Chapter 2
East vis a vis West
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Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

— Rudyard Kipling “The Ballad of East and West”

In 1889, Rudyard Kipling wrote about the distinct boundaries that divide the world into two hemispheres: the east and the west. The end of 20th century has witnessed a paradigm shift in this viewpoint, with the talk of globalization and homogenization. By virtue of jet transportation and cheaper communication channels, the distance between east and west is melting rapidly. Shrunken time and space have facilitated free movement of people across borders. Free flow of news and information over the globe has also driven people to relocate. Migration has become more flexible, accessible and affordable. In the last few decades a large part of population has migrated from South Asian countries to the western nations. The United States of America has attracted the most number of immigrants from all over the world due to its growing economy and increased career prospects. In 2017, a USA based national non-profit organization South Asian American Leading Together (SAALT) has reported, “South Asians are the most rapidly growing demographic group in this country, numbering over 4.3 million, with large growth in the undocumented South Asian population in recent years, including 450,000
According to the American Community Surveys (ACS) and Campbell J. Gibson and Kay Jung, the Asia-born immigrants in the United States have increased 6 fold from 1980s to 2014. The changing contours of boundaries and nationalities have given enough foundation and plot to the writers for designing the poetics of physical and emotional displacement.

The Indian-American writers who themselves have traversed the alien shores, have tried to negotiate the dialectics of immigrant experience in narrative mode. They have unearthed the realities of immigration from their perspectives and wisdom. Among these writers Bharti Mukherjee has brought out the cultural shock and consequent acculturation through female sensibilities. Jhumpa Lahiri has addressed uprootedness, quest for identity and cultural in-betweenness ingrained in diaspora. Amitav Ghosh has projected cosmopolitan identity while Kiran Desai has exposed the rigidity of Indian caste system, illegal immigration and double-consciousness of Indian immigrants. Akhil Sharma has narrated the shattering of ‘American Dream’. Anand Giridhardas has examined the backlash of 9/11 with reference to the questioned nationality of South-Asians. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has clubbed her bicultural ethos with the problems and privileges of immigrants.

Divakaruni’s curative poetics of immigration has an outstanding appeal due to her conviction that “the books will bridge cultures” and “people may ultimately come together and make a better world.” In her writings Divakaruni has churned up her own experience as first generation immigrant woman, who straddles two diametrically opposite worlds: India (the east) and America (the west). Moving to a completely new world at the age of 19 and experiencing a different culture changed Divakaruni’s perception to a great extent. While living in India she was so much into
Indian culture that she could hardly see through it. It was only after her shift to the United States that she comprehended the disparity of both the cultures and the depiction of the two almost opposite cultural systems became her prominent thematic concern. At times she would feel elevated at the exposure of American world and at others she would feel ‘othered’ and alienated. To overcome the latter and share the former, she made writing a tool. She started writing to connect with people and cultures. In an interview with Katie Bolick she states, “I think being an expatriate is good for writers. Moving away from a home, culture often allows a kind of disjunctive perspective that is very important— a slight sense of being the outsider, being out of place.”5 This shift acquainted her with the challenges of cultural pluralism, cultural hybridity, multiculturalism, acculturation, enculturation and assimilation. Apart from cultural discourse Divakaruni has vigorously raised the issues of fragmented identity, racial discrimination, hate crimes, social maladjustment, cross-pollination, exploitation and alienation. She outlines the complexities and the dilemma of the immigrants in the host country, by focusing upon its attraction, repulsion and exploitation by the vested interests. Beena Agarwal admires Divakaruni’s exceptional ability to reconstruct the psyche of immigrants both emotionally and psychologically by saying:

The undercurrent of emotional sweep touching the shores of human sensibility defined in terms of feminine consciousness, longing lingering looks of personal relationship inevitable bonding with native geographical and cultural roots impart distinction and enduring popularity to the art of fiction of Chitra Banerjee and works as a panacea for the generation caught in the whirlwind of conflicting values.6
It is the cultural transposition and relocation rather than geographical that is more agonizing to the immigrants. Culture in any country includes its “language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies and symbols.” It influences the lives, views, visions, thoughts and behavior of people. Culture varies from state to state in a country. The cultural leap from the east to the west is something really momentous. The cultural differences that immigrants go through can better be understood in the light of Hofstede’s internationally recognized six dimensional cultural model. In *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* Hofstede talks about culture as a programming of mind. According to Hofstede, the problem areas of national culture correspond to six dimensions of culture: Power Distance Index (from small to large), Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index (from weak to strong), Short Term Normative Orientation versus Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint. This model is an index for assessing cultural difference among nations. The application of Hofstede model to Divakaruni’s works can be helpful in tracing the cultural dissimilarities between east-west in general and India-America in particular. Whereas the first four dimensions clearly demarcate India and America, the last two reflect in the form of social and emotional maladjustment of the immigrants.

