The tracing of ideas is a guessing game. We can’t tell who first had an idea; we can only tell who first had it influentially, who formulated it in some form, poem or equation or picture, that others could stumble upon with the shock of recognition. The radical ideas that have been changing our attitudes towards our habitat have been around forever.

(Wallace Stegner, 1990)

The importance of having a place called home is dealt with utmost passion by immigrant writers. Their pangs of separation from their homeland can juxtapose the universal cry of retaining and protecting the environment which is home to the entire creation. The landscape plays the canvas where lives are drawn and it is the natural elements like sunlight, water, air that gives motion to human existence. So it is the duty of all living organisms to cherish the beauty of this wonderful world. At times through the texts of expatriate writers readers get to know more about the resources, culture and wealth of their country, providing more information than they supposedly thought they knew. The concept of place can be introspected physically or emotionally. The idea is connoted with the intimacy between humans and landscapes. The sense of belonging stems from such an association. Migration results in dislocation, primarily from a place creating a longing for the past experiences that enabled the creation of space to live in that particular place, which can now only be framed in memories with visuals dominated by the presence of nature. An apt definition for “place” comes from Lucy Lippard:

Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there. (7)
Migration is a process that throws together people from diverse cultural and intellectual background to meet. Their common dilemma, of dislocation from their home runs parallel to the environmental issues that are threatening the larger concept of home for all species. Thus migration is one of the factors that trigger the world wide project of saving anything that can equate the emotions of home. As it is through language that the world around is identified, the environmental consciousness is spread more through literary works. Be it any genre, nature plays a pivotal role. Key concepts of life like gender, politics, and oppression are rooted primarily in the power play of nature. The complex, mystical identity of nature is indeed the prime source of never ending tales, mainly for authors who provides lessons to lead a peaceful and happy life.

The nostalgia for nature arises when one can no longer relate to the chaotic urban scenery, a result of industrial and economic development. This process is slowly homogenizing the entire world in the name of progress, replacing natural with concrete forests. The ill effects of rapid urbanization have resulted in the creation of an unhealthy environment making life more difficult and susceptible to diseases and decay. “Back to nature” seems to be the new wave of movement urging the people to return to good old ways of organic life. The motto is if people could survive in a cleaner environment with less abuse of natural resources back then, the idea of development by exploiting earth’s resources at large at present, whereby production exceeds consumption is alarming. It is time people wake up to the reality that “less is fine” as the ethics of life calls for mutual co-operation and protection of the entire world around. Jennifer Ladino quotes ecocritic Scott Slovik:

As we face the environmental predicaments of a new millennium, a millennium surely to be marked by ever- deepening crisis and despair and emotional numbness, the primary challenge for literary artists and for interpreters of literature maybe to understand the evolving discourse of warning and nostalgia, or love and loss. (xiii)

Divakaruni’s novel *The Mistress of Spices* published in the year 1997 is a text interwoven with myth, folklore and magic realism. The different incarnations of a woman are explored with respect to her back and forth movement from her place of
birth to the land of America. Her dilemma in finding a place where she can feel at home juxtaposes the immigrant experience of many such women caught between modernity and tradition. Tilo, the protagonist of the novel runs a store in Oakland that mainly sells Indian food staples. Her store is a unique place where Indian immigrants visit regularly with the hope of finding all things that have been brought from their country “India.” Along with it Tilo’s healing powers imparted to her by her first mother, aids her customers in their troubles and tribulations.

The important aspect of any story is the magic of the senses to visualize. Though sharing stories began as an oral tradition, an art passed on through ancestors, it still retains its ability to teach and transform. Divakaruni has exploited this unique trait of a story to create an illusion where past and present, tradition and modernism are not separated but interwoven to produce a spectacular experience where time, memory and the essence of living in this wonderful world becomes a journey of hope.

*The Mistress of Spices* has elements of “magic realism,” a method employed in a fiction where in, simple day to day activities of life are told by using fantasy and myth. Gabriel Garcia Marquez can be considered the exponent of magic realism, according to him *The Diary of Colombus* is the first major work in literature that employed the technique of magic realism. In India fantasy and myth fuelled stories from ancient times. To quote from the book *CAEAL Volume 3: Uncertain mirrors: Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures* authored by Benito, Jesus, Manzanas, Ana M., Simal, Begona:

…It can likewise be proposed that the blurring of frontiers between human, animal, and inanimate realms is found in fantastic genres such as folk tales, science fiction, the fable, and the bestiary. However, whereas the texts within these specific traditions eschew any allegiance to realism and instead resort to fantasy or to allegory by building an external, parallel, or alternative world to the tangible one we live in, magical realism grounds the text in a familiar reality that will later be defamiliarized in various ways. In allegorical and fantastic genres, there is no claim to realism, or for that matter, to reality, in contrast with magical realism, which successfully intertwines realism incredible, apparently non real elements. (198-9)
The innumerable landscapes that were once real have become fantasy for the present generation owing to large scale environmental destruction for urban development. What was once real in the past becomes myth in the present. The ever changing cultural climate, be it of a nation or an individual causes the untimely death of the less powerful elements in the world. Man’s intellectual faculty has classified everything around as mere materials, fit only for personal consumption and well being. This selfish nature has depleted the resources faster than one could imagine, ignorance that has proved costly for the existence of earth itself. The thought of being devoid of a dwelling place has created paranoia. Reviving what has been already destroyed is impossible; at the same time retaining what is left is also a very difficult task. Hitherto, the efforts of creative people, who value the aesthetics of everything in life, have come to the rescue of nature.

Jennifer argues that origin stories, which is the most common narrative incarnation of nostalgia simplifies and restores a past which is idealized for audiences to turn for explanation and reassurance. In the novel *The Mistress of Spices* it is Tilo’s past life which is a metaphor for the disconnection of nature from human lives and the act of domination which has created the “otherness” capable for scrutinizing the authority on nature based on supremacy. Individual nostalgia, when it becomes collective, explains the concept of a nation. This attachment to nation becomes aggressive leading to a human centric view of the world as it overshadows the real purpose of individual attachment to nature. Jennifer echoes the concept of nostalgia from Boym’s view point:

Proposes a model based on two kinds of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. She formulates her terms by dividing the word nostalgia into its two parts–nostos “the return home”, and algia “the longing”. Restorative nostalgia linked with nostos, poses as truth, embraces tradition, and seeks a reconstruction of the lost “home,” imagined as return to coherent origin. She links this sort of nostalgia with national memory and identity. Byom locates transformative potential in longing, which she associates with reflective nostalgia.” Ironic, inconclusive, fragmentary,” reflective nostalgia does not attempt to reconstruct a coherent “home” but opts to “explore ways of inhabiting many places at once”. This kind of nostalgia embraces ambivalence with the intention of
fostering creative dialogue through collective, local memory rather than national metanarratives of linear progress…. (13-4).

Exploring the identity for an immigrant is rooted in the nostalgia of everything that belongs to the past. As suggested by Jennifer, the concept of Ritvoi’s *Yesterday’s Self* this nostalgia can be a remedy by signaling the breech between past and present by turning it into a “productive site from which to construct alternative narratives and look toward positive social change” (14). Nature becomes the subject and object at the same time in such narratives. By exploring the identity, nature is also explored. The different layers of immigrant experience equates the dichotomies of finding, understanding, criticizing and finally reinventing space fit for present and the future.

*The Mistress of Spices* is a poignant tale of a woman named Tilo, short for Tilottama, named after the sun-burnished sesame seed, spice for nourishment. She has magical powers imparted by first mother. She has been trained in the art of using spices which she believes has the power to cure all human predicaments. She was once a young woman who transformed into an old one when she vowed to become a Mistress, by passing through the rites of Shampati’s fire. She travels across time and distance. She opens a spice store in Oakland where she cures her visitors to the store using her prayers on her spices which obeys her commands. In this novel, fantasy and fiction are interwoven to narrate immigrant experiences of love and longing, desires, happiness, struggle and hope. The use of myth and folklore in fiction lends a fascinating read of the novel.

The underlying presence of environment is strongly narrated along with Tilo’s past. The imagery of serpents by whom Tilo is guided connotes the world of animate nature. Sumathy opines that 36% of adults suffer from Ophidiophobia which means fear of snakes. In literature snakes often represent fear, darkness and the unknown. But for Tilo, they are her companions and warn her not to go to the island of spice as she would lose her sight, sound and even herself. She ignores their warning and goes ahead with her decision. The island juxtaposes human tendency to explore places with a desire for progress and the serpents her roots that were asking her to never leave, which she ultimately refuses.
The different dimensions of relationship between nature and humans find voice in the novel. Literary works unlike works of history which collects data based on actual facts and concludes leaves no scope for action to its readers whereas literature by using principles can make the reader move with emotion and enables mankind to think and act according to his/her conscience. This can have a strong impact on our society. To quote Alison Croggon from *The Literature of Apocalypse*, “Writing is not the obvious way to change the world, but it certainly changes the way we see it” (quoted in *Uncertain Mirrors*, 193).

Concern about environment was earlier limited to a niche of nature writing, but the recent trend of reading every text from an ecoperspective view has altered the mentality that humans do not possess nature but co-exist in a larger realm called earth and thus are accountable in every way. Human negligence has resulted in devastating changes to the eco system and thus should take up the responsibility of protecting the environment. The plethora of literary works by ethnic writers in United States of America displays the deep attachment for their homelands. Their dual consciousness of place, that is, their love for their country of origin as well as the loyalty for the country, they are at present living helps to understand the importance of place and the intense effort needed to prove their attachment and at the same time battle the trauma of displacement. The need to migrate is an act of survival and Charles Darwin’s opinion in his book, *Origin of Species* explains this as:

Nor do I believe that any great physical change, as of climate, or any unusual degree of isolation to check immigration, is actually necessary to produce new and unoccupied places for natural selection to fill up by modifying and improving some of the varying inhabitants. For as all the inhabitants of each country are struggling together with nicely balanced forces, extremely slight modifications in the structure or habits of one inhabitant would often give it an advantage over others; and still further increase the advantage. No country can be named in which all the native inhabitants are now so perfectly adapted to each other and to the physical conditions under which they live, that none of them could anyhow be improved, for in all countries, the natives have been so far conquered by naturalized productions, that they have allowed foreigners to take firm possession of their land. And as foreigners have thus everywhere
beaten some of the natives, we may safely conclude that the natives might have been modified with advantage, so as to have better resisted such intruders. (65)

In the present context of migration, there is a shift in movement. First it was from the West to the East resulting in an era of colonization. Now the gradual shifting of people from East to West either forced or voluntary holds significance in terms of trade, economics, culture and export of intellectual power. As Darwin explains, that such movements have at times become an advantage as there was an improvement with experience to guard against such intrusions. In the history of British colonization, the formation of East India Company was due to the flourishing spice trade. Thus spices were a treasure trove from the east. Divakaruni’s protagonist Tilo’s mastery over spices which she claims “the spices of true power are from my birthland” (3) represents the Eastern quench for having reclaimed their beloved land from the colonizers. But the bitter memories still linger on in the minds of the Eastern people. Hostility is cultivated in the native and when people migrate, their minds are somewhat tuned to what to expect. Dave Gunning explains a list of features found within a diasporic community as investigated by Robin Cohen:

(1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; (4) an idealization of the supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co–ethnic members in other countries; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries. (113)

The historical definition of borders barge on the philosophy of nationalism of mankind but as far as nature is concerned all these lines are invisible, and migration is based on the dire necessity of survival, taking factors such as climate into consideration. The politics of race, gender, culture are taken into account only for mankind to differentiate or to refuse to accommodate new people into their country. A confinement is created in the mind encircling geographical space where the so called
intruder is alienated. Migration is a natural remedy for survival when the sensory perceptions can alarm threats of extinction. In the case of Indians, one of the reasons for the threat was constitutional. Red-tapism and corruption proved frustrating for many as they were denied employment opportunities despite having high skills and education. This was one of the prime reasons for emigration to United States. The post industrial America promised to solve the economic impotency felt by Indians by luring them with better prospects of employment and higher wages. The general assumption of a more liberated social system where gender equality is granted at least on basic concepts of freedom attracted more female presence in the scene of emigration to United States.

