

## Chapter 3

### **Alienation and Assimilation**

Shell within shell within shell ( ... ) today I plan to stretch my wings, to crack perhaps the shells and emerge into the infinite spaces of the outside world. It frightens me a little ( ... ) Outside America is flinging itself against the walls of my store, calling in its many tongued voice. (MOS 125)

Growing globalization has created a social and cultural impact and along with this, it has also resulted in the dissemination of cultural identities. Alienation experienced, encountered and enamoured is projected by the diasporic writers and the novels' authenticity gets heightened by the fact that it is based on writer's own experience. "Alienation belongs to the logical core of modernity. The separation of the subject from any fixed identity is itself the definition of the problem." (Prosono 228) The journey from feeling alienated towards getting assimilated and integrated is faced with many challenges and the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni highlight this social phenomenon throughout the portrayal of Indian protagonists.

The term 'assimilation' has also been debated and redefined in the context of social changes. From moving beyond 'straight-line assimilation' a term given by Gaul and Sandberg (1973) and becoming more similar in values, behavior and characteristics to Milton Gordon's presenting of three competing images of assimilation-the melting pot, cultural pluralism and Anglo-conformity, the theory of assimilation has met with varied criticism. In the wake of this theory a particular term 'multiculturalism' emerged which marked a difference between 'assimilation' and 'integration' laying focus on cultural

diversity promoting new resources and opportunities. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the characters do not give up their culture but infact integrate with the host culture. Cultural differences do not disappear but it works as an asset leading to fusion of cultures. At times the characters feel lost, confused, perplexed and at other times they jostle with their identities. Contradictory emotions, hesitant notions of belonging, constant longing to return, attempt to negotiate between home and host land almost parallel the issues of identification.

As a writer living in diaspora herself, she has used the novels as a means to construct spaces of in-betweenness between different cultures, societies and homeland. To realize her aim, has combined elements of daily life with an exaggerated, metaphorical perspective known as magic realism. The use of magic realism is according to Isabell Allende:

A way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism ( ... ) It is the capacity to see and to write about all the dimensions of reality.(qtd. in Hadjetian 34)

Since the characters in her novels generally tend to move to the USA on their will, it is the internal condition of the mind in comparison to that of external condition which they grapple with. If Tilo is alienated from pleasure, Panchaali from peace, Rakhi from her own origins, Sudha from trust and Korobi from contentment but still they evolve to chart out a path to assert their identity. Infact, the words of Tilo point out her deep sense of alienation, “But even as I plunge into pain I know with hopelessness that it will not kill me.” (MOS 299) The binarisms of life ‘here and there’, ‘ now and then’, ‘ anywhere and everywhere’ almost

haunt the people in *The Mistress of Spices* as they live in a diaspora and all this has got an expression in her writings through the characters who visit her spice store. The narrative in the novel dangles between mystical and understood. In the words of Zupancic Metka:

The characters in these novels are placed in social settings where the “supernatural” is a commonplace and a regular companion to the daily events, although the humans who hold power continue in their endeavors to bend these powers so as to use them for their personal gain. The struggle between the ego, the pride, the greed, and the need to better understand the extemporal, the all pervading, remains at the centre of Divakaruni’s reinterpretation of old traditions and her projection of how the future could be shaped if humankind achieved the necessary transformation toward love and understanding. (115)

The most striking fact about the novel *Queen of Dreams* is the inner alienation which Rakhi experiences just because her mother does not share much about the land of her origin. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni through the use of dreams has tried to enter into the realm where things are difficult to be understood but still it has a value and a reality behind it. Diasporians often feel that they are away from their homeland and that is the price they have to pay for the future prospects and a better life. The Dream Journals of Mrs Gupta become symbolic of the thought process of her wish to project the bitter truth before her daughter. It is her portfolio of memory lodged in a book which is later used as a tool for re-discovery.

By employing supernatural, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has managed to give an extra dimension to the things happening for which there is no explanation. “Magical

realism is outlined as a shared fictional terrain, the meeting-ground of originally discrete sensibilities ostensibly fated to coalesce in some new mode of perception and representation.” (Delrez 10) Rakhi perceived her husband to have betrayed her, but was his betrayal real? Can a person be a dream-teller? Though these questions haunt the readers but it also underlies the fact that reality is not an objective but a subjective phenomenon. The subjectivities clash and the fantasies create an illusion. In her interview with Susan Comminos (2004) Divakaruni has mentioned, “*Queen of Dreams* is a very different kind of a novel, with a strong interest in mystery and changing realities. Therefore it needed a different kind of telling.”

The way in which the narrative has switched between Rakhi’s point of view, a third person’s point of view and the dream journals written by Rakhi’s mother offers a multifaceted dimension to reality and the kaleidoscopic panorama of changing face of reality in the face of circumstances . The ‘mysterious black car’, ‘white man’, ‘silent patron’, ‘ and ‘asana lesson’ all leave a sort of untold, unsaid color to the complexity of Rakhi’s life but she is able to release herself by her contact with “Emit Maerd” whose name when reversed spells “Dream Time”. Many things are not understood and cannot be explained and this particular truth is manifested through the appearance of such magically enthused things like dreams as Mrs Gupta had put it, “A dream is a telegram from the hidden world” (QOD 34)

Mrs Gupta’s character to me has been envisioned to bridge the gap between dreams and reality, fantastic and ordinary, imaginations and facts. The constant reverberations of lines from Brihat Swapna Sarita are recited by Mrs Gupta as she understands the supernatural as natural. She says, “My life is nothing but a dream from which I will wake into death, which is nothing but a dream of life.” (QOD 19) The transitory

nature of life, unpredictability of the situations and momentary setbacks is all bundled up in the lines mentioned above and the positive note of optimism resonates even in the most negated word 'death'.

Same is the case with Rakhi, her daughter. Bond between women or sisterhood is a recurring theme which serves to provide an answer to the dilemma posed by displacement. Rakhi has herself aptly described the intensity of her relationship, "...my mother, who is the original Do It Now poster girl. Perhaps this is why she dreams and I paint. Because dreams look to the future and paintings try to preserve the past."(QOD 31) Rakhi calls her mother a 'fighter in the family' and she also knows that once her mother decides on a goal, 'she never lets it go'. It is when her mother falls ill that Rakhi realizes that she knows only a little about her mother. Rakhi's mother had kept important things in 'a plastic box with a blue lid' which makes Rakhi think that their relation also is like a box closed with a lid waiting to be opened and understood in a better way.

The way in which she spends most of the time in the 'sewing room' all by her also points at the need of mending, patching and repairing needed in relationships. 'Sewing room' has been used as a motif to project the unstitched patches between people which needed a patch up and stitching. At times Rakhi detests and feels animosity too because her mother does not share. "I hungered for all things Indian because my mother never spoke of the country she'd grown up in." (QOD 35) They share a good relationship but still there is a sense of secrecy to it. The way in which Rakhi's mother had managed home after her husband was laid off from the job is inspirational for Rakhi. She tends to remember this episode with a mark of respect and this experience becomes a kind of motivation for her when she herself faces a competitive threat from Java—a 55,000

employee's fastest growing Café chain in the country.

Her mother's words play a crucial role in helping her fight the competition. "You can succeed only if you do something different. Create a special attraction, something that means more to people than money." (QOD 46) and she ascertains that, "if my mother could risk so much to follow her dreams, then as her daughter can't I take this small risk that faces me today?" (187) It is from an entry in the Dream Journals that Rakhi eventually is able to comprehend the true meaning of life. She also understands the importance of the written words that "dream is not a drug but a way. Listen to where it can take you." (QOD 105) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has touched a deeper chord of spirituality with the mundane and ordinary looking characters.

