

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMATION

Every society is constantly in a state of change, of transformation, of metamorphoses. I think it is very important that it continues to be so to prevent the stagnation of our imaginations, our spirits, and our soul. What I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people . . . is the search for the new voice, this new identity, this new tradition, this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent. It is the combination of the best of both worlds combining them and coming up with something new. (Highway 5)

Women writers reflect their realistic persuasive feelings that have been experienced by them. They are wrapped in unfavourable and unpleasant issues that erupted in their life. They depict the painful break down of their own family and community.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with a hybrid identity is one such writer who establishes herself with the women writers who give their voice for emotional breakdown of women. Through her works she insists on the compelling need for women to have freedom from patriarchal chains. To an extent, they reconcile themselves to the rigidity, but when the imposed boundary breaks, they react.

Divakaruni is a remarkable South Asian writer whose writings comprise novels, short stories and poems. Her distinct experience of the expatriates is expressed in all her works. When the whole world assimilates the experiences of the immigrants,

the appearance of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's diasporic writings aptly provides torchlight to have a glimpse into the world of South Asian Literature.

Divakaruni visualizes in her women characters a new world, a world across the rainbow, where women rescue other women and do not depend on the men. The present study, **“Women at Crossroads: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Works”**, reflects the pulls and pressures of her women protagonists, their constant interplay of tradition and modernity and their suffering due to alienation. Her protagonists seek to synthesize traditions with the modern values which are the need of the hour. The thesis analyses the writer's sensitive nature that has been revealed through her various beliefs, concepts and perceptions.

The women expatriates cover each and every aspect of Divakaruni's consciousness. Her characters strive hard to establish themselves and to reach the other side of the road. As a matter of fact, the immigrants gain autonomy, freedom of expression and financial independence. But they have to fight against their loneliness and struggle for self-respect and self-identity. Though the immigrants exist in the foreign land, they, throughout their life keep longing for the mother land. Deeply drowned in Indian values, they are unable to bear up the artificial and unacceptable foreign values. The cultural fracture that she experiences in the modern society is mapped in her works. Divakaruni has become a permanent part of a larger community of immigrant women and she encompasses with a wider range of issues.

The proposed thesis is designed with six chapters. The first chapter “Introduction” presents the writer in her literary context. A general survey of diasporic writing has been taken up while sufficient focus has been made on a bunch

of diasporic writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Mena Abdullah, Vikram Seth, Meena Alexander, Bharathi Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie. Her writings are quite discernible subsuming the major constituents of diasporic writings. The chapter also traces Divakaruni's bio-sketch, her literary works and themes she has dealt in her works. Among her wide range of writings, the present research is made on the select works. Within her works an attempt has been made to study Divakaruni's portrayal of "Conflict between Two Worlds", "Emotional Crisis", "Realism and Fantasy", and "Inventing Identity" through her women characters. Her writings emerge from her own experience as well as her encounters with South Asian women through MAITRI, a helpline which affords the service of offering counselling to women suffering from domestic violence, depression and cultural alienation. Her vivid experiences get reflected in her writings. She successfully presents a balanced picture of the world of the expatriates in the crossroads. A literary survey of the Divakaruni's writings is briefly outlined. The survey reveals that researchers and critics have analysed Divakaruni's writings from various literary and thematic perspectives. However, less analysis has been made on the means of overcoming boundaries.

The second chapter titled "Conflict between Two Worlds" analyses the encounter between tradition and modernity. Even though the expatriate women are physically far away from the homeland, they are spiritually oriented towards their tradition. She shows how her characters are exposed to the new environment and sophistication in the host land. In all the five works, western values are viewed typically as modern and materialistic whereas Indian values are traditional and spiritual. The clash between adapting the strict traditions inherited from homeland and the modern society the immigrants encounter everyday in the hostland results in the trauma caused by a sense of an outsider.

