SUMMARY

Chapter One

Introduction

With more and more writers of Indian origin settling abroad and engaging them in creating writing in the countries of their domicile, they have experienced unsettlement and dislocation at the political, existential and metaphorical levels. They feel nostalgic, hybrid, ABCD (American Born Confused Desi), expatriates immigrants, people of exile. Now this has been replaced by the term Diaspora. It represents people’s displacement which results in isolation and alienation in cultural spheres in new lands.

Originally the word “Diaspora” refers exclusively to the Jewish diaspora after the Babylonian exile, but recently the word has also come to refer to other historical mass-dispersions of people with common roots. The first modern attestation of the word is in 1876 from the Greek word Diaspeirein means “disperse”. In all cases the term Diaspora carries a sense of displacement of people from their native country to alien country. These people find themselves separated from their national territory, and usually they have a hope or at least have a desire to return to their homeland. There is a strange void in the heart, a pain in the mind and the feeling of
estrangement which refuses to die – forming the basis of “Homeland Diaspora”.

The difference of views, mentality and outlook always prevails with the migrants making it difficult for them to assimilate the otherwise alien culture. Adaption, instead of being pleasure in the pursuit of material identity, becomes a proverbial pain and increase the longing ness of the deserted motherland.

In the present scenario, the largest Asian Diaspora of Southeast Asia is that of the Indian Diaspora and the Indian Diaspora is divided into two categories – the old and the new. The new Indian Diaspora is in a way to change of the old Indian Diaspora of indentured labour migrants to various countries marked by dislocation, realignment and the acute desire of physical survival is now being substituted by a force, a creative wave marked by distinctness of their own in the global culture. The overseas Indian community, estimated at over 25 million, is spread across many regions in the world, on every continent. So the Diasporic Indian writing in English covers every continent and part of the world.

Most of the Indian Diasporic writers reflect the yearning and anxiety of many men and women in their work who continue to feel marginalized and disadvantaged in the developed societies. Subject to racial bias, treated as
object of ridicule because of their dress code, food habits, colour, language and the spoken English, writers tend to expose injustice and inequity through their works.

Chapter Two

**Problems of Intra Cultural and Cross Cultural Relationships**

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the phenomenon of cross-cultural adaptation has been investigated extensively in different countries including United States, Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Israel, Sweden and many more. Millions of people change homes each year and resettle in search of new lives in different countries. But in those different countries, they are challenged to face one another’s numerous cultural differences and search for profound human similarities. They struggle to cope with feelings of inadequacy and frustration in their changed environments. Those who fail to adjust find themselves staying on yet experiencing emotional and social isolation from the new environment.

As life is an alien culture is full of difficult choices, set-backs, dilemmas, and breakdowns, so is the fate of relationships, may it be man-woman, or parents-children, siblings, or even queer relationships. Individual choices regarding human relations echo the socio-cultural trauma that a hyphenated
individual has to go through. The choice can be any of the two cultures or the best of both the worlds, and even an attempt to break away from the strict code of conduct and the set patterns lay down by them. The day-to-day dilemma and the entire process of resolution mirror the life of the ethnic community in the US. This dilemma is reflected in the novels of the two diosporic women writers Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Ann Bhalla. Their novels centre around protagonists who are forced to make choices and the whole gamut of cultural upbringing, social conditioning and hyphenated existence goes into this process of decision making.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s “The Mistress of Spices” is a novel that strings magic, memory, and immigrant life into a tale of love and survival. This novel blends the immediacy of urban America – in this case Oakland, California – with the timeless mythology of ancient India. It is a beguiling story, full of the smells and taste of India – an allegory about the magical way love can transform us. It is too, a work that resonates deeply with the immigrant experience: how shucking an identity can be something akin to dying. In this novel, set in a sacred, mythical frame, the conflict is between desire and duty in the life of the protagonist, Tilo, the spice-mistress, the healer.
It is well-known that cultural dimension is a significant aspect of inter-cultural marriages. If a person marries someone from another culture, it is presumed that he or she knows the difference in culture and is ready to sort out the initial problems of understanding and adjustment. But tension gradually sets in when the time comes for the actual acceptance and sharing of interests, proprieties and even ideas. The straining of relations begins to assume importance when the partners regard their particular cultural values superior to the others and begin to talk loudly about the superiority of their background.

This mood echoes in the first novel of Ann Bhalla’s ‘A Season for All Things’. This novel can be cited as a story of a couple, struggling hard for saving their marital life with a spouse of different culture and keeping their culture simultaneously.

