Chapter V

Summation

The magic realist writer often jerks the reader of the security of his reading life, using various techniques; thus proving almost all mundane and ordinary things and events with deeper meanings and thereby an aura of mystery which threatens the tranquility of simple and innocent things. Thus the common and everyday things and events are transformed into the awesome and the unreal. In this process, time and space are given distorted concepts fit enough to give the reader a great surprise and a shock. Reality is also given a new definition i.e: this reality mixes together the supernatural and the scientific principle. Magical realism expands and categorizes the real so as to encompass myth, magic and the other extraordinary phenomenon in nature or experience which European realism excluded: magic and the magical are not universal: they are constructs of particular cultural, religious or ethnic context. Chitra Banerjee here presents a world she is familiar with in his own cultural and psychological point of view of which ordinary readers may not be familiar with.

Magic realism as manipulated in Chitra Banerjee proves to be a suitable literary mode to convey the tensions that exist between disparate cultures and different perceptions of reality. It is significant the way in which the magic realist narrative works by inter-weaving the supernatural with ordinary daily events. It also reflects in the language of narration the encounter of two cultures and two opposing perceptions of reality. The novel Mistress of Spices concludes with a synthesis of culture on the protagonist’s terms. Ruth Noriega Sanchez in his Challenging Realities: Magic Realism in Contemporary American Women’s Fiction also opines that magical realism can fill the gaps by redeeming the fragments of voices and symbols of the forgotten and subsumed histories of the other from the point of view of the colonized. All these make magic realism a very strong post colonial narrative device in fiction. (52-63)

Generally, the Principal thing of Magic Realism is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and circumstances. This relationship varies from man to man and culture to culture. So often,
the magical mentality (say spiritual of one culture should co-exists with the rational and the empirical (say scientific) reality. Hence myths, superstitions and archetypes play a great role in magic realist writing and they create a new dimension of reality which the normal or elite readers are not aware of. When it comes to literature, magic realism is a fusion between physical reality and psychological reality. It incorporates thoughts, emotions, dreams, cultural mythologies and imaginations.

Near the end of Queen of Dreams, Divakaruni uses the character Jahnavi to impart the very kernel of wisdom: “Forget all you learned about interpreting. Unfocus your eyes. Then maybe the real picture will appear before you” (QD: 287-88). Divakaruni’s novel thus offers its reader an exercise to unfocus one’s eyes in order to unlearn the normative perception shaped by the master discourse of science and rationality. While it is impossible to believe that one can forget all that one has learned about interpreting, it is precisely this kind of utopian impulse that affects incremental changes of a culture. It is interesting to observe that Sigmund Freud had also become renowned by writing about dreams and their interpretations, regarding dreams to be portals to the unconscious. However, when a woman claims to be a dream teller, the general reactions are ridicule and dismissal.

To convince the reader to suspend disbelief, Divakaruni does several things to bend our science-packed minds. In Queen of Dreams, the author endows the granddaughter Jona, with her grandmother’s gift of dreaming. It is through Jona that the reader gains the sense of Mrs. Gupta’s ghostly presence. On the way to find a resting place for Mrs. Gupta’s ashes, Jona claims that her grandmother “is not inside the urn but sitting on the back seat beside her. She adds that her grandmother has described to her exactly where she wants her ashes scattered” (QD 148). Second, Jona’s horrific visions rendered in paintings are prophetic of 9/11. Third, several chapters told in first-person narrative. It is as if the reader were observing Rakhi’s life from the mother’s consciousness and transcendent of her knowledge. And fourth, in Rakhi’s aquatic dream, her mother returns as a seahorse to protect her daughter from the malicious manager (a shark in the dream) of the Java House, a competitor of Rakhi’s tea house.
In the last portion of the dream journals, Mrs. Gupta explains why she must return to the world of dreamers: When dream tellers work in their sleep, the each throw out a thin, invisible thread, as a spider might, from their navel (311). It is said that in the *The Queen of Dreams* that this thread reaches all the way to Swapna Lok, the world where dreams are born. Through it, the dreams that the teller needs to know to travel back to her. When a teller dreams alone, the thread is thin and weak, easily broken. But When tellers live close to one another, their threads combine to form a powerful rope that can bear the weight of even most difficult dream.

Since the mother in Divakaruni’s *The Queen of Dreams* possesses the mysterious ability of mind reading and dream-telling and her cognitive capabilities can be considered unusual, even superhuman. Rakhi perceives her own ordinary human cognition as inferior and uninteresting. Yet the daughter’s ability to make assumptions about her mother’s facial expressions, tones of voice and other paralinguistic signals is anything but trivial. It is an inherent communication skill, which cognitive psychologists and philosophers refer to as “Theory of mind” or “mind reading.” Alison Gopnik explains in *The MIT Encyclopaedia of Cognitive Sciences, Theory of mind* “involves psychological theorizing about our ordinary, intuitive, ‘folk’ understanding of the mind” (838). It suggests that humans possess the inherent ability to make assumptions and predictions regarding the mental states of others on the basis of observable body language, tone of voice, and other paralinguistic signals of communication.

In his essay “International Thought in the Novel,” Alan Palmer suggests that social interaction, in general and especially between closely related people such as married couples, family members, friends or even co-workers, most often involves intermental communication or intermental thought, group-shared, or collective thinking, also known as socially distributed, situated, or extended cognition, and as intersubjectivity” is juxtaposed in Palmer with intramental, individual, or private thought (427) palmer further claims that “social psychologists routinely use the terms ‘mind’ and ‘mental action’ not only about individuals but also about groups of people working as intermental units” (429). When Mrs. Gupta enters her daughter’s mind, she sees scenes of her own life in India - the past she so meticulously tried to hide. In the mother’s words
“there are the moments from my life that I had banished from memory. But like much that is banished, they didn’t leave. They went underground. And now, somehow, my daughter is dreaming them” (259).

The traumas of the mother’s life as an orphan remain largely unspoken; even in Mrs.Gupta’s journals she does not tell much about her childhood. Living as an orphan in the slums, facing hunger and deprivation, the mother is saved by her talent of dream-telling: “it afforded me some protection in that place where orphans were used in cruel ways” (QD 257). While dreaming together, the mother and daughter The Queen of Dreams briefly form such an intermental unit-a cognitive dyad that engages in intermental communication, or more accurately in the intermental dreaming, that allows the mother to access her repressed past. This intermental communication occurs almost exclusively in the realm of dreams, where the mother’s consciousnesses cannot fully control the appearance of her memories and traumatic experiences.

Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s psychoanalytic theory of traumatic remembering can shed some light on Rakhi’s mysterious inheritance of her mother’s traumatic memories. According to their theory, “secret discourse” or “crytonymy” (the practice of word hiding) is symptomatic of traumatized individuals who experience difficulty talking about their past. They claim that family secrets are transmitted without words and it is the offspring’s suspicion that something has been left unsaid that impels the younger generation to listen for clues and hints in their parent’s speech.

Developing Abraham and Torok’s argument in Family Secrets, Esther Ruskin suggests that phantoms or ghosts are an unconscious, repressed formation, too horrible or shameful to be represented in words (28). The phantom image generated in the subconscousness of the traumatized to the child by means of cryptic discourses, thus becoming an integral part of the child’s subconscious worldview. According to Ruskin, the child, by absorbing the gap in her parents’ speech, actually inherits parts of the parent’s subconsciousness. (29). Tragically, the community of dream-tellers is the only intermental unit that the mother is able to join if she wishes to maintain her talent. In her journals, Mrs.Gupta explains that when dream-tellers “live closer to one another their threats combine to form a powerful rope that can bear the weight of even the most
difficult dream…. Dream tellers should not travel too far from their community” (QR 311), because they depend on each other for successful practice of their talent. (206)

The other integral part of magic realism is that it includes myth. Divakaruni is very much aware of myths and stereotypes surrounding Indian women. She consciously explores after her immigration and sets out to question and deconstruct. For instance, one of the myths that Divakaruni explores is the myth of widowhood. The society, which is defined by men, deplores women whose husband is dead. Either young or old the widow becomes an asexual, marginalized being who portends ill omen. Like Pishi even adolescent women were mutilated or marred by shaving off their heads and wearing off ‘austere white’ (SH4). Exposing and questioning this myth Divakaruni brings in contrast Nalini, who has a golden skin as a result of applying turmeric. Banerjee views turmeric as the symbol of marital bliss and representation of good luck of those women who are blessed with their husbands, is used definitely by Nalini as a mere beauty tool.

**Sister of My Heart** revolves around the lives of two Indian girls, Sudha and Anju, and their widowed mothers. Here the author has inter-stitched folktales, myths and fairytales of Bengal. Writing on such themes allows her to stay close to her roots. This can also be felt on reading her **Mistress of Spices** (1997) and **The Palace of Illusions** (2008). In **Sister of My Heart**, Divakaruni seems to reject conventional myths and creates new ones. The first book in the novel is titled **The Princess in the Palace of Snakes**. In this part both the protagonists (sudha & Anju) attempt to conform to the traditional feminine roles allocated by the male hegemonic society. This is symbolized by the traditional fairytale of the princess in the palace of snakes waiting for her prince charming to recue her. The second book is titled **The Queen of Swords**. This is not a traditional fairytale.

India is a land of culture and holding much superstition. Preserving the culture is the prestige of all countries. People of a country have pride to reveal their own cultural identity wherever they go. But some like to stripe off their own cultural identity and ready to put on a new culture when they stay abroad and some wear foreign culture as an over coat of the old shirt of their own cultural value. Chitra Banerjee’s novels are an evidence to prove it.
The mothers begin to lead a fulfilling life with a social purpose. They listen to the music that they like and take walks where they please. They no longer worry about the social stigma attached to a divorcée and keep Sudha with them. They lovingly take care of her daughter. The final gesture of the rejection of patriarchal norms and the acceptance of the rules of the new female universe.

As Divakaruni hails from a traditional Hindu background, she is well versed in Hindu mythology- The Ramayana and The Mahabharata which she incorporates into her novel Sister of my Heart. There are various excerpts of Hindu mythology mainly used by the author for the purpose of comparison and reference. In Sister of My Heart, Pishi compares the flute played by Sudha’s father to that of god Krishna, when he charmed the milk the milkmaids of Brindhaban into leaving home and husband to follow him. (SH: 22). Another instance of comparing the real event with that of the mythological one is where Anju narrates Sudha’s eagerness to meet Ashok, her lover: “Sudha’s already at the open window, her hands extended, and Ashok hurries over to take them… They remind me of the stories Pishi told us about the great lovers of the myths, Shakuntala and Dushmanta. Nala and Damayanthi, Radha and Krishna, how they’d appear to each other in dreams and share their deepest secrets.” (SH: 81).

Divakaruni is a creator of myths. It is fascinating to note down how the novelist has divided her book based on stories, The Princess in the Palace of Snakes and that of Jhansi Rani. Sudha has a way of retelling tales. She recreates these stories and tells to Anju. The title given to each book is relevant. Book I is titled The Princess in the Palace of Snakes and Book II The Queen of Sword. The events in these stories parallel the lives of the central characters. Divakaruni also takes the readers to a long journey a treasure – hunting episode: “The ruby, which was like a teardrop wept by Jataya, the mythical dragon-bird, foretells disaster that is likely to befall the Chatterjee family. This ruby hunting episode where the cave was guarded by demons reflects the other stories like Aludin and the Magic Lamp, Arabian Nights and Other.” (SH: 27)

Though given title prominence and voice in the epic, Chitra Divakaruni’s The Palace of Illusions highlights the role played by Draupadi as well as other women characters. In the epic, they had to remain subservient to their male counterparts- father,
brothers, husbands or sons. So Divakaruni places the women in the forefront in her novel. She makes Panchaali narrate “her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs, her heartbreaks, her achievements, the unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it” (PI:34). The various roles that a woman plays in her life as a daughter, sister, friend, wife, mother is depicted in this novel and woven intricately. Unlike the epic, *The Palace of Illusion* throws light on the causes, sufferings and challenges of the female characters and their role in the domestic life. They not only look after their domestic life but are also concerned the part of the worldly affairs and the harbinger of the great battle. (PL: 38)

Generally Divakaruni brings the women in the forefront in her novel, she makes Panchaali narrate her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs her heart breaks, her achievements, the unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it. In the author’s note, she says, it is her life, her voice, her questions, and her vision that I invite you into in *The Palace of Illusions* (IV). The mythic frame work of her novels contributes to the creation of a female universe. The world of myth is essentially feminine in nature as opposed to the cerebral world which is masculine. In both novels there is an attempt to create fresh myths or at least give new interpretations to existing ones. The new myth symbolizes the feminine world that Divakaruni envisages. It is a world where women rescue other women and do not wait helping for the men.

One aspect of magical realism is that the “magic” or mythological part of this genre comes from the author’s background and culture. Adaptation to a cross cultural setting actually enables this multiple consciousness to ultimately engender a positive psychological element. The women of Divakaruni’s imagined world’ display a flair for adjusting to a world which is linear and individualistic with equal élan as a collective mass of consciousness that is borderless and infinite in inventing identities. (The Criterion Issue.12)

According to Dissanayake, “ceremonies or rituals…do for their members what mothers naturally do for babies: engage their interests, involve them in a shared rhythmic pulse, and thereby instill feelings of closeness and communion.”(64) This new myth symbolizes the new feminine world that Divakaruni envisages. It is a world across the
rainbow (ironically a conventional symbol of hope) where women rescue other women and do not wait helplessly for the men. Divakaruni is of the view that there is relevance for Indian culture as seen in the Bengali language used by the immigrants. As a matter of fact, some of them still persist in embracing various Indian ethos and code. The use of Bengali language, Indian names, appreciation of family ethics and the reference to Indian mythology and religious rites and the Indian attire, all these signify how Indian or human identity through marginalized will always be permanent.

Sigmund Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* quotes Hildebrandt: “it is impossible to think of any action in dream for which the original motive has not in some way or other whether as a wish, or desire or impulse – passed through waking mind. We must admit that the original impulse was not invented by the dream; the dream merrily copied it and spun it out, it merrily elaborated in dramatic form a scrap of historical material which it had found in us.” (Freud101)

In *Queen of Dreams*, Mr. Gupta by sharing the culinary secrets with his daughter, the father not only strengthens their connection, but also transmits cultural knowledge and customs. The novel portrays the possibility for establishing a bicultural identity in spite of Mrs. Gupta’s initial refusal to transmit her culture. Generally, in Chitra’s novels, there is a great conflict in the mindset of her characters whether to disown their traditional culture of their mother land completely or to alienate from the new. In fact, they are not able to disown their native culture and at the same time they are not able to adapt to the new American culture fully. According to Klarina priborkin, Divakaruni’s approach to ethnic identity is condigent with the view of South Asian Diaspora that believes in the necessity of integrating the Indian heritage with its American experience. (South Asian Review 215)

There is a balanced view of facts in Divakaruni’s novels. She does not decry the good influence of the culture of her native land. Every diasporic Indian who experiences upon touching his or her old country with its myriad complexity and humanity is vividly explored to the reader. They possess good qualities but lack certain strongpoint. Divakaruni does not advocate defiance towards any culture. She has recognized the strength of mind and potential of the twenty-first century women who gain
independence and autonomy leading to assertion of the self irrespective of any culture. In her novels, she offers a wonderful variety of experiences gathered from cultural clashes. The novels are based on the predicaments of Indian immigrants in the United States. These characters have been uprooted from the secure life-mode of a traditional set up. They struggle to cope with the new environment by learning new strategies and methods. But in order to provide an alternative life mode, such learning has to be lived and experienced at first hand.

In an interview with Esha Bhaltacharjee published in The Sunday Magazine on 2 February 2003, when asked what Chitra felt she was an Indian, an American, or an Indian living in the United States, she confessed; “I have to live with a hybrid identity. In many ways I’m an Indian, but living in America for 19 years has taught me many things. It has helped me look at both the cultures more clearly. It has taught me to observe, question, explore and evaluate”. (Bhattacharjee3)

Every culture has its own peculiarities and predilections which evoke a mixed response from a different cultural milieu. People quite often try their best to forge a workable synthesis between their native culture and that of new. This process is not a smooth one and it results in some psychological issues alien to both the cultures. The quest and choice are therefore the two ingredients. Cultural concepts are ancient and contemporary, traditional as well as modern. In cases where cultural dissimilarities are much sharper in terms of ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious determinants, the issue gets irredeemably complex for immigrants to cope with. The process of migration to America that started in the mid-nineteenth century has reached a new peak in terms of immigrant population within a span of one hundred years. Notwithstanding their intention, those who choose to stay on and finally settle down, experience a qualitative cultural transformation.

Divakaruni brings out the cultures of India and America through her novels. Each culture has its own significance and uniqueness. A culture has a set off unwritten but conventional principles, rules and regulations. All over the world, cultures are ‘god’s plenty.’ From that Divakaruni opts for the culture of America and India which she investigates in her novels. Though she does not follow any compare and contrast method
of analysis to bring out the differences in cultures, the varying incidents. She presents underline difference.

Through out Chitra Banerjee’s works, the readers get ample illustrations for these differences in the eastern and the western cultures. And while reading and analyzing the stories of Divakruni, the readers may agree that the bicultural theme plays a pivotal role in her fictional world. Divakruni focuses on the subtle details in American and Indian cultures through the novels and by doing so, she influences the readers to look at her texts as bicultural texts. Divakruni never suggests that one culture is better than the other. Her main aim is to show just the characteristics of both the cultures and not to rate them. She does not talk about the American citizens alone for she talks about Indians as natives and as immigrants too.

Divakruni has a sharp creative vision and ability to observe even the subtle differences between Indian and American cultures, which are implicit in her novels. Along with the novel, she deliberately includes the differences in both the cultures in an unobtrusive manner. Her method of writing allows the readers to identify the differences in the cultures at every incident in the novels. The psychological problems of alienation, immigration and identity crisis are dealt with in an excellent manner by Divakruni. But like a typical internal focalization, poetic imagery, psychological time, emotive language, autobiographical elements and characterization in a wonderful way that all of these above said skills together, cumulatively aid the reader in understanding the psychological conflict of east and west in the mind of her protagonist. Through her writings, Chitra seems to convey to her readers that her objective behind writing these novels is to expose the Americans to the energetic voices of the new settlers in their country.

The Food and Culture Encyclopedia says, “A key characteristic of diaspora is that a strong sense of connection to a homeland is maintained through cultural practices and ways of life. Among this culinary culture has an important part to play in diasporic identification.”(54) Culture which includes food habit and language become some of the constituents of diaspora. Mrs.Gupta maintains her culture by mostly cooking Indian foods. Rakhi says: “At home we rarely ate anything but Indian, that was the one way in which my mother kept her culture.” (QD7). But, the repeated use of food items
particularly Indian cuisine unnecessarily in some places, acts as a monotonous jargon, thereby hindering the smooth flow of the novels. Mrs. Gupta in *Queen of Dreams* also clad herself as Indians do either a saree or salwarkameez. She usually restricts herself within the confinement of her house and only ventures out to pass the message of her dreams to her clients. [Malathi: 12]

Divakaruni’ writing is a means of remembering the impressions of her Calcutta childhood. Her memories weave a tapestry rich in cultural myth, sight, sounds, smell and textures that she uses to colour the relationships among her characters: spices, pakora etc., In *Queen of Dreams*, Mrs.Gupta does not buy herself into the myth of America, and her journals sharply resurrect the long forgotten Indian myths, beliefs, tradition, and culture and why, even dreams which show essential of existence, which in reality is only a mixture of all. (QD55) Socially and culturally positioning herself as an immigrant Indian Mrs.Gupta neither acculturates nor assimilates but just adapts or adjusts with life around her, without changing or transforming herself. (55-56). The intermingling of two cultures is strongly felt in the new emergence of the resplendent coffee shop under the banner’ kurma shop.

Chitra Banerjee’s novels can be described a pleasant typical tale of self-discovery which is spiked with elements of mystery, suspense and supernatural elements. It is spun out her masterly combination of Indian American experience magical realism and the magic of Indian folk tale in fresh mixture. She has drawn profusely from Indian folk tales, myths and fairy tales like talking serpents, Nehar and Tunga-dhwaja in *Queen of Dreams* never fail to inculcate the virtues of Indian soil.

As for narrative technicalities, Chitra Banerjee makes sure that she uses all relevant techniques to tell in her novels, assist and aid her perception of the psychology of her characters and the conflict that turmoil in their mind. So in many novels, she craftily uses first person singular. But whatever narrative view point she uses, she moulds it down to cater to her needs and hence these techniques create a sense of familiarity and intimacy among the readers. Apart from Divakaruni’s narrative technique, it is her poetic skill which gives relief and also aids in further intensification of moods like profound sadness or extreme happiness. Chitra Banerjee also utilizes her skill of using the visual
images: aural olfactory, tactical and gustatory. She sometimes combines these images to produce startling effect in portraying the psychological struggle of her characters.

Chitra Banerjee uses words in a highly economic way and she also uses emotive language. Hence, fast reading will not do justification to Chitra Banerjee’s works. Many crispy and very short lines in novels reveal different and deeper levels of meanings. The next simple but effective tool that Chitra Banerjee uses in enhancing her novel of characterization is the usage of italics. She uses them effectively for fulfilling two purposes. First she uses them whenever she is referring to any particular thing pertaining to India, Indian culture or any typical Indian term. Whenever she uses her mother tongue and food items of her place, she uses italics. She also provides an extra word, a contextual clue which is suggestive of the nature of the Indian material, keeping in mind the western reader. The use of mythological characters helps in delineating certain aspects of Indian culture.

Chitra Banerjee’s male characters become flat characters. Regarding this, Chitra Banerjee in an interview with Frederick Luis Aldama observes: “yes, and it’s like (laughs) Mark Antony, who said, not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. I have nothing against men, but I’m just more interested in the dynamic of women’s characters, relationship and growth right now (Aldama10). And that’s what exactly she does to the male characters in her stories.

But above all these technical tools, the key word for Chitra Banerjee’s ability in characterizing her fictional beings are her straight forwardness. She chooses a limited number of characters and weaves awe of magic in her works. Ranjini Jothi Singh is right when she states, “Divakaruni breathes life into South Asian characters who struggle to discover freedom in a world that would restrict them to certain social conditions.” (Jothi Singh 17) Time is yet another important element in her works. The physical time in the hands of Chitra Banerjee becomes the psychological time. Through forward, backward movements and by juxtaposing events of different times, Chitra Banerjee is able to portray the psychology of her characters that are under the conflict of east and west. Thus time is efficiently as a kind of structuring device.
Divakaruni’s compassion for India, her pride in its rich and varied folklore are expressed through the numerous use of stories, mythological allusions, popular songs and carefully sprinkled Bengali words that embellish her works. Moored to the ‘Chai House’ by hope and responsibility, Rakhi still has the wishes: “Before I die, I would like to go to India—if only to lay at rest the ghosts that dance in my head like will-o-the wisps over a ripping sea” (QD83). Devoid of any knowledge about the ancestral home, she possesses only a warped sense of what is Indian.

Divakaruni is not advocating rebellion and defiance of one culture and acceptance of another. She writes to unite people and she does it by destroying myths and stereotypes. As she breaks down these barriers, Divakaruni dissolves backgrounds, communities, ages, and even different worlds. Divakaruni has recognized the strength of mind and potential of the twenty-first century women who gains independence and autonomy leading to assertion of the self. (The Criterion: Issue. I 5) Spices in The Mistress of Spices as the First Mother says, symbolize tradition. Tradition is handed down from generation to generation, and with tradition comes knowledge. Spices and their magical/medicinal use is part of that knowledge.

Divakaruni being an expatriate longs for the past. To keep afresh her ideas about India and its mythology, she uses storytelling as a technique. According to Anju, Sudha is the best storyteller, better even than Pishi. She says, “She can take the old tales and make them new by putting us in them” (17). Every Indian household has a storyteller. Their stories are based on folktales, legends and myths. It is Pishi, the widow aunt of Sudha and Anju who tells stories to them. It is remarkable that Divakaruni’s books have autobiographical elements. Like many Indian children, she grew up in the vast, varied and fascinating folktales, myths and fairy tales of Bengal. The protagonists’ fascination for the same can be paralleled to those of the author’s. Sudha and Anju are so much influenced by the stories narrated to them such as The princess in the palace of snakes, the tale of Bidhata Purush and stories from Hindu mythology. When they were children, their favorite game was acting out the fairy tales Pishi told them, Where Sudha was always the princess and Anju the prince who rescued her. Together, their lives parallel many of the old tales; they have heard and in return tell one another and their babies.
Whether set in India or America, Divakaruni’s plots feature Indian–born women torn between old and new world values. She uses her insight and skilled use of story, plot, and lyrical description to give readers a many-layered look at her characters and their respective worlds, which are filled with fear, hope and discovery, whether in California, Chicago or Calcutta, women learn to adapt to their new and changing culture and as a result, discover their own sense of self amidst joy and heartbreak.

The novel *Sister of my Heart* has forty-two chapters and they are set as a sort of extended dialogue that is multi-tiered and over-layered. The chapters themselves are alternatively titled as: Sudha and Anju, The techniques are epistolary and exclamative, topography that is trans-cultural and rooted, tone that is adjectival and highly lyrical and style that is italicized and romantic. Aspects of feminism, both positive and couched, are present in the prose of many passages in the novel. (pg no: 173). Divakaruni locates her novels at the troubled intersection of female subjectivity and national identities. Although they capture different aspects of the cultural encounter, the ways in which, identities are ordered forms a common matrix in her writings. Divakaruni reconstruct personal and national histories as a historical intervention into master narratives imposed upon her by the dominant culture. The dominant strains of tension in the literary works of the diaspora arise from a perceived conflict between the old and the new country. The diaspora dramatizes the discontinuous links between India and America, between the Indian national cultural identity and the western nation space.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her writing gives importance to sisterhood, that mysterious female bonding which goes far deeper than conventional familial ties and which insistently surfaces in women’s relationships despite all patriarchal conditioning. In the AuthorSpeak column of the January 25, 1999 issue of India Today, Arthur J. Pais, quoting her remarks on how Indian women in history; myth and epic continue to provide role models today, traces the fascination that female bonding has had on her to her childhood experiences.

Migration or immigration has directly or indirectly affected several generations of contemporary writers writing in English, engendering hybridity and cultural complexity within them, and urging them to grapple with multiple cultures and countries
and the tensions between them. Chitra Divakaruni is among those writers affected by immigration as well as by its corollaries: colonialism, post-colonialism, and neo-imperialism. However, Divakaruni’s immigrant narratives focus on celebrating immigration as a liberating agent at the expense of overshadowing the influence of any other agency. While they rarely get openly into issues pertaining to colonial or postcolonial politics, they do reveal striking parallels to orientalist perceptions of many aspects of Indian culture and society.

Reading of her work produces new meanings and new sites of contestation. Therefore she cannot claim to be outside of the power struggle that revolves around the authenticity of voice. Within the Indian community in the diaspora there are many versions of history being produced and the questions of what’s being said, by whom and who is representing who, become pertinent. Divakaruni’s texts are powerful and significant; they are particularly effective in mapping the contours of the new South Asian community in the United States. They help us to view the struggle for identity amongst women and to develop a critique of patriarchal structures that organize the life of Indian diasporic.

From the perspective of the diaspora, the articulations of difference are a complex negotiation always in flux. The writing Divakaruni focuses on those moments or processes that is produced in the articulation of cultural differences. The fiction concentrates on portraying the quest for identity in the new spatial configurations while simultaneously building alliances. She engages themselves in the textural displacement of dominant, homogenizing discourses and in the process creates a literary tradition that is formally and thematically distinct. The Indian costumes of the protagonists in the novel reflect and represent Indian tradition, particularly the south Asian community in the United States. Her individual styles and diversity of thematic patterns point to the changing complexions of Indian and American literature and enriches the field of knowledge about Indians in America.

The commitment and the political stances of the millennium writers, who have just burst into the literary scene in North America, differ from the earlier generation of expatriate writers including Raja Rao, Santha Rama Rau, Anita Desai, and even Bharati
Mukherjee. They do not carry their India with them wherever they go, neither do their Characters blend into the American melting pot with miraculous ease. Contemporary writing from the South Asian diaspora bears the marks of a cultural encounter that combines the re-writing of history with nuanced responses to dislocation and marginalization by hegemonic structures.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in San Francisco represents the current crop of writers, who are concerned with crossing over from one culture to another without compromising either, negotiating new boundaries and remaking themselves. In her writings, the diaspora with its shifting boundaries and confliction encounters between different cultures is an important locus where nationalisms and literatures need to redefine themselves and seek their own margins. The destabilization of identities that occurs in the daily confrontation with the hegemonic discourses of United States compels re-conceptualization of identities and their representation in the corpus of literary works.

In some of Divakauni’s novels, the women frequently leave their marriages or relationships in order to re-conceptualize their notions of self and home. The violence in the lives of the women protagonists is understated. Financial independence and American clothes are markers of individuation made synonymous with “Westernization”. Eventually, protagonists in her novels, leave intending to live for themselves outside of the stranglehold of traditional Indian ethos and western understandings.

The Mistress of Spices is a Universal immigrant story told through magical realism. It is a sensual love story built on the cultural themes of the writer. It blends the spices with the characters and their emotions. Turmeric, the hope for rebirth: chili, the cleanser of evil; fennel to cool tempers; fenugreek, to render the body sweet and kalojire to reduce pain and suffering. The story ends on a positive note the familiar immigrants’ tales of dreams; desires, pain and struggle end with hope.

The novel The Mistress of Spices is a lyric novel, written in a mixture of prose and poetry, in the style that has been called “Magic realism”; while primarily set in this world, it includes features which defy natural laws and gives it an air of mysticism. The heroine, Tilo, comes to Oakland after she has been trained on a remote, magical island by
the priestess-like old mistress of spices for a vocation of ministering to others. Assuming a crone’s body and forbidden to leave her shop, Tilo shares the magic of her spices and her own psychic powers with a variety of Indian immigrants who are alienated, lonely, and or in danger in their new homeland.

The spice shop, where the whole Indian community converges, is like a microcosm in itself. We see myriads of faces there—the bougainvillea girls, the rich men’s wives, the Mohans and Jagjits and Kwesis. Each face tells a story. Many of their immigrant dreams lie shattered in the dust, but there are also some success stories. The ones most vivid among them are the faces of four whose fates are inextricably linked with that of Tilo, the spice and spell maker: Geeta, Lalita, Haroun and Raven. **The Mistress of Spices** is cloaked in fantasy and the prologue, with fantasy. However, a strong undercurrent of realism runs at the very beginning of the novel and becomes manifest later on. However, as the novel progresses, the fantasy element diminishes and the realistic element becomes prominent.

The complexities of diasporic negotiations are underpinned by questions of identity and Divakaruni’s novel tries to capture the nuances that contest the stereotypical images of South Asians as model minorities and unobtrusive citizens. **The Mistress of Spices** offers a close look at a wide spectrum of Indians residing in the diaspora. Like in the composition of whom perhaps the immigrant experience has been one of cultural dispossession and material acquisition. Tilo, the ministering angel, is more concerned with those who need her help. In continuum with the title, each chapter is named after a spice and discusses the trials and tribulations of an individual and the special characteristics of the spices. Thus the reader gets a glimpse into a range of problems that surround the life of the diasporic Indian.

**The Mistress of Spices** adopts a more mature structural configuration in order to discuss the diaspora. Each chapter contains a little vignette about an individual, about a cultural encounter the stories are then braided together through the novel the subtlest shades caught and developments depicted. A Variety of cultural codes and icons are recognized as Tilo weaves her tapestry of different lives and we as readers become implicated in the lives of Jaggi, Ahuja’s wife, and Geeta, to name only a few.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a product of this postmodern spirit. Her fundamental preoccupation, revealed in her two novels *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart*, is to create a female universe out of the conventional male world. The male universe is not altogether shut out. There is the obvious effort to bridge the two. But there is a definite attempt at defining them as distinctive domains. The conventional geography is rejected in *The Mistress of Spices*. Tilo, the protagonist of *The Mistress of Spices*, learns to be a mistress on a far away island that cannot be located on a regular globe:

“The island has been there forever, ‘said the snakes, the Old One also […]
‘We have only seen it from far” green slumbering volcano, red sand of beaches, granite outcrops like grey teeth. Nights when the Old One climbs the highest point, she is a pillar of burning. Her hands send the thunder writing across the sky.’ (MS: 23)

It is described that it is a world in which everything is inverted the dormant but dangerous volcano is painted a life sustaining green, while the normally pleasant beaches take on a dangerous red hue. The nights are bright with the “pillar of burning” which is the Old One. That itself is an inversion of sorts for in traditional Hindu mythology that is extensively used in this novel, it is Lord Shiva, who is depicted as the pillar of fire. That the island has always been there, though undiscovered, situates the female universe outside traditional geographic locations. Conventional geography is represented by the various real cities to which Tilo and the other mistresses who have undergone training along with her on the island are sent. These cities are seen as misty images that the Old One shows the mistresses before they can decide where each one wants to go:

Skyscrapers of silver glass by a lake wide as ocean, fur coated men and women, white like the now that lines the pavements, crossing the street to avoid dark skin. Brownsugar girls in flimsy bright dresses, leaning lipstick on shantytown porches, wait for customers.[…] A woman watching through her barred window a world beyond her reach, while on her forehead the marriage sindur presses down like a coin of blood.
Narrow cobble streets, shuttered houses, men in fez eating mejdool dates and spitting out infidel dog as an Indian passes. (MS: 53-4)

It is explicitly stated that it is an “island of women.” Ironically the phrase “human world” is contrasted, not with a supernatural world, but with the “island of women. That the female universe is an island is also significant. It is cut off from the male universe and the only way in which contact between the two worlds can be established is when the mistresses of their own volition reach out to the other world. Tilo is not permitted to leave the store. Within the male universe the store is an isolated female world by itself. It is filled with spices that are associated with the kitchen, the traditional female domain. It is evident that Divakaruni does not step out of the sphere of conventional feminine territory. She attempts only to recreate the female world out of existing stereotypes.

Tilo, The Mistress of Spices takes her name from Tilottama, the divine danseuse in Indra’s court. But she also brings another meaning to the name. She associates herself with til, the sesame seed. In this sense the divine and the earthly are united in Tilo. When she decides to give up the divine and restrict herself only to the human, she takes another name Maya, a name with profound mythological and philosophical associations. Maya, in Hindu philosophy is feminine and is the principle behind the entire material universe. The material universe is considered an illusion. When Tilo assumes the name Maya, she once again reasserts her earthly and feminine character.

Tilo’s friends are serpents. All her mythic knowledge has been imparted to her by serpents. The serpent is usually a chthonic manifestation of the Mother Goddess and is therefore a symbol of fertility. By association it is also a symbol of the feminine. Divakaruni uses conventional myth and symbolism whenever it serves her purpose of creating a female world. Moreover, The Mistress of Spices is obsessed with descriptions of taste. Food, taste and texture unleash a torrent of adjectives, metaphors and similes. Divakaruni is maddeningly fond of compound adjectives; haze-heavy, wine-dark, aimless-sad, curious-bright. “The jar of red chilies is surprising-light.”

In Sister of My Heart, Divakaruni, by making her two female protagonists: Anju and Sudha narrate their stories alternatively endows them with not only the capacity to
tell their own stories but also invests them with the power to interpret and shape their reality. For instance, it is a popular belief in their community that the night after a child is born, the deity Bidhata Purushu comes down to earth to decide its destiny. The disappearance of the sweet meats kept near the child during the night is indicative of his blessing. Aunt Pishi tells the two girls that in their case the sweet meats remained untouched because they were girls, thus implying women were doomed to suffer.

Once Sudha’s pregnancy reveals the presence of a female foetus, her mother-in-law forces her to undergo an abortion. Anju, the immigrant Indian, manages to convince Sudha to leave her family and come to America with her daughter. Divakaruni’s self reflexive commentary does not allow the story to propose a simple binary between orthodox practices in India and the more liberatory spaces in diasporic America. The novel celebrates the triumph of the friendship between two women separated by geographical and cultural distance. Their mutual compassion strengthens the fabric of resistance and inspires the quest for identity. Sudha leaves her husband in order to save the life of her child. These connections between women in Divakaruni’s fiction are significant and subversive.

The crumbling marble palace in the story is symbolic of the confined space which men have allocated to women in their universe. The princess (mythic representation of Sudha) tries to live by the rules of the male world. She marries the King chosen for her and conceives. But when it is known that the foetus is female the men decide to destroy the baby. It is then that the queen rebels to protect her baby. She leaves the kingdom and reaches the ocean’s edge. (Here Sudha pauses in her story and, Anju slowly recovering from her depression, continues the tale).

The mythic framework of the novel contributes to the creation of a female universe. The world of myth is essentially feminine in nature as opposed to the cerebral world which is masculine. In both Sister of My Heart and The Vine of Desire novels there is an attempt to create fresh myths or at least give new interpretations to existing ones.
But *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni rejects conventional myths and creates new ones. The first book in the novel is titled *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes*. In this part both the protagonists attempt to conform to the traditional feminine roles allocated by the male hegemonic society. This is symbolized by the traditional fairytale of the princess in the palace of snakes waiting for there Prince Charming to rescue her. The second book is titled *The Queen of Swords*. This is not a traditional fairytale. This new myth symbolizes the new feminine world that Divakaruni envisages. It is a world across the rainbow (ironically a conventional symbol or hope) where women rescue other women and do not wait helplessly for the men. Sudha’s journey to America is really the beginning of her journey to a new world of women.

Divakaruni’s diatribes do not stop at exposing the Bengalis for denying their women freedom, humanity, and the right to life. She also judges the often superstitious, planet-gazing conservative Bengalis through the highly critical eyes of a postcolonial commentator who scrutinizes the far-reaching impact of British colonialism on the Bengali psyche. Thus, the Chatterjee cousins in *Sister of My Heart* go to English-medium convents, like most children of upper and middle class Benagali families, and Anju looks forward to getting enrolled at Lady Brabourne college’s Elizabeth Barrett Browning, can be read as her genuine interest in the progressive outlook of Western feminist writers.

However, if the Eastern world is delineated at times in a rather negative light in this book, then the Western world is presented not without its own evils and shortcomings. Freedom and riches in the West are often bought, particularly by the immigrant, at the expense of the love and support provided by the extended family or the community. Hence the same Anju, who used to complain about the noise and lack of privacy in her mother’s home back in India, because of the host of servants and gossiping aunts, yelling neighbors, and shouting road vendors, now misses the din and bustle in her desolate apartment in America. Indeed, America provides “the advantage of anonymity,” but it also adds the burden of responsibility and loneliness.

Despite the innumerable headaches that an American lifestyle entails, Divakaruni’s Characters seem convinced about its ultimate superiority. This is well
expressed in these words of Sudha, who is planning to leave for America with her fatherless, newborn daughter in search of a respectable life for both: “Best of all, no one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me who have decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man” (SH: 272).

By making Sudha leave India for America, instead of staying back and struggling for change at home, the novel makes an escapist of her and makes Indian society seem hopelessly irredeemable. Sudha’s westward move to solve problems generated at home also makes her more responsive to the calls of liberalist Western Feminism as the agenda and needs of which may not necessarily be the same as those of Indian feminism.

Divakaruni’s attitude towards her native India is not lacking in positivity or hopefulness. Her compassion for the land of her origin, her pride in its rich literature and folklore, and her reverence for there religion are expressed through the numerous nostalgically-coined lullabies, proverbs, stories, mythological allusions and popular songs, not to mention the carefully sprinkled untranslated Bengali words add to the knowing reader’s pleasure. But, in the light of the overall message that emanates from her text, one wonders whether these cultural nuggets are sufficient leitmotifs for ontological anchorage to the land of one’s origin. Sudha realizes that even though she can choose to wear either a sari or blue jeans and a t-shirt in her new world, she only ever feels a sense of belonging when she returns to India.

In Divakaruni’s work, despite sex, class, and caste oppression, women need not end up as victims. America chips away at ossified Indian tradition for people to see, America and India are twinned. Divakaruni expressed her views regarding old tales in a 1999 interview (Little India): “One of the things I like about the old tales (Indian myths and stories), is that they involve us emotionally, and without emotional involvement I think literature becomes arid.” (5)

The Vine of Desire is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s sequel to her 1999 novel, Sister of My Heart. In it, one of the tasks she faces is that of condensing the events of the earlier novel, so that the reader unfamiliar with Sisters of My Heart may follow the renewed career of its protagonists, Sudha and Anju. This double burden of advancing
Sudha’s and Anju’s present lives in the States, as well as gesturing towards their pasts in India, does bog down the early sections of *The Vine of Desire* a little bit, displaying too much of an anxiety about readers’ comfort. If Divakaruni had resisted this urge to fill in the gaps through flashbacks, which are a bit contrived, the novel might have flowed more effortlessly, without having to compete with its predecessor.

*The Vine of Desire* is a female Kunstlerroman, a novel depicting the growth of the protagonist into maturity of an artist, with autobiographical undertones. In Anju’s assignment “Draupandi’s Garden”, we see a glimpse of Divakaruni’s own process as a creative writer, blending myth, imagery and lyricism, all derived from her cultural tradition, in order to re-imagine the transformation of women’s identities in the South Asian diaspora:

What would Draupadi plant in her garden? Would it be the agnirekha, flame flower, flower of virtuous courage, flower of the heroes her husbands have become? Would it be a sprig of the parijaat, the tree of fragrant bliss which their mentor Krishna wrested from Indra, the king of the gods? Is it the asha-lata, the mythical desire vine which gives you whatever you wish for? (VD:345-346)

Paralleling this drift, the novel *Sister of my Heart* also charts Sudha’s choice of becoming financially self-reliant by accepting the job of a nurse for an old man from an escape from the brutalities of gender oppression in India. An alternative vision of the possibility of an unconventional and fulfilling life in India is once again given for Sudha. There is thus a blurring of the geographic boundaries of America and India. Along with the repudiation of the conventions of romance, Divakaruni also deconstructs the idea of America as a retreat against gendered oppressions, and offers a far more nuanced understanding of the geographies of suppression, women’s desires, and circuitous passages to fulfillment.

The mothers in *The Vine of Desire* also enter this new world of women. This is symbolically shown when they sell their dilapidated, ancestral house and move to a new flat. The change in them after they move to their new home is amazing:
Along with the old house, the mothers seem to have shrugged off a great burden of tradition. Perhaps, ironically, I [Sudha] helped it happen. For now that I have come back neither wife nor widow, now that I have let go of all that society considers valuable, what is left for them to fear? Away from those ancient halls echoing with patriarchal voices which insisted that foremost of all they must be widows of the Chatterjee family, for the first time they can learn to live their lives with a girlish lightness. (SH: 296)

The mothers begin to lead a fulfilling life with a social purpose. They listen to the music that they like and take walks where they please. They no longer worry about the social stigma attached to a divorcée and keep Sudha with them. They lovingly take care of her daughter. They finally show the gesture of the rejection of patriarchal norms and the acceptance of the rules of the new female universe.

Both the novels: *Sister of my Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* despite defects and discrepancies, ring a fervent note of sincerity and that is where their appeal lies. In the following excerpt, we see America through the eyes of both sisters:

America has its own problems. She said, but at least it would give me the advantage of anonymity. 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. (294)

In Sudha and Anju’s expectations of the USA and in the novel’s almost forced migration of Sudha to America. It is too easily forgotten that anonymity and newness may also mean a loss of identity and sociocultural isolation. Sudha comes to America forsaking love, family, and home, and is expected to embrace a western-style isolated, individualistic life despite her cousin’s support. However, pulling away from India and settling down in the USA, particularly because of all the changes caused by this move cannot be as promising as it is made to look.

Divakaruni could have sought feminist inspiration a few examples of feminist figures in Indian history and culture. In Hindu religious mythology, the goddesses Kali
and Durga are influential icons seen manifestations of power, preservers of good, and destroyers of evil. In 1858 Lakshmi Bai or the Rani (Queen) of Jhansi (1830-1858) led a fierce military resistance to British colonial forces that wanted to annex the independent India state of Jhansi on the pretext that the king of Jhanis left no male heir.

Divakaruni attempts to draw readers’ attention to social injustices against women through the art of sensitive storytelling. Her heroines are endowed with sensitivity, strength, and a resilience that enables them to survive through endless trials. *Sister of my Heart* even uses a plot device of hidden identity. Inspite of all these remarkable technical strengths, the portrayal of stereotyped women might have been avoided. Her women protagonists readily approve of being cheated, dominated and sexually manipulated. Her novels breathe life into the lives of South Asian character who struggle to discover freedom in a world that wants to brand them chattel to patriarchal desire and lineage. While the novels gravitate around women who inhabit such violent social conditions, many must also cope with being South Asian in a U.S.

*Queen of Dreams* is a novel that belongs to the genre of magical realism. It juxtaposes Mrs. Guptas numinous world of dreams with the everyday concerns of her daughter life the Story speaks about the possibility of salvaging relationships, if one chooses to forgive and more on as Rakhi does with her father and ex-husband. Divakaruni in the novel focuses the gulf between dreams and reality. She also focuses on characters belonging to two worlds, Indian immigrants struggling through life in America. In it, she attempts yet the story of a mysterious, reticent mother, gifted with the ability to interpret, and the daughter yearning to decipher her. Infact, she draws a firm line between reality and dream as shadow strangers’ materials. Divakaruni, spins a fresh spell binding story of transforming that is as lyrical as it is dramatic. In this novel, as a dream is a telegram from the hidden world, in elegant prose, Divakaruni has crafted a vivid and enduring dream one that reveals hidden truths about the world we live.

The novel ‘*Queen of Dreams*’ haunts one’s dreams. Some novels catch at one’s subconscious and leave one with a lingering awareness of the mysteries of life. This is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s fourth novel, short fiction and poetry. It is a novel where the narrative alternates between the understood and the mystical. In fact it seems that
Divakaruni is a secret purveyor of magic realism, where the things we don’t understand (such as dreams) can be at least partially explained and made sense of through a kind of magic.

The second half of the novel is where reality, dreams and nightmares begin to intertwine and blur. After her mother’s death, Rakhi finds her dream journal, which she reads with the aid of her father to translate the Bengali words in an attempt to interpret and understand her mother’s life, and thus make sense of her death. Rakhi also finds herself struggling with her business, relationships, and the devastating events of September 11, 2001. The novel is also divided between India and the US, although set entirely in America. To Rakhi, as no doubt to many US-born Indians, India represents the mystical and the longed for—quite literally—a land of dreams, and one that she is on a quest to understand, through the cryptic medium of her mother’s dream journal. The unspoken statement is that Indian women are chaste, modest, obedient and loyal. The women become a metaphor for the purity, the chastity and the sanctity of the Ancient Spirit that is India, the “Items” they carry proving their Indian ness. Indian women forever remain the bearers of culture, the preservers of heritage. They are burdened with the preservation of culture in the form of religion, language, dress and food.

Chitra Divakaruni’s use of different story telling techniques the third person narrative, interior monologue, epistolary exchange, diary entries, stream of conscious dream sequences powerfully convey the pain and confusion. The characters feel during their moments of life-changing awareness. Her skillful use of these different techniques and styles allow the reader a unique access into the complex consciousness of each of the characters including the men. Occasionally, the narrator attempts to describe the pre-language imaginings of the infant Dayita. This prove that Divakaruni’s The Vine of Desire is a powerful story that lifts its characters from its pages and opens the reader’s imagination to an emotionally rich landscape filled with the secrets, lies, truths, and passions that tear people apart and bring them back together.

Divakaruni’s own idealization of America makes her ignore the possibility that when migration pulls people away from their known environment and culture, and places them in a culture that puts a tremendous emphasis on homogeneity and assimilation, they
could be socially outcast even if they are technically accepted in their new home. All the complexities of America’s past and present race and class relations are also brushed aside with nothing more than a few passing references in Divakaruni’s writing.

America becomes this unique exceptional, magical country which offers a safe refuge to the female characters of Divakaruni’s fiction, mostly middle-class Indian women oppressed by Indian traditions and having the means of passage to European-style advancement in the “exceptional” promised land of the United States. America seems to be the rejuvenator of her Indian female characters and endorse the binaries the writer creates between Indian and America. The Indian immigrant woman arrives in the United States with much axed feelings. The mind frame combines the experience of displacement spurred by physical migration. Along with this the woman remains bearer of the culture, the preserver of heritages and is psychologically programmed to enact preordained roles that have been defined for her by traditional patriarchy at home in India and by extension abroad. Divakaruni’s novels; Vine of Desire and Queen of Dreams that the identity of the “new” woman seems to consolidate herself by drawing on both the cultures by reinventing herself totally.

Certainly Divakaruni’s fiction is part of the growing corpus of Asian American women’s writing, whose major theme is the lonely outsider the first or second-generation Asian immigrant in an often hostile, uncomprehending and incomprehensible environment, struggling to assimilate and to keep her ethnic identity alive at the same time. They suffer the double yoke of colour and gender even more than the African American. For Asian or Africa American women, sisterhood is a strength and scour enabling them to discover themselves as persons and to nurture their ties with their community. Divakaruni offers a psychological analysis of Indian immigrant women as represented symbolically in Tilo, with emphasis on traditional mythology as transmitter of theme in literature. The author’s promise resides in the belief that magic is there and it is a part of every day life. The philosophy makes the novel and the mystical transformation of its protagonist, both believable and meaningful.

Divakaruni substantiates the culturally transcendent quality of magical realist literature, an oxymoron which represents a binary opposition between reality and
imagination, a permanently contradictory relation between two worlds. These find a meeting-point in magical realist writing, thus giving a voice to the unthinkable and unspoken or to those living on the margins. What was once unspoken is left expressed, proving that, in utilizing the diametrically opposed characteristics of magical realism, female immigrant writers prove that they too do have a voice.

Women face a crisis before they start proving themselves out. Initially, they are unaware of their own inner strength and they rely upon someone else’s strength. For instance Sudha, Anju, Tilo, Mrs.Gupta all bank on either their husbands or lovers for their support. But after facing the crisis, they free themselves from their own shackles and become aware of their inner strength. Marriage does not guarantee the safety of home or a clear identity for the women. Many women writers in India, for instance, emphasize that marriage might be detrimental to the women’s identity. Generally marriage is said to be the unreasonable demands on the woman and offers little in turn in the hindu context, notions of chastity, service to the husband and motherhood work toward an erasure of the women’s needs, desires and even identity. Chitra’s all protagonists are willing to bend but they never break. For this reason almost all the novels end with a note of optimism and confidence.

Chira Banerjee seems to intentionally avoid spiritually, for her protagonists are not ordinary, traditional female characters, they are very strong individuals who do not weep even over a crisis and hence they do not need any spiritual comfort. Moreover they emerge as such powerful and highly practical beings that they do not rely on spirituality to take charge of their life. But they all have one thing in common. They all come from a highly conservative family and it is their traditional upbringing that instigates the psychological conflict east and west when they migrate to America.

Divakauni is a Bengali, her work is firmly rooted in Bengali soil. Not only are most of her characters Bengali, in many if not most cases, she retells and re-visions the old Bengali women’s stories in contemporary Asian American terms, stories through which, incidentally, women’s community and sisterhood emerge as important motifs even when they have been told by male novelists. 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 not only poses the questions but also offers solution to her women characters by suggesting practical ways of finding emancipation and financial assurance, often through vocational work. Divakaruni represents the women of her novels as a class, just as Marxian epistology. As a fight against the atrocities, women were shown different areas to work and stand on their own with their creativity and hard work and thus breaking the male geocentricism. Divakaruni represents the women of her novels as a class who constantly struggle to achieve financial self sufficiency.

The First Mother in **The Mistress of Spices** is elderly and maternal, representing the traditionalist notion of the South Asian woman in the domestic sphere. Yet at the same time, she is outside the boundaries of conventional culture, for she lives on an isolated island, possesses magical powers and urges the young girls toward progression and change rather than the maintenance of the status quo. She is at once the "old world and the "new," a juxtaposition of differing geographical spaces, times and cultures.

Divakaruni has herself claimed in many of her interviews that the diasporic subjects especially women are concerned about her identity, an identity which they try to reinvent constantly. Her diasporic states change their lives and consequently they become a hybrid immigrant. For Asian or African American women, sisterhood is a strength and succor, enabling them to discover themselves as persons and to nurture their ties with their community; friendship with other women becomes, therefore, central to the fiction of all American “women of color.” (Ranjini Jothi Singh:48)

In **Mistress of Spices**, Tilo’s search and final realization of the self is a result of the ongoing process of self-identification that characterizes the shifting nature of a woman’s identity. To be born anew again she is stripped of the identity she had been possessing. Raven gives her a new name, Maya, “In the old language it can mean many things.
Illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day” (TMS 317), and Tilo wants such a name to move forth in her life; “I need a name like that, I who now have only myself to hold me up” (TMS 317). She leaves with her love in search for his dream but reality beckons her back. She breaks free of all illusions and accepts her new identity, relation and responsibility.

Conventionally the identity of a woman is dictated by what others perceive her to be as per the dictates of the society. She is not her own person but an image adjusting and accommodating as per the image predetermined for her. This identity is not the genuine identity but a distortion of the self; an illusion. The real Tilo remains a false image till she realizes her true calling as Maya; a persona in which her ‘self’, the inherent ‘I’ in her identity amalgamates with her other ‘I’ have constructed out of her relationship with other people and her love.

Tilo in The Mistress of Spices is apprehensive of the outcome if she stepped out of the line; the ‘lakshman rekha’ that kept her in ‘place.’ The first time she decides to break the code set out for the mistress of the spices, she muses, “Today I plan to stretch my wings, to crack perhaps these shells and emerge into the infinite spaces of the outside world. It frightens me a little. I must admit this” (MS125). Woman must be a bridge and a synthesizer. She shouldn’t allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to fast-moving events. The solution lies neither in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither in retreat into home nor escape from it.

Divakaruni’s fiction explores women searching for their identity as human beings, independent of their traditional role as a daughter, wife or mother. Anju and Sudha in The Vine of Desire demonstrate the female independence that Divakaruni celebrates, although such independence is achieved not without trauma and pain. She suggests that women can determine to assert themselves as individuals who can set their own boundaries with their partners only through the importance given to education in their lives. Access to higher education makes them realize the need to live in the family; but rejects the roles prescribed to them by society. Unlike other immigrant narratives,
Chitra conceives the Indian women's immigration to the US as a journey from oppressed and depressed conditions to freedom and discovery of the self with the inspiration of western influence. The women on the other hand walk the tight rope between their dual roles of being a preserver and a carrier of culture and their emerging new identity in the host culture.

Migration has become a global phenomenon especially in the middle class professionals, for economic compulsions. It compels to face the life code of the new country that has induced a consciousness of borders and a nationality in the psyche of the immigrants carry their original culture with them and simultaneously changes to survive in the new world, after all culture is a manifestation of the human psyche. The literary migrants who live away from their roots and culture develop a distinct sensibility. Many contemporary writers proves the quest for national identity by defining, redefining, analyzing and explaining it from all possible angles especially for woman, because male migrants face fewer problems than female migrants. Many Indian writers migrate from their native place to other countries for their own intention.

The sense of exile that migration brings functions in a positive manner in the writings by giving Banerjee an opportunity to articulate their needs and desires in a new, comparatively liberated society and thus creating a new identity. According to the eminent mythologist, Carl Gustav Jung, “The study of myths reveals about the mind and character of a people… And just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, so myths are the symbolic projections of a people’s hopes, values, fears and aspirations” (Guerin 183).

Diasporic experiences seem to be gendered in the sense that emigration to a new country requires readjustment of the traditional roles in the domestic realism, since this socio-economic phenomenon makes new demands in which gender relations have to be renegotiated. On the one hand, women who earn independent income, even if they face racism or exploitation, experience greater independence and control over their life than they had probably been used to before. i.e is in traditional patriarchal societies like India. On the other hand, they are supposed to maintain homeland relationships and socio-religious and cultural traditions in order to transmit them to their own children.
The ends with her metaphorical declaration, “I’ve learned to fly.” Divakaruni deals with a new facet of immigrant experience in the sense that the movement is not necessarily a physical one or from East to West. By making Sudha decide that she is not interested in the United States anymore and would like to go home, the author treads new ground. Through the eyes of people caught in the clash of cultures, Divakaruni reveals the rewards and the perils of breaking free from the past and the complicated, often contrary emotions that shape the passage to independence. Chitra deeply feels the importance of family bonds which anchor people in their homelands.

Despite the innumerable headaches that an American lifestyle entails, Divakaruni’s characters seem convinced about its ultimate superiority. This is well expressed in these words of Sudha, who is planning to leave for America with her fatherless, newborn daughter in search of a respectable life for both: “Best of all, no one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me who have decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man” (SH: 272). The protagonist’s journey to America is really the beginning of her journey to a new world of women.

At the same time, there is a balanced view of facts in Divakaruni’s fiction. She does not decry the good influence of the culture of her native land. The fact that Sudha determines to go back to India and further continues her family contacts back in India shows the hope and trust she has towards her native land. Her homeland also plays a significant role in her redemption and renewal. A catharsis of sorts, which every Diasporic Indian experiences upon touching his or her Old Country, with its myriad complexity and humanity.

Magic realism is often extremely serious in Divakaruni’s works and it contains embedded commentary about art, culture and human nature. As myth and culture is clothed in magic realism, it carries the traditional values. Magical realism expands and categorizes the real so as to encompass myth, magic and the other extraordinary phenomenon in nature or experience. Magic and the magical are not universal that they are constructs of particular cultural, religious or ethnic context.
Though the purpose of the author is to demythify, it can be done only through myth. So myth which is the pride of one’s nation should be cherished and the writers have to give importance to glorify their culture through myth. Culture portrayed in her works includes food habit and language becomes some of the constituents of diaspora. Food, in that cultural mindset, was not only something to be consumed for survival, but also an artistic medium. As the food and culture being a key characteristic of a diaspora, a strong sense of connection to a homeland is maintained through cultural practices and ways of life. Among these culinary culture has an important part to play in diasporic identification. Ceremonies or rituals do for the members what mothers naturally do for babies: engage their interests, involve them in a shared rhythmic pulse, and there by instill feelings of closeness and communion.

Her novels portray the possibility for establishing a bicultural identity. Divakaruni’s approach to ethnic identity is contingent within the view of south Asian Diaspora that believes in the necessity of integrating the Indian heritage with its American experience. Cultural transactions happen in literature that crosses geographical, political and cultural boundaries. The people who migrate from India belong to the professional middle class from urban area and for them life abroad means making money, understanding code and cultural norms of the new country and creating a footing there.

Magic realism has the capacity to enrich our idea of what is ‘real’ by incorporating all dimensions of the imagination, particularly as expressed in magic, myth and religion. In magical realism, the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. The technique that she adopted in her writing also helps to bring out and to adorn the themes of her novels in an effective way.

The principal thing in her work is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. This relationship varies from culture to culture. So often, the magical mentality of one culture should co exists with the rational and the empirical reality. Hence myth, superstition and archetypes play a great role in magic realist writing and they create a new dimension of reality which the normal or elite readers are not aware of. When it comes to literature,
magic realism is a fusion between physical reality and psychological reality. It incorporates thoughts, emotions, dreams, cultural mythologies and imaginations.

Divakaruni is able to offer an authentic perspective on the social constraints placed on immigrant women. In assuming the charge of revealing the plight of such persons, she places themselves at the forefront of the recent emergence of post colonial and feminist texts to tackle the subject of female oppression both in society, inclusive of minority subgroups, and within the home. She seems to state that the female world though cannot be made up of isolated women. They need to bond with one another in order to create a safe refuge for themselves and form lasting female bonds within a women’s community that are sometimes shaken but never entirely ruptured by male intrusions.

For Asian or American women sisterhood is a strength enabling them to discover themselves as persons and to nurture their ties with their community. It is evident that Divakaruni does not step out of the conventional feminine territory. She attempts only to recreate the female world out of existing stereotypes. The mythic framework of her novels contributes to the creation of a female universe. In both novels there is an attempt to create fresh myths or at least give new interpretations to existing ones. The new myth symbolizes the feminine world that Divakaruni envisages. It is a world where women rescue other women and do not wait helping for the men. The protagonist’s journey to America is really the beginning of her journey to a new world of women.

The educated women like Sudha takes divorce from their husbands do not regret the outcome, because they find there is so much in life apart from married life. Married life is not everything. One can do a lot of service even as a single woman or as a single parent. An Indian immigrant woman in America can create an identity for herself by adopting herself to the new place. But socially and culturally positioning herself as an immigrant Indian Mrs.Gupta neither acculturates nor assimilates but just adapts or adjusts with life around her, without changing or transforming herself.

Divakaruni strives to weave her observations with the element of myth, magic and ancient culture alongside contemporary culture. She tried to bring those things
together- a sense of ancient culture and the daily realities of immigrant life. She added that it is important to maintain a sense of cultural identity. The main thing she would like to preserve is their importance of family Indian culture promotes. The technique that she adopted in her writing also helps to bring out and to adorn the themes of her novels in an effective way.

Divakaruni substantiates the culturally transcendent quality of magical realist literature as an oxymoron which presents a binary opposition between reality and imagination, a permanently contradictory relation between two worlds. These find a meeting point in magical realists writing, thus giving a voice to the unthinkable, and unspoken or to those living on the margins. