

Chapter 2

Migration and Displacement

Dreams would not come to me in California because it was too new a place. Its people had settled there only a few hundred years ago, and neither its air nor its earth, the elements from which we most draw sustenance, was weighted yet with dreams. Yes, there had been old inhabitants, but they had been driven from the land, and in going had taken with them, along with their hopes, their ways of dreaming. (QOD 177)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni by the words of Mrs Gupta has summarized the underlying deep seated anguish and anxiety of a displaced person. Dislocation has a significant impact and it takes many forms like migration, exile and diaspora where the movement is either forced or voluntary. This feeling of displacement has been extensively explored in literary texts. However the concept of 'displacement' has far reaching effect as it can never be really traced as to when it happened and it is related often to self-perception according to critics. In this world of globalization marked by social integration this process has acquired an added significance.

Explaining the process of displacement and migration, Oliver Blackwell has stated " Both migration and displacement can be understood as processes which bring about changes in people's physical locations as a result transform economic, social and political relationships." (Koser 19) In the 21st century the quest for economic betterment, better life and position generally is the cause for migration which has been projected in Divakaruni's writings. Instead of the negative 'push' factor it is the 'pull' factor which largely is the

reason for migration in Divakaruni's novels although it does result in a feeling of displacement.

Divakaruni's characters also fit in the definition provided by Safran as they "maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland (...) the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland." (Safran 83-84) Though the characters are displaced but they also get relocated in a new context which offers them new challenges. On the positive side, the freedom offered by the new land offers new opportunities but there is also a feeling of estrangement. Departure from the homeland integrates with the arrival in the hostland but it also leaves a void and emptiness. Though the characters transpose from one nation to another, the landscape of memory lends colour to the canvas of life. Distanced physically, they are hit by the changes in everyday realities but the impeding experiences are transformed into reassuring certainties. 'Past' becomes a positive stimulant and it serves to reformulate and transform the present. Push and pull between expectations and aspirations, tradition and modernity also can be seen.

Divakaruni's novels manifest migration, mobility and diaspora in its varied forms. The reason for settling abroad also varies. It delves into the difficulties inherent in adjusting to a new land but it also creates a perception of the land left behind in all its neutrality. The characters engage themselves in an active process of remembering. Tilo, the mistress of spices, chooses America and voluntarily helps the people open up their treasured thoughts and tries to heal them. Spice shop, for instance, created in *The Mistress of Spices* as a setting serves to bring the displaced people together and tries to offer them solace. Divakaruni has depicted the bond of friendship which the fellow migrants develop.

The women in the novel *Sister of My Heart* though do not migrate but they struggle at various levels and within the personal and the public sphere they try to reshape their life in various ways. Though there is a tragedy in the family and feelings of helplessness and vulnerability strike the characters but their daunting spirit to fight comes to the fore. If Abha Pishi's struggle is to live upto the norms of the society, Sudha and Anju struggle to define themselves in conflicting environments. In their case memories strengthen their ties and in the case of Sudha it gives her the confidence to fight back and resist the oppositions.

The Vine of Desire takes the story of Sudha and Anju further. It charts their journey of self discovery as they face new challenges, environment and circumstances. Anju migrates to US because of her marriage to Sunil and Sudha moves to US to rekindle hope in the life of Anju who lost her unborn child and also to put her life back to track after facing marital problems and also to give her daughter a better life. In their case memories strengthen their ties and in the case of Sudha it gives her the confidence to fight back and resist the oppositions. Mrs. Gupta in *Queen of Dreams* moves to a foreign land in search of a better future but her dreams become a kind of platform for her daughter Rakhi to confront the world in a better way. For Rakhi, the reminisces of her mother and her diaries serve to recuperate the lost faith and trust and it in a way brings the family close thereby leading to close association. The novel *The Palace of Illusions* though retells mythology with a new view point; it does focus on the episode of exile of Pandavas and their condition. It projects Draupadi's journey taking revenge and catapulting her suppressed desires to fight with conviction in a strong-headed way.

Her novel *One Amazing Thing* unfolds the power of memories and the way it sustains and becomes a life-changing mechanism. This novel brings in people from different

origins together that had migrated and have now settled in a new land but always remember their land and people. The memories recreate a lingering sense of homeland and the characters seem to be entrapped in their conversations erupting in their conscience due to past experiences which they tend to associate with their existing conditions. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni through her novels in a way has tried to negotiate with this entrapment. By revisiting their homeland in their memories, they often tend to place the concepts of conservatism and liberation, east-west conflict on one pedestal. The novel *Oleander Girl* exhibits Korobi's strength to pursue a journey of her choice. Hers is a transitory journey to US in search of her father—it is neither migration nor immigration but the metaphor of 'movement' has been used to connote a journey of rediscovery. Though her decision is not welcomed, she still goes ahead and finds out the hidden secrets which shatters her for a while but ultimately she comes back with much more confidence and faith.

One finds an entangled relationship between history, time and place which develops into a reflexive condition and it opens up debates on the issues of 'identification and affiliation' and 're-invention of cultural traditions in the New World Order'. A few events like terrorist attack on World Trade Centre, Indo-China war, terrorists' attacks in Kashmir, Godhra riots feature in the novels of Divakaruni and she has analysed the repercussions of such incidents on the personal lives of the people. Movement, travel, journey and mobility do not just characterize diaspora but they are the constituents of memory as well. Marie-Aude Baronian has gone to the extent of saying that, "Displacement is seen as a semantic intersection of diaspora and memory....Just as diasporas can transcend local boundaries, memories can travel, be adapted and integrated into new contexts without becoming placeless." (Baronian 13-14) Divakaruni, in the words of Zoppi, has represented:

