

Chapter 6

Conclusion

“Love is a code sketched in dust. You look away, the wind blows, the pattern shifts, and when you look again, you discover it says something else.” (VOD 93)

The study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels tried to explore critically the question of women identity, mother-daughter relationship, immigrant experiences, multicultural society and complexities, dissolving boundaries, issue of female self-expression, inter-generational conflicts and relevance of the folk legends and epics in the contemporary modern world in the broader context of diaspora consciousness and experiences. In a research article entitled, “The Cross- Cultural Experiences of Indian Womanhood in the Fiction of Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni” it is stated, “Divakaruni, in proffering the stories of a multitude of both female and male characters, is able to more fully explore the themes of cultural oppression, racial discrimination, cultural assimilation, and the discovery of voice.” (Sharma n.pag.)

This thesis is a befitting example of an investigation into all these issues where it has come to surmise that the notion of identity is both external and internal. If the characters have to fight with their conditioned mind sets, they also have to wage a kind of battle with the external forces and that too twice in case of the diaspora. “The diasporic subject (...) suffers from tension caused by multiple affiliations but is also shown to develop in new and invigorating ways as a result of this multiplicity.” (Naidu 386) Displacement not only results in alienation but also gives a chance to integrate into new culture. Though they feel marginalized, they try to empower themselves and fight the

impeding challenges thus resulting in new paradigms.

Immigrant experience makes them distant but the western world in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni offer an added sense of freedom to break the shackles of tradition. “The textual strategies employed here, particularly in relation to symbolic acts of creativity as a form of personal and cultural survival.” (Flockemann 12-13) If the first generation is more into ‘looking back’ with nostalgia, the younger generation looks back with anxiety. The novels are an appropriate evidence of the generation gap and the way they perceive the entire thing. “New diasporas have relocated the self there and the other here, and consequently borders and boundaries have been confounded. And the flow of culture has been at once homogenizing and hydrogenising.” (Dirlik 581)

As a South Asian Diasporic writer with a feminist perspective, she has unfolded the various facets related to these aspects in her works and has critiqued the society:

Women writers as agents, who in a process of self-definition create keen and cogent cultural critiques. The women represented in women’s writing are not constructed by patriarchy but are self-constructed within and in opposition to cultural formations. (Naidu 372)

This thesis set out to determine and look at the women characters in particular and to analyse the way they get torn between the old and new world values, changing role of men, journey of people into the inner realm to understand the outer world and complexity of human relations in the context of universalization, globalization and the changing scenario of the world where terrorism, materialism, racism are still the hallmarks. The critical study of the novels reveals that almost all women characters, at some point or other, struggle to

challenge the old set of traditions. They fall and fumble but are able to fight against the odds. In other words: “Divakaruni’s human but flawed characters constantly err; they manage to find tiny pin prickles of redemption in situations that seem otherwise.” (Sandhya K 206) This struggle is not without pain but the significant observation is that all her novels end on a note of hope and optimism.

The women characters have their share of adjustments and compromises but these adjustments are made to live life on one’s own terms. They try to defy the norms and taboos but they also set their own boundaries suited to their choice. The support which they get from women in particular is significant. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has given voice to rise of women community to fight for their rights. On one side she has delineated their male counterparts as an obstacle to their growth but has also shown them as supporters and motivators. So male characters in the novels have not just been criticized but also justified many times. “In her novels one can see a kaleidoscopic view of the burden of patriarchy, more dynamic mode of man and woman relationship, complexity of immigration along with uncompromising reverence for Indian nationality and spiritual life.” (Agarwal n.pag.)

This study has shown that the tradition and beliefs are relevant in the contemporary world as it lets the people live with an idol and it helps them fight the pressures of the world but at times it also hinders the growth. The way the characters perceive the moralistic and the ethical standards largely depends on the way they have been culturally attuned. As it has been mentioned, “Indian hierarchical relationships are oriented toward firmly internalized expectations in both superior and subordinate for reciprocity for mutual obligations in a more closely emotionally connected relationship.” (Roland 32) For instance Geeta, the granddaughter, who has been brought up in US rebels against her parents

and decides to stay in a live-in relation with her boyfriend but she is not able to do so in reality. US society permits this kind of relations but her moralistic views stop her from following it. The questions of individuality are immersed in a multicultural society and the way an individual strikes a chord with it to sustain the pressures have been projected with simplicity.