It is only after her death that she acknowledges that her mother was, "their conductor, their buffer zone, their translator, ( ... ) softened the combative edges of their words and clarified their questions, even to themselves." (QOD 165) The Dream Journals give her hope, faith and trust back but it also gives a glimpse of "illness, murder, suicidal depression and schizophrenia" (QOD 239). A balanced picture of the tribulations and trials of life as pointed in the Dream Journals help Rakhi give a form to her painting of the man in a eucalyptus grove. The way she struggles to get the right shape, form, texture reflects her inner conflicts. The more she becomes clear in her thoughts the better is her perception of her painting.

The novel *The Vine of Desire* adds yet another dimension and explores the sensitivity underlying the relationships and it also seems to question the entire scheme of loyalty and trust. Sudha's stepping out is a sign of her desire to shed her old identity and become self-independent. Anju too breaks the norms and refuses to take the money offered

by Sunil and moves out of the house thus trying to cope up with the situational crisis in her own way. So in a way the dilemma to exercise choice itself becomes a kind of trope wherein the people in diaspora not just jostle with their traditional beliefs but also make an attempt to combat it. In the words of E.V. Ramakrishnan:

Literature is shaped by the material conditions of society. The multiple literary traditions in India which go back to the early part of the last millennium have developed through diverse trajectories, negotiating the hegemonic structures of power that informed the social spheres of which they were a product. Hence, while there are points of convergences, there are also points of departures. (1)

These words not just highlight the literary traditions but also throw light on the diasporic condition. The last part of the novel where the two cousins again meet for the last time and Anju takes a flight in a glider is symbolic of the change in the attitudes that has come in both. 'Flight' stands for escape, get away and it also speaks volume about the desires flying high in need of pursuit of happiness.

Women characters in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are symbols of endurance, strength, and fortitude. Sudha's impatience to be on her own for the first time gives way to her confidence. In the party of Mrs Chopra she throws off her inhibitions, mingles with the people and enjoys in full swing with Lalit, a surgeon, who starts taking interest in her. This streak of change in her comes as a surprise but it is also a way of Sudha to break away from the expected behavior. In the party she represents a woman, "who braved the new rules of a new continent because she wanted more in life than a man to take care of her." (VOD 129) She is like a 'turtle' which comes out of his hiding environs but at

time struggles with her own guilt and goes into a mode of self-reproach. Sudha's listening of a folk song 'O nodi re' reflects the psyche of the woman whose life has gone through various hurdles.

*"River, I have just one question for you*

*O river, on your never ending journey.*

*When one of your bank breaks, you build another*

*But what of me, the banks of whose life are all swept away?*

*O river."* (261)

She almost associates herself with the river which has no banks and no support but she refuses to succumb and goes on flowing like the river on its unending journey. Her 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.

The mental space of the characters in *One Amazing Thing* open up in the physical space, which is headed towards ruin and destruction, and it bears implication of the individual's psychology as against the social taboos and set structures. The characters have retained with them their stories as archives stored in a library but by narrating, they turn them into rejuvenation medicine protecting them from further assault of time. By weaving one's memory they try to fit into the meaningful relationship with the consciousness. By introspecting the past they slightly try to figure a transient Utopia leading to relief. The consulate office becomes a database within which the flows of the discourses of the characters interact, fuse and collide with each other. Indifference is there in the beginning and even doubts prevail but later each one empathizes with others' experiences and is drifted back into the past with the narrations in the present.

Mr Pritchett's inability to articulate his trauma of the past before his wife and later his final acceptance in fact exhibits the need for speaking the unspeakable. He had build up a wall probably to prevent further injury to oneself but by breaking the wall he is able to open up a possibility of understanding. However by listening to his story the others become the experienced subject. Bal in his study has implied that, "The personal narrative of memory becomes an institutional force, almost oppressively telling you how to read: an act of shaping other people's memories. The intimacy gives way to the pressure of public culture." (Bal 174)

Uma's reading of the Wife of Bath's Tale is significant as through it Chaucer had hinted at the moral that true beauty lies within. This basically is the message of this conventional tale told with contemporary characters. The end of the novel with Uma lying to her friend about seeing an aurora is also extremely significant. Spanning the journey from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to 21<sup>st</sup> century, from Arthur Knight to the astronomical atmosphere, Divakaruni has tried to create a timelessness of the concept of survival. The novel ends on hope. 'Aurora' is a Latin word meaning 'dawn' and it symbolizes a passage to another world and it also stands for all that is magical, mystical, and unknown about the world. This novel can be viewed as an opportunity for transforming citizenship into self-governing subjects whose human capital becomes a passport toward realizing individual freedom in diverse realms. 'Intensification of interconnectedness' seems to create opportunities for the rise of feelings and leads to 'institutions of cosmopolitanism'. "Cross-cultural transaction is an interactive, dialogic, two-way process rather than a simple active-passive relation." (Sarangi 286)

Divakaruni through her Indian characters has tried to reflect upon the broader

aspect of India and Indianness. The traditions of India, customs and food habits, love for Bollywood songs and places all find an echo in her works. The references to mythological figures adds yet another dimension to the studies of her novel as the deep seated love for spirituality, wisdom and compassion reverberate. One cannot ignore the way she has used the idea of her motherland India and has explored its mythic and philosophic construct. She has constructed India into a literal space which offers challenges and realities that are impossible to ignore. In the words of Ahmed et al (2003) processes of “home-building or “homing” ( ... ) depends on the reclaiming or reprocessing of objects, names, and histories that have been uprooted-in migration, displacement or colonization.” (qtd. in Raghuram 332) She has explored the bitter practices of social discrimination, gender discrimination but has also presented the sweet tastes of land and the rich mythological traditions.

Malathi’s chiding of Mangalam by saying, “This isn’t India. You can’t interfere in people’s lives like this. Leave them alone.” (OAT 59) points at the writer’s understanding of the differences but it also is a kind of acknowledgement of it. Uma all through her growing up period had merely listened about India and therefore for her India is, “The heat, the dirt, the noise, the crowded buses, the beggars, the bribes, the diarrhoea, the bootlicking, the streets littered with garbage that never got picked up.” (OAT 5) However she has gone on to also say, “It’s a different India now” (OAT 5) “‘Place-making practice’ serves to ‘anchor’ the diasporic consciousness against the anxieties of global migration and social displacement.”(Ray 12) A simple passing reference made in the beginning about Uma’s boyfriend Ramon being nicknamed as Ramu by her parents show the tenderness of the heart to accept and change. They overcome their initial shock and then treat him affably. In the novel *Oleander Girl* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has given rainbow scenes of

ceremonies added with smells, spices and poojas. To her the depiction and sketching of ceremonies seem to be working like a kind of recalling the past left behind. “Sarojini hurries to arrange lamps, camphor holders, incense sandalwood powder, marigolds, large copper platters, fruits, milk sweets, rice grains, gold coins, and multicolored pictures depicting a pantheon of Gods.” (OG 6)