In the case of Divakaruni, her move to America happened when her father got a job with the American corporate oil company Esso and thus the family moved to Oklahoma. Her writing career was sparked largely owing to her female immigrant experience in America. In an interview in the San Francisco Examiner Magazine conducted by Joan Smith, Divakaruni explains, “I think that in some ways being an expatriate made me want to write, because it’s such a powerful and poignant experience when you live away from your original culture and this becomes home, but never quite, and then you can’t go back and be quite at home there either, so you become a kind of outsider to both cultures, which is hard, but very good for writers, I think, to be in a position of looking in from the outside observing” (7).

An immigrant experience, especially in the case of women is a journey of empowerment and the recognition of the power that lies within. These different phases are articulated by Divakaruni’s protagonist in *The Mistress of Spices* first as Nayantara, Bhagyavati, Tilo and then finally Maya. Though they are all one woman with different names, adopted during different stages of her life, the transformation is the culmination of a sacred journey of human spirit which goes through various experiences of the mystery of creation. This is indeed a metaphor for all the elements that contribute to the sustenance of life. Though it varies from species to species, the underlying fact is that life is indeed surrounded by various other elements and existence as a single entity is impossible. An individual is connected to a community and many such communities form the world. Thus individual experiences are the base for the investigations and experiments to sort issues that the world is facing today. As
Divakaruni’s tales are fictions blended with Indian culture and values as its core, she is often criticized for stereotyping Indians. But she clarifies her take on such criticism in an edited collection of South Asian Fiction and poetry titled *Living in America* by Rustomji and Roshni:

The challenge lies in trying to bring alive, for readers from other ethnic backgrounds, the Indian– and Indian American– experience, not as something exotic and alien but as something human and shared. It lies in getting my own community to see the subject of my work (often the plight of women of Indian origin struggling within a male- dominated culture, even here in America). It is necessary and important and not, as many have complained, a betrayal of my people, an exposure of secrets that create a “bad impression” of Indians in American society. But the opportunities are more important: to be able to straddle two distinct cultures and depict both with the relatively objective hand of the outsider; to destroy stereotypes and promote understanding between different sectors of the multicultural society in which we live; to paint the complex life of the immigrant with its unique joys and sorrows, so distinct from those of people who have never left their native land. (47)

Tilo’s transformation into an old woman before her departure to America, is a take on Indian mentality where the older generation still refuse the freedom to a young woman to execute her choices. Youth and beauty of a woman is considered self destructive in an Indian context and she is supposed to hold on to her chastity, where as these norms need not be followed by men. But once she gathers enough courage to step out of the comfort zone, travel and set life in motion, she is on a path to transformation. Once stepped into an unknown territory, the survival mechanism is at work, which enables adaptation to a new environment. Moreover, as a result of cultural exchange women are more informed about their rights. They do hold on to their Indian values, but at the same time they also assert their rights which would help them retain their dignity.

The mystery and history of gender disparity are vague. History subdues personal experiences as it records only the collective consciousness of a particular society or a period. The fact that gender disparity still rules the world is a repetitive
process of history where stories are molded from a man’s point of view. Thus certain facts are conveniently ignored. The ancient texts and the religious portrayal of women in India are confusing, to quote Padma Rangaswomy from Namaste America:

The most famous of the Smrtis dealing with the role of women is Manusamhita. Also called Manusmriti, it defines a highly restrictive role for women, keeping them in total economic, legal, and moral dependence on men. Manu enunciates the ideal of wifehood as the negation of the wife’s personality. A woman can give salvation only by virtue of her total obedience and devotion to her husband. “In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead, to her son. A woman must never be independent.” …Though all the myths and legends are created to make women internalize the idea of subordination to man, Indian culture and the Hindu religion also abound in images of female dynamism and power, as seen in kali, the goddess of destruction, or lakshmi, the harbinger of wealth and prosperity. Partly because of this cultural background, women in India do not necessarily think in purely dichotomous terms of man as strong and woman as weak, and despite all the rules and customs restricting their freedom, they sometimes manage to break out of the roles traditionally assigned to them. (145-6)

The reasons that separated man from animals are applicable to the distinction between men from women. Descartes philosophical approach where body and mind are considered two separate entities, assumed that the mind belonged to men and thus animals or nature were denied any supremacy. The faculty of reason was thus assumed as the sole possession of men. Diversity ought to be considered something as simple as evolution other than dissecting it in detail for oppressing and creating hierarchies. The inferior, superior tag was more of a personalized discovery which has formed communities in all spheres like natural, social, cultural, political and economical. Exploitation and oppression go hand in hand in destabilizing the earth. When an individual realizes or reason out the importance of retaining dignity and self respect for everything other, diversity or differences can be celebrated rather than frowned upon.
Even though, the underlying tensions and emotional turmoil’s suffered by all the people who visits Tilo’s store are similar, their stories are wrought mainly with oppression. Haroun, the driver who is ill treated by his Kapadia memsaab is highly elated when he quits his job at the prospects of owning his own car. Jagjith who is racially abused at school, eventually overcomes his fear. Gita’s grandfather who is extremely traditional, fears whether his granddaughter would bring shame to his family by adopting the American culture. He is unable to accept modern ways of living in America which gives too much liberty to Indian women. He holds on to his patriarchal views where women are expected to be submissive and her prime role is of domesticity.

Gita on the other hand is highly independent and takes her own decisions with regard to her life. She cannot imagine a life that is lived by women in her family dedicating all their time and energy in doing household chores, foregoing all personal desires. At the same time she believes in certain Indian values such as the institution of marriage. She does not move in with her boyfriend which is very common for the new generation Indians in America. Gita strongly believes in family ties and has immense respect for elders. Gita is successful in the end by convincing her parents about her personal choice with regard to marriage and also proves her loyalty of being a traditional Indian girl. In the case of Ahuja’s wife, who married because her parents insisted, both marriage and immigrant experience were rather traumatic. She was not strong enough to protest against her husband who ill treated her and had no respect for her. She was alienated both in a relationship as well as in a new country. Her inability to assimilate or adapt to changing life scenarios can be blamed to a tradition that brought up every girl child with the notion of being inferior.

Padma opines that article 15 of the Indian constitution has passed stringent laws against discrimination based on religion, race, caste, place of birth, or sex. This law even surpassed the Equal Rights Amendment adopted by congress in 1972 in America, but failed for “lack of ratification by state legislatures.” Landmark changes in woman’s reform with rights to inheritance of property, to vote, to divorce, to remarry and to get an abortion was amended in the Indian Constitution post independence. These were the rights most of the westernized nation too enjoyed. Unfortunately, the legal freedom given to women by the constitution is still caught in
the webs of tradition, culture and religion. Reforms have to be primarily targeted at those spheres of society first. Padma explains that it is evident that the legal reforms are restricted to law books and that early marriage is advised to keep chastity and virginity safe. Dowry system, female foeticide, stigma for divorce, are still rampant, denial of education for girl child are some of the problems that the society suffers till date.

Though there are many reasons for Indian women to migrate to United States, the primary reason is a conservative society which does not recognize the potential of women in changing all aspects of a society be it political, economic, or cultural. This assumption does not lead to the conclusion that India is the only country with gender discrimination and that American women enjoys equality. In *Women, Democracy and Globalisation in North America: A Comparative Study* authored by Bayes, Jane, Begne, Patricia, Gonzalez, and Laura clarifies the concept of gender by quoting Sandra Harding:

> In virtually every culture, gender difference is a pivotal way in which humans identify themselves as persons, organize social relations, and symbolize meaningful natural and social events and processes….An analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity rather than as a natural consequence of sex difference, or even merely as a social variable assigned to individual people in different ways from culture to culture. (7)

Inequality of gender is subsequently affected by further classifications based on religion, nationality, race, economy and sexuality. Thus it is a problem caused due to vertical and horizontal parameters that define gender with all factors that simultaneously affect the entire human population. Amongst the rampant layman image of India as a nation where female interests are suppressed, the 1990 reservation policy proves otherwise. By setting aside 33 percent of the seats in village council for women, the firstly elected ones were successful that the consequent results of more than 40 percent of local elected officials in India were women, twice the national average around the globe (*Women, Democracy and Globalisation in North America*, 2006:13). This inclusion of women in democracy is paradoxical to the actual influence of women in Indian society. The democratic participation of women in the
US as pointed out by Bayes clarifies that “Despite their efforts to infiltrate the state and use existing institutions to advance an agenda for women, women’s rights activists in the United States have been consistently marginalized by the major parties and governmental institutions” (14).

This bipolar situation of women in terms of power, in the United States as well as India taking into consideration, the geographical, economic and cultural differences is a tangent proof of struggle, and the battle for inclusion in the workings of the government. A lot of changes that will enable to curb gender oppression can be made if women are able to take control of the governance at par with men. Being aware of the political scenarios across the world can help individually, to make decisions to migrate to places which are more pleasant with regard to tolerance and respect for equality. From the historical context, Padma says that the data regarding women’s presence in the early immigration wave was only one in seventy-five. The reason could be either due to restriction on immigration laws or the men’s decision to not bring in their spouses. Under the colonial system, women did migrate as indentured labour. Once the restrictions were removed in 1946, the immigration of women into United States increased double fold. The later wave of immigration saw many highly qualified and professional women in the American immigration scenario.

Their hard work and persistence have indeed helped them establish themselves in America. Apart from their tales of woes about being separated from their homeland, their success stories are indeed an inspiration to other Indian women who aspire for financial freedom and a sense of independence from unwanted restrictions that stall their personal as well as moral growth. The only problem that becomes a burden to such immigrants is a nagging question about belonging. When it comes to adjusting in a new country, research shows that women adapt better than men. A study conducted on Indian immigrants in New York city by Paramatma Saran included in the text Namaste America by Padma Rangaswamy exposes that Indian women were not influenced by the American ways and they were fully satisfied in retaining their Indian traditional values and implemented them in running their household. Even though they were educated and financially independent they still held their views that women must take more responsibility. Their work extended much more towards doing household chores which they considered as their
responsibility more than men. Unlike American women, Indians were less assertive in relationships as they believed it did no good for them. The immigrant experience of women were much better as they had more personal control over them as there was no interference from relatives which was a norm in Indian household. Moreover girls are prepared mentally and emotionally to part from their house when they get married. This cultural attitude helps them to adjust in any new environment rather easily.

Though Saran’s study reveals the general attitude and experiences of immigrant women, there are many other facets to be explored about immigration experience. Literary works mostly highlights the plights of women caught between both worlds. The dilemma whether to leave and forget one’s past or to become a total new American is a matter of personal choice.

Don Delillo Murray’s statement as quoted by Jennifer exposes the intricacies of the notion of belonging as, “it is possible to be homesick for a place even when you are there,” (16). This creates more confusion on what defines home. The mind’s ability to travel back and forth in time picking up nuances that endear the heart to locate similarities in the present is more emotional than other aspects. Losing sight of what was once really there, which is the law of time to change, is a stagnation of the mind which do not progress the way external forces do. Then is the desire to return associated with the intimacy shared over the duration of presence in a particular place? If so, events like environmental degradation, capitalization and changes in the political, economic conditions have redefined nations which cannot be controlled by individual wishes to retain the authenticity of a place.

In a neo globalised world “home” is purely an emotional space that can be defined as a very private alley of the mind. Thus it is quite possible that even being in a country or nation where you hold all legal rights as a citizen, can make you feel the “homesickness” as certain ideologies can no longer survive amidst the so called modernization. The multicultural society of America is a site for conflicts as stereotyping makes friendly allegiance difficult at times. The responsibility falls in the hand of the government to take a liberal stand, but for that their literacy about facts needs to be updated.