“Binary opposition between reality and imagination (...) these find a meeting point (...) thus giving a voice to the unthinkable, and unspoken, or to those ‘living on the margins’.” (Zoppi 151) Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* personifies the experience of immigrants as she balances two cultures-opposed worlds of India and America as well as the real and the magical. Tilo, the mistress of spices, herself looks like ‘a memory, a tradition personified’. She is:

A bent old woman with skin the colour of old sand, behind a glass counter that holds mithai, sweets out of their childhoods (...) it seems that I should always have been there, that I should understand without words their longing for the ways they chose to leave when they chose America. (MOS 4-5)

The way they share their secrets, tragedies and concerns with an old lady Tilo and open their hearts, show their longing to be heard and their deep seated thoughts which they feel cannot be understood by the people of that land. (Oju 157) Massey’s views on ‘place’ become quite relevant here, as he points towards a new “sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.” (155) Tilo understands the power of spices not just Indian but even American. However, she remembers the spices of her own land with keen enthusiasm as she states: “...the spices of true power are from my birth land, land of ardent poetry, aquamarine feathers. Sunset skies brilliant as blood.” (MOS 3)

The spice shop though within the confines of boundaries lends an open site for discussion, exploration and understanding of issues plaguing the world at large. Her store becomes a symbol of life and the spices a slice of experience, sometimes red hot like chilly and sometimes healing like turmeric. Oju has written, “The spice shop seems to be an

extension of Tilo's body and her sense of self."(156) The store has two rooms-outer room and the inner room and it is like the life of expatriates who live a masked life outside and within their being lies the internal consciousness which is different from what is projected.

This novel picturizes the story of many Indians who live as immigrants in the US but jostle with their inner voice to whole heartedly accept the new land. It is Tilo who mentions, "For even her in this new land America, this city which prides itself on being no older than a heartbeat, it is the same things we want, again and again." (MOS 4) Youth, teenagers, adults and oldies all are brought together on one platform that has their own shades of anxieties, tension, apprehensions and concerns. The resolution to adjust and accommodate can be seen but beneath it lurks a hidden desire which they find it difficult to comprehend. In other words, "the spice shop space becomes a public space where the Indian diasporic group identity can be articulated and actively lived in all its diversity." (Oju 157) Kolekar and Annie in their paper on Indian Diaspora have mentioned,

Diaspora is a scattering of the seed in the wind, the fruits of which are a new creation and a fight to survive. Every diasporic movement holds a historical significance, as it carries within itself the kernel of the nation's history. (3)

The dilemma of the people who migrate is this that though they change their place but the heart remains in the things of the past. The store where the entire community tends to relive their experiences caters to the small little cravings of Indian community. Be it the Indian sweets or various kinds of pulses, video tapes, music cassettes the visitors' choice in buying the retail products point at the sense of nostalgia and longing. The things help in mediating, enacting and circulating the culture in motion.

It is significantly important to see how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has

united people from different places of India which is diverse and placed them against the diversity on a global scale with memories looming in their heart. Memory, according to Le Goff, refers to: “the capacity for conserving certain information or a group of psychic functions that allow us to actualize past impressions or information that we represent to ourselves as past.” (51) Here diaspora does not merely remain singular in being. Evolution becomes fluid as the characters embrace and integrate differences and disjunctures. Radhakrishnan’s concept of “home” as “imaginary geographies” and Zhang’s as “process of becoming” and Rey Chow’s “homelessness” as the only home find a reflection in the novels where clinging to remembrances and memories gives a more telescopic view of home which is distant but near.

Even as Indians they have differences be it the difference in custom, caste, class or region but in America they are transgressing the borders and also the differences. Haroun is from Kashmir, Geeta’s grandfather from Jamshedpur, Jagjit from Jullundher, and Lalitha from Kanpur but in America they form a sort of unified community which cherishes the land of the past. Tilo herself has mentioned that in her store on Saturday, “All those voices, Hindi, Oriya, Assamese, Urdu, Tamil, English, layered one on the other like notes from a tanpura...” reverberated. (MOS 78) The perceptions related to the diversified Indians vary and the same happens in USA as well. Though in Oakland, US, the name of her store is Indian-‘Spice Bazar’ where ‘discolored pictures of the Gods’ and ‘plastic green mango leaves’ have been strung over the door for luck. Oakland of this novel invariably finds an echo in the words of Robin Cohen:

On one hand the drift of globalization is towards homogenization and assimilation. On the other, and perhaps in reaction to globalisation, is the

reassertion of localism- notably in the form of ethnicity, nationalism and religious fundamentalism. (131)

Even if the place changes the thoughts lie in the past and the memory of it brings back the reality. Walsh (2006) has analysed the role of ‘belongings in belonging’ and according to him it has the potential to construct trans-local domestic environment. Decorative art pieces, craft objects become a source of treasure that helps in enacting past residences and reforms the present landscape.

Many immigrants try to stick to their past life by clinging to the things which belong to their country and by following an age old routine of customs and superstitions. N. Jayaram, a sociologist, has talked about the, “the socio-cultural baggage” which the people tend to carry with them when they migrate and “find in their culture a defense mechanism against a sense of insecurity in alien settings” (Jayaram 49), because of which they try to cling on to the things related to their home and nation. Literature in her case tends to memorialize the experiences of diaspora. The tastes, smells and sounds tend to re-make India’s sense-scapes. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni seems to suggest, “One has to be able to throw that trans-cultural switch, as it were, in one’s mind on a private and personal level before one can actually implement one’s chosen trans-cultural strategies in the public spaces of the new host society.” (Oju 164) People living in diaspora have to cross various hurdles and they make an effort to adjust and accommodate with the linguistic, cultural, racial and national differences. The writer in her novel has compared their life to the “bitter slight aftertaste in the mouth when one has chewed *amlaki* to freshen the breath.” (MOS 4)

In her novels, we find a form of diaspora that pays the price of getting displaced but since it is a conscious decision, they reconcile with this fact. Her novels echo

this view point:

The notions of displacement and diaspora are, then, in a dialogic relationship with each other. While the idea of displacement suggests the loss of familiar space and emphasizes the need to transform, the notion of diaspora emphasizes the connections between the displaced. (Brah 192-193)

People in the diaspora by reliving and recreating their past adhere to their value system but are also able to restructure their life in the given environment either through memories acting as positive stimulant or serving to present a contrast between the past and the present. The novels effectively revisit the country of birth and Divakaruni throws light on the Indian society, customs and traditions. It helps in rethinking and elaborately pictures the formation of identity against the background of cultural differences which is attuned to the asymmetrical international exchanges. In a way the novels excavates the subtleties and complications that mark the journey of life and the way a person evolves and transforms through the change happening not just at the geographical level but even at the emotional and psychic level.