Effortlessly Divakaruni has presented the glimpses of India of her memories through her characters. Cameron’s thoughts on ‘Gandhi and ahimsa’ project an international perspective on India. “The word *ahimsa* rose in his mind because he had been studying Gandhi.” (OAT 35) Ravi, Mrs Balan’s son, ‘wants to improve the lives of suffering people, just like Mahatma Gandhi’ and he represents the modern Indian youth who think that ‘rigid class boundaries were the bane of Indian society’ (OAT 112). World’s interest in India for its tourist place ‘the Taj Mahal’ also finds a reference as Mr & Mrs Pritchett wish to visit the palaces in India. Uma’s mother tries to lure her into ‘best ayurvedic spa’ and ‘sesame oil massages’. Through Farah, Divakaruni has highlighted the interesting aspects of India and skillfully presented the ‘posters of Indian art’, ‘roadside stall that sold the best kababs’, written in the form of a letter to Tariq. ‘The ‘sandalwood Ganapathi’, ‘belief in Karma’, ‘superstitions’ of Mangalam come to the fore in moments of abject distress. Zlatko Skrbis has mentioned,

It is important to view the homeland as a constructed and imagined topos rather than a clearly defined entity ( ... ) The very idea of homeland has the power to evoke memories, intense emotions and put into action more or less deeply learned attitudes. (38)

A plain incident wherein Meena, the sister, of Mohit Das claps a self-

conscious palm over her mouth to control laughter and is told, “Stop, that, Meena! It’s okay to laugh!” hints at the gender differences of the Indian society but it also carry with it the seeds of change. Divakaruni has not failed to mention the mentality of the ‘devout Hindus’ and the ‘staunch bengalis’ and the interest of the Indians in their son as a ‘carrier of the generations’. Malathi also remembers that her Hindu community treated Kerala Christians as members of ‘a forbidden, scandalous species’. By placing the blemishes and the flaws of her country against the exquisiteness, she has very much tried to reassert the need to understand each other and realize that in imperfection lies the seeds to growth and development. Divakaruni in an interview to Kartik Ramaswamy (2004) said, “In our Hindu scriptures, a quality is described that can be roughly translated as loving the world, all of it, without exception, from a place deep within you. That's what I'd like to have.” The words of Divakaruni almost echo the words of Robin Cohen:

Diasporas are positioned somewhere between nation-states and “travelling cultures” in that they involve dwelling in a nation-state physical sense, but travelling in an astral or spiritual sense that falls outside that nation-state’s space/time zone. (135)

Malathi while explaining the dark secrets of the rich which the beauty parlour girl was privy to states, “We knew that to meddle in the affairs of the powerful was akin to riding the proverbial tiger”. (107) Tigers are the biggest cats of the world and they symbolize strength, boldness, fierceness, power and as per the Asian folk-lore the tiger is considered as the protector of the dead. Mr Pritchett’s inner desire to be strong comes to the fore with his expression as he generally comes across as a timid, weak and submissive guy. Divakaruni by using this image of a ‘tiger’ has contrastingly brought out the difference between

appearance and reality. Malathi's comment hints at the class system of India where the poor and the rich are required to maintain a distance.

Divakaruni has made a dexterous use of the ancient Indian legend and reinvented the myth of the bird of Shampati. Snakes appear and seem to suggest the idea of rebirth and the idea of resurrection thus denoting the need to look at the things with a new approach. The legend of Shampati, as a dominant theme, holds the story together. In the end, almost killed in the earthquake that hits Bay area she learns that happiness comes from being involved in the human world. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has used mythology to present the human experiences and in the words of D.H. Lawrence, "Myths is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience, of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep into the blood and soil, for mental explanation and description." (qtd. in Sharma 66) Divakaruni has used the 'fire' image as it is the provider of heat and light and the source of life as she wishes to pass this energy to the characters straddling between the pressures of a new environment and past tradition. Physical spaces and mindscapes have been overlapped as it reflects the division of cultures and countries. To some extent, the rules imposed by the Old One on Tilo are the rules to help her stick to her tradition. She also remains to a great extent loyal to all her spices and by this way tries to extend her loyalty towards the Indian culture and tradition but by crossing the store she in a way opens up to wider possibilities and probabilities. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's voice comes through these words, "...the store is an excursion into the land of might-have-been. A self indulgence dangerous from a brown people who come from elsewhere to whom real Americans might say Why ?" (MOS 5)

The way in which reference has been made to Shampati's fire reminds of the mythological figure Sita and in a way it also highlights how the inner consciousness of

Divakaruni's own life and traditions have helped her in directing the course of the women characters who not only survive but also metamorphose on foreign soil thus passing the test of fire. "Diaspora captures the many and contradictory relationships that are a sign of the future, though they continue to draw on the past." (Shukla 2002) Mythology and modernity has been blended as here the women though pass the test of fire but they also seem to fight for an equal opportunity and the right of self-determination. The way in which Ahuja's wife decides to walk out of marriage and refuses to succumb to marital rape also advocates issues of sexual autonomy and it posits an important question of female voice and status.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has presented it in a universal context and tried to redefine the significance of human dignity. A journey towards self-realization in Divakaruni's works is in other words a journey towards acceptance and assimilation. The essence of Hindu mysticism finds an exact semblance here with the spices taking on destructive and constructive effect in the way they are used and it wields a kind of unifying force which rejuvenates them to reassess their stands and make adjustments. Mythology makes it more appealing as it touches a chord with the reader.

Time and space has been made timeless and boundless in the novel as Tilo questions: "Was she on the spice island "for a year- or was it two or three?"(MOS 19) Or "the store has been here only for a year. But already many look at it and think it was always" (MOS 4). Sudesh Mishra in an article entitled *From Sugar to Masala, Writing by the Indian Diaspora* has mentioned, "the new diasporic writers are inclined to inhabit the liminal or threshold zone of intercutting subjectivities that defines the experience of migrancy."(Mishra 287) Apart from this reference to time occurs quite often as, "when night slides into day" (MOS 14); when "day cannot be told apart from night, truth from longing"

(MOS 18); or that evening hour when light of sun and moon fall mixed upon our longings, and all is perhaps possible.” (MOS 182) However she steps out of the store in “brahma mahurta, the holy moment of Brahman when night reveals itself as day” (127). The distinction between ‘real’ and ‘universal’ time draws out a distinction between reality and illusion. Tilo goes through a series of processes before actually acknowledging the factors that influence her identity and she is also able to embrace the two opposing worlds with a sense of compromising attitude.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has put in different stories of different characters together but the way Raven and Tilo come together helps to weave many themes into one. It also strikingly brings to light various intricate, multifaceted and compounded woes and problems which the multi-ethnic groups experience in America. The way in which Raven's mother had concealed from him his background, her real name, the way she morphed her identity by calling herself Celestina, his ancestry that made him ashamed of her reflects on the pressure which the people face when they do not belong to the host land. Raven's past story also highlights the way he underwent a crisis. He, however, fights back. When he reveals his past to Tilo, there is a sense of doubt, “My American's voice is glazed and heavy like medicine honey...” (MOS 154)

The complexity of immigration and the hardnosed reverence for one's nationality and spirituality has been interrogated and grilled against the backdrop of myths and images. There is a reference to the ‘sleeping city under the ocean’ and the ‘speaking serpents’. Raven who comes in as an outsider, a person from a different world brings in a concept of mythological ‘raven’ who is responsible for bringing the world into being and also for bringing light to the darkness. Raven gets his name from a bird and he says,

“...that’s what the bird came to tell me. To stop wasting my life on trivialities and find it. To go back to the old ways, the ways of the earth before it was spoiled. To the earthly paradise” (MOS 253)

According to Stuart Hall, identity is: “formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture.” (Hall 44) Raven, while analyzing his past of his mother’s secretive identity, makes an observation, “She hadn’t really escaped it, not in her heart, which is the only place where it counts.” (MOS 211) Geeta’s parents though accepted the American culture and way of living to a certain extent but they are also not able to accept Juan as a life partner for Geeta. This echoes the dichotomous position of the ‘self’ which is hidden inside the conscious mind and unconsciously re-appears and triggers an attempt to connect with the past. It is after knowing his real identity that Raven interrogates and searches for his true self.