69
The association of people untouched by the timely progress that happened in the post industrial America with “wilderness” and being “savage” in the context of civilization is an indirect negligence of nature. Thus every effort was taken to deliberately exclude them from history. Jennifer explains that there was a drastic change brought about in this attitude by the end of the nineteenth century, reason being the rapid industrialization and emergence of the American sublime made popular by Henry David Thoreau and John Muir along with the construction of the frontier myth by Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt and others, the ideology of wilderness was reverted. Parallel to the fast paced industrialization, a large number of Americans who championed the cause for anti-modern way of life took to protest against the changes in technology, economy and society.

Wilderness was included within the encirclement of human civilization, which enabled to spread awareness about the need to protect and conserve nature for betterment of human civilization. The beginning of such a project has come a long way, but the process of establishing identity with respect to a nation is an introspection of the supremacy of nation over nature. The former divides and the latter can unify in entirety. The construction of nationality takes into consideration an unfair stance of majority chosen entirely to fit into an imagined retrospective of qualities predetermined by people in power. These dynamics have changed in the present political scenario of the United States where immigration have given birth to a new breed of citizens who are fast acquiring power due to their increased intellectual potential in all fields possible.

Who is an American? And what are the benchmarks to define yourself as an American? Vishaka N. Desai’s article in The Hindu Newspaper titled “What it means to be American” dated 30th, June 2015 quotes President Obama’s speech “None of us can or should expect a transformation in race relations overnight…but may be we now realize the way a racial bias can infect us even when we don’t realize it, so that we are guarding against not just racial slur, but we are also guarding against the subtle impulse to call Johnny back for a job interview but not Jammal” (14).
America is indeed a land inhabited by people from different backgrounds like nation, colour, culture etc. Vaishaka points out that when on June 24, the Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal’s candidacy was announced for the president of the United States, it was described by media as the historic moment of first Indian American competing for the president’s post. But Jindal’s comment that “We are done with” being identified by our ethnic identity “We are not Indian Americans, African Americans, Irish Americans, rich Americans or poor Americans.” This was a total denial of the fact that America is indeed a nation defined owing to its myriad population, and it is this that is the strength as well as weakness of this nation. Despite this, to quote Vishaka, “actively contributing to forming the identity of this nation, a salad bowl, a tapestry of different textures and hues, existing creatively and collaboratively in the best of times, and colliding and conflicting in the worst of times” (14).

The inclusion of people respite their ethnic background into the government of America, proves that America is indeed on the path to rectify it’s nations past sins of racial contempt. It’s the realization that matters, more than being in denial of the evils that are the harbingers of any society and this attitude can definitely make America set an example to the world by showing how to live in harmony by changing your outlook on race, gender or any other differences tuned in the primitive faculty of men. Now moving on to individual experiences of immigration few questions come into the foray like, Can physically displacing oneself from a place cause concern about the sense of belonging? Can perceptions about place be changed if the environment is not hostile? What are the causes that trigger hostility? Are they cultural, political or natural?

Physics defines the term displacement as “how far out of place an object is.” This is an apt meaning literally in every aspect. So can displacement be sorted out by being back in place or can an alternate universal concept for place bring about a change in the human attitude towards environment. Time and distance have been conquered by technological revolution so the moment is not far for humans to achieve this. To quote Paul Carter from his 1987 study, The Road to Botany Bay, “By the act of place naming, space is transformed symbolically into place, that is, a space with
history” (xxiv). Another argument by Christou regarding “place” in the case of diaspora is that:

The images of identities of places are reconciled with the identity of the subject itself, in the case of the migrant, the returnee. The images of places are constructed and reconstructed during the process of social interaction and symbolic representation of culture in the context of a bipolar relationship between the ‘host’ country (in my case Greece) and the ‘home’ country (in my case the United States) and the struggle to define their meaning and representation.... (36)

Personal experiences provide the evidence for historical narratives. Facts are legitimized over a period of time by opinions. “Feeling at home” comprises of many elements such as materialistic, cultural and natural. Though urbanity denotes empowerment, liberation and progress, the locating of roots into a region of rural nature where environment is adorned with innocence and purity invokes anti-urbanite attitude. Jennifer opines that “regions are dynamic places that should be characterized not just by their “roots” but also by their “routes”: the migrations, itineraries, and mobilities of the diverse people that inhabit, pass through, and give meaning to any place” (60). Thus amidst urbanization, the regionality of a place is retained by the experiences that a place is subjected to apart from physical progress. The familiarity of landscapes all over the world denotes the unity of nature, whereas the other elements are man-made and are identified because of the physical proximity one shares with it. When all efforts are focused on reviving cultural and materialistic elements, no matter where life is, the one thing that is ignored is the presence of nature which is in close proximity to what is called “place.” There is no place, if there is no nature and place is nature.

The longing of immigrants to return to their homeland if not permanent, at least occasionally turns into a shock when they realize that their familiar place, has indeed transformed, and is no longer recognizable. The urbanization which has left them feeling chaotic in the so called “city life” has claimed their native land also. In the pretext of protecting identity, immigrants fully retain their cultural tradition by celebrating national and religious festivals, cooking traditional food, wearing ethnic
clothes, forming communities or groups. In contrast, it is surprising to know that back home, the zest to keep alive the traditions are rather dull. The influence of western way of living is more rampant among Indians back home. The new brand conscious Indian proves the point. Thus urbanization is indeed spreading at such a speed, engulfing the so called space. Immigrant experience can be a positive one as they get to experience best of both worlds, broaden their views, helping them reconstruct the idea of place from a global perspective. To quote Lawrence Buell from *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the US and Beyond*:

Clearly it is possible to take a good thing too far. Nothing is easier than to slip into a kind of self-righteous hectoring didacticism when arguing for the importance of place to make a mantra out of that totem word, like the mantra of “family values” perhaps, as if returning home and committing one’s whole life there, or to an adopted place like Richardson, Alaska, would somehow would solve all the evils of the world. Your connection to your soil is surely not the sole measure of your health of soul. On the contrary, place attachment can itself become pathological: can abet possessiveness, ethnocentrism, xenophobia. The Palestinians impasse shows this, as does the struggle over Kosovo, sacred to Serbian memory but populated overwhelmingly in recent times by ethnic Albanians agitating for self determination. Place centeredness can also produce an opposite extreme of vulnerability: can make one impotent and maladaptive outside one’s home range. A certain capacity for self-deterritorialization seems needful for resiliency and even survival. Moreover as novelist-historian Wallace Stegner cautions, “we may love a place and still be dangerous to it,” (74) through unwise use born of possessiveness or ecological ignorance. (77)

Boundaries are created to separate nations and also between humans and other species. As barriers are broken down through eco consciousness, we realize that landscapes cannot be partitioned as they stretch beyond human reach. Divakaruni’s protagonist investigates the nuances of immigrant life, the dynamics of individuals caught between tradition and the neo capitalist lure which often confuses. This has spread like a contagious disease and in Divakaruni’s novel *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo vows to cure this using her knowledge of spices brought from the land to which
they all belong. Tradition denotes tangent things such as language, culture, food, clothing, religion etc. As defined by Cheryll Glotfelty in her book *Ecocriticism Reader*, “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” The basic thing that supports life on earth is food and is the primary factor that connects all species to the environment. The urban rural divide is highly complacent in terms of food culture.

…This is what the customers see as they enter, ducking under plastic-green mango leaves strung over the door for luck: a bent woman with skin the colour of old sand, behind a glass counter that holds *mithai* sweets out of their childhoods. Out of their mothers’ kitchens. Emerald-green burfis, rasogollahs white as dawn, and, made from lentil flour, *laddus* like nuggets of gold. It seems right that I should have been here always, that I should understand without words their longing for the ways they chose to leave behind when they chose America. Their shame for that longing, like the bitter slight aftertaste in the mouth when one has chewed *amlaki* to freshen the breath…. (4-5)

In the above passage, reminisces about childhood seems to be connected with food. The similar tastes takes one back to the place and time that has rooted deep in memories enabling to cherish the wonderful moments once again. Food tops the list of basic needs for any species to survive. This food is produced from land. Hence conservation of land is very important for survival. The father of modern environmental ethics and a renowned scientist and scholar Aldo Leopold in his essay “The Land Ethic” argues that all species are entitled to existence as a matter of biotic right. He defines different levels of ethics. Relationship between individuals forms the first ethics, secondly the relationship between individual and society. He adds further that there is no ethics that connects man to land as it is merely treated as property. He says, “The land–relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (168). In the contemporary world the above statement has become a motto. As Guha quotes Gandhi’s prediction that “the distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplication of wants” and that he “wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites, and go to the ends of the earth in search for all this, and I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic” (30).
The repercussion of this greed is visibly felt in the present food culture which has become highly contaminated. Cross cultural contact has resulted in the major change in the preferences of food. For example, the presence of multinational food companies, chain of restaurants all across India shows the growing affinity towards a shift from traditional food choice which is a much healthier option. The full chain of supply, management and consumption has become controversial as people closer to this procedure have not been responsible enough to keep standards owing to high rates of consumption. But at the same time each one is accountable for not leading a simple life by curtailing wants and recycling resources.

A major question raised by Amy, B Trubek in the preface of her book *Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir*, “Is there a relevant and possibly even vital connection to be made between food and place?” The answer is “yes.” She explains this by saying that assumptions on food culture “based on moral values” can influence other values concerning “food practices, food tastes, and origins—appear trivial.” She argues that alternative cultural values about place, community, agriculture and hospitality are based on the concerns about practices, tastes and origins. This “intersection between taste and place can organize such values and practices” to monitor our “contemporary food system and shape our food future in new ways” (xiii).

Every country has its quotidian food preferences and over the years it has become their tradition to pass on from generation to generation such tastes which are not only identified by taste buds but also has become part of human cultural identity. Divakaruni’s protagonist Tilo has mastered this knowledge about the connection between food and human psyche and thus finds it the ultimate way to seep in to the hearts of fellow immigrants by providing them the same in a faraway country. The spices and the other ingredients generally used in the Indian kitchens which are sold in Tilo’s store is a metaphor for the local flavor of nature imprinted in their memories that everyone carries within them even though they are part of globalization where shifting terrains is just a matter of physical movement. Such a sentiment would definitely help in understanding the procedure by which food reaches the table and make everyone to take the effort to be informed about the various processes like farming, processing and finally eating.
Food is the best way to bond and an opportunity to discover a recipe that can unite people across the world. Amy quotes Salman Rushdie from the novel *Shame* that “in order to unlock a society, look at its untranslatable words” (xviii). In fact it is only the natural world that do not need to be translated as it needs no language, but it’s abundance is felt universally. Guha quotes Mira Behn, Gandhi’s disciple of over thirty years, whose real name was Madeleine Slade, daughter of an English admiral who moved from Gandhi’s Ashram to a Himalayan village who devoted herself to the study of nature and the relation of peasant life to it:

The tragedy today is that educated and moneyed classes are altogether out of touch with the vital fundamentals of existence-our Mother Earth, and the animal and vegetable population which she sustains. This world of Nature’s planning is ruthlessly plundered, despoiled and disorganized by man whenever he gets the chance. By his science and machinery he may get huge returns for a time, but ultimately will come desolation. We have got to study Nature’s balance, and develop our lives within her laws, if we are to survive as a physically healthy and morally decent species. (92)

The idealization of village life in India was similar to the transcendentalism in America. Perry Millers *Nature’s Nation* and the battle between nature and civilization in *The American Theme* were all works that brought out eco consciousness of American nation. The political struggles gradually gave way in erasing the agenda of nature conservation to modernity for selfish human progress. The power struggles for ownership over land reduced nature to mere heritage sites for a glorified history. The people who fought for equal partnership with nature were considered a hindrance to progress and were sidelined. This tug of war led to ostracizing people who were landless as uncultured and poor. In a larger context their experiences were similar to those in exile or the voluntary immigrants.

