Chapter IV

Cultural Dualism

The magnificent prospect of globalization, across the globe, has completely transformed the long-lasting general image of the contemporary Indian Writing in English: the main focus of the texts and the serious treatment of the subject matters are now crossing the borders of nations and cultures. Of the newly emerging writers, who express myriad voices of those once considered subaltern, Divakaruni is riding the crest of this new literary wave, as her accounts of the experience of the diasporas and its effects upon women not only provide the readers with insight into the lives of the Indian women immigrants in particular who currently reside in the United States, but also present a model with which one can better understand the processes through which minority identities are constructed. Padma Rangaswamy, a renowned writer on Indian Women Diaspora, notes in her novel, Nameste America, “The Post-1965 Indian immigrant women are a different breed altogether […] as articulate and organized professionals, they have expressed themselves in literature and recorded their immigrant experiences for posterity” (147).

The works of Divakaruni, in fact, paint a clear and precise picture of the diasporic experience of the Indian women immigrants in the United States which is best characterized by a state of liminality. The state of such a conscious awareness is created by the perpetual oscillation between contradictory conceptions of race and culture, time and geography. As a result, these women have been subjected to exist in this in-between space, by living in America, and develop an altered consciousness
which privileges them to preserving their own old traditional culture while at the same time adapting to their current American surroundings. The notion of such an altered consciousness in response to minority status has been expounded on most famously by W.E.B. Du Bois, an Afro-American writer, who terms the related changes in self-perception as the creation of double-consciousness. He describes it as “a strange thing, this double consciousness, […]. One ever feels his twoness […]; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body” (102). The emotional strain between two seemingly disparate identities is a complex problem that has been experienced by immigrants all over the world, and it is especially a salient issue in the multi-cultural environment of the United States.

The interstitial space lived in by the Indian women diaspora, which is considered as another version of Du Bois’s double consciousness, can be well understood and explained more clearly by the writers of Indian women diaspora. The prominent women characters of Divakaruni’s texts are caught between the traditional customs of India from which they have emigrated and their present experiences with the more westernized culture of America. They exist in between categorical constructions of racial and sexual identities. While living in such a liminal space, the self-perceptions of these women are dramatically altered, for a manner in which they themselves see changes due to the uncertain nature of their interstitial environment. They perceive their status through new and different lenses only to realize that the notion of a singular identity is a fallacy. The double consciousness appears ultimately to be a positive psychological element, the only possible solution to the conflicts that arise from cross-cultural adaptation. The women, that Divakaruni has created, are capable of living in the world in which the individuals exist not as a unified one, but
rather as hybrid and bicultural, bound by no borders and bipolar in the possibilities of creating consciousness and inventing identities.

Divakaruni’s works reflect the diasporic Indian women’s struggle in the process of cultural adaptation and identity formation. As the women struggle to define themselves as Indian and American, they find that their self-perceptions and self-identifications are contingent upon the particular realm that they are occupying, and a conflict of consciousness emerges when contrasting self-perceptions exist simultaneously. In the private realm, comprised of the domestic and sexual spheres, traditional Indian culture assumes specific duties of women; and strict conceptions of morality are held in high esteem, transgressed only by those considered daring and depraved. Contrary to this, in the public realm which is comprised of experiences outside of the home and especially in the professional sphere, there is a sense of freedom of self-expression on many levels. As a result of these two different forces, the pressures from family and career often begin to clash, resulting in one of the increasingly common conflicts they experience in the process of cultural adaptation.

The Indian women immigrants settled in the United States are living in between two diverse worlds: the world of their parents, culture and community as well as the American world of their profession and education, and so their identity consists of a bicultural theme. It is found to be an amalgamation of some of the more apparent austere values of the East that include family as central, respect of elders, living by custom, ritual and religion, and some of the modern liberal values of the West such as independence, technological and material development, and personal freedom. These immigrants, who have roots in vastly different cultures in India, have to get involved in maintaining their traditions and heritage, while changing their way
of life in America to adapt into a new culture. They manage to straddle two cultures at once while developing an identity that is inherently Indian American. Thus, the identity development results in a complex, and fascinating biculturalism or otherwise called “cultural dualism” (Rutter, 1149), i.e. a state that consists of two distinct cultural concepts or principles.

Identity defines an individual, differentiates one from the other, sets them apart and makes them recognizable or known. It is an individual’s sense of self as a member of an ethnic group and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense. It provides every individual a sense of belonging with the society based on his or her social experience. Additionally, it refers to identification or feeling of membership with others regarding the character, the spirit of a culture or the cultural ethos based on a sense of commonality of origin, beliefs, values, customs, or practices of a specific group of people. Melwani quotes the observation of Kalpana Kanwar of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: “Asian Indians have various levels of identity: the national identity (Indian), state or lingual identity (Himachal or Pahaadi), religious affiliation (Hindu), caste (Rajput) and clan or subcaste (Banyal), though not necessarily in that order. Depending upon the situation and the salience of the identity, different layers are revealed” (10).

The identity development is a continuous process which is conditioned by the influence of the family, cultural belief systems, community, and other related aspects. This process, for the immigrants, is crucial as it refers to adopting preferences of certain cultural values and systems which follow preference for values of the dominant culture in addition to the values found present in one’s own cultural group. It questions the values of both the minority and majority cultures and resolves the
conflicts to develop a cultural identity that selects elements from both the dominant and the minority cultural groups’ values. Most Indian values and communication styles, that stem from a collective perspective, are family focused and driven by duty and obligation rather than self-interest and personal desires. During the process of identity development, these Indian Americans select and integrate their private, public and collective selves. As a result, they start stressing on increasing their individuation and disengagement from the family as central to this process, which are not necessarily emphasized in traditional notions in Indian families. They are, finally, made to feel un-Indian. Though they experience cultural conflicts and identity dilemmas, yet they attempt to bring together the different value system of their home culture with that of mainstream American society while getting more exposed to western lifestyle and ideas of individuality through popular culture. Finally, they begin to resist the traditional beliefs and practices of their native culture even to the extent of ridiculing their old-fashioned ways. They feel their dualism as both Indian and American for their lives and identities have become bifurcated between the land of their birth and the land of the settlement.

Biculturalism is a common theme in the lives of a majority of Indian women [born in India and] raised in the United States. It “is the ability of a person to function effectively in more than one culture and also to switch roles back and forth as the situation changes” (Jambunathan, et al., 398). It is a constant blending of cultural contexts while functioning in two or more ethnic customs and traditions. The competencies and sensitivities associated with two cultures get integrated within a single person. The ethnic individuals adopt a variety of strategies in dealing with their dual cultural environment. For some, the primary ethnic group serves as the most
potent identification. Others adopt a more adaptive position or view themselves as members of two cultural worlds, switching identification according to situation.

