, breathing reality, one of the finest creations by Divakaruni. She is the structural and the magical pivot of the novel and the link in the novel. Tilo has to decide which part of her heritage she will keep and which part she will chose to abandon. Tilo's magical; power begins to crumble when she is drawn to the mysterious Raven, the lonely American. Tilo is unable to penetrate his psyche and must break all her vows to taste the forbidden fruit. And while "First Mother" may represent a mythical pull for the security of one's cultural and emotional ties to India the land of birth, the lonely American becomes the call to explore and forge the new identity in America's vast multicultural landscape.

The Mistress of spices is a fairy mistress represents the exotic India. Tilo is a perfect blend of heart and mind, the heart melting at the grievances of others and the mind concocting the exact remedy that is required. The spice function only as a medium

through which she can reach her customer's with their varied problems. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices* reveals before us the predicament of the immigrant Indians in America; with a very spicy touch. The novel also illustrates many of the complex conflicts that multi-ethnic groups experience in America

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