The first dimension of culture as specified by Hofstede is ‘Power Distance Index’. It “expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.” Inequalities can be seen in every society but in some they are more glaring. The countries with higher PDI observe hierarchies in society, family, gender, politics and economy. In this context
Divakaruni has portrayed India with higher PDI. There is a large distance between *brahmin*-*shudra*, parents-children, husband-wife, men-women, leader-subject and employer-employee. Divakaruni has especially focused on the PDI in family and gender patterns. In most of the Indian families, decorum, propriety and formalities are observed to the extremes and there is hardly any space for free and frank discussions. Rigid societies believe, “Families were not for fun. They were for feeding and clothing and teaching children, so that they would, in turn, be adequately equipped to feed and clothe and teach their children.” In such families there is lack of communication between parents and children which may be out of respect, hesitation or fear. Mainly the girls in the family don’t feel free to express themselves. Divakaruni has framed up the paucity of communication in “The Love of a Good Man” where Monisha accepts:

> And though my mother and I conversed about many things- my college professors, a new movie, the rising price of Ilish fish- we rarely spoke about what we really thought. We buried our hurts inside our bodies, like shrapnel.

Not only parents and children but husband-wife also live in wooden togetherness in which they share only their bodies not lives. A wife barely vocalizes what she thinks and feels as a body and soul. This prolonged silence leads to suppressed desires and visions. By giving a contrast of American culture Divakaruni has tried her best to show that healthy communication is a must for sound relationships. Sincere confessions, apologies, admiration and forgiveness can save relationships.
With the migration the dynamics of power change and the wrestling between the cultures results in parent child conflict. Immigrant parents have to make serious efforts to get their kids adjust in the new set up and unique social system. They struggle hard to give their children the best values from their birth culture and chosen culture. They feel incessant pressure to condition their children for accepting new western world without rejecting their eastern background. Children also feel equally strained. Their abrupt move from strict environment to sudden freedom disorients them. Many parents are prepared for the changing family dynamics but most of them fail to understand the anxiety experienced by children inside and outside the home. An example of this situation has been given in *The Mistress of Spices*. Jagjit, a school going Punjabi boy is bullied by his white classmates. He doesn’t want to go to school because other kids make fun of his turban and long hair. They call him ‘idiot’, ‘nigger’, ‘asshole’ and nobody befriends him. What is more troublesome is the fact that he has nobody around, either at school or at home, to share his problem. As a result he becomes easy prey to the ‘big boys’ gang who comes to his rescue in school. This gang takes him to places, gets him expensive gifts, listens to his problem and teaches him fighting. In exchange Jagjit carries and drops off their drug packets from one place to another. To Jagjit, his gang becomes his family. Like Jagjit many children are afraid of discussing their problems with parents and parents also don’t take the initiative. Such children find a substitute support system which may mislead them. The situation of grown up children is more awkward. When these America bred children visit their homeland and meet their parents it is felt that their relation with their parents has undergone a vast change. “The Names of Stars in Bengali” deals with a similar case where a daughter comes
from California to Calcutta almost after a decade. During her interaction with old mother, the daughter gets irritated at trivial things but in a moment of introspection she realizes:

. . . they had stepped into a time machine named immigration, and when they fell from its ferocious spinning, it was into the alien habits of a world they had imagined imperfectly. In this world, they could not inhabit a house together, in the old way. They could not be mother and daughter in that way again.11

Along with family relations, the gender relations also encounter the change. As Levitt has pointed out that gender is the central organizing principle of migrant life and transnational migration affects interpersonal power relations between man and woman.12 The difference in the experiences of men and women during transnational migration is somehow a result of how differently they are treated in their homeland. In India a majority of women are bound to follow the dictates of patriarchy. In some of the rural parts of India, women are treated as slaves and their lives are meant to serve others. They are deprived of nutrition, education, and other basic necessities. These rural women are kept under the thumb and can’t even decide what to wear, how to behave, which places to go and whom to talk with. In such a scenario their sudden shift to a land of freedom and liberty becomes a temptation as well as a trap. They are born and brought up in a strict cultural environment where they are taught to act and behave in a certain way. Their moving to a foreign land demands a sudden transformation in their behavior, worldview and sensibilities. This cultural switching results in conflicting situations. The constraints of old and
the attraction towards new life makes it challenging for them to make choices that can please everybody around them. Women as compared to men connect more immensely to their surroundings and especially, Indian women who are generally portrayed to be the holder and the preserver of the Indian culture. It is herculean task for them to carve out an identity of their own from a combination of cultures of homeland and hostland without compromising their dignity. This ‘in-between’ existence pushes them towards the condition which is more complex and numerous divided. They develop multiple consciousnesses which results in neither unified not hybrid but rather fragmented identity. Meena Alexander puts it well, “That’s all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations.”13 Divakaruni has impeccably portrayed the cultural dilemmas of South-Asian immigrant women. Sudha expresses the pangs of cultural split saying:

My mind whips about. East and west, east and west . . . . The river of my life is speeding towards an abyss. What shall I do? . . . I want to bite into the apple of America. I want to swim to India, to the parrot-green smells of childhood.14

Thus with the shift of location, the Power Distance Index also shifts.

The second dimension proposed by Hofstede pertains to individualism and collectivism. As per Hofstede:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its
opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.  