Bicultural individuals locate themselves in a place between two cultural spaces, suggesting marginal competency and sensitivity in both cultures. It is a complex experience of loneliness and struggle to belong to two different cultures and generations. Being shuttled between American and Indian homes, Divakaruni’s women question the likelihood of ever finding the right balance between these two cultures. While they feel the inherent values such as collectivism, religious commitment and gender role differentiation of their native culture, the new environment promotes individualism, secularism and gender equality. The tension, this dualistic condition arouses, can lead to great psychological stress. Hegde (2004) argues that because of traveling between cultures, one’s ethnic identity needs to be constantly defined and redefined, and to be “negotiated between the self and the external world” (318). He or she, then, starts integrating his or her own ethnic culture and the host culture.

Divakaruni has herself claimed in many of her interviews that the diasporic subjects, especially women, are concerned about their identity, an identity which they try to reinvent constantly. She says in an interview: “We need to remain secure in our own identity but participate fully in the culture, politics and daily life of America. The important part of integration is that you don’t give up, you share. [...] – that is the duality of immigration” (Girish: 2007, online). These women’s diasporic status change their lives and consequently they become a hybrid or bicultural immigrant as explained by Antonia Navarro Tejero who comments that: “the proposed hybrid immigrant woman is that who, by re-evaluating her homeland’s culture, rejects
tradition to adapt to the new conventions found in the United States, no matter if those
customs are even more misogynist than those of India” (126).

Divakaruni’s Indian women, from different backgrounds and generations, have
attempted to understand and redefine themselves while gaining a bicultural identity in
the States. They develop fusion identities whereby they accommodate the norms,
attitudes and behavior patterns of their own culture and the American cultural systems
into one mindset. Adaptation and biculturalism are the processes that facilitate their
integration into the dominant society. These women appreciate western thought and
culture through their life experience, and, after living through the initial stages of
identity formation, feel within them the process of biculturalism begins to come to
terms with their constant push and pull worlds. The biculturalism, thus created, begins
to reshape and reinforce their identity as Indian American specifically. The personal
experiences of such women of Indian descent provide an insightful picture of what
many Indian Americans in general come in contact with the growing up in the States.

Divakaruni, like other immigrant writers who straddle between physical and
psychological borders of two different cultures, falls a victim to the tensions of binary
polarities such as “dislocation vs relocation, domicile vs diasporic consequences,
dispossession vs integration, heritage vs hybridity and exile vs involvement”
(Vijayasree, 221). She appears to be preoccupied with analyzing the pressures and
conflicts which women undergo in a social system which is still patriarchal to a larger
extent. When individuals travel across half the globe, from India to America, it can
“alter one’s belief and affect one’s perspectives” (Jadika, 15) but women are seen still
as detained in the same status of subjugation, without enjoying the freedom to air out
their beliefs and thoughts and even now restricted by male domination. It is also
considered as a phase in which women are questioning the system and “groping for their identities and their status both in the family set-up and the larger social structure” (Amin, 150). They seem to be oscillating between the urge for self-fulfillment and the demands for self-sacrifice. Divakaruni’s characters, especially women, feel trapped in cultural clutches and conventional restraints because they do not lead the life following the choice of their hearts but that of tradition. Hence they develop cultural cringe and long for freedom.

For the female protagonists in Divakaruni’s works, clothes, education, thinking about their own rights and pleasures become a signifier of modernity. The identity of modern women is associated with an elite “westernization”, and a repudiation of ancient and ostensibly timeless traditions. Even though the force of the rhetoric of nationalism, every now and then, enforces the fact that these traditions are selectively resurrected, yet they get amalgamated with the values of modernity. In her essay, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India”, Lata Mani has shown that the reconstructions of women’s experience can thus be fundamental to the invention of “tradition” and “modernity”, […]” (88). These convenient descriptions are significant in the study of the Diaspora while defining a community in flux. In any encounter involving the “east” and “west”, selfhood and nationhood are problematized.

Circumscribed by the markers of traditional identity, women find themselves living their lives as symbols of a national/communal identity, symbols that are not easily challenged in the home country but acquire a particular change in Diaspora. Divakaruni’s works provide a spectrum of feminist strong power or resistances in the process of immigration and they are part of a complex effort at creating a space for a
female subject where she can articulate her desires. This space is necessarily located outside the paradigm of traditional identity. For instance, Sumita and Abha, the protagonists of the stories “Clothes” and “Affair” respectively, rebel against functioning as the repository of national/cultural identity. They often interrogate their own westernization, but they do not want to be pushed back into playing crusaders for their community.

The story, “Clothes” provides Divakaruni’s perspective of feminist sensibility and the cultural dualism of the prime character, Sumita, a simple, homely girl from an Indian village who grows amidst the ecstasies of rural life, enjoying the charak fair and visiting the neighbor’s guava tree, taking long swims in the waters of the women’s lake, dallying with other maidens on a hot summer afternoon, and telling fairytales that she would marry a handsome prince who would take her to his fairy world, even as they braid each other’s hair in long, elaborate patterns. Amidst the typical Indian traditional imagination of heavenly happiness, the golden days of her childhood pass, slowly and undisturbed, couched within the romantic tower of fairy tales where innumerable maiden desires get born and nourished – mysterious dreams of a prince who would come someday and take her, far, far away, to the kingdom of the sky, where everything would be so tempting, so marvelous, so magical. Time flies along, in its own leisurely pace, and finally, one day, the prince of her heart indeed comes, “all the way from California” (AM, 18), to marry her and carry her to his kingdom beyond the oceans.

Sumita feels that life in California, with her husband, is a garden of bliss and fruitfulness. America, the vivid, vibrant, vivacious land of the fairytales, unfolds its own wonders. Sumita becomes strangely surprised on learning that the name of her
husband’s store is “7-Eleven” (AM, 21), which seems quite a strange, exotic and risky name to her, because back in her home, she knows people always name their shops piously “after gods and goddesses – Ganesh Sweet House, Lakshmi Vastralaya for Fine Saris” (AM, 21), as a signal of good luck. She is also surprised when Somesh tells her that for the Americans, drinking is a normal routine – “It’s a part of their culture, not considered immoral [...] , there’s nothing wrong with it” (AM, 21). Sumita compares it with what her father used to tell about their village toddy shops where alcohol, “dark, stinking dens of vice” (AM, 21), is sold. She indeed begins to wonder what America really is.