The findings also suggest that literary devices like the use of legends, dream journals, epistolary style, and elements of fairy tale have an important role to play in the development of the characters, themes and plot of the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni:

The themes of cultural continuation and perpetuation are woven into narratives of change, often dramatic geopolitical change or territorial dislocation. References are made to deities, local legend, ancient myths (...) but these are not mere backdrops to the main narrative but are embedded into the narratives of the characters' lives. They thus have an aetiological or ethnographic value, and they reveal the tentacles that tie South Asian women to their cultural origins. (Naidu 382)

Not only do they project the conscience of the characters but it also lends a kind of uniqueness to her writings. Past and present have come on one level through the use of such devices and it has given an insight into the way how each experience shapes incidents and events of life unconsciously. In the narrative of the novels the epic stories and the legends have been compressed to give a fair understanding of the Indian cultural tradition. It has helped in binding the culture of the past with the contemporary multicultural world. It has enabled the readers to read the mind of the characters. The gift of dreaming with which a character like Mrs. Gupta works enables her to perceive the objective reality which leaves an

impression on the individual psyche. Sunil for instance in his memory thinks of the Bollywood movies and his fantasies are his imaginative moorings which he wishes to experience in real life:

Driven in part by memory and nostalgia, diasporic communities are involved in a constant dialogue between their past and a new present, with the homeland embodying tradition and authenticity (...) media functions as repositories for content and images that help re-imagine culture (...) media are not mere artifacts evocative of a “home” left behind in shaping how the “home” is remembered, they reconfigure memory and nostalgia. (Anderson 57)

The mythical characters like Sita, Draupadi, and Savitri get subverted into her novels with such ease that it creates a lasting effect on the minds and makes it more humane. The way she has interpreted the entire life of Draupadi from a contemporary view point marks a change in the way a woman thinks and believes in this modern world. ‘Lakshman Rekha’ has come to symbolize so many things. “Divakaruni’s narrative blends the stories of Sita and Draupadi with the lived realities of divorce and familial dysfunction to suggest that Indian myths of womanhood need to be reinvented to accommodate a contemporary reality.” (Iyer 15) It not just stands for crossing of boundaries but it also reflects its impact. It not just speaks tons about the diasporic condition but it borders the precincts laid down by traditions and customs.

Journey through the passage of novels written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni starting from the last part of the twentieth century has led to an in-depth study of the complexities, conditions and challenges faced by the immigrants with an added focus on

women protagonists who brave it doubly as they struggle not just with their inner fears but also the external conditions. Inner fears result because of their conditioned mindset, traditional upbringing and conventional rearing up wherein sticking to the moral codes imposed by society and values and ethos become a sort of enforced obligation. The drift away from their homeland open to them a land of possibilities but these possibilities clash with their own self-imposed boundaries. Displacement and dislocation make them distant from their homeland but their thoughts, ideas and liking towards simple things create a sense of nearness. In an attempt to retain the part of what they have left behind they end up creating an artificial and an abstract presence of homeland for years.

The dilemma boggling the second generation and the third generation is quite distinct from the first generation. They are already assimilated into the new environment which is not 'new' for them but face a kind of pressure to adhere to old ways from their elders. The generation which is born not in their country of origin has to face the pressure from the older people and their conflict is in a way trying to strike a balance between their parental expectations and the societal conditions. For most of the second and third generation immigrants their place of origin is a place to which they do not feel belonged. A few have an imaginary view of the society and a few wish to explore it to understand a society which their elders label as their own.

In the novels it is seen that the pangs of separation take various forms. Either it culminates in a 'return' or it ends in mere nostalgia and memory where longing paves way for learning to live in harmony within the cultural periphery of the adopted land. This study of the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reveals ten important aspects true to the diasporic tradition and these are: Memory and nostalgia work as a tool for recollection of the

birthplace; characters walk the passage of discovery leading to a better understanding of 'Identity' and 'Self'; rejection of patriarchal subjugation and suppression leading to empowerment; the need for spirit to survive and assimilate; bonds of womanhood an essential ingredient to fight the challenges leading to improvement; emergence of the 'new woman' and 'the real man'; mythology as a machine to churn the product of modernity; analytical commentary on the Indian aspect inherent in the broader framework, food and music as a metaphor of remembrance and recollection and finally the past as a catalyst shaping the present.