The unequal distribution of land and monopoly over natural resources led to commercialization of food. What was ethically in reach for every one gradually became out of reach. This power struggle over basic needs led to sacrificing of traditional methods of food production and consumption. Atkins reflects the words of Mennell and Van in the book *Food In Society* that “Taste is culturally shaped and
socially controlled” (5). The cultural and social restriction on food choices has led to transformation of food usage over the years. Scientific tools have invented a whole new variety of food. Media and advertising have played with minds to adopt these changes without being aware of the methods that go into their making. Tastes and preferences of food passed over through tradition have slowly metamorphosed in to a consumerist attitude of consumption straining ecological balance through hideous means.

The journey of food on a social level starts from household, to cities, to nations, and finally the globe. But on an ethical level consumption has to be in such a way that every organism on earth gets enough to sustain life. So the mass production of food only to cater to individuals, nations that are economically prosperous leaves a big gap in the food chain leaving the less privileged to starve. This gross injustice can imbalance the equilibrium of earth as without food one cannot survive. To begin with the primary relation of food and consumption is at a domestic level. The kitchen is an important part of a home and a site of conflict and love at the same time. Politics of gender harness much in the kitchen where women is supposed to be cooking and pleasing men, when they return from work. A place where women are confined, where deep rooted prejudice of a society which demarcates boundaries, stopping women from coming out to the main stream society displaying their equal potential and intelligence which are very much at par with men.

At the same time fond memories of home are often articulated with food and its taste. Food plays an important role in the life of immigrants, as it helps them connect with their roots. Similar tastes of a community become part of immigrant literature. Cooking and relishing dishes ease the pain of immigrant life. In The Mistress of Spices, as Tilo sells Indian ingredients at her store, often her visitors are Indians, who throng the place to pick their favorite food stuff from India. Every country has its unique food culture and the evolution of food from raw to cooked, is a journey similar to a man’s journey from primitive to modern. To quote Lupton “Cooking is a moral process, transferring raw matter from ‘nature’ to the state of ‘culture’, and thereby taming and domesticating it…Food is therefore ‘civilised’ by cooking, not simply at the level of practice, but at the level of the imagination” (2).
But here is another image. A woman in a kitchen, cooking my rice. She is fragrant as the grains she rolls between her fingers to see if they are done. Rice steam has softened her skin, has loosened hair tied back taut all day. Has gentled the smudges under her eyes. Payday today, so she can begin the frying, mustard seeds sputtering in the pan, brinjal and bittergourd turning yellow-red. Into a curry of cauliflowers like white fists, she mixes *garam masala* to bring patience and hope. Is she one, is she many, is she not the woman in a hundreded Indian homes who is sprinkling, over sweet *kheer* that has simmered all afternoon, cardamom seeds from my shop for the dreams that keep us from going mad? (61)

Divakaruni in the above passage introspects the connection between woman and food. Woman’s association with cooking dates back to the cave men time. Men used to hunt and women used to settle down and nest with their young ones, nurturing them, this was the way of life which still continues. Indian women are still very much content cooking for their family, even though men too have cultivated this interest lately. But the concept of cooking is visualized with women. The extravagance of food denotes the financial status of a family. The trend of conducting ceremonies with a lavish menu is an example of that. Cooking is one of the activities that keep Indian women in America busy. They engage themselves through the day preparing dishes to keep their thoughts from wandering.

The thread that connects immigrants from the same community together is food. They feel nostalgic and at times feel at home in a different land. The general association of kitchen with women and the paranoia of recreating home by cooking authentic dishes is a way of staying connected with your roots. For any immigrant the first bout of home sickness is brought out by the memory of food that was once relished at home, just like how your memories of childhood tastes, connected with what your mother would have cooked for you even if you are very much at home.

Food represents a nation or culture on a global platform. “you are what you eat,” a famous German Dictum is suggestive of the connection between food and identity. Food habits are distinguished on the basis of quality, nutritive value, and health. Food habit divides a society into different classes. The poor has to succumb to
what they can afford whereas the rich has many options. The large scale commercialization of food has left people in dismay over the safety and methods of procurement. The adulteration and use of potential hazardous contents in food has raised an alarm of concern worldwide. As countries export and import worldwide, the relations are strengthened. But the worry is, certain foods that grow only under certain climatic or natural conditions or are region specific are forcefully harvested through the year to have a continuous supply by using enhanced scientific means of cultivation.

The knowledge about the connection between nature, life and food is very important for a healthy living. There is a spiritual connection between food and culture, for instance rice is considered as an auspicious grain in many countries such as Japan and India. It is used in various religious ceremonies invoking the past connected with rural life. Such ceremonies exemplify the human–nature connection where nature was often worshipped and thanked for supporting life through its resources. The significance of food directly sourced from nature with little interference from technology is slowly being destroyed with the advent of western commercialized ways of food production and consumption. There is an anxiety of loosing culture and heritage through hybridization of food. The new trend of creating an universal flavor, through massive advertising, often targeting the young population for whom preserving culture and heritage is the last priority can extinct various age old food practices.

Though this trend is on an epidemic level, the diaspora have steadfastly acted on methods to revive their ethnic tradition by understanding the consequences of exploiting nature on the pretext of progress as there is awareness that in order to be healthy, one must consume the purest form of food. The practices of cooking passed on from ancestors are cherished never like before. The book *Food in Society* co-authored by Peter Atkins and Ian Bowler stresses on this aspect of the diaspora:

Under pressure, some characteristic ethnic foods may be a source of shame as much as of pride. Paige Gutierrez (1984), for instance, recounts how crawfish–eating Cajuns used to hide their preference because of its associations with poverty. However, the ‘new ethnicity’ which has been evident in the USA
since the 1960s, has led to a revival of culinary roots and to the celebration of that country’s extraordinary diversity. Ethnic speciality restaurants have multiplied and they have sought to negotiate with their customers a version of cultural authenticity which, although reductionist and exaggerated, does satisfy a demand for an exotic consumption experience. (274)

Thus negotiating identity through food practices is a practice close to one’s heart as food is a factor that dwells into the mind beyond boundaries, and is carried along with every individual. Stuart Hall explains in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*:

> Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term “cultural identity” lays claim. (392)

If geography determines the borders of a nation, then biological aspects, culture, language also separates people. The revelation that the physical differences are the result of natures’ mysterious dynamics with accordance to climate and the creation of species according to their adaptability then the need to draw lines can only be an act of anthropocentrism. The inferior, superior structures are socially created and has subdued into nature also. Gender inequality is based on the biological aspect of a female’s capability to produce young ones, even though it’s a result of consummation between both the sexes. This intense act makes women realize or experience nature as divine, thus they are more attached or deeply moved by any destruction.

Daughter, remember this, no matter what happens. You did no wrong in telling me. No man, husband or not, has the right to beat you, to force you to a bed that sickens you.’ She does not say yes or no. ‘Go now. And don’t be afraid. This morning he’s been too busy to call home.’ ‘How do you know?’ ‘We old women, we sense things.’ From the door she whispers, ‘pray that I die soon.’ ‘No,’ I say. ‘you deserve happiness. You deserve dignity. I will pray for that.’ (105-6)
The gender struggle which exist in our society is a worldwide phenomenon. In this novel, Tilo’s customer the Indian wife is addressed as Ahuja’s wife, bereaved of an identity. She echoes the sentiments of many women across the world who has been subjected to domestic violence. It is a grave matter of concern that the progress that society claims to have achieved remains in terms of a narcissistic tendency to indulge in luxury by generating a consumerist attitude towards life where everything is objectified. Women too are objectified like nature. Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* explains that Deep ecology distinguishes the dualism between nature versus humanity whereas “Ecofeminism” focuses on “Androcentric” dualism man versus women. In the first case humans acknowledge themselves as superior on grounds of having an “immortal soul or rationality” (26). In ecofeminism men claim their upper status to women in terms of “larger brain size.” Greg adds that ecofeminism shares the common “logic of domination” (Warren 1994: 129) and this theory suggests that “women are associated with nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational and the abstract” (Davion 1994: 9), the argument reaffirms that feminists and ecologists have every reason to join for a common cause.

This illogical construction of hierarchy based on the roles was a result of patriarchal society which is limiting the liberal space required for women to live with dignity. Such a sense of ownership of women by labeling them weak in terms of biological construct calls for investigating the cultural attitude of human society. This situation can be juxtaposed with the attitude towards nature by man. Radical movements and conflicts can only aggravate the present situation. It is not a role reversal that is required but an understanding that all natural elements are necessary to support each other in the chain of ecosystem.

Ahuja’s wife’s desire to die as a result of the constant physical and mental trauma experienced with her husband is very disturbing as the idea of marriage is based on love, respect and trust. Being away from her loved ones in a different country where she is alienated due to her many differences, her sense of insecurity increases double fold. Being forced into sex every night without her inclination is another act of violence that has shattered her mind. To top it all her inability to conceive has made her loose her ultimate hope. Issue faced by women is parallel to
what nature is subjected to. Constant exploitation of natural resources is an act of violence, as the victim (nature) cannot react in the short term. Mankind is pushing nature into exile by replacing lush greenery by urban infrastructure. The capitalist idea of mass production is driving nature into infertility thus stagnating life and evoking the threat of extinction. Thus the idea of love, respect and trust are needed not only between humans but between every organism on earth. To quote Ynestra King:

A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity. Ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution. Biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets. Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the inorganic for the convenience of market society. Therefore, we need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. Potentially, ecofeminism is such a movement. (20)

Rachel Carlson’s landmark book *Silent Spring* on environmentalism published in the year 1962 was a shocking revelation to the public wherein for the first time the impact of environmental degradation was exposed. It dealt with the alarming levels of pollution as a result of progress which made use of chemicals like pesticides on a large scale without being aware of the impending consequences. As Jennifer sums up Lytle’s and Rothman’s words about Carlson’s work “that it drew criticism from some members in the scientific community as ‘feminine hysteria’ and that this seminal environment work reflected a growing knowledge that a separation of a pristine natural world from a somehow fouled and human-created world was an ‘anachronistic way of thinking.’ Indeed Carson was on the cutting edge of a broader shift toward seeing nonhuman nature not as culture’s opposite but as inextricable connected to the ‘human-created world’” (96).
The way history is replete with heroic figures, nations and patriotism forming a part of human nostalgia so is the natural world, where once these events occurred. Divakaruni’s sensibilities lie in the fact that her ardent admiration of her homeland is combined with the optimism that human psyche is indeed capable of understanding that interest in history is mainly due to the memories that has become a part of life. By communicating from every side we will be able to overcome misconceptions about the past and realize that the glory of this world is the natural environment around which is indeed everyone’s home. The idea of ownership is univocal. This feeling gives hope to survive anywhere in the world, despite the innumerable problems that surround the idea of “home.”

Let him be discoverer of the land that you are, mountain and lake and cityscape. Let him carve out roads where none went before. Let him enter finally where you are deepest and most unknown, thick vines, jaguar cry, the dizzying odour of rajanigandha, the wild tuberose, flower of the bridal night. For isn’t love the illusion that you will open yourselves totally to each other, suffering no distance to be kept. (288)

Daphne quotes Clements, “Every experience of transcending is a step of further awakening, in which the self becomes progressively awake to itself. Every process in nature, every step of evolution and every form found in the manifest world faithfully follows this perfect theme of awakening, which is the play of the self within itself. Individual awareness discovers its basis, its self, to be identical with the self of the universe” (130).

The attempt to unify the world can begin on an individual level. As discussed earlier food culture can be one of the major ways of doing that. Apart from that, accepting cultural differences in matters of language, religion, beliefs, clothes, traditions etc can help in reducing conflicts. A deep understanding about oneself, all the factors that contribute to forming an identity can give common sense to accommodate contrasting views with respect rather than hatred. Primarily a sense of belonging should be developed towards the environment around and such a kinship should be the top priority. This would help in retaining a sort of affinity to the sub levels like the concept of nation, language, religion and so on. It is important to strike
a balance so as not to involve in a chronic obsession to imagined differences. The truth being the environment which is very much visible and supports the life of innumerable species is ignored over other trivial issues or conflicts. Thus all the efforts and energies must be focused to protect and sustain something that breathes life into us.