For Sumita, America becomes a haven of desire and promise: “a kingdom beyond the seven seas” (AM, 18). After she comes to America, her husband buys her American clothes. Though she cannot wear these clothes while she and her husband live with his parents, she models them for him in the privacy of their bedroom and dreams of wearing them when they move from their joint-family situation to an American style nuclear family, minus his parents. The clothes in this story are symbolic: the Indian sari is a symbol of native cultural entrapment whereas the western attire of skirt and blouse are symbols of Sumita’s affiliation to western feminist liberation.

Sumita moves from Calcutta to California, into a small apartment that she shares with her new husband and his parents. She describes the difference between an Indian home and the American world outside and the contradictory feelings that emerge from the disconnection between the two spheres:

That’s our dream (mine more than his, I suspect) – moving out of this two-room apartment where it seems to me if we all
breathed in at once, there would be no air left. [...] I stand inside this glass world, watching helplessly as America rushes by, wanting to scream. Then I’m ashamed. Mita, I tell myself, you’re growing westernized. Back home you’d never have felt this way. (AM, 25-26)

While describing her home in California, she feels as if she has never left India and friends of her youth. Time and space are motionless, whereas outside, in America, they are rushing by, constantly shifting and transforming while the onlooker simply observes from a rather removed perspective.

The traditions Sumita follows i.e. covering her head with her sari, serving tea to her mother-in-law’s friends, hiding overt sexual activity, and never addressing her husband by his name are all signs of respect in India and are strictly maintained in her home in California too. She recognizes that she feels resentment toward these traditions and the utter Indianness of the home, and she longs to partake some of the refined values of America that is outside her re-created Calcutta world. She is then plagued by feelings of shame for what she perceives as her increasing yearning for a more westernized self, even while she does not want to ignore her strong desire for change and assimilation. Sumita develops different perceptions of herself in response to this emotional tension – while at home, she sees herself as the traditional sari-clad Indian housewife, subservient, meek, and modest, living life in the Indian way and the moment that she entertains thoughts of leaving her home, however, she views herself as independent, confident, and progressive. She is aware of her conflicting desires and her luminal psychological position, thus she perceives herself as in-between or
bicultrual, the guilt-ridden subservient wife and the confident yet claustrophobic woman.

Sumita comes to perceive herself with various self-perceptions existing simultaneously. Although she has not actually left her home for her husband’s store, she has created a romantic vision of it, and with it, an entirely new self-perception. She thinks,

But I have another plan, [...]. I want to stand behind the counter in the cream-and-brown skirt set (color of earth, color of seeds) and ring up purchases. The register drawer will glide open. Confident, I will count out green dollars and silver quarters. Gleaming copper pennies. [...] (I have never visited the store – my in-laws don’t consider it proper for a wife – but of course I know exactly what it looks like.) I will charm the customers with my smile, so that they will return again and again just to hear me telling them to have a nice day. (AM, 27)

Since actual physical movement away from the home is forbidden to Sumita, she must resort to creating her own picture of that which lies outside, and simply envisioning what she imagines America to be becomes enough to change her self-perception so that she is no longer an Indian housewife only, but also a working westernized woman as well as in between these two roles.

The feminine psyche, when gets exposed to an advanced culture that advocates the egalitarian principle of advocating equal social, political, and economic rights and opportunities to all, irrespective of their race, creed, and gender, it starts moving towards it to adopt the customs and values of it and wishing to stay within it viewing
it as a safe haven for its turbulent emotional condition. Sumita’s preference to wear American clothes like Jeans and T-shirts, her dreams to move out to a separate house from her in-laws to lead an American life, and her desire to assist her husband in running the store profitably are seen as various instances that show the amazing amalgamation of highly sophisticated American values with already existing inherent orthodox Indian traditional values. While living in America, she feels a peculiar sensation runs up her spine and it seems to her as if she has been transformed anew into another radical being, and has taken on a new, bicultural identity that is quite unknown. She finds herself stuck in the tug of war between the enchanting prospects of a bold future and the cold fears of losing the past. However interestingly, that the very past and its norms, which she apprehends to lose, give her the inspiration of diving into the future to become bicultural.

An unidentified gunman shoots Sumita’s husband dead. One moment of crisis, and the silvery world of marriage, the arbor of love, the dreams of conjugal bliss, the fountains of expectations, all fall and crumble before her eyes like a house of cards left exposed in the storm. When her in-laws want to take her back to India, the words of her husband, “I want you to go to college. Choose a career” (AM, 31), thunder her head like the poundings of a thousand hammers. The desire for survival gives her an alarmingly strong impetus, and she resolves to fight her way. She realizes that one is lost only when he or she let go off his or her life. Life may be heartless, merciless, despairing yet one has to survive.

Sumita thinks of the faces of all those smiling American children whom she has dreamt of teaching. She dreams of herself in the cream blouse and long brown American skirt which her husband bought for her when he was alive. She imagines
the faces of all those customers she has anticipated to meet in the store. This time, a new woman holds her gaze, “eyes apprehensive yet steady” (AM, 33). The woman in the mirror is none other than she herself, but in a novel manifestation. Her eyes look forward, and the spirit of fire burning within her convinces everyone that none can now dare to stop her in her upward and onward journey. She indeed emerges as a triumphant woman.

The cause of Sumita’s emergence as a bold and victorious woman is clearly due to the fact that as a woman, as well as an immigrant and member of high culture, she knows how to make all ends meet. She knows how to delve into the past in order to overcome its torturous bondages, at the same time she knows not to disown the positive aspects of the past heritage. As an immigrant, she embraces the promoting feature of both cultures and as a woman, she strikes a remarkably admirable balance between the various roles and norms assigned to her. Sumita poetically sums up her position in the land of freedom, “Sometimes I laugh to myself, thinking how ironic it is that after all my fears about America, my life has turned out to be no different from Deepali’s or Radha’s. But at other times, I feel caught in a world where everything is frozen in place, like a scene inside a glass paperweight. It is a world so small that if I were to stretch out my arms, I would touch its cold unyielding edges. “(AM, 26).

These lines depict the entangled web of the Indian woman immigrant that involves the twin processes of migration and relocation and it ultimately ends up in a “bicultural” existence.