The identity becomes a projection of shared culture held in common by certain people, but it also represents the deep, significant differences between people. It is in the novels that we find that India is related with a lot of metaphorical possibility and it does not merely remain a kind of 'geo-political' presence. Nation acquires for the characters their tradition and culture and it transforms their present and thereby it becomes a 'set of social-formation'.

Situated within and across a range of nations, the characters come to embody a set of disconnections between place, culture and identity. However it also proposes that a

whole range of life experiences lie outside observed geographical boundaries. The interplay of material, spiritual, ideological, practical and discursive phenomena find an expression and it tends to comprehend the effect of social, political and cultural change. We live in a world in which there is “ a gradual spectrum of mixed up differences” (Geertz 148) Indianness rooted in the characters underlie the national belonging but at the same time it also tries to become heterogeneous as it maps onto other forms of identification. It continually seems to translate a set of differences into something new and this is evident in the way the characters emerge and evolve with the changing situations. Nowhere is the attempt to flatten differences and make everything seem equal. Infact the stories of the lives lived comprehend the negotiations structured by difference. Set in India and America, the novelist has represented immigrant experiences, clash of cultures, conflicts of assimilation and the entangled web of ties between generations.

Sister of My Heart which is set in Calcutta (India) exhibit India’s tradition and its rich cuisines and they come as a backdrop against the main instances of life. The three widowed women in the Chatterjee household try to instill the roots of tradition and condition their daughters into accepting the norms of society. The nursery rhyme which Aunt Nalini sings hint at their attitudes, “Good daughters are bright lamps, lighting their mother’s name; wicked daughters are fire brands, scorching the family’s fame.” (SMH 10) Life for Sudha and Anju which had begun in an ‘old crumbling marble mansion’ moves towards the land of dreams that offers optimistic possibilities but the novel ends on an open-ended note where possibilities might get pricked down or may obtain progression. Harpreet Kaur Sahi in a comparative study of Shashi Deshpande and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has observed that “Divakaruni illuminates the difficult adjustments of women in whom memory

and duty co-exist with a new, often painful and disorienting set of standards.” (Sahi 206)

The issue of divorce which is a taboo for the women makes a woman in Indian society a ‘social pariah’ and she has to face the brunt of it but Sudha refuses to give in and files for the final divorce. She is the one who refuses to marry Ashok because he refuses to accept her with her daughter. The silent Sudha becomes quite vocal in her actions and her thoughts. She feels, “I’d spent years of my life pushing a rock uphill-and the moment I stopped, it rolled right down to the bottom.” (SMH 257) Despite a patchwork of past there is a fight against established and deep-rooted social assumptions. Diaspora thus has emerged as a type of consciousness in her novels where the focus is on myriad experiences, state of mind and a sense of identity. Celebration of human resilience and creativity coupled with memories and inheritances gain ground in the novels. Various strands that exist in the tangled texture of our plural existence find an echo.

The conflict between the old and the new values emerge like a wave which ebbs and flows. The inner and the outer world clash many times and they try to strike a balance which is noteworthy. The reality of women’s lives be it pining for love, struggling for acceptance, battling the expectations of family and society, craving for financial independence, yearning for respect and submitting, submerging themselves totally have all been put into this book which has lent an emotional texture to this story of women and their relationships. Feelings and emotions of desire, loss, sacrifice, jealousy, forgiveness, friendship, rivalry, love, doubt, and most importantly tolerance, trust and faith have been explored in all its shades which characterize a woman’s personality. The characters are both free and somewhere they seem to be caught in the net of cultural changes. Though the characters transpose from one nation to another, the landscape of memory lends colour to

the canvas of life. Distanced physically, they are hit by the changes in everyday realities but the impending experiences are transformed into reassuring certainties. However her women characters imbibe the enigmatic persona of a woman, serve to be a carrier of her culture but at the same time have a power of transformation. In the words of Anu Celly Narula:

The relationship [Anju & Sudha] enjoy becomes symptomatic of a hybridity sensibility, as it bridges the gap between home and exile, subjectivity and agency, domination and subjugation, as well as exposes the slippages inherent to our constructs of ethnicity, sexuality and identity. (52)

The dynamics of remembrance and memories resulting from loss is a characteristic quality of diaspora. The potency of memories is far-reaching and gets reflected in the cradle of diasporic writings. Baucom (2005) has quoted, “history is not ‘history’, not a property of the past but the property the present inherits as its structuring material and the property (both affective and instrumental) the past holds in the present.” (qtd. in Bayo 18) Hooks has quoted that the recovery of memory offers “ both a sense of re-union and a sense of release” (158) A person’s life becomes like a written text which is dependent on other texts and the inscriptions of home and environment gradually evolve in a way which is not a product of choices but left to circumstances. In the novels one can see that the women characters try to resist the definition of others about themselves. Their past experiences function as a device of self-recovery. Their accounts help them to reclaim their effort towards resistance against subjugation. Anh Hua in relation to memory and remembrance has mentioned:

The struggle for memory can help to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering and triumph in ways that transform reality. Remembrance is not simply to document but to

construct the new, to move us into a different mode of articulation. (147)

The Vine of Desire a sequel to *Sister of My Heart* starts with death and the cycle of life is explored in its full enormity. In this novel, Anju awakens to an identity in relation to Western values of individuality but grapples with a personal loss, whereas Sudha battles the familial control and traditional mindset rooted in patriarchy but is still dependent on her cousin. Sudha takes a decision not to surrender her life to the stifling surrounding culture but opts for a journey to discover her independence. The novel which has been divided into two books –Book I-Subterranean Truths and Book II- Remembrance and Forgetting highlight the bitter truths, move the characters into a nostalgic mode leading them to self- interrogation and finally accepting and forgiving.