…See, bunches of podina leaves green as the forests of our childhood. Hold them up and smell how fresh and pungent, isn’t it this the cause enough for gladness. Tear open a packet of chilli-cashews and cram a handful into the mouth. Chew. That hot taste, that crumble and crunch against your cheeks, the delicious tears that rise to your eyes. Here’s kumkum powder red as the heart of a hibiscus flower to put on our foreheads for married luck. And look, look, Mysore sandalwood soap with its calm bright fragrance, the same brand you used to buy me in India so many years ago when we were newlyweds Ah life, how fine it is. (79)

Simple everyday instances where the sight of fresh podina leaves stiffle a sense of delightment and even has the power to recall one’s childhood proves that sights, sounds and smells are interconnected with the environment where life thrives. All the items like cashews, kumkum powder, podina leaves are procured from nature. How such things can provide solace is a deliberate expose of the role that nature plays in human lives by bringing back fond memories. The importance of the above said things which are brushed aside as lifeless in a fiction, from an ecoperspective gains equal importance as the human characters. By romanticizing the natural elements such as the spices as indispensable not only for culinary purpose but for even healing the pain and trauma faced by the immigrants, the author through Tilo explains that it’s not just your loved ones or belongings that you leave behind but also an aspect of nature that can keep your spirits alive no matter where you are at present. The spices evoke an earthy and closest feeling which human senses can contemplate.

In a neo globalised world which runs on scientific assumptions the concept of spices being used for treating human issues reveals the romantic side of human nature which still believes in the power of nature to cure. This is a reminder that all life forms primarily belong to the environment. “Belonging” is an essence of living.
Everyone believes that they belong somewhere in order to feel that they exist. It is more to do with the attitude of the mind and is very important for a sense of well being. An affinity is often developed when similarities in terms of culture, language, physical resemblance is seen. There is also a contradictory meaning to belonging.

Classifications made merely based on social, cultural and physical resemblances restricts people to confine themselves to a smaller group resulting in disillusionment about the larger concept of unity, leading to conflicts that are not real but envisaged. This effect is layered and ever continuous and has its positive as well as negative effects. On the positive side when people leave their homeland to another country the first thing that immediately puts them at ease is finding people from their own country and reinventing their cultural space in a different land enabling them to retain their identity. This sense of identity is nothing but “nationalism.” Dave explains Homi Bhabha’s idea of nationalism from his essay “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” first published in 1990 that belonging and identity to a nation is imagined into two different unities:

First to History as it determines the time from past to present, where the degree of authenticity remains the same and an integrity of the nation is guaranteed. Secondly the concept of space where ‘a body of people’ can at any time be identified as a nation’s part as a continuing process. Bhabha defines the first unity as ‘pedagogical’ and the second ‘performative’ and these concepts of nation always diverge and there is a confusion as to which group can claim to belong to a nation. Thus we have to rethink on a new model to define nationalism. “Belonging is not something that can be uncomplicatedly found on either side of the Atlantic. Instead, it must be fought for, and claimed in whichever ways present themselves”. (71)

In the case of literature and writers the idea of the nineteenth century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel holds true as he proposed that all global writing has to be read together, across boundaries of culture and language in order to bring them under one umbrella termed as “world literature” (1979). When writers like Banerjee who is an immigrant in the US writes about India and her view about the country she resides,
is sort of a cultural exchange where communication channels are opened for dialogues between the two countries in various aspects.

As Sudesh Mishra points out in from *Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora* that the old and the new Indian diasporas are distinct as the “semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to non–metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surivan and Guyana” in the years 1830 and 1917 marks the journey of old diasporas whereas the new diasporas are the “late capital or post modern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centers such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Britain.” However the earlier or older migration was the result of “colonialism in the heyday of capitalism” as the migration of indentured labor to the Fiji islands was initiated by CSR, a giant Australian sugar corporation. Moreover, the descendants of the old diaspora along with the post-Independence emigrants from the subcontinent to sundry metropolitan centers formed the new diaspora (276).

According to the Central Intelligence Agency The World Factbook, The United States of America is the 4th largest country in the world having a population of 318,892,103 (July 2014 est.) out of which Asians form 4.43% of the total population. Sandhu, and Sabeen points out that the current data from the U.S census and the department of homeland Security’s office of migration statistics (O I S), shows that there are 2.3 million residents of Indian ancestry. Even though the migration history began in 1790, until 1990 “the population remained relatively small.” He further adds that migration is at the same time a problem and also a solution. A problem because “low-skilled migrants’ and ‘immigrant entrepreneurs” have “impacted the black urban under-class” (2012). The solution that migration provides is by supplying high skilled migrants to meet the demands of leading institutions, corporations, and nations for “economic growth and an edge in global competitiveness.” With this data clarity about the presence of Indians not in numbers rather their impact on the American society is gained. The question is has their success helped in cultural assimilation? Indian culture has indeed been impressive for the Americans to follow on a personal level as the importance given to family ties tops the list for an Indian and it has evidently influenced the American society also.
…His name is Juan, Juan Cordero. ‘Hai bhagaban, I say. She is marrying a white man.’ Dad, mom, she says, please don’t be upset. He’s very nice man, really, you’ll see when I bring him home to visit. I’m so glad I finally got it off my chest. I’ve been wanting to tell you for a long time. To me she says, Grandpa, he’s not white, he’s chicano….you are loosing your caste and putting blackest kali on our ancestor’s faces to marry a man who is not even a sahib, whose people are slum criminals and illegals, don’t say O grandpa you just don’t understand, you think I don’t see TV news. (89)

The essence of migration has impacted age old cultural practices where marriages were strictly confined to take place between people of same status according to various societal norms. Choosing a life partner outside such constraints was considered a taboo. Though this rigidity exists within countries like India, instances of marriages between people who are totally different with respect to race, religion and nationality has become rampant with cross cultural interactions made possible through migration. Marriages are indeed the most personal or private event in an individual’s life and thus the changing trends in marriages indicate the change in the attitude of people towards more acceptance and tolerance which is the need of the hour to promote peace. However Gita’s grandfather belongs to the old school, and is not able to accept that such marriages can work. At first he is more concerned about his family honour and is reluctant to accept Juan as he had a stereotypical image already settled in his mind about Chicanos propagated through media. Gradually his love for his granddaughter makes him believe and trust her with her decision. The general assumption that Indian marriages last longer when compared to other countries and one of the reason being, the traditional Indian concept of not being self centered and giving priority to others before you, a successful recipe for maintaining relationships with mutual respect and love. To quote Sandhu:

It comes at no surprise, then, that Asian Indians have the highest rate of marriage among Asian groups in the United States. Data from the 2010 U. S census reveal that approximately seventy-five percent of Asian Indians are married with their spouse present. Therefore beyond their labor market successes, Asian Indians are deemed a success when it comes to marriage too.
They take pride in their low separation and divorce rates and are lauded for this by the American polity. (68)

Marriage is a part of cultural history, and the world is kept alive due to the relationships that stems from marriage. The process of fertility can be called the culture of nature. Lance Newman quotes Sherry Ortner that women are “identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture” and that since “it is always part of culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it “natural” to subordinate, not to say oppress, them” (15). This union can mean marriage in a cultural context. A decision from a woman’s part to marry someone suitable is often frowned upon as she is considered less capable of taking intelligent decisions. Firstly Gita’s decision to choose a life partner all by herself and secondly someone who is of a different nationality is a shocker to her grandfather. His beliefs were deep rooted in Indian traditions according to which elders mostly men decided for the women in their family. He blames the culture of America for giving women too much freedom, and feels helpless that he too is stranded there. If interracial marriages are a concern for the old generation, there are a lot more issues that come with the immigration status which includes a total makeover of lifestyles.

Industrialization has led to the movement of people across the world that in turn has urbanized their living spaces owing to increased economic potential. To meet the greed of this new populace more exploitation of natural resources is on the rise creating ecological imbalance and impending disasters. David Davies expresses Kendall Walton’s viewpoint that a narrative is fictional when its socially recognized function is to serve as a certain kind of resource in games of make believe. To elaborate on this point a novel though is a fictitious account of events, it does involve a certain amount of the author’s experiences. But the articulation of facts in understanding the world has an indirect impact. Davies quotes Putnam:

No matter how profound the psychological insights of a novelist may seem to be, they cannot be called knowledge if they have not been tested. To say that the perceptive reader can just see that the psychological insights of a novelist are not just plausible, but that they have some kind of universal truth, is to
return to the idea of knowledge by intuition of matters of empirical fact...If I read Celine’s [sic] *Journey to the End of Night* I do not learn that love does not exist, that all human beings are hateful and hating...What I learn is to see the world as it looks to someone who is sure that hypothesis is correct...It is knowledge of possibility. It is conceptual knowledge...It cannot be said that after reading [Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*], one has acquired knowledge of what it was like to be a communist in the 1940’s, unless one has some independent source of knowledge that Doris Lessing’s account is factually true. You may feel convinced upon reading *The Golden Notebook*; you may say to yourself, this is what it was like.’ But unless you want to substitute subjective plausibility...for answering to the objective facts,...You have no right to say ‘I *know* that this is what it was like’. You do not know; and the very next week you may be convinced by an equally plausible novel that it must have all been entirely different from Doris Lessing’s description. (148-9)

The genuineness of truth in a fictional narrative is correlated with the readers’ attitude and on a general assumption about the truth backed up by non fictional narratives such as history. When the actual texts are read in relation with fictional, some amount of clarity is achieved to decipher truth. There is a wide criticism that immigrant writers tend to be hypocritical as they glorify and condemn their roots as well as their host country at the same time. Nevertheless this intrinsic double play helps in judging their experiences with an open mind. Experiences can only be shared but the extant of feelings can never be expressed through any language. So when there is a collective effort to expose similar experiences through fiction, the effects of any cause can be summarized if not on an emotional but an intellectual level. This can be adjourned as a sort of propagandist literature which puts forth the problems, demands and awareness on a particular issue. In this case, how it feels to be uprooted from one’s roots voluntarily or involuntarily. How difficult is the assimilation into a new culture. Will the need to preserve one’s tradition over rule the idea of progress by erasing all sorts of boundaries.

As mentioned in the introduction, India was Britian’s most ambitious colony. The resources were largely exploited for business; hitherto something that was
untouched and was not colonized in the literal sense was the tradition of the people. “Configurations of colonial space” is categorized by Quayson into four basic ways although he says that “these were not mutually exclusive but rather mixed and overlapped in specific local contexts.” He further adds “the context of formal colonialism, setting up of a government to rule the people. The context of plantation economies, which dealt with production (mainly agricultural) for export of commodities like sugar, coffee or tobacco.” Finally “the contexts of migration and diaspora,” which is crossing the borders between colonies or between the colonies and the colonizing power. The power play in each of these contexts vary and it’s after effects on culture is felt whether before or after the colonial period (2). The unification of collective conscious owes a great deal to the colonization. To quote Dave Gunning: “often the concerns of post colonial writing can be narrowly local, without reference to their difference from a colonial vision, although this concern to craft a positive sense of identity cannot in turn be wholly divorced from the history that previously has enfeebled it.” He further justifies his stand by quoting Elleke Boehmer:

identity was not by any means the single problem which occupied the minds of those who sought to dismantle empire. But it is one that still draws collective attention. One reason for this prominence surely must be that the dismantling of empire was only ever part of the cultural agenda of post colonialism. Establishing that which comes after, and sounding whether emergent structures are fit for their purpose, frequently motivates the explorations of identity found in postcolonial writing. (9)

The exploration of identity is a transcending path for immigrant people. They find a voice for their various dilemmas through their cultural ambassadors or the doyens of immigrant writing whose works speaks the language of collective sense by invoking shared nostalgia about their homeland. By using the universal language, communication becomes effective to exchange ideas, thoughts, and experiences in a global scenario. Ashcroft opines in Caliban’s Voice that “language is not simply a repository of cultural contents, but a tool, and often a weapon, which can be employed for various purposes, a tool which is itself part of the cultural experience in which it is useful” (4). As correctly said by the Filipino American short story writer N. V. M.
Gonzales that "An alien language does not fail if it is employed in honest service to the scene, in evocation of the landscape, and in celebration of the people one has known from birth" (xii).