Cultural dualism is a global phenomenon today. The hiatus between different ways of life leads to a feeling of depression and frustration when one gets into the culture of other from one’s own. The values of his or her traditional beliefs come into
contact with the same of the other, initially leaving him or her to stand on the cross-roads, but finally moving towards integration of the two, creating a bicultural identity. As an expatriate writer, Divakaruni successfully gives an imaginative shape to the sensibility of Indian immigrant women who assume dual affiliation in their lives. Her sensibility is also diasporic and so many of her works highlight the subtleties of Indian women expatriates’ bicultural consciousness. Jayanti, in “SP,GR”, realizes the fact that one’s culture changes according to the demands and the needs of the circumstances, but to detach the old memories and the old past from one’s psyche, to suit the expectations of the present and future, becomes a conflicting task. The domination of the superior culture hinders the local culture, hypnotizing such people with its outward superficiality.

Jayanti, who goes to America for higher studies, carries with her intense feelings of happiness and pleasant excitement about that country. She makes keen observation of each and every minute detail in her journey. Everything contains in itself Americanness which in turn makes her gay and frolic. She enjoys the beauty of the air-hostess and her smile which is as beautiful as her golden wavy hair that falls in perfect curls to her shoulder for the reason that she is an American. The reply given by the air hostess “No problem” (AM, 35), when she dashes against her at the door side thrills her very much as she tries afterwards to say the same in the similar manner several times. She relates Aunt Pratima’s brief and crisp reply [to her letter asking for her permission to stay with her] to American way of expressing themselves economically.

Jayanti fancies in her dreams: “Will I marry a prince from a far-off magic land, where the pavements are silver and the roofs are gold?” (AM, 46). The
enthusiasm which she shows in such imaginations clearly reveals how in modern society, girls, brought up in cities, imagine their future life with fascination. She feels as if she has entered into a fantasy world which she has known only in picture books. Her Imaginations about the white professor, the one she loves and plans to marry in future after her planned detachment from the Indian traditional familial life; her own changed appearance in modern, American life style, “dressed in a placid skirt and a matching sweater”; her bobbed hair swinging around her face while she “spiritedly argue against the handsome professor’s interpretation of Dreiser’s philosophy” (AM, 45); her outing with him for a dinner to a French restaurant; his confession of his love for her and wearing a ring onto her finger and takes her as his wife; and finally her self-awareness about her own traditional past, “[…] here my imagination, conditioned by a lifetime of maternal censorship, shuts itself down” (AM, 45) show the protagonist’s struggle as she progresses towards integrating her past and her new found situation and feels solace and pleasure in gaining a bicultural identity.

Aunt Pratima’s house is no different from the Indian that Jayanti left, resulting in Jayanti’s feelings of confusion about where she is and what her new life will be like. She admits, “As I watch Aunt ladle more dal onto his plate, I have a strange sense of disorientation, and for a moment I wonder whether I’ve left Calcutta at all” (AM, 42). Within home, Jayanti feels such disorientation because it appears that time and space has not triggered the changes she has expected in her immigration. Rather, she is stuck in a world in which Indian tradition remains the same, and assimilation is but a distant glance outside the window. She wonders, “Outside, America is whizzing by the fogged-up car window, blurry silhouettes of brick and stone and tall black glass that glint in the sun, making me dizzy. I wipe the moisture from the pane with
the edge of my sari” (AM, 40). Again time and space are contingent upon culture: where there is Indian culture, time and space are stationary, and where there is American culture, there is fast-paced movement so great that it makes Jayanti dizzy. She is overwhelmed by the America living right outside her door.

As Jayanti and her Aunt walk around their neighborhood one afternoon, they are approached by a group of young boys, who, upon noticing the skin color of the women, proceed to attack them with racist slurs. Jayanti describes:

The boys bend their heads together, consulting, then the tallest one takes a step toward us and says, “Nigger”. […] The word arcs through the empty street like a rock, an impossible word which belongs to another place and time. […] Now the others take up the word, chanting it in high singsong voices that have not broken yet, nigger, nigger, until I want to scream, or weep. Or laugh, because can’t they see that I’m not black at all but an Indian girl or good family? […] I don’t see which boy first picks up the fistful of slush, but now they’re all throwing it at us. It splatters on our coats and runs down our saris, leaving long streaks.

(AM, 50-51)

Within the house of her aunt and uncle, Jayanti perceives herself as an Indian woman, but when she steps outside, she is suddenly aware of the fact that others perceive her as black, and her entire perception of her own race is thrown into question upon leaving the domestic sphere. She essentially denies any connection that she has to be black race, for she does not want to associate herself with a people whom she,
through her own racism, deems to be a lower status than herself. Thus her response to her racist attack only perpetuates the general cycle of racism, thus furthering Jayanti’s confusion about who she is in relation to American race categorizations.

Jayanti’s desire for laughter is an attempt to refute the fact that she is no longer seen as an upper class Indian woman that she has always thought herself to be. It is clear, however, that the harsh words of the young boys have affected her to the point where she cannot help but perceive herself differently. The fact that Jayanti reacts to the incident in such a strong and equally racist manner suggests that she has been confronted by or shaken with a perception of herself that she has never considered herself before. When Jayanti and her Aunt arrive home, they attempt to forget about the racist attacks they just endured. Jayanti tries to return to seeing herself as an Indian woman, and desires all the comforts associated with this identity. The hungry yearning of Jayanti for “homehomehome” (AM, 55) after being disappointed by the deceptive American culture makes evident of the awareness of the lost essence of the past. Her mind starts wallowing in nostalgia – “I want my room in Calcutta […], I want the high mahogany bed in which I’ve slept as long as I can remember, the comforting smell of sundried cotton sheets to pull around my head […]. But I am too far away for the spell to work, for the words to take me back, even in my head” (AM, 55). Now that she is in her home, she again reverts to the perception of herself as the upper class Indian woman, but at the same time she is cognizant of the change that has occurred, a change so profound that she cannot return to her former singular racial self-perception anymore.

Jayanti has developed a bicultural consciousness in viewing herself, one with which she understands herself as an Indian immigrant living in America, and the other
with which she sees herself as the upper class Indian girl of her family. Finally, she perceives herself as in between the two, although these self-perceptions conflict with each other, she comes to understand that this paradoxical condition is her fate. As she stands out on the balcony, at the end of the story, watching as the freezing snow falls upon her hand, she remarks, “And now it makes sense that the beauty and the pain should be part of each other” (AM, 56). To live, thus, in a state of biculturalism with oppositional conditions existing within a fragmented self, is the essence of the diasporic experience. The identity of the Indian diaspora can be categorized as of comprising both consciousnesses that encompass various conflicting characteristics. The manner in which Divakaruni’s characters perceive themselves is based upon this bivalency of self, and the notion that one’s relation to one’s surrounding space determines the process and outcome of self-perception and allows for paradoxical views of the self to exist, thereby deconstructing the concept of identity as unified and perception as singular.