Chapter Three

**Diasporic Displacement and Replacement**

The course of migration in the twentieth century has produced a riddle of the very perception of geological gap and race. To be in Diasporas (dia means through and sperno means scattered community) means to be in an un-belonging room. Diasporic communities do not split their association with
their homeland, but erect different relations. Devotion to cultural roots is a characteristic of the diasporic experience. This diasporic community realizes that it is very hard to leave the country behind even though one has left it in a conspicuous sense. The inner character of this society is inevitably India. In the communal structure and creative field the communications among different cultural entities have created an eclectic milieu and distinct body in the writings of Asian-American writers.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni belongs to a new age of East Indian writers of narrative fiction. She illustrates Indians overseas who face dislodgment, stick to their native culture, endeavor to incorporate themselves into their espoused home, and suffer strain over ethical and emotional issues.

Divakruni reveals, “It is the pain of leaving the homeland but also the excitement of being in a new place – that is the duality of immigration.”

She explores this duality of immigration in her novel “The Vine of Desire”, sequel to her earlier novel “Sister of My Heart”. Divakaruni, being a storyteller of immigrants, especially women, who must face the contradictions between the country they left behind and the one that they must call home, draws a compelling contrast between the selflessness required of women in India and the sometimes bewildering freedoms offered in their adopted land.
Ann Bhalla’s “A Passing Shadow” is a scalding book about dislocations, and alienations, outsiders and losers, the tenuous and unconscious intersections of lives and histories, and the consolations of storytelling. It is also a book about the improbabilities of love. The shadows of life pass by and our efforts at bringing them to the pen yield a manuscript that is fraught with our frustration at our inability to hold on to them and simultaneously a feeling of elation of having generated a fresh fantasy. Deceptively simple and hugely entertaining, this book is a modern paranoid about life. This multi-layered tale is truly timeless and universal. It is observation from life.

Chapter Four

**Cultural Clashes in Family and Society**

Every nation has a distinct culture of its own. Like other cultures, Indian culture is rich and diverse and as a result unique in its very own way. The rich values which Indians received from their culture are deeply rooted within their hearts, mind, body as well as soul. But when they cross the border to lead their life in align countries like America, Australia, Canada, South Africa etc., they face cultural clashes in their family and society. There is no doubt; the foreign countries have a lot to offer in terms of day-to-day facilities. But it is a tough decision for an immigrant to choose
between the homeland based on personal affection and cultural roots, or the place that provides the present affluence.

Most of the immigrants who have roots in different cultures are involved in maintaining their traditions and heritage, while changing their way of life to assimilate into new cultural world.

Like other diasporic writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s writings also explore how American culture has reshaped the customs within the Indian American communities on the west coast. Most of the stories of her book “Arranged Marriage” are about Indian immigrants to the United States from her native region of Bengal. These stories (Arranged Marriage) explore the cross-cultural experiences of womanhood through a feminist perspective. Stories of Arranged Marriage capture the experience of recent immigrants, mostly from professional classes, such as electronic engineers and businesspeople, but also a few from the working class, such as auto mechanics and convenience-store clerks. There are several immigrant brides who are both liberated and trapped by cultural changes, and who are struggling to carve out an identity of their own.

These stories (Arranged Marriage) reflect the diasporic South Asian women’s battle with cultural assimilation in western world.
In one of her novel “Sister of My Heart”, Divakaruni has combined the desire for strong bonds between women with her experience of the rift between the old India and the Westernized India.

In her short story collection, “The Unknown Errors of Our Lives” Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the lives of different characters who carry their country with them but an anxiety for a deeper, indefinable need consumes them. The true, final destination remains an enigma. There is a deep and extended insight into the intricate relationship between the mother/land/ tongue and children who move to better pastures.

An extramarital affair, whether it is a short or a long affair definitely hurts a person. The reasons for someone to have an affair are many and the temptation to start an affair does not seem to wane. The temptation to stray from a monogamous relationship has existed for thousands of years and comes in many forms. As having an extramarital affair is common in western culture, it is a taboo in Indian culture. This difference of two cultures is well shown in Ann Bhalla’s “A Season for All Things”.

Chapter Five

**Marginalization and Frustration**
Relocating from a site with a history of confrontation between colonial and indigenous forces to a nucleus of neo-colonial power confronts people with the difficult challenge of negotiating between a heritage of resistance to colonialism and the pressure of adapting to the colonial or imperial “Other” as the new home.

