PREFACE

Binaries are the nexus of this cosmos where existence can not be insulated from binaries. In the corridors of metaphysics and philosophy binaries remain a moot point till date. Many theoretical schools have also manipulated the idea of binary sets or binary oppositions but the praxis of binary debate can be credited to the post-colonial, post-modern and diasporic literature. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is among the most enchanting voices of Indian diasporic literature. Her penchant for dissolving the boundaries has earned global fame and she has been listed among twenty most influential global Indian women of 2015. Her writings have slashed through the binaries and boundaries that separate human beings in the name of class, gender, race and nationality. For this reason she has steered a large number of scholars. Out of the whole spectrum of Divakaruni’s writings, the proposed research rests on the thorough study of twelve of her novels The Mistress of Spices, The Palace of Illusions, Queen of Dreams, Sister of My Heart, The Vine of Desires, Neela: Victory Song, Grandma and the Great Gourd, One Amazing Thing, The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming, The Conch Bearer Shadowland and two of her short story collections: Arranged Marriage and The Unknown Errors of Our Lives. The present thesis “Between and Beyond the Binaries in the Novels and Short Stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni” is an endeavour to look between and beyond the binaries of East-West, Men-Women, Tradition-Modernity, and Realism-Magic Realism in the above mentioned novels and short stories. This research intends to study and analyse the undertones and overtones of feminism, humanitarianism, spiritualism, mysticism, post-colonialism, post-modernism, Marxism, multiculturalism, existentialism and ecocriticism in the writings of Divakaruni.
The guidelines prescribed in the *M.L.A. Handbook for the Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition*, are followed in conducting research, consulting the resources, employment of writing techniques, citation and bibliography. This research is divided into seven chapters and every chapter begins with a quotation that contains the crux of the chapter.

The first chapter of the thesis oversees the formulation, fabrication and juxtaposition of the binaries on theoretical grounds. The journey of binaries from linguistics to literature is detailed with reference to Structuralism and Deconstruction. The inversion and subversion of the binaries recommended by Jacques Derrida, is embraced by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who herself has a keen urge to attack and challenge the binaries and boundaries that cripple the worldview and breed prejudice. The biographical details of Divakaruni, her career and literary opus are presented for an expedite comprehension of her life and literature.

Divakaruni is chiefly interested in the binaries of location, gender and ideology. These binaries have a constant pull and push movement. Her first collection of short stories *Arranged Marriage* highlights the impact of location binary over gender binary. The stories are about the challenges that women face in India and abroad. *The Mistress of Spices*, her first novel creates a via duct between India-America, past-present, life-death and real-mystical. The *Sister of My Heart* along with its sequel *The Vine of Desires* is about balancing the ‘treasured beliefs’ and ‘surprising new desires’. One Amazing Thing dismantles the walls that divide human beings. This novel promotes the sense of community over isolation. *The Brotherhood of the Conch* trilogy erodes the binaries of real-hyperreal, science-

The second chapter is centered on the east-west binary. It is designed after Hofstede’s six dimensional cultural model to locate cultural difference between India and America. It focuses on the cultural clash in the hype and hoopla of multiculturalism, and the ensuing mechanism of enculturation, acculturation and assimilation. Along with cultural jostling and shifting this chapter takes into account the problems of fragmented identity, cross-pollination, racial discrimination and hate crimes faced by the immigrants. It also acknowledges the efforts put in by the writers to dissolve the boundaries between east and west in general, and India and America in particular. The chapter concludes with a strong conviction that any move from one pole to the other is more about sharing than giving up.

The ‘unapologetically feminist’ writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is chiefly occupied with gender binaries. Gender is both interpreted and imposed through binaries. The third chapter makes a diachronic study of women’s stature in Indian society. It begins with an examination of social and cultural power structures that perpetuate the surrogacy of women. In *The Palace of Illusions*, a retelling of the grand epic *Mahabharta*, Divakaruni has tried to thwart the age old gender stereotypes. Panchaali’s journey has been narrated through three levels: liberal, matriarchal and metaphysical. The author goes on to show that even after the centuries society not only recommends but imposes a standard form of behavior on
women. Both men and women are imprisoned in gender patterns. This chapter charts the changes that have come in social position and mental disposition of both men and women, over the years and across the boundaries. Divakaruni promotes the notion of gender fluidity by underlining its presence in Indian mythology.

A reverence for tradition and enthusiasm for modernity is the notable feature of Divakaruni’s life and literature. This chapter defines tradition and modernity in contemporary context and establishes the strength of Indian tradition and potential of American modernity. The tussle as well as the interdependence of tradition and modernity is aesthetically delineated in this chapter. This chapter emphasizes on the modernization of Indian traditions at both cultural and structural level. This transformation is shown through the author’s works where a move from patriarchy towards matriarchy; authority towards individuality; subjugation towards liberation; mythical towards logical; hierarchy towards equality, and from religious bigotry towards secularism, can be noticed.

The next chapter deals with multiple realms of this universe. This universe has many levels of existence and to comprehend the reality in multiple interfaces the use of magic realism becomes indispensable. Although the genre of magic realism is popularly associated with Salman Rushdie but Divakaruni has given it new heights by exploring its mystical, spiritual, social, psychological, mythological and scientific dimensions. This chapter locates the five primary elements of magic realism given by Wendy Faris in the novels and short stories of Divakaruni. A catalogue of the techniques and tools employed by the author to create magic realism, is given in the
chapter. Divakaruni fluidly moves between realism - magic realism, dream- reality and natural - super natural.

The sixth chapter deliberates on the craftsmanship of the author. Being a writer of Indian diaspora, she consciously adopts a complex multi voiced narrative style that mirrors her position on the threshold of cultures, histories and memories. Since she is a professor of creative writing, she has by no surprise, exceptional ability to innovate new narrative techniques. She keeps experimenting with plot, setting, characters, narrative perspective, themes and writing styles. Her non-linear plots, seamless transition from one narrative mode to another, extensive use of myths, interior monologue, epistolary exchange, diary entries, stream-of-conscious dream sequences make her writings engrossing and interesting. With the abundant use of similes, metaphors, images, symbols and poetic prose she makes reading a richly textured experience.

The last chapter summarizes the acquisitions of previous chapters and concludes the findings. The solution to the binary debate is traced back in the metaphysics of Lao Tzu, philosophy of Buddha and psychological approach of Freud. The author inherits combination and synthesis from Indian roots, and exploration and experimentation from American routes. Hence her approach remains bipolar: between and beyond the binaries. This chapter goes on to show that Divakaruni empowers her characters with humanitarianism, spiritualism and a sense of community which enable them to handle the fusion and fission of binaries, and overcome the existential crisis. The present research leaves traces for further
investigation of the author’s work in the light of Mythical and Archetypal Criticism, Postmodernism, New-Historicism and Cultural Materialism etc.

The study concludes with a conviction that amid the present day strife of boundaries and binaries, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the one who is resolved to negotiate, to integrate and to synthesize. She breaks down the barriers, dissolve the boundaries, disperse the space between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages, races and nationalities. The present research comes up with a new outlook towards binaries that promotes cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

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