The protagonist-narrator of the short story, “The Word Love”, Shona has her own deep problems with the widowed mother back in Calcutta. She takes for granted that her mother would not accept her relationship with her American boyfriend, Rex. She loves her mother fiercely too and fears of the latter finding out that she is living in sin and living for love, for her mother would never understand and would never forgive her. Her sense of self as a good Indian girl and an adult woman in the United States appears as conflict, implying that she stands between her deep-rooted Indian morals and the American acceptance of unmarried couple’s cohabiting. Though she successfully conceals it from her mother, yet she feels it an unbearable burden all
times for her mother, after having become widowed when Shona was just two years old, has devoted her entire life for bringing her up.

“Love” is magical and mysterious word which cannot be easily defined. Americanization has been accepted in total by Shona when she falls in love with Rex and decides to live with him outside the institution of marriage. She recollects how her mother has struggled in bringing her up after her father’s death. Mother-daughter relationship, which is something special in Indian culture, can be seen at its best in this story. She makes a self-introspection in living with a man even before marriage and feels anxiety for concealing this from her mother. She wants to confess and finally faces the wrath of her mother after her confession. This makes Rex to say: “It was never me, was it? Never love. It was always you and her, her and you” (AM, 70). Even though people get physically separated from their country and live thousands of kilometers away from their native lands, their native cultures and traditions make them nostalgic. Here, Shona’s respect for her tradition and her past makes it hard to lie to her mother about her affair. She is unable to come out of her relationship, yet, her life in the American liberated society, which allows such relationship between a man and a woman before marriage, imbues her with spirit and courage to live with Rex.

Shona’s main problem is that she wants to adopt the western style like cohabitation, etc. and at the same time she is not able to give up her sense of a loyal Indian daughter to her mother. She stands between these two antithetical forces which Rex fails to understand. He is not aware of the root cause of her dilemma that it is only the act of concealing the fact that worries her too much and not her liaison.
When she expects a word of comfort from him, he advises her ignorantly not to disclose the fact to her mother, “that you’re living in sin. With a foreigner, no less. Someone whose favorite food is sacred cow steak and Budweiser” (AM, 59). His indifferent behavior, unmindful of her real grievance, alerts her to reconsider her relationship with him. She realizes, for the first time, that she has been living with two different cultural values - living with Rex for her personal desire and sustaining her filial relationship with her mother for her loyalty to deep-rooted culture.

Divakaruni portrays Shona as educated who though derives utmost delight and content in American lifestyle still sustains impeccable regard for her own country’s value systems. Her filial affection pricks her largely for deliberately hiding her secret affair with Rex. Such a sense of guilty, when gets agitated by Rex’s indifferent behavior, she takes the extreme step of snapping her ties with him. She is not able to forget her mother’s true dedication and self-effacing love for her and the pains she has endured, throughout her younger days, in bringing her to be well-educated and independent. At the same time, her exposure to the well-advanced, modern and highly sophisticated American culture refrains her from repenting for having a secret affair with an American before marriage, perhaps such is a common practice in the western countries.

The bicultural tensions of diasporic identity, where values and norms are always in flux, are amply played in “The Word Love”. The intense bond between mother and daughter is shattered when the latter starts living with her American boyfriend. She is consumed by guilt on the one hand, and the pressure to conform to the demands of a relationship on the other. Her life appears to move within the stranglehold of traditional Indian ethos and American understandings of the word,
“love”. Divakaruni expresses her own idiosyncrasy, one that is composed of facts and fancy where a vision of life and love is revalued. She forges a new bicultural identity to the protagonist in the process of cultural variation, in which the self gains more in addition to what it has preserved.

The short story, “Affair” also highlights the dual affinities of the migrants, especially middle-class Indian women who, in most instances, are primarily housewives. The relationship between Abha and Meena builds the space of intervention that enables both women to extricate themselves from meaningless relationships and re-write their strategies of survival. Completely constructed by patriarchy, the husbands in this story [both Ashok and Srikant], cannot even begin to understand the individuals’ desires. For them, their wives are just symbol of their financial and sexual power. Therefore, for their wives, Abha and Meena, financial independence and American clothes have become the indicators of individuation which are synonymous of westernization. Thus the story traces the awakening of Abha to her own individuality, learning the values of western philosophy from Meena. The discovery that her best friend is having an affair makes her rethink of her own marriage. Despite her initial suspicions i.e. Meena’s lover might be her own husband and instead of feeling relief, after knowing that her suspicion is wrong, the effect of these various instances speeds up her understanding of her relationship with him. She finally takes the decision to leave him and live her own life with the possibility of economic independence by accepting the offer of a well paid job, compiling an Indian “cookbook – glossy cover, color pictures, the whole bit – of selected dishes from all the Bay Area Indian restaurants” (AM, 253).
The Indian woman takes her subservient image from Indian mythology and the manner in which Indian women are represented in it. An image of womanhood that has a profound effect on the Indian psyche is that of Sita, the heroine of India’s most beloved epic, The Ramayana. Sita’s chastity, obedience, and unflinching loyalty to her husband represent the ideal path for an Indian wife. This ideology survives even among modern, upper-class Indian women who defer to their husbands in an almost instinctive way. The paradigm of Indian female identity in the domestic realm is the essence of submissiveness, thus the culture tends to expect similar behavior from its actual women, regardless of time or place. The inordinate amount of emphasis placed on Indian women to be domestic goddesses results in constructing the home as a place where time and space cease to function according to normal patterns and instead become frozen in the practices and mores of ancient Indian mythology and culture.

Obviously, the subservience of Sita contrasts greatly with the feminism of America and the emphasis on women’s independence and equality. Increasingly, this clash between cultures has manifested itself between family and career. Divakaruni portrays the conflicts between men and women found present in Indian culture that typically divides tasks by gender, with men working outside the home and women playing the roles of homemaker and mother. Therefore, when Indian women immigrants, in her works, choose to pursue a career rather than raising a family, the battle between the domestic and the public realms is exacerbated for the entire familial structure changes when women leave the home and begin to work. Working outside the home is a source of strength for these young women, undermining the patriarchy characteristic of the traditional Indian home. Professional women typically believe that working in the United States make them stronger persons and more
independent. Having their own income frees them who so far have been depending on their husbands for every expense and gives them more decision-making power in the household.