Past haunts the characters which to a certain extent stops them from moving towards a better future. Anju after losing her child muses, “I believed that, if I could only get out of Calcutta to one of those exotic countries I read about, it would transform me. But transformation isn’t so easy, is it?” (VOD 14) and she herself feels that after Sudha reached US, “the changes multiplied the way vines might in a magical tale.” (VOD 9) On the other hand Sudha and Sunil also are “ afraid to touch each other’s pasts, the way one is with a cut that’s just stopped bleeding” (VOD 31) Anju however claims that “there’s too much of the past in my blood still, like a sickness I have to sweat out before I can take out the future.” (VOD 39) Sudha though has accepted her divorce and separation but she accepts, “Once in India I scrubbed the color of marriage from my forehead, believing I was rid of it. But it comes back.”(VOD 45) Sudha’s habit of chewing a clove and Sunil’s addiction to watching movies point their inability to confront the reality. Their nervousness is evident in their habits by which they try to avoid their truth. The blankness enwrapping the life of Sudha

makes her chew as if she is trying to chew up the past and Sunil tries to live in a world of imagination and fantasy in the world of movies trying to avoid the actuality of things. Anju takes on to wearing large sunglasses. 'Large sunglasses' are her way of trying to create a distance between appearance and reality. It dims her vision and she to a certain extent tries to delve inward and dig up the 'old, buried shards' of her life. The secrets of their own 'self' lie suppressed and it can burst open 'when they least expect it'. (VOD 70)

It is when Sudha meets Sara that the inherent desires of her heart come to the fore. She says, "I want an existence iridescent as nail polish (...) I want to bite into the apple of America. I want to swim to India, to the parrot-green smells of childhood." (VOD 87) The longing for the past and the passion for the untraveled paths puts the characters in a mode of conflict wherein the tussle between the tradition and the modern intersect at some point. Sudha wanted to be independent and America seemed to be a best place for that but it is only after going there and living there that she feels that, "the people there do not see me. Is it their ignorance of my world that renders me invisible, or their distrust?" (VOD 81) It is in the private realm where time and space seem to stop and demonstrate change. The domestic realm once crossed makes her experience a conflict of consciousness which results in a fragmentary self.

Sudha's stitching of the 'Imaginary Quilt' which she refers to as 'The Quilt for Lost Souls' point at her transformation from a submissive woman into a creative, imaginative woman. For Anh Hua, 'quilting' is a metaphor for understanding various theories of diaspora and Sudha's act also throws light on the desires, nostalgia, longing and also shows her sense of accountability even when subjected to a kind of in-betweenness. Her wishes overlap with her situations and she tries to understand the meaning of happiness

which has eluded her so often. She finally voices her innermost feelings in the company of Lalit as she says, “Haven’t you realized yet that I’m homeless. That I’ve never had a home, an only delusion of belonging which the world was quick to squish.” (VOD 290) Her decision to return to India is because she wishes to start over in a culture which she comprehends and not in a culture which makes her ‘invisible’. She emphatically says, “I’m tired of this mantra that everyone chants, this cure for all ills. America America America.” (VOD 336) She tries to fight with her own demons and exorcize the internal conflicts. She confesses in her letter to Sunil, “I came to America in search of freedom but was swept away by the longing to be desired.”(VOD 350) In her research on Divakaruni’s works D. Dhanalakshmi has mentioned that Divakaruni has expertly juxtaposed “the ultimatum latitude and crassness of modern day America with the issues both personal and cultural which each woman faces.” (127)

The novel ends with images of flying and reuniting. “The woman on the ground [Sudha] opens her arms for the woman who was in the sky [Anju]. This is what we do with grief (...)” and the singing of the old man “Rain, come, I’ve been waiting for you so long.” (VOD 373) also gives an added effect to the meaning of re-uniting and coming together. In this case Rosemary George’s concept of home finds an expression as she has mentioned: “Homes are not about inclusions and wide open arms as much as they are about places carved out of closed doors, closed borders and screening apparatuses.” (19)

Sudha and Anju both in their own ways struggle with the circumstances and still carve out an identity for themselves. They freeze, fall and fail but they melt, rise and succeed to accept and assimilate. Sudha’s personal sacrifices and Anju’s own wishes intersect at some point which shows their deep relationship. The particular realm which they

occupy after marriage changes their entire way of thinking. Sudha turns to take life not by chance but tries to fight it as a challenge whereas Anju for whom it was always a matter of choice seems to be caught in making choices which make her lose her baby. On one side Sudha by making a decision is able to bring Dayita into this world whereas Anju by making a resolution has to part with Prem (unborn). To exist, almost all the women in the novel embrace the dichotomy of life and contradictory situations with an élan. However the younger girls show the grit and power to redefine their way of living and thinking thus bringing themselves to a new environment. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's women seem to evolve through three well-defined phases as defined by Elaine Showalter:

First, there is the prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition (...) Second, there is the phase of *protest* against these standards and values and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. (13)

Novels thereby are rich and meaningful documents on which is superimposed the entire spectrum of individual in a diaspora with its social and psychological conflicts.