The tensions that arise come not just from simple longing and loyalties divided between the original and adopted homelands, but also from immigration’s link to colonialism and neo-imperialism. The immigrants from India, coming to the United States in significant numbers, between 1904 and 1924, and again after 1965, have followed amendments to restrictive immigration policies.

While immigration brought new opportunities for these Indian-American immigrants, it also brought them challenges such as dislocation, isolation, identity crisis, and a sense of differentiation that could easily bring back colonial memories. The writers emerging from this population were poised to portray these crises, but they also found themselves susceptible to an existing dominant tradition of immigrant narratives that characterized immigration as pure opportunity and the adoptive country as a mythical paradise.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows the problems, pains, and erasures brought about by immigration in the life of immigrants. Her short stories book “Arranged Marriage” celebrates Indian women’s immigration to the United States as a journey from oppressed or depressed conditions to freedom and discovery of self with the inspiration of western influences.

In her novel “Sister of My Heart”, the protagonist comes to America with dreams in her eyes and becomes more independent as she undergoes acculturation processes. But after some time, her misconceptions about freedom dissolve. She realizes that sporting short hair, wearing jeans and using expletives are not signs of emancipation. Unable to cope up with the challenges of the new world she sinks into deep despondency.

Having explored so much about the women coming over alien countries, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni also explores the experiences of second generation in her novels. A lot of young people who have grown up her in West have seen India only as visitors. Or, in many cases, they have not seen India at all, if their parents did not make a real effort. So they (second generation) have lack of connection to their homeland but they have romanticized view of what the East would be and try to connect back with the homeland. This is a huge theme in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novel “Queen of Dreams”.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents multiple consciousnesses as an identity that is “in between” such oppositional states, characterized by being neither rather than both. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the process of self-perception is the foundation of identity formation for the central character Tilotamma (Tilo). As Tilo strives to define herself as South Asian and American, she develops multiple consciousnesses that manifest themselves in both her experiences and her subsequent relationships with her racial and sexual identities.

Ann Bhalla’s “A Passing Shadow” is a book that verges on migration with a nation. It carps on the vagaries that nature can inflict on a person who is either not ready to face it or is caught unawares. The bee not only sucks nectar but also stings in self defense.

Chapter Six

**Conclusion**

For the writers of Indian Diaspora, the subject matter has also been based on their mother country i.e. India. But their vision of India is different. They focus attention on the strange love-hate relationship that exists between the East and the West and the immigrant’s quest for their identity. Their fiction reflects their experience of their inner conflict, the traditional Indian values
and the love of the western materialistic prosperity. The protagonists go through a cycle of emotions which Indians experience in the West.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Ann Bhalla are two prominent diasporic writers of Indian origin. The former deals with the immigrant experience, which is an important theme in today’s world. Most of her stories and novels deal with the experience of migration, the first cultural clashes the immigrants face in America, the nostalgia for the old country, etc. She writes to unite people and she does this by destroying myths and stereotypes. As she breaks down these barriers, she dissolves boundaries between people of different background, communities, ages and even different world.

Ann Bhalla focuses on assimilation, filial sensibility and cross-culturalism in the relationships of Indian living abroad in her novels.

A common thread running through Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Ann Bhalla’s works is the experience of being “Foreign”. Their characters long for meaningful connection, but what they find is rarely what they expected. These trying to adapt to an unfamiliar world do not always succeed. Some are homesick, many are misunderstood. So their works focus on the inter-cultural miscommunications and conflicts, all too often experiences by Indian immigrants and second generation Indian Americans. Many of their
characters struggle against or conform to outside influences that affect their life in alien country.

Much of Divakaruni’s work is partially autobiographical. Most of her stories and novels are set in the Bay Area of California, and she also excels at depicting the nuances of immigrant experience, she writes to shatter stereotypes and myths. She breaks down the barriers between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages, and different worlds. She focuses on the bicultural lives of Indian women struggling with cultural shackles to carve out an identity of their own.

Ann Bhalla has steadily probed her stand on the issue of the mutual and relational dialogue inside the social network. The characters of her novels have been profusely moving in and out the story. At certain places, the characters have blended their process of adaptation. Diaspora could not be justified to the hilt because the degree of migration is limited. Assimilation in a new land is an art though it is considered a survival trait in most of the societies.