Abha is not able to enjoy life like her husband, Ashok and her friend, Meena seem to do. She does not wear stylish clothes or makeup, not “want Ashok’s heartbeat speed up” (AM, 235) on seeing her, as she has learned from her mother that most Bengali wives wear simple cotton saris and are too busy with their household duties to care for their looks. When Ashok dances with Meena at the party, and when “her [Meena’s] hair tangling around his throat like a living thing” (AM, 248), she can just stand and look at the pair with envy. On seeing Meena gets out of her lifeless marriage with the mismatched Srikant, she [Abha] realizes that her own marriage with Ashok is also an arrangement that does not really work for either one of them. Only through Meena’s decision to start a new life with her co-worker turned lover Charles, she feels that her mind is also dragged towards American way of individuation. Indian women in the United States seem to assume the role between being properly South Asian and being a feminist, as these are perceived as being mutually exclusive categories. Paradoxically, some Indian scholars argue that westernization actually denies variability in women’s roles as either traditional or progressive, whereas the reality may be a healthy mixture of the two.

The very foundation of cultural dualism is the act of perceiving oneself, and the subsequent conflict that characterizes the ensuing tension between pure self-perception and the self-perception as it is influenced by others. Divakaruni presents this double consciousness as an identity i.e. “in between” oppositional states. In The Mistress of Spices, the process of self-perception is the foundation of dual identity
formation for Tilo and other Indian immigrants. As Tilo strives, to define herself as Indian and American, she develops bicultural consciousness that manifests itself in both her experiences and her subsequent relationships with her racial and sexual identities. While Tilo is living in America, she is incapable of pure self-perception, and can see herself through the eyes of those around her, leaving her own self-seeing as a secondary and almost marginal perspective. Tilo views herself through the lens of her surrounding society, thereby leaving more than one conflicting simultaneous visions of her identity. At first, she allows these perceptions of herself [as created by others] to dominate her thinking. Yet, when she adapts herself to American culture, she never gives up claiming her own self-perception. Ironically, however, she finds that she is in fact comprised of different identities, that other people have ascribed to her, for the perceptions that others have had of her are all legitimate aspects of her identity. The result of this knowledge is Tilo’s recognition of her bicultural consciousness. Divakaruni nevertheless presents it as a possible solution for Tilo’s dilemma of cross-cultural identity formation.

As an older woman born with supernatural shaman-like abilities in a small village in India, Tilo’s gift is her ability to elicit specific powers inherent in spices and use them to cure the maladies of those around her. She is sent to Oakland, California, to a tiny Indian spice shop where she must begin her duties of healing the masses. Thus, she is thrust into the chaos of American life and the newness of a culture to which she must adapt. Although she has already begun her diasporic journey, she does not feel the loss of home, but rather finding of many. Divakaruni presents Tilo as inextricably mired in the workings of Diaspora, and the entire notion of “home” becomes displaced, transformed into an intangible condition that is not based on a
singular location but rather a movement among many places. When Tilo arrives on the island, she and the other young girls like her are given new identities, an indication that the past is being relegated to memory and new personae are being forged.

Tilo meets the First Mother, an elderly maternal representing the traditionalist notion of Indian woman in the domestic sphere. Yet at the same time, she is outside the boundaries of conventional culture, for she lives on an isolated island, and urges the young girls toward progression and change rather than maintaining the status quo. She is at once the “old world and the new”, a juxtaposition of differing geographical spaces, times and cultures. She gives Tilo a knife as a gift, the purpose of which Tilo believes is “[...] to cut my moorings from the past, the future. To keep me always rocking at sea” (TMS, 51). Tilo enters a state of liminality, a space between the past and the future and without a precise knowledge of where the present is. She is unmoored and treading the dark waters between the lands of her past and the lands of her future. The island is the diasporic space she has first encountered. It nurtures her, educating and preparing her for the next stage of life she has to encounter when she leaves, and also imbuing her with a sense of singularity of identity.

Once in America, Tilo is immediately placed in yet another interstitial space, unable to forget her history but still yearning to move forward with life. She lives “in-between”, for the island of the past is no longer her home, while America is still too unfamiliar to describe as such. While the Island is seen as female, America is now portrayed as an almost hermaphroditic space in its many identities as Tilo is in hers. Even though Tilo, now, lives in California, she finds that she cannot let her time on the island with the First Mother and the other Mistresses go of. The memories are
with her day and night, reminders and warnings of the past strain her thoughts, creating conflict in her present life. As her relationship with Raven progresses, she finds the past inescapable, because the possible admonitions of the First Mother constantly plaque her present consciousness. She describes her dilemma as, “The spice’s silence is like a stone in my heart, like ash on my tongue. Through it I can hear back to long ago, the Old One laughing bitter as bile. I know what she would say were she here” (TMS, 128). There is a sense of simultaneous universes, or different spheres that exist at the same time and in the same place. As Tilo ponders one day, “First Mother, are you at this very moment singing the song of welcome, the song to help my soul through the layers, bone and steel and forbidding word, that separate the two worlds” (TMS, 296). The phrase “at this very moment” suggests a synchrony between the Island and America, rather than a divide between them that would relegate the Island to the past and America to the present.

When Tilo dons her first American outfit and walks out into the street on which her store is located, she makes the striking transition between states of mind and possesses a consciousness that she believes is that of an American but at the same time it is foreign and “other” consciousness for her.

I pull on my no-nonsense pants and polyester top, button my nondescript brown coat all the way to my calves. I lace my sturdy brown shoes, heft my brown umbrella in readiness. This new-clothed self, I and not-I, is woven of strands of brownness with only her young eyes and her bleached-jute hair for surprise. […] She will finger in pleased wonder the collar of her coat, which is better even than a cloak of disappearing. And
when the bus comes she will surge at it with the others, her
blending so successful that you standing across the street will no
longer know who is who. (TMS, 131-132)

The first suggestion of the shift in consciousness is Tilo’s use of the phrase, “I and
not-I”. She feels her “in-betweeness” as a positive sensation, one that gives her
“pleased wonder”. She embraces the idea that she can blend in with America and be a
part of it. While she is waiting at the bus stop, she relishes the fact that her difference
is no longer the marker of her racial identity, for she can stand amongst a group of
ture Americans and exist as one herself among them, with no one being able to tell
“who is who”.