One important observation regarding the novels is the way Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's own assimilation with the adopted land has changed her view and projection of it in her writings. If *Mistress of Spices* reflect out n out landscape of characters projecting the situation of the immigrants and gives a picture of the way the various characters struggle through their own selves and with the outer selves, *Sister of my Heart* focusses on the bonds of womanhood and the way they cope with the conflicting situation. It can be called a story of women narrated through a woman and with *The Vine of Desire*; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has shaped the complexity of relationships into a web of desires which weaken humanity at large. The entire gamut of relations has been studied in detail against the backdrop of two cultures intersecting with each other in the ideology of the characters. With *Queen of Dreams* the author has presented an emotional aspect of the desire to explore and understand the 'native land' of second generation immigrant and presented the contemporary problem of terrorism plaguing the world. In *The Palace of Illusions* the mythical character represents the modern and contemporary 'new woman'. With the novel *One Amazing Thing* the spirit of human beings to survive the disasters and the challenges

have been made vocal and not just the Indo- Americans but the South Asians in general living in America have been brought together on one platform. Finally the novel *Oleander Girl* brings in the question of identity as against the broader canvas of inter-racial and international geographical spaces.

The main characteristic feature defining ‘diaspora’ is the sense of displacement. Right from Tilo, Anju, Sudha, Rakhi, Korobi, the main protagonists of Divakaruni’s novels along with the other characters in *One Amazing Thing* are shown to have moved away from the country of their birth. However they still cling to the myths and the legends of their country which shape their personality. The longing to return is there but they also seem to carry a sense of doubt. Sudha is the only protagonist who takes the decision of returning back to India and she is the one who realizes that her true independence is possible only by returning. Korobi’s journey to US is merely an interlude as she had never ever thought of settling in US. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitan societies characterize the world and by bringing the nine characters from different origins under one roof, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has managed to universalize the feeling of nostalgia but she has also shown through Uma Sinha a trend which is recent where to the second generation the land of their birth seems foreign and alien and they are more comfortable within their adopted land.

There are varied motives for migrating to another country. The ‘push and pull’ theory as enumerated by the theoreticians is noteworthy. Migration due to economic reasons is common as each one wishes to better the prospects and improve their standards of living. For instance there is Haroun, the driver, in *Mistress of Spices* who migrated to US for better wages. However Haroun also symbolizes a person who migrates to escape the risk of

terrorism plaguing Kashmir. So in his case on one side it is the 'push' factor which works while in US he sees chances of improvement. There is Malathi who moves to US to pursue her dream of having her own parlour but ends up working in the Indian Embassy's office as a clerk.

Even Sunil, the husband of Anju, in *Sister of My Heart* had migrated to US for better prospects and also for personal reasons because he did not like the chauvinistic attitude of his father. Uma Sinha's parents also represent the dream of the professionals to work in the US for better career opportunities. The adopted land also to a certain extent comes across as a land of escape-an escape from the rigidity, conservatism, inner fears and the images of flight associated with escape seem to suggest a fight wherein the people trapped within their own fears flutter to escape. About the early fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Lavina Dhingra Shankar has mentioned that it, "simplifies the binaries of a repressive, patriarchal India, and a liberatory space that is provided by the American geography and the promise of the 'American dream'." (30)

For some, education works as one of the 'pull' factors. In case of women, generally the migration is due to personal reasons. For instance, Anju goes to US to be with her husband after marriage and Sudha to be with her cousin and help her in her difficult times. Even Rakhi's mother Mrs Gupta plans to go to America for the sake of her daughter. Whatever the motive and whether it is forced or voluntary, migration on one side adds to their personality but it also leaves them with a sense of 'nostalgia'. Each character at some point indulges in their moments of nostalgia. However Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has also made her characters question the notion of freedom in their own context. To most of the characters immigration offers innumerable opportunities of freedom away from their

homeland where there is no outward pressure of clinging to the restrictions.