Divakaruni has shown this difference in terms of family structure, ideologies and social institutions. In wide eastern societies like India an absolute freedom is denied. The actions of an individual are determined by family, society and group to a great extent. People are more family oriented and everything they do or have has an emotional connect. Individual good lies in family good. Contrary to this western people live life on their own terms, without any interference and judgments. They are more open, carefree, individualistic, goal-oriented and tend to make their own decisions. Indians prefer joint families with young and old living together. The extended family has concern and interference at the same time. In America, families are nuclear. At an early age children are made independent and at certain age elders are shifted to old age homes. Divakaruni has related the disparity between American individualistic culture and Indian collective culture in her story “Doors” where Preeti represents the former and Deepak the latter. Preeti has been living in the US since her early teens and Deepak is a guy ‘straight out of India’. This loving couple is perfectly matched at emotional level but absolutely incompatible at cultural level. Deepak has grown up in large Indian family where doors are always open to welcome all. Preeti brought up as a single child in America, believes in the idea of privacy and is obsessed with keeping the doors shut. This fundamental difference becomes obvious with the appearance of Deepak’s friend Raj who comes from India to do his masters and plans to stay with them. Deepak is excited at the proposition but Preeti is afraid of the idea as she is not used to long term houseguests. Friendly
and informal Raj is a complete foil to Preeti who is very much particular about manners and privacy. What is felt as concern by the former is termed as interference by the latter. Preeti is left frustrated by Raj who always leaves the doors open, enters her room without knocking, disturbs her privacy by uninvited advice. Owing to her individualist mindset, Preeti is unable to adjust in this situation and feels suffocated. Everything seems crumbling down to her: her studies, her health and above all her marriage. As far as Deepak is concerned, he has no idea what Preeti is going through. The story ends at a sad note where Raj is compelled to leave the house and the loving couple slams door in each other’s face. A close observation reveals that none of the three is to be blamed for this sad turn of events, it is the cultural rift. Preeti herself admits “I guess it’s a cultural thing.” The immigrants get confused between ‘I’ and ‘We’ approach. They can’t decide which way to go. Sudha in Vine of Desires finds herself in the same fix when in America where everyone tells her ‘Live for yourself’. An Indian woman like her, who has always lived for others, surprisingly asks:

I’m not sure what it means. I’m not sure I know how to do it and still be a good person….There’s a terrible pull to the idea of living for myself, and a terrible emptiness. I feel like a flyway helium balloon- all the people I know are on the ground somewhere, but so far away and small, they hardly matter. Yet I know I can’t go back to the old ways, living for others.”

Immigrants have to decide their preferences and inspire their children for the same. The author herself grew up in a family of parents and grandparents where everybody took care of each other. The author wants to inculcate the same in her
sons. She says, “I want my boys to grow up with that, not thinking you just take care of yourself and that’s it. It’s a question of balancing what the individual wants and what’s good for the family.”

The outlook of Indians is vastly different from that of Americans as far as the institution of marriage is concerned. Divakaruni observes, “Marriage in the United States is about finding the ‘right mate,’ an attractive person to fulfill one’s fantasies. However, in India, people marry to perpetuate the culture and strengthen family ties.” Getting married at right age is a social obligation in India as “it is a shame if grown girl sits in the house not married.” Marriage is a huge affair in India which considers the financial status, social reputation, caste and dowry negotiation from both the families. In most of the cases marriages are fixed by male members of the family and women are less involved. In some remote villages the girl and the boy don’t even see each other before marriage. On the reverse side, in America marriage is a personal affair of two individuals. They find it essential to know each other well. They want to ensure sexual as well as emotional compatibility, therefore, they have live-in-relationship or a long courtship before they get married. Divakaruni has manifested this difference through her characters. Indian girls like Sudha, Sumita, and Lalita reluctantly go for a marriage that is in their family’s favour whereas Indian American girls like Meera, Shona, and Monisha prefer live-in relationship over arranged marriage. The cultural tussle over marriage gets heightened in immigrant families where parents unwillingly allow their children to have their ways except for the decision of marriage. This ambiguous attitude is crisply drafted through Geeta Banerjee’s story in *The Mistress of Spices*. Geeta Banerjee is the only child to her parents; therefore, she is very pampered. Having grown up in America,
she believes in following her own way. Her parents never make fuss over her western dressing style, working and partying with male colleagues. They keep mum when she comes home late night or takes her decisions independently. But they come in for a great jerk when Geeta rejects the marriage proposal extended by them and declares her decision of marrying a Chicano she loves. This revelation turns her father to stone and her mother cries, “I never thought you’d do this to us, is this how you repay us for giving you so much freedom even though all our relatives warned us not to.”

Her grandfather vehemently reacts saying, “You are losing your caste and putting blackest kali on our ancestors’ faces to marry a man who is not even a sahib, whose people are slum criminals and illegals . . .” Seeing this ‘prehistoric’ reaction Geeta leaves the house to move in with Juan, her beloved. The cultural clash the Banerjee family goes through is very natural for Indian immigrants.

Marrying at the right age is not the only cultural requisite, maintaining the sanctity of marriage is another cultural obligation on Indians. Nuptial ties are considered above one’s desires and happiness. Zhao and Park write in this context, “If an Indian woman challenges the expectations of marriage (through divorce, being unmarried, alternative sexuality, or marrying outside of the Indian community), she is often depicted by some members of the community as too westernized, betraying the family, or even deviant.” Perhaps this is the reason that Asha, Abha, Meena, Lalita, Sudha keep suffering in a loveless marriage until they feel choked. Before these women decide to dissolve their marriage, they have to prepare themselves to face their parent’s anger, gossiping in India, family dishonor and many such issues. Meena’s cry involves above mentioned apprehensions, “Selfish they’ll call me. Immoral. A bad woman. I have to keep telling myself I’m not that. It’s not wrong to
want to be happy, is it?" Thus the difference between individualistic and collective culture is reflected in family structure, one’s personality constitution and social institutions.