Tilo observes some of her female patrons fulfilling the traditional submissive
role of the Indian housewife, with patriarchal dominance and instances of domestic
abuse. These female patrons view her as a traditional older Indian woman,
unattractive in her age, sexless in terms of her desires and submissive to the will of
others. Tilo begins to see herself as she believes others do: “[…] a bent woman with
skin the color of old sand, behind a glass encounter that holds mithai, sweets out of
their childhoods. Out of their mothers’ kitchens […]” (TMS, 4). She describes herself
as possessing an old woman voice and an old woman body covered in “creases and
gnarls” (TMS, 5) and layers of wrinkles like old-napkin. She is deferential to the
elders who enter the store, referring to older men as “dada” (TMS, 85), a term of
endearing respect. She is not seductive but rather matronly, repressing sexual desire;
she is silent in her opinions and offers advice only when asked. In her behavior in the
store, she typifies the traditional submissive Indian woman and she is perceived to be
so by her various patrons.
Tilo, yet, observes some other young, sexualized and flirtatious patrons who come to her store, “[…] all fizzy laughter and flutter lashes. In miniskirts their legs are long and tan, cocoabutter smooth. Their lips are dark and pouting. They toss back their crinkle-cut hair and glance around and laugh again […] all sway and undulation” (TMS, 254-255). These are the two extremes of sexuality of Indian women that Tilo encounters, and she herself begins to fall in between these contrasting roles in perceiving her own sexuality. Her sense of passion and her ability to seduce are clearly evident in her friendship with Raven. Even in their initial meetings, Raven appeals to her sexual side, creating emotions in Tilo that she has never experienced before. During their first conversation, she thinks to herself, “There is a lurching inside me, like something stitched up tearing lose. O danger” (TMS, 69). The moment that Raven’s hand first touches her own is one that she cannot fully even articulate: “What words can I choose to describe it, this touch that goes through me like a blade of fire, yet so sweet that I want the hurting to never stop” (TMS, 70). The language that Divakaruni uses to describe Tilo’s sensations is replete with a sexual suggestiveness that grows more overt as the relationship between Raven and Tilo progresses. When they fully consummate their love, Tilo appears as a highly knowledgeable and sensual lover, and her sexuality is in stark contrast to the older asexual woman from the spice store. Strangely, there is a sense that this sexual knowledge has already been there for Tilo [though hidden] while she has perceived herself as the asexual woman from the spice store.

Divakaruni is subtly suggesting the possibility of simultaneous selves, as if Tilo has another younger and more sexualized identity that existed along with the asexual identity of the older woman. She begins to view Raven as a representative of
American culture. From the moment she meets him, she refers to him not by his name, but rather as “my American” (TMS, 110). While Raven views her as his “mysterious Indian beauty” (TMS, 290) and an Eastern exotic fantasy, she comes to see him as her token American lover. As Tilo moves through the maze of American culture, she desires even more to see herself, to view her life through her own eyes rather than the perspectives of others. She realizes that in the place of a unified identity she possesses an identity of multiplicity. She is comprised of different and contradictory perceptions of the self. She reveals that what she is made of i.e. different consciousnesses that allow her to exist not only as Indian or American, but rather as everything in between.

Divakaruni’s work of fiction, *Sister of My Heart* deals with two closely-bonded cousin sisters’ growing up in a Hindu zamindar family of West Bengal and eventually ending up in America. The unwillingness of the sisters to work for a better life in their native country and the lure of America are quite understandable. The novel, by ending in America, not only leaves the readers wondering about the potency of new challenges ahead, but also makes one ponder upon the broader issues of the diasporic displacement and the consequent formation of bicultural identity. The three widows of the Chatterjee family [Pishi Ma, the two cousins’ paternal aunt, and their mothers], and these two cousins meander their way through the drama of life, facing marriage, motherhood, divorce, widowhood, etc., and each stage brings to focus a certain aspect of the upper-class Bengali culture and tradition, which are cherished or criticized from the uniquely feminine and diasporic perspective of the author.

Anju’s mother, Gouri Ma or Rani Ma, reminds one of the pomp and splendor, the grace and intelligence often attached to the leading ladies of the zamindar
households. The novel depicts the gradual loss of financial status of the family as they are forced to relinquish their riches and amenities of comfort, one by one. When Pishi Ma, the otherwise strong upholder of traditions, sounds adamant regarding her decision to sell the generations-old patriarchal property and move to an apartment, even the sisters are appalled. Though Pishi Ma has been kind to all, her upright Brahmin culture does not allow her a normal life. Not only is she blamed for the ill-fate that has befallen on her, though she has nothing to do with it, she is also robbed of her right to good food and clothing and even the chance to educate herself at home with the help of a private tutor. Through her stoically austere character, Divakaruni depicts the hardship and alienation faced by a widow in upper-class Hindu Bengali society. Sudha’s mother, Nalini, primarily comes across as a woman handicapped in attitude by the patriarchal tradition. She does not hesitate to sacrifice her own daughter’s happiness, or even her first granddaughter’s life, when it comes to saving face in her honor-conscious, prestige-obsessed family. Thus, when Sudha refuses to abort her unborn daughter, Nalini says: “I told her to grit her teeth and put up with it, and try for another pregnancy. A woman can have many children, after all, but a husband is forever […] what’ll we tell our relatives? Uff, she’s smeared kali forever on the Chatterjee family, to say nothing of my ancestors” (SMH, 244).

The effects of the Victorian straitjacketing of women in their British society is evident here from the way these Bengali women are constantly made aware of their gender limits and bound in the shackles of propriety and honor. Hailing from such an orthodox familial background that preserves cherished cultural values and traditional precedents for several decades together, Anju and Sudha grow together, through with birth, marriage, and pregnancy all occurring for the two Chatterjee sisters at about the
same time. Divakaruni’s diatribes do not stop at exposing the Bengalis for denying their women freedom, humanity, and the right to life. She also judges the often superstitious, planet-gazing conservative Bengalis through the highly critical eyes of a postcolonial commentator who scrutinizes the far-reaching impact of British colonialism on the Bengali psyche. Thus, the Chatterjee cousins go to English-medium convents, and Anju looks forward to getting enrolled at Lady Brabourne College’s English honors program, these institutions being the fruits of British rule. Anju’s excessive fascination with Virginia Woolf or her craze for Elizabeth Barrett Browning can also be read as her genuine interest in the progressive outlook of Western feminist writers.