The interpretation of nationality is the representation of land in the mind and then other factors like culture, tradition and language follows. In a wealthy cosmopolitan country like USA, Tilo’s spice store in Oakland stands out as a landmark for not only immigrants but all those who are interested in getting to know different cultures. Being open to other culture can help in building up tolerance level that is the need of the hour.

...A tola of lotus root burned in evening with prishniparni, a few words spoken, and he would not be able to keep away. Yes it would be him standing across from me and not this fat man in round-rimmed glasses who is telling me I’m all out of chana besan. If I wanted, he would see not this old body but what I wished, curve of mango breast to cup in one’s palm, long lean line of eucalyptus thigh. I would call on others, abhrak and amlaki to remove wrinkles and blacken hair and firm the sagging flesh. And king of all, makaradwaj rejuvenator whom the Ashwini Kumars, twin physicians of the gods, gave to their disciple Dhanwantari to make him foremost among healers. Makaradwaj which must always be used with greatest care for even one measure too much can bring death, but I am not afraid, I Tilo who was most brilliant of all the Old One’s apprentices. (82-3)

Tilo has preserved the traditional knowledge like any other immigrant. She holds it so near and dear and letting go of traditions will be akin to losing one’s identity. There is an everlasting conflict between tradition and modern in all spheres of life. While tradition is an emotional bonding with one’s past, keeping alive a sense of belonging to a particular point, modernism calls for breaking away from such chains to liberate oneself to live anywhere in the world without pangs of nostalgia. This is an impossible task as humans are gifted with memory and emotions that are vital facets of survival. Even though scientific temperament has helped us to break away from superstitions and enabled us to understand mysteries, there is an ongoing parallel journey striving to head back to where it all started because most of the
human inventions have proved detrimental by far. What was thought beneficial has proved catastrophic to the environment which in turn has affected lives negatively in many ways. This realization has indeed sparked off debates concerning the importance of the natural world. The organic revolution in many fields is indeed an early sign of recovering from past ecological sins.

Literature is also a vital force that could add more support to this global mission. Every writer is capable of impacting the mindsets of people through their works. Divakaruni in *The Mistress of Spices* exhibits Indian culture by detailing different aspects like food, medicine, the need for restoring landscapes. She depicts urban development as mere representations of chaotic minds. She emphasizes that traditions should be preserved as it can make one feel grounded to the earth that give a sense of belonging. More than ownership there should be a partnership between man and nature. Nature is the ultimate healer and there are remedies for all sorts of problems in nature. Tilo’s use of spices to cure issues of immigrants as well as natives in her store is similar to the art of healing with herbs purely extracted from nature mainly known as Ayurveda.

An age old tradition of treatment, Ayurveda associated with India dates back to two thousand years on records and assumed to have roots much earlier than that. Over the years it has achieved tremendous popularity as one of the soft commodities exported worldwide. In the modern sense Ayurveda is one of the rich cultural history which is slowly reclaiming its glorious past which was thwarted by colonialism and the resultant hegemony of Western medicine. It was *Mahabharta* that first mentioned Ayurveda as the science of medicine. In contrast to the scientific way of modern medicine, Ayurveda is an alternative medicine which focuses on prevention by lifestyle modifications than cure. It calls for analyzing the spiritual side of human body, its close association with nature by providing medications which are procured directly from bio life in the form of herbs. Since most of the medicines are procured from forests the importance of securing and protecting them has gained significance. The book *Modern and Global Ayurveda: Pluralism and Paradigms* written by Wujastyk, Dagmar, Smith, Frederick M. cites the laws of Caraka Samhita which is an integral ethic of Ayurveda:
He who practices medicine out of compassion for all creatures rather than for gain (artha) or for gratification of the senses (kama) surpasses all. Those who for the sake of making a living merchandises medicine bargain for a heap of dust letting go a heap of gold. No benefactor moral or material, compares to the physician who by serving the noose of death in the form of fierce diseases brings back to life those being dragged towards death’s abode, because there is no other gift greater than the gift of life. He who practices medicine while holding compassion for creatures as the highest religion is a man who has fulfilled his mission. He obtains supreme happiness. (58)

Divakaruni places Tilo in such a context. The art of healing can only be mastered by someone with compassion and that’s exactly Tilo is good at. According to Wardwell, around fifty thousand chiropractitioners are there in the United States apart from fast expanding range of practitioners from acupuncturists to herbalists. Claudia Welch points out that in the modern world there are two ways of learning Ayurveda, one is institutional and the other traditional. The institutional is associated with BAMS (Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine or Surgery ) where the study progresses with higher degrees thereafter. The traditional is the method where the disciple lives with his guru earning his trust and respect over many years like the gurukul systems mentioned in ancient texts like Bhagavadgita. Similarly Tilo has learned from her first mother in the island. The art she learned was put for good use and she even forsake her youth for helping people from her land, who miles apart were longing for trust and love. She believes that there is cure for everything in ancient wisdom like burning lotus roots with prishparini and uttering few words can actually make someone attracted to you. Abhrak and amlakai to remove wrinkles, to blacken hair and firm the sagging flesh. Makaradwaj, which must be used with great care, because an overdose could be fatal is a good rejuvenator and foremost among healers, but she isn’t afraid as she claims to be the first mother’s brilliant apprentice. Divakaruni traces the ancient wisdom of her birth land where knowledge was passed through lineage. This system gave profound importance to elders as they were considered treasure trove of knowledge. The emphasis on prevention than cure is what makes Ayurveda different from other methods. The global impact of Ayurveda
is increasing day by day with more of Westerners developing a keen interest on this intellectual property of Indian antiquity.

Teaching and learning is a cultural process where there is exchange of trust and respect. Tilo as she imparts methods of healing by using everyday spices, the authenticity and effectiveness is based on belief than on experiments. Making medicine out of ingredients that are deep rooted in tradition; one can experience the bliss of connecting with earth without actually exploiting reserves. Imparting such knowledge can help people break barriers and adopt more natural ways of protecting health there by preserving what is required. This give and take policy can go a long way in shielding environment from unwanted exploitations.

From romanticizing the East for its various mystiques, the practical inclusion of methods has come into foray in the form of educational institute’s setup in Western countries where these ancient practices are taught. Welch proves this point by saying that the United States has opened institutions which offers curricula taught by Indian teachers, highly experienced with a BAMS degree. As there is no recognized licensing and regulation for the practice of Ayurveda, a detailed curriculum on theory combined with clinical experiences exposes students to different “valid viewpoint,” by which tolerance to different “approaches can be achieved.”

Surpassing the modern belief on science, the revival of Ayurveda and its export across the world proves that man is indeed returning to the soil for his/ her well being. According to Guha one of Gandhi’s close followers J. C. Kumarappa, an economist who was entrusted the work of village reconstruction explored the relation between peasant agriculture and the natural world. He strongly believed that natural nutrients like water from ponds and rivers, and manure from cattle dung and from the forest needs to be managed well as they were equally important for agriculture. To quote Guha:

In the case of an agricultural civilization, the system ordained by nature is not interfered with to any great extent. If there is a variation at all, it follows a natural mutation. The agriculturalist only aids nature or intensifies in a short time what takes place in nature in long period…Under the economic system of [industrial society]…we find that variations from nature are very violent in
that a large supply of goods is produced irrespective of demand, and then a
demand is artificially created for goods by means of clever advertisements.
(33)

Guha points out that conservation were not only part of an Indian system, but
it was spread worldwide. Yellowstone was the first national park created in the year
1872. The best- managed system of national parks was created by the United States.

Intellectuals and thinkers highly believed that the human spirit could be nourished by
wilderness. Like any other place the greed for progress eventually turned America in
to a superpower economy gradually becoming the hub of industrialization. There is no
doubt that migration to America is mainly for economic betterment. Through
industrialization America has come a long way in establishing themselves as a
country with best in class infrastructure, improved health care facilities, high
standards of education, sanitation etc.

These developments were a result of anthropocentrism where only the needs
of man were considered, totally denying the rights of environment as they are silent.
But, the reactions are becoming visible through the natural disasters around the world
in the form of drastic climate changes, extinction of various species, earthquakes, and
floods and so on. It’s a matter of concern that though such predictions were essayed
by eminent activists long before, steps to correct them is moving at a very slow pace.
For instance Guha quotes from an essay written by John Muir, a writer from
California, published in July 1897 of the Atlantic Monthly which reads thus:

American forests! The glory of the world! Surveyed thus from the east to the
west, from the north to the south, they are rich beyond thought, immortal,
immeasurable, enough and to spare for every feeding, sheltering beast and
bird, insect and son of Adam; and nobody need have cared had there been no
pines in Norway, no cedars and deodars on Lebanon and the Himalayas; no
vine-clad selvas in the basin of the Amazon. With such variety, harmony, and
triumphant exuberance, even nature, it would seem, might have rested content
with the forests of North America, and planted no more.

So they appeared a few centuries ago when they were rejoicing in
wildness. The Indians with stone axes could do them no more harm than could
gnawing beavers or browsing moose. Even the fires of the Indian and the fierce shattering lightening seemed to work together only for good in clearing spots here and there for smooth garden prairies, and openings for sunflowers seeking the light. But when the steel axe of the white man rang out in the startled air, the doom [of the forest] was sealed. Every tree heard the bodeful sound, and pillars of smoke gave the sign in the sky.

I suppose we need not go mourning the buffaloes. In the nature of things they had to give place to better cattle, though the change might have been made without barbarous wickedness. Likewise many of nature’s five hundred kinds of wild trees had to make way for orchards and cornfields. In the settlement and civilization of the country, bread more than timber or beauty was needed; and in the blindness of hunger, the early settlers, claiming heaven as their guide, regarded God’s trees as only a larger kind of pernicious weed, extremely hard to get rid of.

Accordingly, with no eye to the future, these pious destroyers waged interminable forest wars; chips flew thick and fast; trees in their beauty fell crashing by millions, smashed to confusion, and the smoke of their burning has been rising to heaven [for] more than two hundred years. After the Atlantic coast from Maine to Georgia had been mostly cleared and scorched into melancholy ruins, the overflowing multitudes of bread and money seekers poured over the Alleghanies into the fertile Middle West, spreading ruthless devastation ever wider and further over the rich valley of the Mississippi and the vast shadowy pine region about the Great lakes. Thence still westward the invading horde of destroyers called settlers made its fiery way over the broad Rocky Mountains, felling and burning more fiercely than ever, until at last it has reached the wild side of the continent, and entered the last of the great aboriginal forests on the shores of the specific.(67-9)

Newman points out that the green house gases produced by humans mainly carbon dioxide, amount to 55 percent of global warming with United States and the European union, the two richest nations on the planet having just 10 percent of the total population of the world is responsible for half the carbon dioxide release. These
data definitely helps in creating awareness on the effects of global warming and it’s possible after effects. There is a need to check and bring in stringent regulations to thwart exploitation of natural resources. The fast pace at which science and technology is creating havoc in the minds of people, the beauty of solitude, silence have become rather extinct. Educating seems to be the effective way of overcoming such negligence of the natural world around. It becomes difficult to get the common men to read nonfiction about the environment. However more interest is generated when literature is read through an ecoperspective way. This was obviously started by the romantic writers whose works gave immense description about the natural world through poems and novels where landmarks were equally important with the human characters. Each emotion was articulated in such a way that the natural world also responded with subtle to drastic changes.