The novel *The Sister of My Heart* to a certain extent is an attempt by a diasporic writer to look back at her own country. In this novel Divakaruni seems to be reminded of her days in India and by recollecting the memories through her characters has managed to recreate a tradition. In this novel the characters do not live in diaspora but have been born and brought up in the traditional environment of India. As a diasporic writer, she has tried to look back at India and society. Women characters pass through different stages to achieve in their own way a sense of fulfillment. Anand Mulloo’s words fall in line with Divakaruni’s attempt to recreate her country. He has mentioned:

Looking back in nostalgia to the motherland, to reconstruct imaginary homelands, in towns and villages, in Little Indias or new China towns becomes an urge, a habit and a compulsion, a “homeward journey”, with its

imaginative geography and history, its politics, memory and desire.” (240)

Puranic myth has been used to lend a colour of India in all its vibrancy. Tradition, folk-lore and legends have been blended with the modern day story. Divakaruni has mentioned, “They say in the old tales that the first night after a child is born, the Bidhata Purush comes down to earth himself to decide what its fortune is to be. That is why they bathe babies in sandalwood water ( ... ) That is why they leave sweetmeats by the cradle( ... ) If the child is especially lucky, in the morning it will all be gone.”(3) The mention of ‘Bidhata Purush’ reverberates throughout the novel when the characters are caught in a perplexing situation as if to find answers to the unsolved questions. ‘Bidhata Purush’ provides a kind of relief for some and it serves as a remembrance of the tradition when the old-new values clash at some point.

The novel is divided into two parts - Book I-The Princess in the Palace of Snakes and Book II-The Queen of Swords which hint at the underlying meaning. First part is related to the childhood and the growing up years of Anju and Sudha whereas Book II is related to their experience after marriage. In the first part they are without the presence of men and seem to be caught in frenzy against men’s deception which had ruined their families. On the other hand in the second book they stand up with men and fight it out in their own way. The titles of the book indicate the transformation which the novelist aims at, in her protagonists. Sudha and Anju are like the princesses’ brought up in a secured palace but they are enwrapped in a conditioned environment and the strict rules of their mothers. At some point of time they would have to take the command in their own hands and fight the challenges.

Each alternate chapter in the novel is titled in their names and they narrate

their story in first person. Anju and Sudha voice their innermost feelings and the story moves from their childhood to wifehood and how their shared joys, moments of happiness, flashes of disappointment, repertoires of exchanges get affected with a hidden past. The usually quiet Sudha becomes the Queen of Swords or the Rani of Jhansi to save her unborn girl child. Anju on the other hand accepts a new environment and tries to assimilate in the new culture but is shattered when she is faced with miscarriage. Sudha and Anju often used to call the three mothers the holy trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva—keeping the little domestic world on track. The journey to California in America is a sort of liberation for Sudha. The letter from Singhji which she reads after boarding the plane rids her of her guilt and she feels free. She is all laced up to make her daughter Dayita grow up courageous and strong. United States is taken as a promised land, “as amazing as the fairy kingdoms of Pishi’s tales” (SOH 179) and it is also taken as “the land across the ocean at the end of the rainbow” (SOH 309)

A letter from Gouri ma in the novel *The Vine of Desire* points at the need for communication. She writes, “Do not repeat my mistake and build a wall of work between you and the people you love.” (VOD 72) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with reference to mythology has hinted at the expected behavior. Pointing to the story of Sita, Ravana and Lakshmana, the message is brought forth, “Each of our lives has a magic circle drawn around it, one we must not cross.” (VOD 80) In the letter to Ashok, Sudha from America writes, “Remember the old tales about the Vish kanyas? Women bred on poison, whose kisses brought destruction wherever they went? I think I’m one of them.” (VOD 170) On one hand is her desire to break the barriers but on the other hand her traditional values pull her backwards. She reproaches and condemns herself and it shakes her self-belief. Her

struggle lies in accepting herself the way she is. She becomes self-judgemental and this judgement is based on the moralistic codes imposed on by the society. She feels women are like 'Indian grass' which inspite of droughts and cows and all the weeds that try to choke it but continues to grow all by itself. At one point the multiplicity of her desires compound into a multiple identity. She says, "Now there are many Sudhas, each wanting something different. To be independent. To be desired. To be true." (VOD 195) After taking up the job and becoming self-independent, Sudha tends to become self-analytical. With trust and conviction she from a mode of self-reproach moves towards a mode of self-deploration.

The legend of Tunga-dhwaja in *The Queen of Dreams* has been employed by the novelist to also point at the multisided dimensions of change and transformation. Mrs. Gupta had hoped that the way in which the law of reversal could transform Tunga-dhwaja from a king to beggar, couldn't that 'same law transform me—an orphan and a novice, a beggar girl of sorts into a queen?' (QOD 261) However the tragedy is that her wish comes true and strikes her like a boomerang and it works as an 'erratic phenomenon'. Mrs Gupta herself says, "Tunga-dhwaja's change was like a tower cracked open by lightning. My own would be slower, subtler, more insidious—a rodent gnawing at the roots of a banyan." (QOD 262)

The way in which Rakhi survives the struggle, succeeds in rekindling the love by forgiving, manages to rise above the feeling of alienation, leaves the idea of marginalisation, accepts despair and nostalgia by learning to readjust, assimilate and adapt speaks volumes about her desire to survive. It is through her exchanges with varied people that Rakhi is able to accept her acculturation and look at the various possibilities of defining identity and meaning of life. Out of the five paintings which Rakhi receives, one painting is

of, “A many-armed purple being with a moonlike face floats above a nest of serpents. Is he (she? it?) a god or a human? (244) marks a resemblance to a female Goddess and Divakaruni has managed to bring in the rich Indian tradition and the relation of diasporic community settled in US to India.

As herself in diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tends to relook at the Indian cultural heritage and epic Mahabharatha in the novel *The Palace of Illusions* from the perspective of a woman. Divakaruni by retelling the story has tried to relate to the plight and pathos of the women and has tried to kindle her interest in awakening the woman against submissiveness and rejecting the traditional thoughts which have become a hindrance for growth and progress. It is in the novel that she tries to reaffirm her desire, “A story gains power with retelling.” (POI 20) “Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us”. (Hudson 10) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is not an exception. Her personal experiences, thoughts, views, dilemmas, anxieties and aspirations have all got transformed into the various narratives.