‘Masculinity Vs Femininity’, also known as ‘tough Vs tender’ is the third cultural dimension given by Hofstede. In ‘masculine’ societies gender characteristics and gender roles are strictly followed. Here men are assumed to be assertive and tough, and women are supposed to be modest and tender. In ‘feminine’ societies gender roles overlap and instead of competition cooperation is promoted. Divakaruni makes it clear that “It’s a man’s world in India.” Obsession with gender roles and repression of female sexuality seal this verdict. Gender roles typify gender difference which is a universal phenomenon and its type and degree varies according to socio-political structures of a country. In India there are rigid norms as to “how a man should act, what is a woman’s duty.” There is segregation of duties for men and women- the former is always money maker and the latter is usually home-maker. Men consider it below dignity to assist in household duties and to allow their women to work outside home. In America people “don’t believe in men’s work and women’s work.” Both men and women share domestic and financial responsibilities. Anju in *Sister of My Hearts* whole heartedly appreciates the liberal American approach and relishes the freedom it offers. In India where a woman’s dress to her gait everything is culturally determined, she was never allowed to go anywhere on her own. She had to wear sari from her early teens. But in America things are entirely different. For the first time she gets an opportunity to earn her own money. Her husband Sunil doesn’t mind cooking for her and helping her in household chores. Anju shares the taste of freedom with Sudha saying:
Unlike some of the other Indian husbands I know, Sunil has always encouraged me to feel comfortable in America. He taught me to drive and introduced me to his colleagues at work. He bought me jeans and hiking boots, and when I said I’d like to see how I look with short hair, he said, Go for it! He’s taken me to malls and plays and dance clubs and the ocean. And finally, though money is short, he has been enthusiastic about my going to college to get a degree in literature.28

In American society women are not bridled by cultural palisade and can assert themselves freely. Their existence is not parasitically dependent on man. A spinster, a widow or a divorcee is not looked down with suspicion. This is the reason Hameeda and Sudha prefer to come to America after divorce. Both want to save their daughters from the invectives of masculine society. Sudha admits:

No one in America would care that I was a daughter of the Chatterjees, or that I was divorced. I could design a new life, earn my own living, give Dayita everything she needed. Best of all, no-one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me, who had decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man.29

Sexuality is also viewed differently in India and America. Americans are more open in matter of sex and take it as a medium to relate. For Indians, sex is still a taboo and talking about sex is considered indecent. Indians have moralistic attitude towards sex. To them it all about performing. It is hard for Indian women to talk
openly of love let alone the mention of sex. Madhulika S. Khandelwal, in her book *Becoming American, Being Indian* proposes cultural grounds for hushed up female sexuality in India. She writes:

Indians' widespread belief that sexual freedom was a hallmark of American society placed them on guard with Americans, as it did with their own U.S. - reared children, particularly their daughters. [...] Indian culture perceives sexuality itself as dangerous to the values of the traditional Indian family, thus within the home it remains, as much does, under the control of the patriarch.30

American women, on the other hand explore sex freely and enjoy it equally. Meera, an Indian American character confesses “we tried wild and wonderful things that would have left me speechless with shock in India had I been able to imagine them.”31 Thus the difference between ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ society is judged in terms of gender roles and sexuality.

Uncertainty avoidance index is another parameter to compare culture. Societies with stronger UAI take change as threat. Different is termed as dangerous by them. People feel a kind of security in rules and restrictions. The lower UAI societies have curiosity for change. They are more flexible and receptive. Keeping these features in mind Divakaruni portrayal of Indians shows their stronger UAI. This is the reason when her characters come from India to America; most of them get a cultural shock. A wide range of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation can be observed in immigrants. The unsettling selves, stress of adaptation, longing for the roots
empowered by social and mental seclusion in a foreign land, result into neurosis and psychosis. Particularly the old people can’t bear the setback of being dislodged in the twilight of their life. They are emotionally and physically dwindled. Trideep’s father Mr. Sen is such a figure. His longing for home has turned him into a corpse with no sign of life within. His mental agony has rendered him paralyzed. He neither eats properly nor talks to anybody. He keeps his eyes shut because “he can’t stand to be here. In this bed, in this house, in this country, all of which is alien to him.”32 Like Mr. Sen, Geeta’s grandfather Mr. Banerjee also feels frustrated in his attempt to hold on to his past with his failing hands. He comes to Tilo, the mistress of spices and shares his pain saying, “But mental peace I am no having, not even one iota, since I crossed the kalapani and came to this America.”33 Like a therapist Tilo listens to Mr. Banerjee and the likes, diagnoses their psychological and spiritual ailments and help them reconstruct their shattered selves.

Hofstede’s Long Term Orientation Vs Short Term Normative Orientation also differentiates between Indian and American culture. An obsession with past and its traditions, and a craze for social spending implies the short term orientation of Indians. In The Vine of Desires Lalit tells Sudha about his troubled childhood saying, “We were particularly miserable in our lack of money because my father had retained the Indian mentality of saving face.... But then someone in the community would invite us for a birthday party or a wedding, and Dad would make sure our gift was the fanciest one.”34 The mentality of Indian immigrants results in financial crunches and family discord. Contrary to this Americans look towards future and believe in thrift. They are comparatively fond of savings and investments.
The last cultural dimension refers to Indulgence Vs Restraint. The culture and surrounding play a vital role in shaping up one’s lifestyle. Western notion of fulfillment is reverse to Indian thought of denouncement; therefore, ideological difference is very natural. The spiritual inclination, moral attitude of eastern countries is a foil to materialistic fervor and techno savvy mindset of western countries. What to Indians is “the unholy trinity of alcohol, drugs and sex” is very much a part of culture for an American. It becomes really challenging for the Indian immigrants to keep their children away from the glamour of American culture. In \textit{The Mistress of Spices} Manu’s father doesn’t allow his teenager son to attend a prom night which to him is all about boozing and dancing. Manu gets very angry with his dad but he is unable to notice his father’s ‘frightened love’ and fear of losing him to America.