When I close my eyes the island comes to me, coconut palms swaying, soft sun floating on the evening sea, smell of wild honeysuckle in the sweet heavy air, so real I could weep. I hear thin call of ospreys as they dive for salt fish. It is a sound like violins. (147)

Doreen Massey’s definition for a global sense of place as the vision of a particular site understood to be a nodal point of interconnected force fields of planetary scope clarifies that an individual identifies to their home place rather than any other labeling such as nation, culture or language. For Tilo, her island is the ultimate destination, a home that she longs for. There is a pious relation that she shares with the island. Her place is visible to her not only through her eyes but her heart and soul. She can recall her beloved place in her memories. This memory is adorned with a visual treat of nature. She is full of praise for her birth land “land of ardent poetry, aquamarine feathers. Sunset skies brilliant as blood” (3). Finding a language to describe nature is not necessary as nature itself expresses as a language which can be understood by each and everyone. The authenticity of passion for nature is in accordance to the physical proximity, the farther you go away from nature, the more desperately you want to return. Emerson explains this experience as:

All men are in some degree impressed by the face of the world; some men even to delight. This love of beauty is taste. Others have the same love in such
excess, that, not content with admiring, they seek to embody it in new forms. The creation of beauty is art. The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature. For although the works of nature are innumerable and all different, the result or the expression of them all is similar and single. Nature is a sea of forms radically alike and even unique. A leaf, a sunbeam, a landscape, the ocean make an analogous impression on the mind. What is common to them all, --that perfectness and harmony, is beauty. The standard of beauty is the entire circuit of natural forms, -- the totality of nature; which the Italians expressed by defining beauty “il piunell’ uno.” Nothing is quite beautiful alone; nothing but is beautiful in the whole. A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace. The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is art a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus in art does nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works. (25-6)

The aesthetics of a novel is displayed through its artistic rendezvous with nature. In Divakaruni’s novel, it is the magical connection between nature, its resources and the lives of immigrant Indians who is constantly negotiating the idea of home. As Buell claims that “Diaspora can feel wrenching and liberatory by turns” (232). Matters that are likely to cause a stifle if put up as part of political propaganda can easily skid through in to the pages of a novel without causing much flux as after all it’s just a novel. Most of the ideas that become the background for stories in a fiction are of socio-historical relevance. Like how immigrant writers’ books are overloaded with racial prejudices, similarly experiences that are real are often fictionalized by the authors. However the common factor in all texts is the attachment to the environment in myriad ways, it is something invisible most of the time or maybe it is something taken for granted.

A novel begins, ends or is outlined by nature irrespective of its genre or purpose. This meditative quality of life finds its resonance in nature. Besides all the nerve breaking issues that is confronted in day to day life, the mind tends to return to
the lap of nature when in distress. This situation is exemplified in Momaday’s words as quoted by Jennifer:

Once in his life, a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all colours of the dawn and dusk. (132)

Such a return to the past will have to be limited to the imagination if steps are not taken to preserve nature. The process of immigration opens up possibilities for dialogues between the native and the non-natives. The sentiment shared over land is universal and this theme can indeed bind people together to fight for a common cause to protect “land ethics.” If nature is identified with the image of pristine landscapes, then women are also considered a “thing of beauty.” In a globalized world this notion is supported with commoditization of the female bodies. This attitude has been doubled up with the presence of media, and the consumerist attitude of people, where the quality and standards of everything is measured with its monetary worth.

The profitable business of beauty and cosmetic products, mainly for women shows the discontent and the obsession of people with altering their physical features to boost their perception of what is considered ideal in the global market. Instances in Divakaruni’s novel prove the dichotomies of racial and cultural prejudices. In Raven’s case, his mother’s shame in having to reveal her true ethnic identity as they were stamped as shabby, uncultured people made her disguise as a white by straightening her hair, and behaving in every way possible according to the benchmarks of a white citizen. Similarly Jagjit dreamed of breaking his Punjabi image and joining the gang of American boys who were loud and boisterous. He was extremely pained that it was his ethnic background that made his schoolmates scorn at him.

Beauty is also associated with wealth, as the countries that are more powerful owing to their wealth have a population with more health and vigor, compared to the developing countries afflicted with higher levels of poverty. In most part of the novel
Tilo’s physicality is of an old woman, as women are considered to be more wise, intelligent, and more powerful emotionally and mentally as they age. This mother figure is what offers solace to the customers who walk into her store with problems common to the diasporic community. A woman handles many roles at the same time with tremendous ease. Recognizing her desire for Raven, she falls for the lure of the preconceived notions of a woman’s beauty which is required to attract the opposite sex, though she is aware that Raven’s fondness for her is mainly due to her spiritual powers which give him comfort, and peace. In Tilo’s presence he can let go his troubled past. Contrary to this knowledge, Tilo too gets the fever of consumerism:

A mirror. A colour TV so I may see into the heart of America, into the heart, I hope, of my lonely American. A make-up kit with everything in it. Perfume of rose and lavender. Shoes, several pairs, in different colours, the last ones red as burnished chillies, high heels like chisels. Clothes and more clothes—dresses pantsuits sweaters, the intricate wispy mysteries of American feminine underwear. And last of all a bed robe of white lace like rain drops caught in a spider’s web. (130)

She does finally succeed in curbing her temptations by holding on to her good old values. These are issues people face on a day to day basis in the era of globalization. Most of them do succumb to the want of materials which they can otherwise live without. But the heavy advertising which manipulates the minds into believing that luxury is indeed a necessity results in revolving human lives around commodities and the motto of living becomes buying. Curbing such materialistic attitude can go a long way in controlling production, which in turn can save unnecessary exploitation of natural resources. Only when there is awareness in the minds of people, can the earth be saved from the ill effects of modernization.

The world till date has always been divided into two halves, the developed countries and the developing countries. The communist Manifesto published in the year 1848, jointly by Karl Marx, a German Philosopher, and Friedrich Engels, a German sociologist puts forth the concept of belief in the state ownership of industry, transport etc. They believed this common ownership would bring about a classless
society. The advent of industries in the 19th century resulted in capitalism which widened the gap between the working class and the owners.

The exploitation of workers was rampant. They were engaged in scattered works, denying them opportunity to master a particular skill and they were de-skilled. Capitalism was all about profit and loss and humans were mere labor force that determined their economic interests. According to Marxist ideology, society was divided into base and superstructure. The former being the material means of production, distribution and exchange and the latter cultural i.e art, religion, law etc. The economic climate of a country determined the culture, and this was the traditional Marxist view. The recent past witnessed a revisionist Marxism a term used by Barry, which was initiated by the French Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser (1918-1990).

Ideology a key term in Marxism is defined by Althusser (quoted by Goldstein) as; “Ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society” (23).

This subtly contradicted the traditional Marxist view of art being influenced by economics, proving that art did have an amount of independence. Althusser clarifies that state power is based on repressive structures for e.g law courts, prisons, the police force, and the army. On the other hand it is also controlled by what he calls ideological structures or state ideological apparatuses. This includes institutions like political parties, schools, the media, churches, the family, art and literature. The invisible collaboration between the two is related to hegemony, a concept founded by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. The term was defined by Raymond Williams as “the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings, values and beliefs of a kind which can be abstracted as a ‘world–view’ or ‘class outlook’” (101).

Hegemony, in fact is a social control which is experienced as natural unlike rule, which is forced. Althusser opines that it is this concept that is exploited by capitalists resulting in unequal distribution of wealth. To cater to corporate interests, world agencies have sanctioned the unlimited growth of industries without paying much heed to the environmental issues. Indians have flourished in the business scene
in the US contrary to their limits of having an ethnic knowledge of trade. Padma Rangaswamy opines that a study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the year 1990, proves that among the sixty different ethnic groups in the United States, Indian men’s rate of self-employment were at 11.7 percent, which was slightly above the national average of 10.8 percent. The main areas were business by Indians were setup are the “India Town”, “Devon Avenue” and other areas with a high population of Indians. Among these the “Devon Avenue” is notorious for violence. The Indo-Pak, or the Hindu- Muslim animosity is carried forward from their home soil. The efforts of agencies such as NTBA has worked a great deal till date in keeping “Devon Avenue” safe as it is one of the largest shopping arena for Indians in America.

The heart wrenching experience of Mohan and Veena, whose store Mohan Indian Foods was destroyed by two American teenagers as an act of racial violence is told by Divakaruni as one of the incidents that was possible to have struck any Indian merchant in the United States. “son of a bitch Indian, should stayed in your own goddamn country” (170). These lines echo the acute hatred symptomatic of xenophobia. The presence of hostility which hinders the immigrant dreams needs to be addressed by authorities to curb such violence which can break the hopes of people migrating to a distant land in order to make a better living.

Finally, broken in mind, body and spirit Mohan is taken back to India, with the help of money pooled in by the society where he lived. Though it’s an instance of violence in isolation, every immigrant carries this fear within them when being in a land which does not belong to them. When globalization takes pride in the back and fro movement of people across countries, the stamping of citizenship proves a burden, as the present scene, where there is a high rise of xenophobic crimes reported across the world. Partha Chaterjee articulates this notion by arguing that:

Anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society….It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains-the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside”, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East
had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain therefore the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa. (6)

The term “spiritual” is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as being connected with the human spirit, rather than the body or physical things. It is connected with religion too. As all religion teaches primarily to love and respect everything in the universe. Culture is a major factor that moulds this spiritual side of individuals and there is a need to discard practices that go against this thought and bring peace to the world. An analysis of the Western culture shows a bend towards materialistic aspirations rather than spiritual. At this juncture, the myriad ethnic cultures that have begun to map the US can become a potential guide to love and tolerance. Tilo’s temporary transformation to gratify her senses and to boost her physical image by commodities is thwarted by her spiritual self, a byproduct of her cultural upbringing to limit her wants, and to let go off her greed juxtaposing the capitalist vandalism in the new era of globalization. Globalization has increased the experience of inequality due to monopoly of trade by powerful corporate. The abuse of natural resources has created ecological imbalances which could possibly lead to a catastrophic war over such resources. Eleanor Rose Ty quotes Arif Dirlik from the book *The Postcolonial Aura*:

Global motions of people (and, therefore, cultures), the weakening of boundaries (among societies as well as among social categories), the replications in societies internally of inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, simultaneous homogenization and fragmentation within and across societies, the interpenetration of the global and local, and the disorganization of a world conceived in terms of ‘three worlds’ or ‘nation states’. He notes that although global capitalism admits different cultures into the realm of capital, it is only “to break them down and to remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and
consumption, and to even reconstitute subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and consumers more responsive to the operations of capital. (15)

The ecological dimension to capitalism is that humans have reached a stage wherein they are profoundly blinded by the luxury of a materialistic life and has cultivated a total disregard for nature. By revisiting the past, the miseries of modern life are gauged. An analysis of human heritage strongly proves the association and deep affinity between humans and nature. The past traditions of the East are revisited in the present day California where Tilo’s store is located, promising to purify the tampered victims of chaotic modernization.

The repeated stereotyping, mockery subjugates the minority into winding up into a shell of fear, unable to fulfill their aspirations and dreams. But when such individual plights are exposed, it becomes collective enough to protest against the injustice. To intervene in such matters the necessity of setting up social Service Organization were needed. Indo-American Center, in India Town, on Devon Avenue was one of the earliest popular social organization which served not only the South Asian community but also Iranians, Russians, Assyrians and Arabs. It was founded by M. K. G. Pillay in the year 1990. He was an immigrant to the United States when he was barely 15 year old. His initial years in Chicago were wrought with difficulties. He had to take up even menial tasks for survival. All these experiences have made him well aware of the plight of immigrants, which inspired him to setup the organization. Help was extended to each and everyone irrespective of their ethnic background, language, gender and class. The organization has a historical record of enabling immigrants to become natural citizens of US which to a great extent gave the people satisfaction of belonging to United States of America. This political procedure of attaining citizenship enabled them to assert their rights, and establish their marks to their full potential due to legal guardianship of the state. This was just a beginning, at present, there are many such organizations in the US run by Indians.