The story of a woman told here is the story of millions of women who are fighting and unconsciously battling the identity crisis to discover their self. Panchaali who was considered responsible for the war of Mahabharata and mass scale destruction tells the story of her own survival and struggle. The first person narrations of the events unfolding in her life from the moment of birth till death crisscrosses and gives a fresh approach to the entire legend. It is the first novel in which Divakaruni has focussed on the female of the yester years and made her the protagonist as she takes us back to the ‘Dvapara Yug’ or ‘The Third Age of Man’ but coincides the theme with the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Divakaruni has dived into

the core of Hindu mythology to redeem the women. In the Author's Note to *The Palace of Illusions* Divakaruni has written, "I would often wonder if indeed there was more to existence than what logic and my sense could grasp." The locale and the setting is ancient, the characters and the events are legendary, the episodes and stories are mythical but the entire gamut of emotions is real, the struggle is modern and the spirit to fight against all odds is human. In her own words,

I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of men's exploits. Better still, I would have one of them tell it herself, with all her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs, her heart breaks, her achievements, the unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it. (xv)

It is through the magical that the real has been given the energy. Woman's life is compared to a banyan root which exists without soil or water but still sustains the pressures. The positive, encouraging and affirmative tone of the novelist dons the character and through the character of Shikhandi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni seems to be echoing her voice, "the power of a man is like a bull's charge, while the power of a woman moves aslant like a serpent seeking its prey. I know the particular properties of your power. Unless you use it correctly, it won't get you what you want." (POI 52)

The rage of fire and the power of energy characterize Draupadi's spirit to fight injustice. She even challenges the myth of her birth and tries to recreate her own story of life thus breaking the shackles of long line of traditions. She tries to unfold an alternative life for her rejecting the life which she is born into. She refuses to be the typical clichéd woman and her dream to have her own palace can be paralleled to her desire to write her

own story. Though she grows up listening to the story of her birth and prophecy, she challenges to dream against the winds. Her dream palace is her illusionary world which she strives to turn into reality. Though her success is not complete but her attempt and her effort to go for it is all-inclusive.

Panchaali also has to face exile with her five husbands for 12 years. They have to go in hiding in the 13<sup>th</sup> year where they decide to stay disguised at King's Virat palace. Disguise and mask are the symbols of artificial behavior and a forced way to search for acceptance also. Exile in this novel is a kind of punishment inflicted on the Pandavas, has the connotation of separation, longing and expulsion but it is also a metaphor for the uncertainty, insecurity and ambiguity. There is an urge to reclaim and to look back for the forgone. In a research paper on "*The Spiritual Sense of Alienation in Diasporic Life: Reading Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta and Jhumpa Lahiri*" it has been written,

Exile plays a pivotal role in both the two great Hindu epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharatha*. In fact the Hindu pantheon of Gods and Goddesses is replete with the concept of mobility symbolized by the deities ( ... ) The psyche of the Indian immigrant fed on the mythologies of movement and exile is preconditioned to succumb to the sense of estrangement, alienation, non-belonging, and dislocation at the slightest pretext. Hence, physical displacement is only a catalyst that generally aggravates a pre-existing psychological and spiritual sense of loneliness ( ... ) It is because of this complex and apparently paradoxical nature of the exilic condition that it is equated with the post modern condition. (Saha 2)

Panchaali is from a medieval world, her urges and desires are parallel to the contemporary women. Home is a symbol of the place of one's own dreams and getting one is like deserving the most coveted trophies of life. For Panchaali also her palace is her aspiration which she lives and breathes. The palace itself defines a story of power and glory and it also is a product of perseverance and potential. The palace embraces experiences, hidden realities, myths and desires. Panchaali tends to measure her development, her experience of suffering and success, steps into new acquired social roles through this palace.

The palace of Panchaali which she finally gets though during exile acts like a central motif for human obsession. It stands for the hidden desires, buried truths, concealed fate, burning passions and unrealized dreams. The words of Krishna at that stage fell deaf on her ears: "Appreciate the Palace of Illusions, by all means. But if you identify so deeply with it, you set yourself up for sorrow."(POI 149) Her wish to make her own choice and to be creatively exploring the décor and layout of the palace almost finds a semblance in her need to assert her freedom. The situation of Pandavas is almost like the diasporas who are forcibly or voluntarily forced to stay away from their home and family and in the course of their settlement achieve success but also lose much along the way. The need to have one's own palace grows with the Panchaali's need to grow, change, and individualize. The way Panchaali is treated by the Kauravas has a resemblance in the racial discrimination and slurs meted out to the outsiders.

While referring to mythology Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has also blended the personal and the public realm to bring out the predicament of the affect of situations on human psyche. With her novel *The Vine of Desire* the novelist has almost placed the global and the local, history and present as a record of the accomplishments as well as annihilation.

The current events have been parallelly placed with the personal stories thus trying to create a semblance between the personal and the public. When Sudha reaches America and Anju awaits her arrival, it has been noted for instance that, “It is the year of dangerous movements ( ... ) a major earthquake hit Los Angeles, causing seven billion dollars damage and leaving more than ten thousand people homeless.”(VOD 11) Anju knows that her husband has a soft corner for her husband but is still ready to accept her. At this moment Divakaruni writes, “It is the year of accounting, the year of pardons, the year of uneasy alliances. Somewhere in America a man is sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of a black activist ( ... ) Somewhere in India a bandit queen is released.” (VOD 26) When Anju resumes her classes, she has an inherent fear of losing her sister and her husband. Divakaruni’s words fall as a warning, “It is the year of death, the year of discovery. In Sarajevo, Johannesburg, Burundi, the ground is sludgy with blood. Christians and Muslims, Zulus and the ANC, Hutu and Tutsi.” (VOD 51)

Happenings at the international level also affect the psyche of the person at the personal level. Sudha’s emotional conflict is paralleled with her thinking of, “Is this the law of the world, that to go forward you must first step back ( ... ) dizzying roar of SUVs and Harleys, BMWs and Benzes, as they vie with each other for mastery of the road.”(VOD 97) When the three visit Mr Chopra and attend the party it is mentioned, “It is year of taking risks, of facing consequences. In Bangladesh a woman writer criticizes the Quran and must go underground to escape the fatwa ( ... ) And here in a home not hers, Sudha, servant girl turned apsara for a night, loveliness for the gods to squabble over, trails her fingers over the spot in the mirror where Anju’s reflection had been. (VOD 127) Sudha steps out of the house and becomes nostalgic on her way to Trideep and Myra’s house accompanied with

Lupe. At this point the novelist has made an observation, “It is the year of nostalgia. In a few days 350,000 people will descend upon Saugerties, New York, to celebrate a festival named Woodstock ( ... ) but in this place where geography is shaped overnight and recalling is less profitable than looking ahead.” (VOD 209) The old man, Mr Sen, does not readily accept Sudha as his nurse and the fight to resist his anger is placed against: “It is the year of aggressive movements; a man named Saddam is mobilizing sixty thousand soldiers and seven hundred tanks, which will result in a reciprocal mobilization by the U.S. army.” (VOD 227)

Sudha does manage to pacify the old man and Sunil makes a last attempt to patch up with Anju which is paralleled with the note, “It is the year of temporary compromises. On the continent halfway across the world, Russia signs on accord titled “partnership for peace.” On an island at the edge of the Atlantic, the IRA agrees to cease hostilities.” (VOD 241) Sunil decides to go back to India to perform the last rites and Divakaruni in a subtle way has added, “It is the year of exiles returning home: Arafat to Gaza, Solzhenitsyn to Russia, and Sunil to childhood.” (294) At the end each one makes a choice having left with no option but to accept and assimilate. This is marked with the author’s words, “It is the year of stubbornness, Bosnia rejecting a call for cease-fire, India test firing a missile powerful enough to reach China.” (VOD 372)

By mentioning the international happenings, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has basically given a universal appeal to the problems posed in relationships and the need for an understanding which could make one self reliant and self independent. The non-linear narrative of the book is built out of an intricate web of relations and the memories coupled with circumstances have showcased the contrasting expectations with stark reality. Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni has created an image of a personal history and political history which reflects social history.