Theses six dimensions of culture throw light on the fact that immigrants belong to more than one country and have more than one home. The process of immigration has drastic social and emotional implications. It is really taxing for Indian immigrants to become a part of new westernized society without being apart from eastern social values. They learn to balance new rules, new habits with old convictions and beliefs. Sometimes they fail to balance their values, lives and perceptions accordingly and experience multifarious personalities of oneself. They feel torn apart due to the altered egos and different principles of society. They are in constant dilemma as their loyalties are divided between homeland and hostland. Divakaruni herself has felt this split, therefore, in one of her articles she writes “Why couldn’t I be part of both countries, and loyal to them both, kind of like a woman is loyal to her birth family as well as her husband’s?” The struggle that
immigrants face in crossing the emotional and behavioral boundaries can make anyone nostalgic. In a foreign land they feel a kind of hollowness. In words of Sansam “for the immigrant Indians, new life in America was like being thrown into the sea even before learning how to swim.” Another important thing that these migrants feel on the foreign land is that it is difficult for them to make friends because of vast cultural disparity. Americans like their privacy and want their lives ‘to be smooth and uninterrupted’ by the claims of friends, relatives or neighbours. Moreover, immigrants are busy in learning and realizing the other side of life. In the struggle of getting settled into new environment they can afford only colleagues not friends. Immigrants miss the fun, food frolic and festivals of their homeland. Their nostalgia is aptly described through Mrs. Dutta when she says “I miss it all so much, sometimes I feel that someone has reached in and torn out a handful of my chest.” Thus cultural differences result in social and emotional maladjustment.

Some of the issues that Immigrants face have been ironed out by the revolution of information technology in 21st century. Without even visiting a country people can acquire an understanding of the place, people, society, community, food, and lifestyle of the nation they are going to migrate. This has significantly helped in reducing the stress and cultural barriers. Immigrants also have evolved their own ways to overcome the feeling of estrangement and yearning for home.

For the immigrants one way of locating the self in this conflicting situation is to stand at the border of two cultures, “looking critically at both, neither assimilating nor combining either of them.” The second way suggested by Homi Bhabha is to look towards both, being both here and there. It is conceptualized as Hybridity.
suggesting the rejection of any single or unified identity, and a preference for multiple cultural locations and identities. In *The Third Space* Homi Bhabha is concerned with migrant and minority groups. These groups apparently translate and hybridize the metropolitan space. They incorporate some of its cultural forms at the same time as they are incorporated into it. This area of mutual intervention is called third space where the communities in interaction with one another, agreeing on certain issues, diverging on others.⁴⁰

In the increased diversity which has made the US a multicultural country. The distance from tangible culture is compensated by associating oneself with the intangible part of it. The idea of home entails the preservation of their culture, traditions, heritage and their continuity. In that sense immigrants have created a virtual home for themselves in a foreign land. Especially in case of Divakaruni’s immigrant characters the idea of ‘third space’ is preferred. Home is enlivened through food, attire and rituals. There is hardly any book in which she has not presented food as an emotional and cultural connect. The Indian immigrants relish Indian music, cooking Indian food, wearing Indian dresses, celebrating Indian festivals or reading about Indian culture. Cultural habits like going to *gurudwara* or keeping a fast on *ekadashi* gives them a sense of fulfillment and they observe these habits almost like a ritual. Divakaruni has very poignantly shown how the act of looking at Indian calendar becomes a reverie into Indian culture:

> The Indian months and days are marked in Red Bengali lettering.
> The English ones are printed underneath in a small, innocuous blue. It indicates all our festivals, even minnow ones like *Jamai*
Shasthi, when sons-in-law are invited and served their favorite dishes. It tells us which days are auspicious, and which bad luck. Little diagrams mark full moons and no moons, and the thin sliver of the eleventh night, which is a time for women without husbands to fast and pray for purification. Handwritten notes on the bottom of each page warn us of the dangerous hours: rahukal, which shifts each day with the movement of the planets, when it is good to lie low.41

Divakaruni’s female characters also take the challenge, manage their transformation and look into the opportunities that can empower them and achieve their freedom and self-dependence. Sudha’s journey from India to America is worth mentioning. It incorporates her hopes, plight, chaos and finally realization. Sudha finds that in America all rules are different; the notion of right and wrong has completely altered for her:

America isn’t the same country for everyone you know. Things here didn’t work out the way I’d hoped. Going back with you would be a way for me to start over in a culture I understand the way I’ll never understand America. In a new part of India, where no one knows me. Without the weight of old memories . . . . 42

Sudha explores the possibilities of a third space which has familiarity of India and anonymity of America. She decides to go to India with old Mr.Sen and start a new life in a new city where nobody knows her. Although Sudha intends to leave America but she carries with herself the confidence that it has given. She
becomes an independent woman who doesn’t need men to protect herself. She takes the biggest decision of her life on her own. This sense of autonomy will be a souvenir from America.