The Vine of Desire explores the issue of 'culture straddling' in perspective and has questioned the entire system of values and beliefs. Decision of Sudha to return back to India is a major step which reverses the expectations and in a way balances the native culture and the culture of the inherited land. *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* thus open up varied questions on the way tradition and society shapes a person's personality. Sudha and Anju who grow up in a traditional and conservative environment find themselves wired in it even after moving to the land of dreams. Bal (1999) in his study on cultural

analysis has said that it, “seeks to understand the past as part of the present, as what I have around us, and without which no culture would be able to exist. (3) The novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and her characters seem to be caught in a web of the past, but it changes their present view as well. At times it serves to catalyse the change and at other times it hinders the transformation.

After exploring the psyche of the first generation immigrants, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her fourth novel tried to go beyond one more generation and explore the dilemma, confusion, conflict of the second generation immigrants also placing side by side the anxiety of the first generation. Femke Stock in an essay on “Home and Memory” has stated,

Adding to the complexity are differences between first generation migrants, who can relate their diasporic experiences to their own memories of a time before migration, and later generations for whom the ‘new land’ has never been new and whose memories of the ‘homeland’ are more fragmented. (24)

The Queen of Dreams is the story of a young woman Rakhi living in California who tries to rediscover her Indian roots through her mother’s Dream Journal entries which opens for her the doors to her past. Dream Journals are a record of her mother’s life experiences which she has never shared with anyone and which are discovered after her death. It is through her father with whom she has a cold relationship that she is able to interpret, infer and construct the hidden meanings and is able to put to rest the noise of misinterpretations and give a voice to the artist within her. Instead of blaming others she is able to forgive and accept. The past makes her look towards the future with a better understanding and enhanced acceptability. Stock has mentioned that, “The act of

remembering is always contextual, a continuous process of recalling, interpreting and reconstructing the past in terms of the present and in the light of an anticipated future.” (24)

Rakhi's mother consciously tries not to share about life in India to avoid conflict but because she does not share, the desire and the craze for the untold and undiscovered is more. This is very atypical of her mother to do so but that is the reason behind the shaping up of an imaginative India in Rakhi's imaginations. “What cruel karma had placed me in the care of the only two Indians who never mentioned their homeland if they could help it?” (QOD 82) She craves to recreate this tradition as in some way she has been denied her heritage. However the terrorist attack of 9/ 11 shifts her imagination on a more global level wherein she tries to comprehend the meaning of the world. India then becomes a little more than a legendary fable after the terrorist attacks but it always remains a key to her past and present lives. In the foreword to the novel, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has quoted Haruki Murakami, “what we know and what we don't know are like the Siamese twins, inseparable”

The situation of the second generation is yet more complicated because they don't feel they belong to the place where they are from and in their country of birth they are still labelled as outsiders. The bafflement and perplexity surrounding the two generations has been aptly described as, “The older generation cannot afford to invoke India in an authoritarian mode to resolve problems in diaspora and the younger generation will be ill-advised to indulge in a spree of forgetfulness about where they have come from.” (Brazier 42)

The concept of ‘imaginary counter-diasporic migration’ holds true here as Rakhi though never travels back to India but her thoughts oscillate between India as a land

of return. The tussle between ‘homeland’ and ‘hostland’ are always fresh in her psyche. To me she is doubly displaced. Her search is emotional and leads to a life-changing experience. From descriptive analytical category the concept of diaspora here has moved towards a socio-cultural condition. In the very beginning of the novel Rakhi’s mother has hinted how the change in geography affects her. She is not able to dream when she reaches California. Rakhi is not a migrant but is born in a host society to migrant parents. Rakhi tries to live in an imagined community which has resulted from the distance of homeland culture and experience of hostland. Homi Bhaba has called this as “Third Space”. It is a novel about trying to understand what has not been explained. The novel seeks to present a search for reality which is overshadowed by doubts and misgivings. The characters face racial discrimination, economic crisis and are suspected but they also struggle to make a mark.

To live as a migrant is also to live in a world of immense possibility and creativity. In such a situation, one has to create new narratives which will accommodate one’s position more positively than dominant narratives of belonging and identity. (Nair 82)

The novel deals with the larger theme of acceptance as the key to realizing one’s dreams. In a research paper *The Next Generation: Diaspora, Youth and Identity Construction* it has been quoted, “Displacement and migration, then, may not be literal facts of these young citizens’ lives, but they form part of their consciousness and affect the way that they are treated and the way they live.” (Hirji 7)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has brilliantly blended the title of the novel with a personal, historical, national and public importance. The title has a resonance in the Bollywood track “Mere Sapnon Ki Rani” which is generally sung by Rakhi’s father for Mrs

Gupta and can be translated as ‘queen of my dreams’ or ‘my queen of dreams’ but the irony is that she is not a dream queen for one but her life is meant to “dream the dreams of other people (...) help live their lives” (VOD 3) A woman who helps, discover and understand other people’s dream is unable to attain happiness and pleasure in the dreams which she sees for herself.