Along with Indianness, mythology, characters and settings, music also has been employed to understand the complex situation of the diaspora and it has been represented with a touch of nostalgia. Music itself justifies the metaphor. Though music is singular but the image it provokes is plural. Music in fact creates a space where senses originate and it gives a sense to the latent senses. Notion of music to a great extent is culturally constructed:

Music ( ... ) produces a pleasure which we seek always to renew, but never to explain, it is thus the locus of pure effect ( ... ) it is an effect cut off, as if purified, from all explanatory reason, in other words, ultimately, from all responsible reason. (Dyan 108)

His words hold true for Divakaruni as well as she recaptures her characters' love for songs and music of their nation which seem to keep them tied with their land. Seema with whom Korobi stays in an apartment in US tells, "Bollywood songs, nostalgic old favourites, the immigrant's longing to capture home. In India, I never cared for this kind of music, but now as I hear it, homesickness twists my insides." (OG 97)

Rakhi's husband is a musician and though they go through a rough patch in marriage, it is Sonny who makes an effort to come close. 'Music' becomes a reason to untangle their relationship but it also becomes a source of myriad mix of matching tunes and finally helps even in uniting the family. When Rakhi goes through financial crisis, her father suggests her to do something different. His past time hobby of humming Bollywood track becomes the reason for an innovation. He sings Bengal folk songs and it gives him a sense

of relief from the otherwise stressed out state. Home and the things associated with it remain embedded in memories. Ashcroft has hinted at this striking truth related to memory:

This sense of home rests deeply in a sense of imagined community which now has nothing to do with nation, but with a shared sense of loss which becomes the constant horizon of one's practice of habitation ( ... ) This imagined community of seekers defies home by its absence, by its situation as the focus of desire. This may be intensely so for the diasporic subject. But the mythical and elusive nature of home, is possibly that which embeds it so strongly in the imagination. (197)

Singing one's own tunes and following the rhythms and music of tradition enhances the sense of togetherness and it creates a bond of brotherhood. Melody of the music becomes a kind of invitation for togetherness between people of nations. It also helps in keeping alive the myth of home as nearer to them.

In the *Kurma House International*, many people Mexican, Afro-Americans, Indians especially the old timers flock as birds of the same feather. Rakhi says, "I guess good music crosses all boundaries, like good food."(QOD 196) The joy the people experience, the camaraderie they share, the glint of happiness they experience for a short while listening to the old songs reflect the deep seated desire for a distant land. Songs, lyrics and music of their own culture rejuvenates and refreshes the enigmatic love for culture and tradition. Rakhi on seeing the people who crowd her Chai shop feels:

There's an enigma about them-where they've come from, why they left those distant places. What they've had to give up in order to survive in America. Watching them pulls us out of the cramped familiarity of our own lives into a

larger possibility, once upon a time, in a land far, far away. (QOD 196)

For them singing songs and playing music is like discovering their roots and their origin. The pleasure to play and participate in musical delight gives them a chance to feel like discovering their talent which for them is not less than prodigious endowment. This state of theirs is well put in Rakhi's words, "...their joy at discovery, like an unexpected oasis tucked into an arid stretch of dunes, something they thought they'd never find here in America. It's a pleasure to watch their pleasure." (QOD 196) However it is ironical that the music which gives pleasure to many are labelled as 'loud' by Americans in the context and people are called 'strange' which shows a kind of distance and detachment on both sides which constantly brandishes the mind of diaspora. However, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has positivity in her as she shows Rakhi trying to understand the DJ music being played and learns to finally comprehend the scenario of it. The music which had sounded jarring to her ears now becomes a sound of shedding inhibitions. Rakhi understands that club is nothing but a "... roomful of people loose themselves to the mood and become one with the sound!" and that it helps people "shed suspicion and the memory of pain. Why, it was a little like being God!" She feels lighter with "each shrug of her shoulder, each swish of her hips." (QOD 306) The title itself is taken from a Bollywood track and it carries with it the seeds of illusion against reality. The desires, dreams and thoughts are all bundled up in one phrase.

The way in which at the end Rakhi appreciates the Indian musical instruments producing American mix of rhythms conforms to the acceptance on Rakhi's part of acculturation which indeed had been a complex process for her. It is through accepting the variety in art that she is able to accept the differences in identity. Her mother had called her 'aparajita' the meaning of which she never explained but Rakhi succeeds in blooming

like this flower and pollinates the attributes of resilience, perseverance and never-give up attitude. It is within the realm of two conflicting cultures that shapes the identity of Rakhi. She regains faith in the supreme power and through it is able to achieve the point of peace. Bell Hooks has written, "Home is no longer just one place. It is locations ( ... ) one confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the constructions of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become." (148) Rakhi is able to do this. In the Dream Journal also, Mrs Gupta is reminded of the teachings of her first teacher which hints at a greater truth underlying human life. "One life is too little to be divided between the outside world and the inner one the world of day light and that of shadow ( ... ) You will have nothing left to offer the dream God. And if then the God in anger leaves you. You will spend the rest of your life bereft." (QOD147) Though Rakhi lives on two borders but is able to adapt to a new 'art of the present' as suggested by Homi.K.Bhabha in *The Locations of Culture*. Rakhi feels that she not only belongs to US geographically but even psychologically. The 'handful of earth' which her mother carried to California as a gift now assumes importance. The 'soil' symbolizes the roots and the roots symbolize the origin but for Rakhi there was now nothing which she could hold on to.

Her novel *One Amazing Thing* also portrays this. The shadows of the past become reflected in the things of the present. " They spent all their spare time together ( ... ) walking to Patel Brothers Spice House to buy sambar powder and avakaya pickle, watching Bollywood movies on a second hand DVD ( ... ) oiling one another's hair." (OAT 15) Jiang though had lived in India for a considerable period of time, still she felt, "We had our own people, and we got from them everything we needed." (OAT 68) The non- Chinese were called as 'ghosts'. Diasporic identity therefore then seems like a chocolate, shaped like

a shell and tucked into its own nest. Outside it is crunchy but inside it is the softest, sweetest thing. Guilt and elation fill the characters.

Another major change which people are forced to accept is the change in their names. This is an interesting aspect of assimilation. Gayatri Spivak has revived the greek term *catechrisis* which infact gets translated into the writings of Divakaruni. Many characters undergo a change in their names which are manifestations of onset of modernity as against the encounter with the Western world. Balwant becomes Belle, Rakhi becomes Rikki, Jonaki becomes Jona. The change in names creates a hyphenated diasporic space. Though this seems to be a simple process but behind it is the entire phenomenon of change. Sometimes this change also results in the loss of identity. “Names are symbols of identity. As identity becomes the core issue, the names become quite significant ( ... ) In literature, dealing with the clash of cultures, countries, and races, names emerge as identity symbols.” (Bhardwaj 12)

For instance, in the case of Rakhi her ‘dreams are like kites cut free from cause’ and she hankers after that which she has never got. So when Sonny in the end almost pronounces Rakhi instead of Rikki, he actually claims the foregone, old, past of Rakhi with all her imperfections and gives to Rakhi her sense of belonging. Though both of them are Indians but their life is in America as the only land they have known is that. Rakhi longs to visit India but she is also seeped in the culture of America. “She didn’t even know if he’d been born in America, like herself, though she could tell he’d been born in America, like herself, though she could tell he’d lived in it long enough to be uncomfortable anywhere else.” (QOD 270) Name marks an identity and it is a pointer of one’s origin, it sets each person apart from the other and the way it gets transformed during the journey of

assimilation also hints at the dissolving of boundaries and crossing over.