Identity is often taken as synonymous with ethnicity, culture and religion and it becomes more important in a new environment and adopted land. When in their own country they probably don't even take notice of it but when in an adopted land their race, culture, religion defines their identity and therefore they try to cling to it in some way or the other. The way the characters come and share their feelings with Tilo and pick up the spices of their choices in *The Mistress of Spices* reflect the need to be in one's own community. The way Mr. Gupta in *Queen of Dreams* tries to prepare the food in the Café to give it an authentic Indian taste and the way Indian community is shown to be swinging to the tunes of old Bollywood songs speaks on the inherent need of the diasporic community to cling to their background and ethnicity. "Symbols of ethnicity are often self-consciously formulated as a distinctive ethnic identity system and used by culturally subordinated groups to promote a sense of pride in their own religion, language, food and clothing." (Pandian 5) The way Sudha and Anju in *The Vine of Desire* dress up in sarees for a function at the Chopra's also show the way they miss their tradition but there are girls like Belle brought up in US who do not want to go back to the traditional way of dressing in Punjabi suits.

Discrimination resulting from terrorist attacks especially the 9/11 attacks on US has been severely dealt within her novels and the way it impacts the view of the native people against the South Asians. "External violence resonates with internal violence, leading to irruptions allowing the narrator to construct a history through identification, but not at-a-distance'." (Silverman 25) Just because their physical features and colour of their skin resembles, all are put under the test of fire and they go through the trauma of apathy, indifference and coldness of the people around them. *Queen of Dreams* has explored the

way the South Asians became a subject of abusive attacks because of the after effects of terrorism. Hatred resulted in loathsome attacks on the South Asian community and the country of their adopted land the feeling as of strangers, outsiders and as alien's surfaces which puts to question the entire dogma of universalization, internationalization and globalization. In the same way *One Amazing Thing* also deals with this issue of marginalizing the people just on the basis of their race and religion. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni by projecting the inherent fear and distrust in the minds of the people and later by pointing to the futility of it has tried to spread a message to rise above the narrow conservatism and together fight the injustices.

One important aspect related to the twenty first century is the outbreak of natural disasters resulting from environmental hazards and global warming. Earthquakes and hurricanes-the natural disasters have been discussed in detail in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Ecological perspective indirectly gains a ground in her novels. For Armbruster and Wallace, "the inclusion of urban, ethnic, and national perspectives in an ecological approach to literary and cultural studies is necessary to avoid eco-criticism's theoretical and conceptual self-marginalization in the larger space of the humanities." (7) These disasters to a great extent point the inner turmoil of the characters. Disasters are the physical representations of the inner disturbances. The helplessness and vulnerability of the humanity in facing these disasters and the way these disasters question the entire existence of universe has been explored. Divakaruni has almost echoed the words of Laure Coupe that, "nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct" (3) and that "Green Studies is much more than a revival of mimesis: it is a new kind of pragmatics." (4) Natural disasters ring a bell of warning to the humanity to reconsider the man made boundaries of land and nations

which is highly unrealistic against the wider boundary between life and death. In the book entitled *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism* it has been quoted, “At the beginning of the 21st century it no longer makes sense to think of nature and culture in oppositional terms. Rather, we should start to conceive of the pair as hybridized entities.” (Gersdrof 14) The way the characters in *One Amazing Thing* come together to accept their differences and brave the challenge posed by an earthquake is an illustration of the need to dissolve boundaries. Most of her novels try to suggest compromise, forgetting and forgiving as the solutions to overcome the problems which project her humanistic attitude.

An analytical study of the novels has revealed that the stress in all the novels is on the strong relation between the women which play an important role in fighting the challenges posed by the situation. The term ‘sisterhood’ which connotes community of interests also means a bonding and “often this bond with other women have various emotional shades-being aware of each other’s predicament and needs, caring for each other, supporting each other in daily activities and even at critical times, sharing a rich inner life, coming together against male tyranny, helping each other out of tight spots.” (Karekatti 98) One finds this notion of ‘sisterhood’ prevalent in the novels.