The Mistress of Spices is a story full of fantasy and imagination. Divakaruni has created a modern fable with myth and magic destroying the realistic world. Tilotamma, the trained mistress undergoes various torments and finds difficult to fix her to the modern westernized culture. She struggles to retain her ancient ideas in the unfamiliar and unkind new world. Divakaruni is a fervent follower of Indian tradition and is well nurtured with Bengali customs. This is revealed in the decoration of Tilo's shop with Indian spices like chilli, turmeric, asafoetida, cinnamon, ginger, neem seed and pepper. This represents her as a woman immersed in Indian tradition.

Divakaruni highlights the false perception about tradition through an immigrant character, Ahuja. Against the backdrop of modernity, Ahuja highlights a false perception, where a woman going to work is believed to cause problems. Though Lalita, his wife likes to go for work she stays at home and lives happily with her husband. Divakaruni, even after crossing the border stresses the significance of tradition through the character Lalita. Caught between the two cultures Geeta's family also struggles at the crossroads.

In *Sister of My Heart* Divakaruni depicts her homeland Calcutta as an enchanting city. Though she feels comfortable in America she longs for her alienated community. The Chatterjee's family girls Anju and Sudha belong to an orthodox family, giving great importance to rituals, customs and values. Divakaruni shows how tradition is deep-rooted in the lives of her characters. Tradition plays an easy prey, particularly in women characters like Anju, Pishima and Sudha. Divakaruni confess, "I come from a very traditional family, but we weren't rich enough to own one of the mansions. But many of our friends did live in places like that" (127). Divakaruni says that moving to the US really made her regenerate her boundaries, and in some ways, helped her to reinvent herself as a woman.

Sudha towards the end instead of fighting her way out, she tries to prove herself by vacating her homeland. She flies to America, an easy route to escape the huddles of her native land. Divakaruni's compassion for the land of her origin is rich and expressed through the numerous nostalgically-coined lullabies, proverbs, stories, mythological allusions and popular songs.

In *Queen of Dreams* the second generation immigrant Rakhi creates a traditional gap with her mother Mrs. Gupta. This identified gap does not compromise the mother-daughter relationship. Mrs. Gupta fails to be an ideal Indian mother in teaching her daughter how to behave in an alien society without losing the traditional values inherited from the homeland. In the *Arranged Marriage*, almost all the women characters undergo the plight of suffering under the clutches of tradition and modernity. The protagonists like Sumita, Asha, and Preeti go through a terrible experience owing to the discrepancy between two cultures.

The third chapter "Emotional Crisis" expresses the deep emotional chaos experienced by Divakaruni's women characters. Emotional separation occurs in their relationship when one gets alienated or when one experiences mental stress, undergoes psychological trauma and encounters emotional crisis.

In *The Mistress of Spices* Tilo's sublime manifestation of her inner and outer world adds a rich emotional texture. After the ordination, she has no relation. The old mother strongly instructs her not to have any human relationship. This creates a solitary lace. Ultimately her search resumes its trail through Raven.

In *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*, Divakaruni highlights the importance and greatness of relationships. The two sisters create an exceptional knot

which remains to be the core of the novel as their affection travels into an ever ending journey. Anju and Sudha are sisters of their heart; even their mothers could not comprehend their love for each other. They were sentimentally united even when they were torn apart.

In *Queen of Dreams*, the mother-daughter relation is strained by some mysterious thoughts. Rakhi has not enjoyed her mother's love and concern. She liked to inherit her mother's foreseeing talent, but it was denied to her which disturbs her to a large extent. She weaves a new family configuration with loneliness and discernment. In *Arranged Marriage*, the battered women like Sumita, Jayanthi, Meera, Preeti, Anju, Runu, Meena and Asha experience emotional crisis. All long for love, independence, friendship, sisterhood and motherhood. When they fail to attain it or retain their relationship they lament and feel dissociated.

The fourth chapter "Realism and Fantasy" pictures the magical stories constituting various prisms. Divakaruni has employed this technique to release the tension of the real troubles of the world. Diasporic writers when unable to grasp controls over the external forces and when they sense dissatisfaction with the present state, travel to a wonderland which constitutes reality and fantasy. *The Mistress of Spices* is a perfect example for magical realism. Tilo being encountered with a spice mother crosses Shampati fire. Tilo has great fantasy for snakes; they provoke her inner urge to explore her. Divakaruni treats spices as character. When Tilo gets entertained with Raven, they speak and criticises her.