Mrs Gupta and her husband represent the first generation migrants who decided to make US their place of stay. Mrs Gupta’s reason for migration is love & marriage and Mr Gupta’s reason is job and work. However the ironical part is that the reason for which both of them had moved to a distant land hardly survives in the real sense. Mr Gupta is laid off from the job and Mrs Gupta though lives in marriage, is not purely into it. So the dream-city to which they travel renders them dreamless to a certain extent. Their distance from their land creates a distance also in their relations. They struggle to keep their roots intact in whatever possible manner. However the clinging on to the past, results in somewhat stubbornly attitude towards adjustment. Because they are far away from their own country, the tendency and the desperateness to keep a ‘feel’ of the homeland are intense. By doing this they feel they are being loyal to themselves and their culture but the question which constantly occurs is that their attempt at trying to keep up with tradition, is it not a myth? Rakhi has mentioned at one point, “At home we rarely ate anything but Indian; that was one way in which my mother kept her culture.”(QOD 8) In a paper on *Culture, Belonging and Collective imaginations: Reading Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Queen of Dreams*, researcher has concluded that:

The sense of Diaspora is born out of displacement from familiar systems of knowledge and the corresponding emergence of interactive spaces within

globalized networks of communication (...) *Queen of Dreams* (2004) makes us revisit this definition of diaspora and forces us to think about what happens after these interactive spaces of globalization have successfully assimilated the diasporic to the extent that he may lose the sense of being diasporic, but ironically, such a paradigmatic shift may also challenge his assimilated status which then jeopardizes his sense of stable identity in the interstitiality of the eye-holespace. (Jayaraman 8)

It is in the novel *The Palace of Illusions* that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has experimented with a traditional, mythical and legendary character Draupadi and explored her psyche through the modern, factual, contemporary and current outlook. In a daring attempt, Divakaruni drives us into a fantastic world inhabited by kings, queens, magic and palaces but strongly bangs on the emotional and psychological reasons behind the characters' actions. She calls Draupadi an 'epitome of timeless woman'. Panchaali (Draupadi) right from her childhood never felt at home but it is her exile that makes her incredibly adamant for her to create a home of her dreams. She is not lonely but her inner alienation drives her to push her five husbands to create a palace of her dreams which she can call her own. Her mental space is inclined towards creating a physical space as a projection of her unclaimed things which she wants to reclaim. Her exilic condition is a reflection of her mind. She almost rediscovers herself and her identity. Her thoughts reflect her desires. Her life in exile is eased by the support of her five husbands and it also makes her ponder on the journey of her life and to a greater extent towards realizing the spiritual realm:

Truly it was a transient world we lived in. Yesterday in a palace, today on the

road, tomorrow-who knew? Perhaps I would find the home that eluded me all my life. But one thing was certain: the currents of history had finally caught me up and were dragging me headlong. How much water would I have to swallow before I came to a resting place? (POI 139)

Though this novel is about the ancient legend but it analyses the present situation with a mirror into the past and inspires the future. It opens possibilities into the future of mankind with a changed perspective but it also projects the past as a memoir to create a memory of moments -magical, mythical and modern. Rama Nair's words hold true, "The truth of art lies in its power to inscribe new dimensions to reality." (74) As a diasporic writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has made use of mythology to reflect a sense of culture and identity which gets re-constructed with pieces from shards of memories. Just as multiple storylines criss-cross the minds of the people in diaspora, she has also woven a net of imaginative world to sustain and support. Various strands which exist in the tangled texture of our plural existence have been studied and the way the relocation of characters affect the identity has been explored. In the novel one finds that identity and identity crisis almost become like 'semantic beacons' signifying not just the past but also the contemporary period. The words of Sudhir Kakar find a resonance here as he has observed, "At some places identity is referred to as a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at others, to an unconscious, striving for continuity of experience and yet another places as a sense of solidarity with a groups ideal." (16) Kavitha Nair in her paper *Agency, Narrativity, Gender in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions* has gone on to say that "Though it was Vyas who prophesied the future of Draupadi but it is Draupadi who lent a meaning to Vyas' prophecy. She turns 'his-story' into 'history'." (156)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels are a kind of *bildungsroman* and in most of it there is no lineal narration. She explores the binary view of the world i.e. the past and the present, objective and subjective, identity and identification, magical and the real. She builds a connection between the memories and experiences. Divakaruni's merit consists precisely of her insistence on the need to accept conventions and make it a tool for introspection. The novelist has brought in the Indian mythical dimension as a kind of discourse to reflect on other discourses marking the contemporary world thus making her novels a space of encounter for such a hybrid. In one of the interviews to Uma Ganesan Hong, Divakaruni (2007) has mentioned, "India is a country that straddles several centuries at the same time." It is this belief of hers which gets translated into the transformative process of the characters.

Another novel entitled *One Amazing Thing* projects a different path of the memories flowing into the present and thus serving to boost the will to survive. People from different origins in this novel have been dislocated at some point of time and they come together by chance/fate due to a natural calamity. Novelists' own experience with Hurricane in Houston in 2005 led her to memorize and recollect the experience. Noted writer Toni Morrison has compared memory to water. She has written,

All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through (...) the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory- what the nerves and skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our 'flooding'. (305)

Her novel delves into personal stories but these stories point a universal truth. Each

character seems to be running away to a new place to rediscover oneself and the echo of it is summed up in a statement by a nurse to Mrs Pritchett, "Moving to live where no one knew you, shucking off your worn out life like old snake skin!"(OAT 176) This novel is not a movement towards a new settlement but rather takes a step towards the old settlement driven by the vehicle of recall, remembrance, recollection and with memory as an engine to it. The stories of the characters show that they are disoriented, dejected, displaced and are in search of some kind of reconciliation with them. It reflects on the changes wrought in a man through circumstantial evidences and destined orders of the nature.

The very thought of going to homeland fills Uma with a sense of anxiety and 'anticipation' for this honeymoon with India can be understood because for her the place of belonging is the place where she has been brought up. Her journey to India as she understands is a journey not into a native land but into a foreign land where she has to struggle to identify. The 'café', 'cavernous libraries', 'university', 'life in US' is what she is proud of. In her memory and thoughts she longs and desires that for her parents 'disillusion and dyspepsia to set in.' (OAT 6). The plight of second generation immigrants is more confusing and since they are groomed in bilingual and bicultural environment, they face intense cultural dilemma. Lily though is a Chinese by origin has been brought up in America and with her hip-hugging jeans has almost now imbibed the intelligence and American impatience. On the other hand is Malathi who is a first generation immigrant to US but her initial inhibition to give away her saree to support a fractured hand is faced with a cultural shock but it only takes her a while to accept it as a means of co-operation which is the seed of community building. Tariq is a second generation immigrant who is distraught by the impeding racial attacks on him but still he observes and follows religious practices

which hint at the ingrained culture.