The relation between the mother-daughter like that of Anju & Sudha with their mothers Gouri Ma, Nalini and Abha Pishi, Rakhi and her mother, Draupadi and her Dai ma show that they all inherit the sense of strength and endurance from their mothers . Though they try to walk a different path to follow their dreams but on their journey they gain a lot of support from their mothers either through direct help and or through their memories which shape their thoughts and views. Though Draupadi is unlike Dai ma in

several aspects but she continues to think of her at almost every time she takes an important decision. Death of Rakhi's mother and the Journal entries which she discovers after her death opens up for Rakhi a world of positivity and she acknowledges the hardness and the outer stubbornness which her mother carried all throughout her life. Gouri ma and Abha Pishi are almost idolized by the girls. Though they don't want to become exactly like them but they appreciate their dedication, commitment and power to survive.

Not just the mother- daughter relation but the relation between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law also has been explored. The way the relation between Kunti and Draupadi develops and progresses from a sense of hatred to a sense of appreciation is the key point of the novel *The Palace of Illusions*. Though there is anger, jealousy and envy which crop up in their relation, Draupadi cannot stop her from admiring the guts and confidence of the lady to dictate the way she makes things done from her sons. It is Draupadi who along with Uttara is able to unite and work for the widows. However this sensitive relationship has also been looked at from various other angles where insecurities of women lead to distrust between women. There is Sudha's mother-in-law who controls her son to the extent of possessiveness which leads to a break up between Sudha and her husband Ramesh.

Even the men in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni do not come across as symbols of male chauvinists. They are emotional, sensitive, caring but they are also shown to carry the seeds of patriarchy which have been sown in their psyche. So most male characters are stubborn as well as sensitive, caring as well as obstinate, emotional as well as indifferent. Just as a woman has its weakness and her strengths, novelist has presented both the negative as well as the positive aspects of men. In a way the novelist

seems to have adopted a humanistic attitude in dealing with characters as human beings rather than being gender-biased. If Anju feels strongly after her miscarriage, even Sunil suffers the pangs of sorrow though he does not speak about it openly. The way he cares and loves Dayita and fondles with her brings to light his emotional side. He tries a lot to prevent himself from falling to temptations but fails. Sunil cooks for Anju the same way in which Rakhi's father takes to cooking. Even Bheem is shown to help Draupadi in household chores. Father figures as carriers of love find an illustration in Mr Gupta, Sonny, Sunil and Singhji to name a few.

However, with examples of Sunil's father Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has presented the way sometimes male subjugation results in loss of confidence. Sunil's father exercises control over his wife in such a way that she is unable to retort or even speak back but by showing Sunil opposing this kind of patriarchal control, the novelist has pointed towards the need to change. There is reference to Ahuja's wife who becomes the victim of domestic violence and there is Sudha's husband who falls weak and is unable to stop her mother from forcing Sudha to abort. However Sudha's decision to bring the girl child in the world on her own bravely puts forth a positive development.

The novelist has discussed the marital relationship and has tried to touch the question of arranged marriages which are an inherent part of the Indian social system. In her novels, the elders are generally shown to be against the entire concept of love marriage. It is only through Geeta's grandfather that the writer has tried to show a positive change. Sudha has to let go her love because the boy belongs to the lower caste. Just as love transcends the narrow man-made boundaries, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, through her writings, wishes the boundaries between countries, nations and societies to dissolve.

The most obvious finding resulting from an analytical study of the novels shows that Divakaruni also falls into the line of tradition of the women diasporic writers because of the themes which she has chosen. Like her contemporaries she also has tried to restyle perceptions of home and nation by bringing gender issues to the fore. She has projected the global paradigm shift and its challenges, gaining of the voices as against the subdued expressions, bringing to light the happenings of social realities, longings and feeling of belonging. Class, caste, nationality and gender remain the major constraints but the way it gets reformulated to create new identities is the focus of her novels.

She has employed diasporic experiences to help women to liberate themselves and re-question the social imposition. Women do not remain passive but compelled by loneliness, isolation are able to give a new meaning to life. They try to turn upside down the trauma into a compelling force driving them towards financial independence. Women in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are in the words of Bennett, “constructive marginals” who “get beyond this confusing point through a recognition of the inevitability of ambiguity and of their own responsibility to think autonomous based on the assessment of the context.” (Bennett 115) They learn through their experiences and deliberate on the inherent traits. Her novels delve on the fictional transformations of the author’s experiences as she is a diasporic herself. Food, music has been used as a metonym for homesickness and also a way of retaining the tradition. Familiar tastes, aroma, spices and smells have been recreated to create a sense of normalcy.