Though Anju and Sudha have got the courage to go to a movie in an afternoon without the knowledge of their mothers, they are aware of their own limitations as daughters of the tradition-bound Chatterjee family. Moreover, Sudha is cognizant that to dare to elope with the love of one’s life will definitely put the family reputation in jeopardy, and doom her cousin’s chance of marriage to a respected family. Yet, when the same sisters have to face the crucial moment of saving the unborn daughter, they attribute their sense of justice and feminism to America. It is a clear articulation of the way in which every liberated female character in the works of Divakaruni seems to find comfort and solace by living in an interstitial space, balancing herself between India and America. As Sudha decides to end her marriage to save her child, Anju, in a fleeting moment of apprehension, questions herself about her part in blending Sudha’s traditional Indian womanly qualities with her “American-feminist notions” (SMH, 250). The cultural dualism in Anju which is best expressed well in advance through her readings of British and American literatures in college and in her
migration to America, further clearly depicted when she declares that her notions of feminism and justice are “American” (SMH, 206).

Divakaruni presents the negative aspects of the Indian male through various interactions of Anju and Sudha with their lovers, husbands, and in-laws. They are either too weak to be able to protect their women or totally busy subjugating them. As Anju grudgingly points out that this society wants its women to be nothing more than “good breeding stock” (SMH, 98), while men are spineless jellyfish even as their yet-to-be born female infants face death at the hands of a cruel, uncompromising society. At the same time, Divakaruni never fails to see the evils and shortcomings of the Western world. Freedom and riches are often bought, particularly by the immigrants, at the expense of the love and support provided by the extended family or the community. Hence, the same Anju, who used to complain about the noise and lack of privacy in her mother’s home back in India, because of the host of servants and gossiping aunts, yelling neighbors, and shouting road vendors, now misses the din and bustle in her desolate apartment in America. Indeed, America provides the advantage of anonymity and also adds the burden of responsibility and loneliness.

America, no doubt, adds self-confidence to the Indian immigrants, endowing them with a certain light-heartedness and ease that allow them to trust the partner’s vivacity and enterprise in the place of domesticity and docility. Despite the innumerable headaches that an American lifestyle entails, these women immigrants of India seem convinced about its ultimate superiority. This is well expressed in the words of Sudha, who is planning to leave for America with her fatherless, newborn daughter in search of a responsible life for both. She says that it is better to go to America as it is the right place for mothers like her who prefer to live alone than
living with the wrong man. Sudha’s westward move to solve her problems generated at home not only makes her more responsive to the calls of liberalist Western feminism but also adds a bicultural identity to her along with Anju.

Divakaruni’s works may be taken for a thorough analysis to ascertain the identity development experiences of Indian women immigrants, mostly born in India and raised in the United States. The study showcases how these women use the influence of their family, culture, community, and tradition in the development of their identities. The findings confirm that Indian women diasporas consist of a bicultural identity. Living in mainstream United States society, biculturalism becomes inevitable for individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In a broad sense, it is a social process by which social and cultural changes occur when people from different cultures come in direct contact with each other. It is the progression of acquiring the capability to function within a dominant culture while retaining one’s original culture. It also facilitates cultural contacts, transmission, and mutual understandings between ethnic groups and the larger society, as well as the individuals who are from different cultures. Though some of the immigrants are obligatory to cultural hybridization for certain well-known reasons such as academic pursuits, lucrative jobs, modern comfortable sophisticated lifestyle, etc., Divakaruni’s women willingly accept the American way because they want to come to this land of liberty, hoping to enhance their survival chances.

Divakaruni’s women characters experience in their lives the ways in which the different social spaces or cultural fields, they occupy are associated with particular notions of generationally appropriate behavior and ideologies of citizenship and ethnicity. These young women, either studying in or married recently and migrated to
America, know that they have to negotiate different ideals of youthful behavior in specific contexts and select certain images or identifications within particular social and structural constraints. They show reactions that range from suspicion to confirmation, from disbelief to delight, and from acceptance to appreciation because one’s cultural values are often unrecognized until they are challenged by exposure to different values. These women acknowledge different cultural perspectives and learn to work effectively within the boundaries that are comfortable for them, while sharing views of the larger culture to increase the understanding to improve the ability to negotiate a balance of two cultures. Their tastes in clothing, sports, music, food and culture are marks of difference from the preferences of the parents.

Divakaruni’s women represent two different worlds, the American world of public participation, and the Indian world of their family. Thus, they seem to be leading a double existence – Indian at home to follow their cultural teachings and gain their parents’ approval and American outside to win the confidence and support of the host land. Gawle illustrates: “So when we grew up and flew out of the nest and became comfortable with being American, our parents experienced angst and betrayal. To make them happy we did what made them happy at home and did what made us happy outside. It was the only way we could really make peace with the situation” (33).

Divakaruni presents, in her works, the complex consciousness of the Indian women diaspora and their process of bicultural identity formation. One may find the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres resulted in conflicting self-perceptions, and the influence of one’s surrounding environment as a direct determinant of how one’s consciousness and overall identity is to be formed. For Tilo,
in *The Mistress of Spices*, her self-perception is in fact the perception that other people have had of her, and the many contradictions among these perspectives lead to her eventual understanding of her acceptance of double identity. Identity is as liminal as the space in which Divakaruni’s women live, indeterminate in their in-betweenness and continuously transforming as their geography changes. One may clearly see the celebration of forever-evolving identity, one that is constantly moving as quickly as cultural connections are lost and found in the diasporic experience, resulting in the creation of the selves that are endless in their possibilities and uncertain in their futures. This identity is malleable and uncertain. Even culture, the crux of the diasporic experience and its conflicts, is not an established entity, as the characters of Divakaruni’s texts move between the conflicting cultures of India and America, the culture itself seems to be manifold as the women themselves.

Indian women immigrants, from the perspective of Divakaruni, are comprised of double identities, existing together and conflicting with each other, but ultimately, to one degree or another, accepted in their contradictions by the women who possess them. These women embrace the conflict, the inevitable consequence of living as a paradox. In characterizing Indian women diasporic identity, Vindu Goel notes, “In the end [after much soul searching] you realize that you are neither Indian nor American. […] You are simply yourself, an amalgam of cultural contradiction”(19). While this description may appear to simplify the dual nature of Divakaruni’s characters, it aptly expresses the dialectic of identity that may be found in the texts. The psyche of the individual is completely transformed. What emerges is a consciousness exemplified by duality, that thrives on the contradiction of oppositional constructs, and whose only definable essence is that of paradox. The methods of the formation of the
identity and the creation of bicultural consciousness for the Indian diasporic women continue to evolve, and the development of this cultural dualism dominates and preludes the process of cultural adaptation for this generation of women.