Divakaruni is also part of organisations named Maitri in San Fransisco Bay Area and Daya in Houston that help South Asian or South Asian American women in distress. She is also on board of Pratham, an organization that helps educate under
privileged children in India. Her works with such organizations has helped her get an insight into the problems of Asian women in America, and her stories are also inspired by such incidents. Many a times the harsh realities of life often go unnoticed and it is stories mainly in the form of fiction that help create awareness as it reaches a wider audience.

You who have more knowledge than me of loving, I ask you this: Do you, sleeping in your lover’s arms, dream his dreams? For that is what I see behind my closed lids. Red barked sequoia and innocent blue eucalyptus, squirrels with their silk-brown eyes. A land to grow into, to be transformed by. Its Winter of chill caves and smoky fires, its waterfalls frozen into soundlessness. Its summers of gritty earth under our bare feet, under our bare backs as we make love in the field of poppies. (289)

Raven’s imagery of an earthly paradise, which he describes as his final destination in the world, where he would love to spent the rest of his lifetime with his love Tilo epitomizes the eternal beauty of nature. His overwhelming sentimentality about attaining peace in the midst of nature excludes the possibility of any construction man made that he desires. For him home is “nature” and even the most intense and private act of love making ought to be taking place in the “field of poppies.” For someone like Raven who has been moulded by American culture, the thought of reuniting with nature is symptomatic of minds longing to return to a life of initiation.

Such thoughts and change in his attitude was brought out after he met Tilo. “you’re authentic in a way they’ll never be,” he adds. Authentic. A curious word to use. “What do you mean, authentic?” I ask. “you know, real. Real Indian” (254). India has been often defined as a fairytale land of magic and mysticism under the umbrella term of “Orientalism.” This has been a source of curiosity in the minds of Westerners for a very long time. This is not completely true in the case of the novel The Mistress of Spices, India as an exotic place is narrated in a positive light to make the West familiarize with Indian tradition, and break myths. The creation of female identity through food reinforces the much unchanged cultural scenario, which confines women to domestic space. However Divakaruni is successful through Tilo,
to transform this knowledge of food considered as a woman’s monopoly to extend her influence to a farther domain slowly and invisibly.

The romantic association of love between man and woman is mainly based on beauty and youth, but for Raven he finds a spiritual companionship with Tilo, a unique love which can transcend, time and space. Tilo’s healing power attracts Raven and gives him hope to revamp his traumatic past life. Tilo too had the longing for love and companionship which every woman longed for. Their love was nothing less of a beautiful relationship which could be every woman’s envy, a love which is timeless and immortal. Through Raven and Tilo, Divakaruni unfolds a story of two individuals, with differences as two worlds apart, but what brings them together is their ultimate goal of finding a paradise on earth in every sense. Her novel brings out the myriad emotions of life. To quote Divakaruni from the book Yellow Light: The Flowering of Asian American Arts edited by Amy Ling:

Writing must come out of what we know, and what we feel…but ultimately it must transcend all that to reach across time and space and memory to touch those who have never– and who will never– live as we have lived. What else is literature for? Because if it’s only the specifics of a culture we want to record, surely a sociologist or an anthropologist could do better.(137)

Diaspora’s create a transnational hybridized identity as same as the shifting contours of landscape gives us an unexplained complex identity of nature. It is this mystery of life, which enables mankind to question whether the issues that happen in day to day lives are predestined as much as the issues faced by all other life forms. The term biodiversity encapsulates all the varieties of life around of which humans are just a part and not superior in any faculty as is assumed. But anthropocentrism has resulted in destruction of the environment in many ways faster than imagined. Kevin J. O’Brien quotes the words of paleontologist Niles Eldredge to explain the velocity of human influence on environment:

We humans have transformed the very face of the planet. Agriculture has triggered the population explosion, enabling the rise of the civilizations and the growth of towns and cities. Clearing forests and grasslands for agriculture and the growth of towns and cities has meant the end of ecosystems- and
species- the world over….As human beings have spread around the globe, we have taken other species with us, deliberately transporting domesticated animals and plants as well as accidentally introducing a number of disease-causing microbes and species to foreign ecosystems….Alien species often cause great ecological disturbance and are a side effect of the growth and spread of human populations around the globe. (34)

The different cultures breathe life into the biodiversity on earth. The cultural diversity if not preserved can dwindle to such an extent so as to cause extinction. The rampant effects of globalization backed by industrial powers pose a threat to homogenizing the ethnic communities. Though technological and industrial revolution promises to bridge the gap between people in all aspects such as economic, political, cultural- the need to preserve such differences is very important, as biodiversity is the very essence of the environment, Kevin supports Davis’s argument that says:

Traditional cultures have survived precisely because of their ability to cope with change, the one constant in history. People disappear only when they are overwhelmed by external forces, when drastic conditions imposed on them from the outside render them incapable of adapting to new possibilities for life…. it is not change that threatens the integrity of the ethnosphere, it is power, the crude face of domination. (156)

Divakaruni’s protagonist Tilo’s struggle was mainly to hold on to her Indian identity, to make sure that her Indian culture has many facets that needs to be passed on to other people and the new generations who are unaware or uncomfortable to identify with their roots. The small steps taken by individuals can make a big difference in preserving cultural identity. As the term “culture” denotes the relationship that humans share with fellow humans as well as the environment, celebration of variety can teach tolerance rather than taking efforts at homogenizing all life forms as it is an impossible task leaving displeasure and hatred towards anything that is different. To quote Kevin:

This recognition is important, in part, because there are so many environmental problems in our world. Indeed, perhaps the greatest challenge
facing those of us who hope to conserve the variety of life is that we cannot present this as the only or most urgent moral issue. As much as we should pass laws and change minds, about biodiversity, other realities and problems also demand immediate attention. Human beings suffer the cruel fate of abject poverty across the world in shockingly high numbers. Violence, neglect and genocide are produced by senseless prejudices rooted in differences in race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and many other factors. The scourge of war destroy habitats, communities and lives at an alarming rate. Industrialized civilizations are increasingly warming the climate, fundamentally changing the character of many of earth’s ecosystems. No attentive person in the world today can deny that these and many other problems are real, are serious, and demand a response. An ethics of biodiversity must acknowledge such disturbing realities, neither ignoring their importance nor pretending that it can address them all. (168)

Heritages that have been around since ages are fast being erased or replaced by globalization. To add on to the ‘Diasporas’, the new breed of “Environmental Refugees” - a term coined by economist Norman Myers and defined as “people who can no longer gain a secure livelihood in their homelands because of drought, soil erosion, desertification, deforestation and other environmental problems” (173) and “Conservation Refugees” defined by Sociologist Charles Geisler as “people who involuntarily part with their livelihood claims in places set aside for natural protection” are on the rise. Unlike the Diaspora who has left their homeland for economic prospects and out of their personal choice, the “Environmental Refugees” and “Conservation Refugees” are more traumatized as they are forced out of their home not out of their will but owing to reasons out of their control.

This displacement is often caused by the decisions of other human beings. Kevin opines that the choices made by some humans in relation to land development, cultivation, use of resources and supply of energy have put the survival of large number of others at stake. This in turn challenges the ethics of biodiversity which includes human beings apart from other species and changes in environment affects humans as it equally affects other life forms. There has to be a social justice behind every step taken by the authorities as any wrong move from their part can have
adverse effects on the marginalized as well as people with access to less resources. Kevin elaborates on Larry Rassmussen idea that:

He cautions against “apartheid thinking” in order to point out that the forces separating human beings from the non human world also separate us from one another. Rasmussen’s project of an Earth ethic affirms the value of all life-forms, including human beings, and so requires rigorous social as well as environmental analysis. Like Northcutt, Rassmussen bases this commitment on the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, finding in these a vision of the universe as “a moral one bent by god’s own struggle to arch in the direction of redemption and eventual harmony.” When this assertion is translated into contemporary environmentalist terms, we learn “that justice pertains to humans and nonhumans alike, as it does in the bible’s inclusive, theocentric understanding of creation.” (177)

The fact that whether it is the diaspora, environmental or conservation refugees, their main struggle is assimilating into a new place or culture that is mainly caused due to racism which results in oppression. This state of humans can be equated with environment where injustice is done to animals, and other species or land which is more vulnerable to exploitation. The act of colonization, slavery, the rule of the whites across the world is at the same time past, present and future of the earth, as these prejudices have not vanished but continue to terrorize the earth in different forms, but the concept of inequality thrives. Thus Raven’s dream and hope of finding an earthly paradise along with Tilo, is exposed as a mirage of human minds. Whereas in reality, an earthly paradise can be realized if humans understand that there are differences but being aware of such differences and having an intellectual maturity to accept and tolerate such differences can be the only solution to put an end to all sorts of oppressions in the world.

The concept of globalization has indeed made us think falsely that by homogenizing the entire race harmony can be achieved. However, the increased and diverse new forms of acts of terrorism imply the fragility of such an idea. The reason being, it is extremely difficult for any life to give up on its past tradition, because that is what defines identity and the present and future depends largely on that identity. So
the more someone is forced to give up on their identity, it results in the power play of what is or which is more superior. These tensions can build up into a volcano of intolerance where the fumes are enough to engulf the entire earth.

It wouldn’t work, Raven. Even if we found your special place.’ I take a deep breath, then say it. ‘Because there is no earthly paradise. Except what we can make back there, in the soot in the rubble in the crisped-away flesh. In the guns and needles, the white drug-dust, the young men and women lying down to dreams of wealth and power and waking in cells. yes, in the hate in the fear.

(315)

Tilo’s urge to abandon her search for an earthly paradise, for helping the people and the city devastated by an earthquake, though is partly due to her guilt of having caused it, at the same time is the realization that environmental disasters are caused due to human intervention to a certain extent, but the need to be united in the time of crisis, irrespective of personal differences of race, gender, class is indeed a display of the emotion called “love” for everything around you. The basic value that every life is important is learned as it helps to balance the eco system and help in survival. Though Tilo’s role was to understand the problems of immigrants who underwent hostility in myriad ways, when Oakland where her spice store stood came under the earthquake, her immediate impulse was to return there and help the people in distress, rather than running away to safety.

Tilo accomplished the final crossing of boundaries in the literal sense by the act of giving away her heart, body and soul to a Native American. This was forbidden and for her disobedience she expected the wrath from her first mother. She strongly felt that what she did was merely what any mortal human would do and was thus willing to accept any sort of punishment. By falling in love with Raven, Tilo has put aside all her differences which were an obstacle that any immigrant faces in completely assimilating into a place emotionally. But this was made possible by Raven who equally falls in love with Tilo for her unique self which encompasses her tradition, culture and her grit and determination to not to leave her past roots but to hold them dear and at the same time understand and tolerate the unfamiliarity’s that she comes across.
An immigrant or any one displaced from their home due to many reasons mentioned in this chapter propagates the idea that the very essence of life is its variety. There are many angles to this thought be it scientific or spiritual, but the summary is that life is a mystery, and it is this mysteriousness, that gives wings to fly as far as one could in search of knowledge to understand the world and at the same time, imprint memories with glimpses from the past, so as to remain grounded to the realities of existence. Similar to the serpents that followed Tilo, “You who have followed me through my up-and-down life, I leave you with one last question: The grace of the world, taken or given back, is there any accounting for it. “I Maya,” I whisper. ‘I Maya thank you” (317).

At the end of the novel Tilo is renamed as “Maya” which means illusion that symbolizes the impermanence of identities which every life is subjected to. She retains her cultural past by choosing a name of Indian origin. Identity can be simple or complex at the same time. An open mind that believes that life is ever evolving, with altering identity transcending time and space can live with multiple consciousness that arise out of this in betweens experienced by geographically displaced people.