Taken together, this research work suggests that diasporic condition displaces the individuals or communities from their home land but the urge to be accepted equally in the adopted land force them to accept a kind of hybrid existence. The focus is on

the women protagonists. Nostalgia and memory become a medium of reliving the past. Cultural shock felt by the first generation turns into a kind of cultural assimilation by the following generations. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni though has examined with all its neutrality India and its tradition but she has also delved on the life of US but not glorified it in any way. However her women characters do perceive US as the land of dreams. In all her novels except *Sister of My Heart*, the setting is US. Her last novel *Oleander Girl* though projects the life in US but only as a transit for the protagonist. The novels reflect the changes the characters undergo but it also portrays the discrimination meted to them. Survival in the adopted land is a major challenge which the characters engage in a very befitting way. Nowhere in her novels does one find loss of hope. There are instances of disappointments, disillusionment and anxieties but equally impressive is the spirit to survive.

This thesis adds to the given corpus of work on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as it brings to light the selected novels under one umbrella and scans the potential of a writer in conveying a message which has a universal appeal. In general the novelist has been compared and contrasted with other writers but a thorough critical analysis of her works have been done here which could be of good use for the future research. This research provides an in-depth study of the conditions which affect a woman, how they cope with it and the way they strive continuously to strike a balance between conventions and modernization. It also paves a way to understand the need for becoming more sympathetic towards human beings in general by highlighting the pain and suffering caused to people on account of discrimination.

Falling in line with the tradition of the diasporic writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has presented the dilemma facing the people but the underlying thought seems to

vocalize one's own traditions and culture before the wider audience and make an attempt to rekindle one's association with one's heritage. At times the references to stories from Mahabharatha and Ramayana seem to be not just catalysts of projecting the theme but it also projects the epics as the foundation stone of the Indian culture and tradition. The philosophy of 'Karma' has been projected hinting at the spiritual aspect of the country like India.

Most importantly this study also reveals an attempt on the part of the writer to motivate the young women to break the shackles of tradition and in the contemporary world be symbols of 'new woman'. She has been critical of the practices which are an inherent part of Indian patriarchal system and raised a voice against the issues of widows, female foeticide, female subjugation due to patriarchal control, lack of choice in marriage, and has spoken on the need for education of girls. Her modern sensibility parallels with her traditional beliefs and her characters also jostle between these two extremes. Infact her novels portray the social conditions, political state of affairs, cultural differences but it also signifies the effect of globalization and the way it has impacted the sense of identity. The woman protagonists do not just remain individuals but they stand for the entire community in general. Her novels are the products of this multicultural world wherein marginalized community stand at the periphery of discovering their self driven by the process of acculturation and assimilation.

Thesis also marks the development of the characters not just by transcending the geographical boundaries but also by understanding the situations. The women though detest the society which had imposed a lot of restrictions but they also seem to gain a sense of courage and strength from the old generation of women. Women of her novels are not outright rebels but they are fighters who learn to adjust in the environment by adopting

varied techniques. At times they sacrifice but beyond a point of endurance they revolt. They let go off their dreams but at the same time in their pursuit of self-respect they are shown to make headstrong decisions. They are shown to be demanding in terms of love but even go to the extent of declining love. They endure but they resist too. Isolation and loneliness are the two traits which the women protagonists endure but they do not end up becoming melancholic figures, instead rise up to the challenges to attain a kind of self-contentment. Circumstances and situations pose a lot of challenges in her novels but the characters do not succumb before the worst conditions, instead, walk the path of progress-not materialistically but generously in an attempt to understand and reconcile with the given situation.

The past and the feeling of nostalgia have worked as a positive force and it has been conveyed through a unique blend of imaginary and reality. In this materialistic world where selfishness is the key to success, what one finds appealing in the novels of Divakaruni is the attempt she has made to understand the need to be compassionate towards each other as human beings. For instance, Anju knows that her husband is inclined towards Sudha but still she calls her to US because she feels US would promise her more freedom. Mrs Gupta at one point had decided to give up her plan of going to US but only to give her daughter a better future she moves to US. The characters are not self-absorbed but they bother about the people they are with. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has focussed not just on the need for independence but interdependence is also seen as an important aspect.