Not just music and names, food also acquires significance in her novels. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has used the medium of spices and the culinary aspect to delve into the issue of immigrants. “The migrant home forms a focal point from which cultural expressions, in this case culinary cultural expressions, are produced, consumed, re-configured, and integrated in the kitchen” (Checinska 298) The title of the novel *The Mistress of Spices* is related to the spices and each chapter has also been named after each spice. The characters suffer from a sense of displacement, feel nostalgic, are lost in memories and are at times sad but the spices have been used to create in them the desire to adjust and assimilate still keeping their culture intact. Sujith Kumar Rath has written,

Spices are not mere taste enhancers in this story by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni - nor are they medicines. They are real characters with emotions. Spices, here, possess powers that are real- they heal, soothe, enhance, possess, enliven, energize on the positive side and wreck vengeance, take offence, be mean, and strike on the negative side . (3)

The name of the mistress is Tilo which is named after sesame seeds, ‘the spice of nourishment’ which suggests that she would become instrumental in nourishing a better cross cultural understanding though being in a diaspora.

Each spice remains merely an object but when Tilo awakens it through its proper name, the spice undergoes a transformation which in a way highlights realization and absorption of the value of others. Example, a poppy seed is called ‘khus khus’ but its continuous chanting transforms it into ‘afim’. In the novel it is evident that giving a true name even to a seed, “gives that power into the listener’s hands which rests within” (MOS

172). A twofold relation is at work here with the power resting in the name of the spice and the power to connect lying with the mistress (one who has the spice). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni through the delineation of dual force of the spice has hinted at the need of the reciprocating relationships and understanding the world at large. Spices have lent a picture of Indianness to this novel though the setting is America. In an interview with Morton Marcus (1997) the author has quoted:

In Indian folk belief, spices are used for more than flavourings. They have magical powers all their own, and they provide remedies for physical maladies as well as cures for spiritual ills. You have to be careful how you use the spices, since their misuse can be dangerous. If you don't follow their rules, the spices can destroy you. In the novel, I made the rules into laws from the divine realm, laws Tilo could not transgress without serious consequences. (Divakaruni)

Tilo 'provisionalizes' the wisdom of spices and in doing so steps into a series of integrating process whereby she is able to shed inhibitions and walk out of the store thereby trying to find an epicenter between the internal and the external world. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has given a picturesque view of the Indian cuisine through this novel thus exhibiting to the western world the aroma of the spices and its impact on the greater philosophy of life. The reference to food items like basmati rice, karela, rajma, kheer, pakodas, pudina leaves and the use of it have lent an authentic Indian taste or the mention of brand items like 'Singer machine', 'Mysore sandalwood soap', 'Bedekar pickles' or 'Bata shoes' also evoke a sense of a nation which is deeply seeped into the character's lives and it brings back memories which has many associations attached to it. The cackly voices of the

immigrants have been captured excellently.

The protagonist Tilo herself is a symbol of power who tries to transcend the boundaries and goes beyond the prescribed social norms and traditions. The image of 'Island and the sea' and 'crossing the ocean' has been pin pointedly employed by the novelist to suggest a fluid space for openness and crossing over which carries with it a sense of exchange of communication across cultures and languages. Tilo goes against the rules and helps Kwesi, an Afro –American, and Raven, a Native American. By making her protagonist cross the bounds of the store, the novelist has suggested the need to assimilate with the new environment.

Tilo always keeps a knife under her mattress and this probably suggests her unconscious decision to cut her moorings from the past and look towards the future. That possibly is the message which Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni wishes to convey through all her characters that it is important to cut the rigid rubrics of past at some stage to look towards the future. However at a personal level she struggles with the 'mirror' image. She had been forbidden to see herself in a mirror. In the beginning of the novel it is clearly cited that she even avoids seeing her own image in the reflection of the windows of the store. But as she progresses with her thoughts and experiences she is unable to control her desire to look in the mirror. This is nothing but recognition of her 'self'. She at one point says, "Mirror, forbidden glass that I hope will tell me the secret of myself." (MOS 151) Tilo's dilemma and her struggles is more on the inner side than on the external. She has to overcome the hidden fears which she has transported from her own homeland. It is not the hostland that has made her wary but the way she has been brought up and her past experiences that have shaped her.

'Food' becomes a fodder for the soul and not just a way to fill in the

stomach. Cooking the cuisine of one's own country is like continuing the cultural tradition and lineage. Cuisine and culinary aspect becomes a source of attachment, memory and remembrance. In the novel the word 'Bread' has been used to symbolize Americans. Mrs Gupta's words say it all. "*My poor Rakhi, to place so much belief in bread!*" (QOD 8) There is an air of doubt, disbelief and distrust in Mrs Gupta which shows that she from her heart is not able to fully assimilate the hostland but for Rakhi it is the opposite, "as long as there's fresh bread in this world, things can't be beyond repair" and "I love this place-and I'm fortunate to have it." (QOD 22) So for Rakhi she feels double divorced from her land of birth when she later experiences hatred and racial discrimination just on the basis of colour and country of birth. Malathi in her research paper has mentioned, "Having imbibed the American culture by birth and Indian culture through blood Rakhi trapezes between the two cultures." (53) Rakhi never had liked Indian food as she was growing up but eventually started liking. The taste of food, the flavor of cuisine and the spices of cooking reflect not just the individual's taste but also the state of mind. Food is a strong symbol of state, status and commune. For Rakhi, "It was always pasta and pizza and Oh mom, not alu parathas again!" kind of stubbornness. Mrs Gupta never objected to this because she knew complete assimilation to the host culture would be possible only with complete acceptance and on part of Rakhi eating the western food was like asserting her own identity which she associates with the US. Food has a dynamic pathway here leading to the understanding of time, moments and the change seen externally is reflected in the change of situation, setting, time and place. The way one values its traditional food interplays with the notion of self and identity.

Mrs Gupta from her heart always wished that Rakhi should 'focus on her

American life' (QOD 49) but she herself is never able to detach herself completely. Even the 'Brooke Bond Tea' was 'one of the few habits she'd carried over from India'. The label of tea here is not just a label but it foretells the looming longing for things which were Indian. Memory of food stuff labels carried to a new land helps in the reproduction of sociality, myth, ritual and practice that are core to maintaining the boundaries of diasporic communities and constructs of 'home', 'away', and 'return'.