Along with cultural jostling and shifting, the immigrants have to face many other problems also including identity crisis, racial prejudice and legal bias. It can’t be denied that west offers a whole lot of opportunities of growth but non-American staff remains a soft target of exploitation, abuse and inequalities at the work place. Many times Immigrants have to take up odd jobs and they are disillusioned. Divakaruni has realistically projected their disenchantment through the collective voice of immigrants:

No one told us it would be so hard here in Amreekah, all day scrubbing greasy floors, lying under engines that drip black oil, driving the belching monster trucks that coat our lungs with tar. Standing behind counters of dim motels where we must smile as we hand keys to whores. Yes, always smile, even when people say ‘Bastard foreigner taking over the country stealing our jobs. Even when cops pull us over because we’re in the wrong part the rich part of town.43

Even if they find the suitable job, it becomes difficult for them to secure higher positions due to discrimination and other racial issues. The prosperous financial structure of the United States of America owes a lot to these immigrants who work with full zeal and passion in the country. The corporate enjoys a benefit of low cost labor however it brings resentment in the citizens fearing loss of jobs
that further triggers hatred towards the immigrants. Bikram tells Jayanti “The Americans hate us. They’re always putting us down because we’re dark-skinned foreigners, *kala admi*. Blaming us for the damn economy, for taking away their jobs.” All this discourage immigrants to take up their work in good spirit and positive stride. These experiences do not let them feel at home and make them uncomfortable at foreign land.

The most crucial aspect of immigration is identity crisis which includes both the ethnic and the emotional identity. The immigrants shuttle between identity and anonymity. This is beyond imagination how the crossing of borders changes the notion of self in immigrants. The immigrants continue to redefine and reconstruct their identity within multiple cultural and psychological interfaces. Their hyphenated identities as Indian-American or African-American split them into halves. The migrants often possesses a double consciousness, a leftover native one and a First World one. Identity involves both political and emotional identity. Free flow of immigrants across the globe has increased the severity of this issue with legal implications. To obtain recognition and protection in the US, the immigrant Indians must constantly prove their identity. In lieu of the current political situations of 2017, it is a bigger aspect as to where one should be included and excluded in the mixed bloods of Indian communities. Divakaruni herself has undergone this identity crisis. In her essay “The Reluctant Patriot” she shares this traumatic experience in the wake of 9/11 tragedy after which every non-American was looked upon as terrorist. Divakaruni herself was forced to put up American flag on her house in order to prove her patriotism. She witnessed the hate crimes and ethnic profiling against South Asian community. Women in veils were called terrorist bitches; Sikhs
in turban and beards were beaten to death. Divakaruni plumbs the pain of every immigrant when she writes, “I am struck by the fact that no matter how long I--or my California-born children--live in this country, whenever there is a major conflict with another nation, we will be looked at with suspicion.” Be Iranian hostage crisis, Persian Gulf War or Pentagon attack, the identity of immigrants is interrogated. This fact shook her to the core. Soon after this incident she wrote *Queen of Dreams* to discuss the issue of identity crisis among immigrants in America in which this issue is dealt with on double strands.

Rakhi, a second generation immigrant inherits uncertainties about self from her mother Mrs. Gupta who is a dream teller. After a secret marriage, Mrs. Gupta leaves the mysterious caves and powers in India to accompany her husband to America. Mr. Gupta, her husband knows nothing about her background and family. In a foreign land away from her roots, her home, dreams and powers, she feels isolated. She can’t share it with her husband who doesn’t know her past. Mrs. Gupta finds herself shuttling between India and America, past and present, powers and pleasures, dreams and reality. Meanwhile Rakhi is born. As every child forms a sense of identity through mother, it is quite natural for Rakhi to look up to her mother for a sense of self. But she is not fortunate that way because her mother’s past as a dream teller, checks the current of identity transmission. Rakhi is never told any stories by her mother that could give glimpses of her roots. Both her mother and her mother-land become a mystery for Rakhi who cries, “I hungered for all things Indian because my mother never spoke of the country she’d grown up in- just as she never spoke of her past.” Indian food and her mother’s saris were the only things she knew about India. She had a strong penchant to visit India, explore India and
learn Bengali language. She starts painting Indian figures and sceneries, to fulfill her subconscious yearning for her roots. Rakhi’s situation is a foil to that of her friend Belle whose immigrant parents want to mould her identity in their own ethnic frame. Belle is sick of it and Rakhi is sick for it. The ‘imaginary homeland’ creates a tension between mother and daughter. Rakhi accuses her mother for her fractured identity saying, “And whose fault is it if I don’t know who I am? If I have a warped Western sense of what is Indian?” At this her mother reverts:

You’re right. It is my fault. I see now that I brought you up wrong. I thought it would protect you if I didn’t talk about the past. That way you wouldn’t be constantly looking back, hankering, like so many immigrants do. I didn’t want to be like those other mothers, splitting you between here and there, between your life right now and that which can never be.