The humanistic perspective and the need to rise above the shallow markers of discrimination have been emphasized repetitively in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Her novel *One Amazing Thing* for example conveys this theme of compassion and mutual understanding where diversity leads to unity and hybridity could be the hall

marks of universality. Past is seen as intrinsically connected to the future of the individuals and the society at large. The need to break the stereotypical attitude is the need of the situation both for the East and the West. Through her characters the novelist has touched a chord by posing rhetorical questions in the course of the novels to ironically hint at the need for changed perspectives. Tilo, for instance chooses to transport herself to Oakland to help her own community but she also realizes that the problems are universal through a person called Raven. The need for 'cross-pollination' of ideas is found in her writings.

The Tilo-Raven relationship becomes symbolic of many things: of the need for minority groups to come together in political action and also in romance; of the displacement of Native Americans and newer immigrants by dominant white culture and the diasporic status of each group; of the need for Indian immigrants to negotiate both their Indianness and their Americanness and not be imprisoned by either. (Iyer 16)

In her novel *One Amazing Thing* there is no protagonist but humanity at large is at the centre and the entire theory and purpose of existence is unfolded. In *The Palace of Illusions* she has pin-pointed for instance at the illusionary world of desires and placed reality as contradictory to it. Battle of Kurukshetra where nothing is won becomes a symbol in the writings of Divakaruni to project the futility of war and violence leading to nothing.

The autobiographical element seeps in the way Divakaruni treats her characters and especially the women. History, myth, society, racial issues, magical realism, diversity all get blended together. Since the writer belongs to Bengal, she has dealt with women protagonists hailing from Bengal and time and again there are references to the food and folk music of Bengal. The journey of the characters generally takes place from Bengal

to Sanfransisco, California, New York and Houston. Her own experiences with deadly hurricane and 9/11 incident get penned through her protagonists. In one of her blogs titled “How America made me into a Writer”, she has written,

Immigration made me into a writer. The lifestyle and values in America were so different from my traditional middle class Bengali life. I started writing to make sense of things; to understand my life and the lives of other immigrants. I started very small writing in a notebook only for myself.
(Imparo 2013)

This thesis comprehensively probes into the dilemma of the diaspora, marginal status of immigrants, feeling of alienation but it brings back their urge to continue, integrate and assimilate which helps them in defining their own roads of adjustment. It hints at the truth that it is only with positive attitude and by discarding the narrow and rigid conservatism can the people from various religions, caste and class come together.

The co-existence of change and continuity then is a defining element of diasporic communities and identities. The tensions and struggles which arise from this paradox have a radical impact on the construction of female subjectivities, as represented in the literature produced by women of the South Asian Diaspora. (Naidu 87)

It traces the challenges confronting the diaspora and highlights the ways they are evolving but still retaining their tradition, ethnicity and cultural heritage. This research has thrown up light on many more questions like the relevance of myths and legends in the modern times and the way it affects the diaspora. It has also once again put the whole notion of home, nation, identity and community in multi-layered perspectives. It has delved on the

themes of calamities and catastrophes which throw an open challenge before the entire humanity at large and also discussed the way man-made disasters in the form of terrorism, racial abuse, and discrimination mar the confidence and break the trust of communities. It has opened up a debate on the whole issue of morality and the way it differs from society to society. The east-west encounter, oriental and occidental clash of values have also been examined through the view points of the characters but it has also celebrated the differences.

The research area has been delimited to focus on the diaspora consciousness and experience in the selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. There is however, a wide scope to cover other critical aspects and explore different socio-cultural issues which have not been explored by me. The aim had been to study the gradual evolution and change only related to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. This has ensured a detailed study of the writer, her creative evolution along with her journey in the diaspora and the experiences of the diasporic community as a whole. I hope this thesis would encourage many future scholars to deal with other corresponding issues in their research work. Such novels definitely are of relevance and significant to the study of New Writings in English for a better understanding of the Diaspora Studies.

In a way the study of the novels has opened up inter-disciplinary approach where psychology, sociology, literature, environmental science coalesce for a better understanding of the human conditions. This thesis thus looks at the 'horizontal connections' and unfolds the world of relationships where the characters defy the vertical and hierarchical power structures.

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