This novel also brings out the repercussions of reverse migration. Absence of certain things paradoxically finds a presence in others. Uma's parents for instance shifted to US to fulfill their dreams of climbing the ladder of social status but time and again they criticize India and the things associated with Indianness. They 'plunged enthusiastically', 'orchestrated elaborate, schizophrenic meals' and all the while 'bemoaned the corruption of Indian politicians'.(OAT 5) However again when they shift their base they try to convince their daughter of "India Shining" who disapproves of their diplomatic style. They live through India in their discussions and subsist by making ends meet. So after getting displaced; they try to place themselves again. For them reverse migration also raises several questions and more so for their daughter. Movement to a new place whether it is hostland or homeland entails for them conflict, change and challenges.

In view of this novel the term 'diaspora' succeeds in capturing a metaphor for the diverse discourses. Diaspora signals an engagement with a matrix of diversity: of cultures, languages, histories, people, places, times and the novel blends the people of various cultures together to portray a single voice of dynamic construction that adjusts continually to the changes experienced within, surrounding the self. It portrays a complex, multifaceted field of life with a marked emphasis on intercultural connections.

Since the characters are varied and are strangers to each other, their stories help in providing a contextualized understanding of the multicultural setting. It underlines the centrality of experiences in the process of re-possessing the past to understand the present, both chronological and spatial, in a meaningful way. The novel rewrites life stories referring to history and events that aims at being more respectful of differences. The use of

the stories to describe the social fabric opens up the plethora of memories. Memories which the characters re-live to while up their time replays the forgotten moments:

[I]t is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses in us the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. The truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and in our language. (Caruth 4)

Malathi, Mangalam, Uma, Mr & Mrs Pritchett, Cameron, Tariq, Uma, Jiang, Lily all remember the situations and incidents which either forced them or motivated them to leave their friends, family, neighbours, their country and home. This novel agrees with Vijay Agnew's views on memories as he has written that,

Memories ignite our imaginations and enable us to vividly recreate our recollections of home (...) memories can be nostalgically evocative (...) as an antidote to the struggles of the present. Others who had wounds of memory (...) may find travels to the past an involuntary, albeit necessary, journey to come to terms with the present selves.(10)

Cameron, an Afro-African's memory is a memory wrought by destruction and devastation. Therefore he tries and makes every effort to save further destruction. Though he invites a rage of anger from people like Tariq but he takes it easy and just tries to calm him by saying, "I am not a violent man."(OAT 13) Memory carries with it the seeds of development and grains of future action. Cameron is emotionally troubled, physically always out of place but tries to travel distances to adopt a girl Seva in India to come to terms with his own self. His mobility gives him a chance to fight the psychological pressures. It

helps him to assert his identity. The indifference does not break him but with conviction and confidence, he moves on to become the leader of the people caught in natural disaster. As he performs the duty of a disaster manager he is able to put his conflicting views also to some extent at rest.

On the other hand, Jiang, though a Chinese by birth, lived in India before her marriage as her parents had settled there. After her marriage she moves to US but hardly remembers China. However, the fact that she is at the consulate office to get visa for journey to India shows how rooted and ingrained is her memory in India which is not her homeland. Though in the past she was forced to leave India on account of the tension because of the Indo-China war and had to let go off her love, her memory helps her to “break free from the ground.” According to Pablo Shiladitya Bose, in an article for the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, “the range of diasporic transnational practices is not monolithic but instead governed by differences in class, gender, race, sexuality, and a host of other distinctions”.(125) Identity basically results because of difference, dislocation and displacement and it affects a person culturally, psychologically as well as emotionally. The stories of the characters are in other words the stories of migration, of identities in flux, subjects facing crisis situations and trauma and it represents a contemporary phase in globalization. Her novel tries to offer an understanding of the relationship of culture to space which is one of the challenges of the contemporary “world citizens”.

Her last published novel *Oleander Girl* is set in India but transports the protagonist to US for a while. Anu and Korobi-mother and daughter both fight their ways to travel abroad. Both disobey and travel against the wishes of their elders. Both are shown to travel to US for a purpose. In their case migration is a kind of path to rediscover themselves.

If for Anu it meant an opportunity to explore, for Korobi it becomes an opportunity to assert her 'self' and identity. Anu and Korobi after their displacement from India have to face hurdles but for Anu it is like jostling with her own fears and conditioning whereas for Korobi it is to succeed in what she has aimed at. For one migration becomes a noose whereas for another it leads to whole-hearted acceptance. Anu's life is under a strong control in India but even after going abroad she is not in the real sense able to free herself from this control.

The sub-plot of Korobi's mother and her lover Rob, an Afro-American, unfolds the life in US. Contrastive views are presented through mother-daughter. Korobi's mother had migrated to US for studies but the traditional mindset did not allow her to rise above this narrow conventionalism whereas Korobi has the strength to fight with freedom though she has been brought up in a traditional family under the care of grandparents. She had been sent to boarding at the age of five and probably that has filled her with an independent streak. She refuses to be bogged down by any kind of family pressures and has a voice of her own. It is from her grandmother that she comes to know of her mother. Sarojini tells Korobi, "She learned to live a double life, assertive and competitive at school and college, compliant and voiceless everywhere else." (OG 57)

Anu, Korobi's mother, had received a scholarship, to study international relations at the University of California in Berkeley. She was the first daughter of Roys to go far from home. It was America which made her adventurous and Sarojini Roy tells Korobi to take her trip to US as an adventurous trip. On one hand was her mother who fell in love and even entered into a physical relation with her lover but on the other hand is Korobi, who though is very head-strong, still tries to cling to the traditional values. Korobi also readily

accepts, “I love my mother. But I am not her. My journey has taught me that.” (OG 280)” Anu had travelled back to India but she always remained displaced and alienated whereas for Korobi it is not so: “She has travelled the world and chosen to come back home.” (OG 284) For Korobi home is where the heart is whereas Anu could never really find a home for her.