Rakhi’s disconnection with her mother and roots renders her incapable of connecting to anybody in her life—neither to her father nor to her husband. Her daughter Jonaki remains the only one who gives her a sense of connectivity. When it is revealed that Mrs. Gupta’s talent of dream telling has been shifted to Rakhi’s daughter Jonaki, Rakhi is unhinged further because the detachment she faced as a daughter is waiting for her as a mother. Like everybody else in her life, her daughter Jonaki also becomes a mystery for her. Every effort on her part to construct emotional identity is terribly thwarted. She remains “insecure mother, needy friend, blocked painter, stumbling businesswoman, blind dreamer, grudging daughter, possessive ex-wife.” It is only after her mother’s death that she is able to built up a
new identity out of these fragments of her shattered self. The sense of belongingness which her mother could never provide her with, is given by her mother’s dream journals. Rakhi starts filling in the gaps as to who her mother was, what her vocation was and in what kind of situations and surroundings she had been. These revelations help Rakhi in locating her roots. In process of translating these journals from Bengali to English, she not only comes closer to her dead mother but also restores her filial affections for her father. Her father tells her stories about India, cooks Indian food for her and shares the secrets of Indian culinary art. Knowing about her cultural heritage makes her emotionally enriched. She reconciles with her husband Sonny and for the first time she enjoys a sense of belonging.

When Rakhi’s emotional identity is established, her political identity is challenged. The blight of 9/11 overnight makes the South-Asians ‘vulnerable’ as well as ‘frightening’. In this attack some lose their lives, some their loved-ones, some their faith and the immigrants lose their sense of identity. Rakhi, her family and friends are attacked in Kurma House International by four young men who spit on them saying “You ain’t no American! It’s fuckers like you who planned this attack on the innocent people of this country.”50 At once Rakhi feels shocked and so unmoored. She is once again haunted by the question “But if I wasn’t American, then what was I?”51 This question echoes the dilemma of millions of immigrants whose identity is always on the peril.

Rakhi’s Chai House has an analogy with her own identity formation. Her Chai house which is based on Indian concept doesn’t stand competition from the western café Java. Rakhi’s mother makes her realize that its failure lies in its lack of
authenticity. Her mother tells, “This isn’t a real cha shop, but mishmash, a Westerner’s notion of what’s Indian” Rakhi also fails in constituting an identity because she lacks the spirit of real India. Her knowledge about India is part her fantasies and part her longings. After her mother’s death Rakhi’s father helps her in knowing and establishing a bond with India. Now that she knows what real India is, Rakhi manifests it into her Chai house and resuscitates it as Kurma House ‘with the tastes and smells of the old country’. The decor, the dishes and the ambience everything gives a whiff of India. Soon it attracts customers from all races and ethnicities. Rakhi’s father Mr. Gupta sings old Hindi songs for the mix race audience, thus satisfying their need for something ‘deep and real’. To decorate the Kurma House customers contribute their ethnic stuff like “a Tibetan bell, a small Persian rug in jeweled colors, an African mask, a woodcut from Afghanistan, a jade figurine, a beat-up mirror that looks Russian.” Kurma House becomes a mosaic of different cultures and Rakhi renames it as Kurma House International. At first Rakhi is unhappy with this change because with a great effort she had made something authentic but a single statement from her customers “We’re all brothers and sisters here, after all, bhaibahen” takes away all her apprehensions. She realizes that in this world of global integration one’s identity is bound to be multicultural. The possibilities of undiluted culture in multicultural world are next to impossible.

Like Rakhi, Tariq in One Amazing Thing also confronts identity crisis in post 9/11 America. Being Muslim Tariq and his family become soft target for government agents. The stares, humiliation, physical torture and mental harassment shakes the whole family and they are suggested by community people to go back to India. But Tariq looks at America as his home and the thought of leaving his home disturbs
him. Moreover he finds himself a misfit for India. This bicultural Indian-American
guy feels chaotic about his identity- his American self is denied to him and Indian
self, he wants to disown. Like Rakhi and Tariq there are many immigrants whose
identities are questioned at the slightest move.

Corollary to the problem of identity crisis is the issue of Racism for
immigrants. Their skin color never lets them forget that they are outsiders.
Confirming to Michel Banton’s hypothesis that racial difference has been the basis
for discrimination and disempowerment, Pramod K. Nayar speculates:

Racial difference has been the cornerstone of violent and brutal
campaigns against particular races and groups, especially
Aboriginals and First Nation people in Canada, Australia and the
USA . . . . Racial difference has also been marked in terms of
economic development, rights and welfare in nation-states
. . . . Racial difference characterizes access to education, areas of
residence and employment.55