Similarly in *Sister of My Heart* Divakaruni brings the mysterious elements. The two books entitled *The Princess in Place of Snakes* and the *Queen of Swords*

secretly speak the sounding myth, fantasy and reality. In *Queen of Dreams* Mrs. Gupta as like Tilo shows less involvement in life and concentrates in her dream career. She uses dream as a vehicle to enter a world of illusion. Divakaruni with all her essence tries to capture the magnificence and radiance of fantasy. She realizes that fantasy endeavours her characters to live a real life.

The fifth chapter entitled “Inventing Identity” proves Divakaruni as a persevering writer. The unnecessary boundaries make her women characters get tied up to a tight situation and ultimately they break down all stereotypes and repositioned with a new life style. Divakaruni has made a new epistemology and tries to integrate the society. Their physical distance from their home and their encounters with new ways of life bestow upon them a crisis. Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* goes through four reincarnations to reach a destination. She undergoes a long transformation to identify her identity.

In *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* Anju and Sudha identify their individuality through self realization. The reinforcement of their will power helps them to invent their identity. In a broader perspective both Anju and Sudha pay assurance to each other and get actualized. They wish to survive independently without male influence.

Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams* is frustrated and yearns for her identity. On the contrary, Mrs. Gupta tries to erase all traces of her roots. Rakhi strives hard to learn her identity from her mother's Dream Journal. She is burdened by the unreliability of the past as well as the uncertainty of the future. She experiences a kind of emptiness.

Rakhi towards the end tries to compromise with her identity and attains self-confidence and gets succumbed to her husband.

The characters in *Arranged Marriage* manage to live in a suffocating environment. Later, knowing the realities, they undertake transactions and seek to pursue self-esteemed style. Divakaruni elaborately presents the pitiable condition of the expatriates through Asha, Mrinal, Preeti, Meena and others. In a multicultural community, in order to survive, the characters change their names and identities often with ease.

The last chapter “Summation” sums up the findings of the previous chapters. Divakaruni succeeds in demonstrating a democratic environment for women folk. She inextricably involves in the matters of the distressed and dislocated women and allows them to live in a world of fantasy. Women at crossroads encounter with many atrocities and consequently they fight against all odd anguishes.

The thesis thus attempts to reconcile Divakaruni's women protagonists to a new environment. Initially, Divakaruni's protagonists are encircled in various conflicts which create in them an emotional crisis, to escape the tortures they cleverly fly into the world of fantasy forgetting their realistic living and finally realize their position and decide to explore their identity. For that, they must cry and confide, protest and embrace, in short, exist so intensely to the environment. They are entangled with the cultures of the homeland and the hostland. Divakaruni's fragmented and fractured heroines are subjected to insidious discrimination and have to struggle against all atrocities in all walks of life. The divided consciousness that grows in them blasts at a particular juncture that helps them to identify their identity.

The shift in Divakaruni's writings record and reflect a very broad spectrum of life. It is interesting to note that as she invents her women expatriates' personality, the insecurity seems to slowly disappear. One could victimize many significant elements in her works, which create and recreate, construct and reconstruct a new and unblemished Sudha, Anju, Geeta, Tilo, Lalita, Rakhi, Asha , Preeti and many others. Divakaruni is neither a Feminist nor a Womanist but a creator of a conducive environment for the flowering of a New Woman with a difference. Her worry for womens' emancipation reflects itself powerfully in the fictional world that she has imaginatively constructed. Divakaruni visualises hopefully the dawn of the new era for women.

Divakaruni has not exclusively adopted a particular method to fashion the creative material into something rich and strange, but she has allowed the fictional space to be touched by various trends of theories like postcolonialism, post modernism, and multi-culturalism. Thus, Divakaruni's works lend themselves to layers of interpretation and form a rich canvas for further research.