One finds that Anju lives masked identities. On one side she travels oceans to pursue her dreams, joins International House to learn folk dancing, and even has a live-in relationship with Rob. On the other side she behaves like a timid, weak and submissive person in India. When Korobi meets Rob he says, “I’ve come to see that Anu too, was responsible for her situation (...) couldn’t break away from his control. Her childhood conditioning went too deep.”(OG 252) Martin Heidegger had written, “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.” (243) For her displacement is without actual relocation. She comes across as a weak individual who could not go against her parents, whereas Korobi comes across as a headstrong person who values her parents but follows her own inner voice. She defies her traditional customs and goes to the extent of getting her hair cut because it gave her an opportunity to travel to search her father. “A mass of curls, barely reaching my shoulders, have transformed into a stranger, glamorous and a little dangerous.” (OG 177) Anu though had changed her place of living but her thoughts and mind still could not accept the new freedom whereas Korobi though lives in US for a short while, she is able to mould herself as per the requirement. She transforms, accepts and even dares the route to discover her roots. In other words adjustment after displacement has a lot to do with one’s own attitude coupled with mindset which is reflected in the words:

Displacement, then, is not simply an external, geo-political phenomenon. It is

also an internal process, in which the subject is cast out from its own history and culture (...) yet oddly it continues to be the carrier and medium through which that culture comes to know itself. (Smith 10)

To Korobi, America is full of possibilities and when she meets Mitra with whom she is to share the apartment she reacts in a confused manner, “ I wonder how America the Beautiful could have wrought such a change on him.” (OG 94) It is after moving to America though only for a short time, that she starts missing her people, her ethnicity and everything associated with India.“ Bollywood songs, nostalgic old favourites, the immigrants longing to capture home. In India, I never cared for this kind of music, but now as I hear it, homesickness twists my inside.” (OG 97) The very things in which she had never taken any interest seem to catch fancy for her. “I find myself missing our temple back home, though I rarely visited it on my own.” (OG 94)

The distance between two lands and the geographical distance even seems to take a toll on the personal relations. “She in a land of night while he is in day time, each unable to truly gauge the other’s sufferings heart.” (OG 121) While staying in US, she is helped by Vic but back in India when she shares the details with her grandmother, she warns her, “What happens in America isn’t your life; it’s only an interlude.” (OG 136) Vic who has been brought up in America however feels, “I guess I really didn’t think of myself as India.” (OG 149) Korobi’s journey in US is not easy. She meets different people and one of them even tries to seduce her, another thinks that she is out there for some kind of monetary benefits. By bringing people from different class, caste, race, community, age and gender almost together and reflecting on the difference of opinions, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has almost put the core of human problem at the centre by explaining the sameness yet

uniqueness, uniformity yet distinctiveness, and semblances yet differences. Korobi faces many problems but still her view is, “I love what I’ve seen of America. And there’s so much more, unbounded and bristling with possibility.” (OG 218) However she does not like the way people distrust in US. “I’m suddenly exhausted. Why was everyone in America convinced that I was out to deceive him?” (OG 233) One finds that the characters evolve despite traumatic experience in the form of rejection, social and patriarchal control. Adopting a mixed approach of rejection-acceptance, rebelling-submitting she is able to stand up and face the challenges.

Korobi’s decision to travel back shows her toughness. She though physically leaves a land of possibilities but carries with her the independent streak and comes back much more confident, determined to fight back the challenges. She learns, “To get to the other side, you must travel through grief.” (OG 276) Divakaruni has touched on the topic of class, caste and race distinctions and she seems to be advocating the need for cross-cultural acceptance. Both the families, Roys and the Bose are shocked to hear of Korobi’s father as being Black. “...for so many people, having Korobi’s father turn out to be black would be far worse than if he were merely a foreigner.” (OG 225)

This novel is about the journey which metaphorically conveys the distances between lands as the distances between hearts. It projects the need to fight one’s fears. Anu gets bogged down by patriarchal pressure and control whereas Korobi rejects this control and charts a way towards mutual respect and understanding for each other. The psychological landscape has to transgress the physical landscape. While culture has long been defined as the force that defines and delimits societies in terms of fixed spaces, the recent intensification of globalization, according to Divakaruni, is suggestive of the fact that

it is no longer possible to imagine the world as a collection of disparate, autonomous regions. A woman has to cross several borders and the novel presents the journey of the two women who, right from their birth to matrimony, slowly move forward. One gets disoriented, dislodged and finally dissolved by the clutches of death but another blooms, re-lodges and finally acknowledges the differences. The crust and boundaries of countries hardens them but it is through trials and tribulations that they come to dwell at the edge of the world. The transformation which Korobi experiences seem to promote a sense of tolerance. It enables her family members not only to sympathize but also to a certain extent empathize with other communities.

Displacement, thus, in Divakaruni's novels resulting due to migration, immigration, travel or exile offers possibility of providing 'positive spaces of assimilation'. It largely offers a chance for development and cross- cultural dialogues resulting both in alienation and assimilation. Diaspora thus experiences various kinds of displacement but it is their inner consciousness which makes them adjust, accommodate and even adapt. Desperateness, conflicts, worries, doubts, suspicions characterize the people who relocate to new places but their struggles in Divakaruni's novels are evidences of chronicles of time and contribute towards betterment of self-perception in relation to past and memories.

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