Rakhi remembers her past with Sonny in a fond way and the way she tried to act the 'symbolic female matriarch' trying to cook the various Indian dishes to reflect her love for Sonny. She remembers that, "this was when she still cooked elaborate meals-appetizers, rotis rolled out fresh, rich curries in almond sauce, traditional Indian desserts that required hours of culinary acrobatics." (QOD 12) Rakhi sticks to the tradition in the hope of maintaining relation and as her relation with Sonny goes bitter the art of her cooking also seem to evade her. Cooking traditional food becomes a past for her and the memory of it as present. The discourse related to culinary aspect highlights and in a way negotiates the 'pangs of migratory displacement'. Here comes to mind the words of Benzi Zhang,

Diaspora is the process of crossing and recrossing multiple borders of language, history, race, time and culture [which] must challenge the absolutism of singular place by relocating their identity in the multiplicity of plural relationships. (69)

Belle labels the Indians as 'mashed-potato people' and Mrs Gupta also hints at the way in which such fusions of east and west sometimes creates double crossed identities. When the Chai shop does not run into profit she says, "This isn't a real cha shop?" - "but a mishmash, a westerner's notion of what is Indian. May be if you can make it into something authentic,

you'll survive.” (QOD 89) This statement gives a peak into the real problem of diaspora. They are not able to give up completely and are neither ready to accept the environment fully. Anita Mannur has brought out the importance of culinary narrative in diasporic fiction. She writes,

Culinary discourse is ambivalently coded and complexly situated; within the tradition of immigrant literature ( ... ) consuming ethically coded food ( ... ) is more than accultural practice ( ... ) ; it is also a long standing material in global commerce and exchange. (49)

Their life gets split between here and there, right and wrong and that which is, that which was and that which will never be. In an attempt to hold on to their memories and their past they cling on to things and exaggerate the goodness which infact is the source of troubles for the next generation. Constant hankering after the long lost land leads to a kind of possessiveness which remains unrequited. Rakhi suffers from ‘vegetable guilt’ after her mother’s death because she does not know to prepare any of the Indian dishes which her mother made brilliantly. There is a reference to the smell of fennel which is supposed to ‘heal internal wounds’.

Food habits, movies, songs, clothes unconsciously reflect this commune. So though Mrs Gupta or many other people who flock *Kurma International* have moved to America but subconsciously have taken with them their nation and it lives as an image recurring time and again as a memory or nostalgia. It is “a tool for forging kinship” (Rai 163). Simple food stuffs, bygone lyrics and traditional clothes bring out the hidden Indianness in them which they have tried to suppress or keep behind the closed quarters in an attempt to absorb the new ways. At the *Kurma House International* they serve ‘pakodas’

along with cup cakes and muffins. Later ‘buffet’ is introduced which becomes a metaphor of changed mindset and flexible fossil for flourishing. Rakhi’s father comments, “But now we’re in a different country, with different people. We can’t follow old ways. We’ve got to be flexible, no?” (QOD 241)

Dressing, clothes, attire and appearance also changes as one crosses boundaries and it not just becomes a way of acceptance but it also shows the way people assimilate with the new environment and culture. Tilo for instance not just transforms mentally but even the way in which she selects clothes also point at the change happening at all levels from physical to mental. She chooses a ‘no-nonsense pants and polyester top’, ‘brown coat’, ‘sturdy brown shoes’ which give her an impression of a ‘new-clothed self’. (MOS 132) Once she breaks the rule she does it more frequently in the entire course of the novel. The pangs of guilt lessen and she seems to speak with élan, “it’s my desire I want to fulfill for once.” (MOS 82) This is also yet another feature of the diaspora that they at least get a chance to explore the other side of their personality because of the changed environment and shifting set of customs and mores.

Clothes and outfits too carry a seed of traditionalism and it also represents a cultural identity. Diaspora face this confusion regarding dressing as the traditional, conservative approach goes against the modern, westernized contemporary outlook. Belle always tries to shed the ‘last vestiges of her desi-ness’ (QOD 15) For Belle the thought of Indian food and dress is like making her travel backwards. She detests things which she has been forced to imbibe. When Rakhi’s business fails, she feels, “ they’ll probably arrange my marriage to one of those upright young Indian farmers ( ... ) I can just see myself ten years from now, shrouded in fat and a polyester salwaar kameez ( ... ) rolling out makki ki rotis for

all my in-laws.” (QOD 81) Because she has always been in jeans and T-s the traditional clothes look to her as a shroud which would kill her identity but on the other hand is Mrs Gupta who values her clothes brought from India especially the ‘scarf’. The scarf stands for the customs and traditions which she is enwrapped in and which blankets her identity. Scarf is the gift which she gives to Rakhi and on occasions which required special attention she took it out and she remarks, “The one thing in the ensemble that’s mine is a gauzy Indian black-and-silver scarf...” (QOD 93) Mrs Gupta always feels guilty that she doomed her daughter to the ‘bland life of suburban America’ (QOD 43) When America is hit by the terror attack of 9/11, even almost all the South Asians are forced to give up their kurtas, loose pants, dashikis and fez hats and dress in jeans and T-shirts as if the dress conveyed loyalty and patriotism. They receive notes from organizations stating, “Don’t wear your native clothes” (QOD 274) and Rakhi wondrously and with exasperation looks down at her pants which is her routine attire and questions, ‘what native clothes?’ (QOD 274) The question almost shakes her entire being and her notion of self-identity in a moment of national crisis.

In case of diasporas, the challenge before them is not just their personal memories which haunt them but something called the collective consciousness-which comprises of the inherited set of attitudes, view and ideas and cultural restraints which shackle them into a set of behavior. Malathi’s unwillingness to give her sari finds an apt reaction, “We’re in a situation where the regular rules don’t apply. I can’t help Miss Uma here unless I have enough cloth.” (OAT 25) On the other hand we have Tariq who first seems to be quite rigid but later brings in the prayer shawl from his briefcase and places it into Mangalam’s hands. Divakaruni very aptly has brought out a truth that unless and until

the diasporians are ready to give up, they would not be able to help themselves. It is the sense of sharing and telling that sets us free and brings people close. Emphasis on empathy has been placed and unless and until we take time to understand one another, mankind can never come together. The phrase 'enough cloth' stands for the spirit of acceptance, approval, agreement and most important tolerance. The 'prayer shawl' serves as a bridge to bridge the divides and differences. Diasporic identity is like living a story within a story and the novel *One Amazing Thing* unfolds a series of untold stories to bring out the significance of humanity.

Identity crisis is also one such issue facing the diasporians and the way they grapple with it throughout their lives. Tariq though shaved off his beard and tried to change himself with the changing times in America and his family members 'stopped wearing the hijab', 'folded the scarves and put them away' but in a way it resulted in a kind of fight with one's own identity. His words to his mother echoes the deep meaning of life, "She must do what she believed in, not what made the people around her feel better." (28) The anger caused due to forced behavior always remain tucked away in the small, dark closet of the mind and in the same way religious beliefs ingrained travels over centuries and continents. Divakaruni has hinted that most of the time people tend to blame the political upheavals for their cause of discomfort and attribute their change to the change brought in by the environment and situation they are in.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has merged the imaginative and the real in her novels. She has almost brought the past into the present through a convoluted process of flashback. Her personal experience of crossing the border and experiencing displacement corresponds to approximating the historical experience of cultural and geographical

displacement that lies at the heart of diaspora. The experience of migration has been employed to convey the in-between potential of diaspora. Indirectly Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has managed to reconfigure one's own nation through her writings and has managed to represent her national identity. Nation seems to emerge through her narrations. It has been argued that,

Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which ( ... ) it came into being ( ... ) Nation is then essentially a cultural community and is created and sustained by the customs, traditions, and experiences of a people who may never meet most of the fellow-members, or know them but come together in an "imagined community", because in the mind of each, lives an image of their communion. (Anderson 12)

Metaphors in her novels have become a central concept in understanding the human condition. Migrancy is seen not just as self-transformative but it emphasises the need to balance the tension resulting from loss on one hand and also acknowledging the new space as offering productive possibilities on the other hand. Just as Bharati Mukherjee has articulated her feelings in words like 'unhousement' and 'rehousement', Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni too has recapitulated the need to rework and gather the scattered and fragmented parts of one's life to gain a better understanding in a new environment.

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