Historically, the western countries mainly America have practiced racism,
discrimination, cultural abuses, violence against immigrants. This history is repeated
time and again, be it an answer to the Catastrophe of 9/11 attacks or response to
Donald Trump’s immigration policies. In March 2017, three serial attacks on Indians
in the US in less than one month, show that racial intolerance is still there.
Divakaruni has exposed the same racial bigotry through her works and has shown
how the non-whites are looked down with needless skepticism. Asian people are
picked by the cops just because they are in non-entry posh zone. Such partial
treatment reminds immigrants about their ‘otherness’ and makes them feel homesick. They are ill-treated to such an extent that many a times this leads to suicide or murder. Racial attacks are very common at workplaces, schools and hospitals, etc. She spots “The man who finds his grocery windows smashed by rocks, picks up one to read the hate-not tied around it. Children sobbing outside their safe suburban home over their poisoned dog. Woman with her dupatta torn from her shoulders as she walks a city pavement, the teenagers speeding away in their car hooting laughter.”56 American racism to its utmost barbarism has been shown in The Mistress of Spices. One evening Mohan who runs MOHAN INDIAN FOODS, is about to wind up his food cart when two American boys obstruct his way. Before he can understand their motive, they start destroying his cart and at his protests they beat him so brutally that Mohan is sent to the hospital in very critical condition. Mohan almost loses his right eye and now the question of livelihood looms large on him. Months later when he hears of the acquittal of these two rogues, he almost gets insane with anger. He is uncontrollable until he is tied to bed with force. Finally his friends arrange tickets for him and his wife so that they can start afresh in India. Mohan’s story reveals that mental wounds are tougher to heal than physical ones. Tilo sympathizes with him saying, “O Mohan broken in body broken in mind by America . . . .”57 The gang ‘DOTBUSTER’ mentioned by Divakaruni has a reference to the bindi worn by Hindu women on their foreheads. This group in active since 1987 and has played much havoc on Indian immigrants. Jayanti in “Silver Pavement, Golden Roofs” exemplifies this disillusionment of the immigrants. From Calcutta she comes to Chicago for higher studies. She plans to stay with her aunt and uncle. Her uncle who himself has experienced American prejudice and hatred
warns Jayanti that America is “like a dain” that “pretends to give and then snatches everything back.”\textsuperscript{58} Jayanti’s illusion of glorious America breaks when during their evening walk Jayanti and her aunt are attacked by white teenagers with racist slurs. Jayanti is immensely shocked and confused at being addressed as ‘nigger’. Her entire perception about her own race is questioned. Her pride in being an upper-class Indian is challenged by American race categorization. Racism elicits a fear among the immigrants who come to love their host country and receive hatred instead.

The predicaments of immigrants should not mislead one to think that immigration is completely a dismal experience. Divakaruni presumes, if handled properly immigration can be more about sharing than giving up. Author’s own life and literature are an example that immigration is a medium of cultural exchange. It has widened the mental horizons of eastern people. Especially in case of women their exposure to the western culture has encouraged them for self decision-making, independence and practical approach in life. On the other hand American life style has transformed a lot with the influence of Indian spiritualism and meditative practices. Western people have developed interest in studying and exploring eastern culture and history. Many Americans can be seen wearing Indian attire, relishing Indian cuisine, performing wedding in Indian style. The western perception of India as conservative and regressive has undergone a great change.

Divakaruni demonstrates that the east is not entirely grim and the west is not completely glamorous. India is not the same as Edward Said’s ‘Orientalism’ projects it-exotic, mystical, seductive, primitive, poor, savage, pagan and undeveloped.’ India has changed a lot over the years. Divakaruni clarifies, “It’s a different India
now, India Shining!” America is also not a utopia as most of the immigrants imagine it to be. It has its own horrid realities and problems. Divakaruni questions the meaning of notions such as the ‘American Dream’, ‘prosperity’, and ‘success’ for those peoples whose otherness may exclude them from mainstream America. America is the hostland for the millions who come to achieve their dreams. This country gives massive space to everyone to rise and flourish. If America stands for liberty and enterprise, India has a name for spiritualism and tolerance. The western culture never had nuisance of caste system like India but they have racist issues between whites and nonwhites. If the east has the patriarchal dominance in society, the west has practiced human slavery and unequal socio-political rights for women at a point of time. She eulogizes India for its spiritualism, traditional values, family ties, compassion and warmth but doesn’t flinch from criticizing cultural barriers, exploitative social practices like segregation of human beings in the name of gender and class. She has all the appreciation for the exposure, expression, energy and enterprise that America offers to immigrants but she doesn’t forget to mention the pangs of being addressed as ‘other’, ‘alien’, ‘foreigner’ and ‘minority’. Immigrants at some point of time realize “Things here aren’t as perfect as people at home like to think. We all thought we’d become millionaires. But it’s not so easy.” They find “There are a lot of silenced women here. The no-money, no rights rule works here, too. And bribery. It’s just not as blatant.” Both the east and the west may be different in their soci-political structure, customs, cultures and lifestyle but human situation is the same everywhere. Only its implication and reactions vary. The way of bringing up a baby may be different in India and America but a mother’s
affections towards her baby are the same at both the places. She explicates her intention by saying “One of the things I hope to show in my writing is that although the ways of thinking and doing things are different for Indians and Americans, the reasons we think and do those things are often the same.” For all communities, American or Asian, it is necessary to invest substantially to strengthen the ethnic, religious and social bonds among people of different nationalities. It is believed that the best way is to rapidly blend in the dominant culture of the land, and enjoy the positive aspect of multiculturalism. Beena Agarwal fairly estimates:

The mingling of East and West, haunting of past and present, the crisis of identity, allurement of West and the consolation of East imparts a rare quality of richness and profundity to the writings of Divakaruni. The perennial current of human sympathy and the longing for human love emancipates her diasporic sensibility from being localized and leads it towards the current of globalization and universality.

In this age of worldwide integration, the terms like- diasporas, transnational, migrants, expatriates, etc. have become a very common phenomena and the difference between them is often blurred. It is time to go beyond and see the eastern and western culture as different colors in the mosaic of global culture. Through her works Divakaruni tries to unite the profound ancient heritage of Indian culture and the very global American culture. Divakaruni likes to bring the two together in her writing as she feels it is the way to enrich both the cultures.
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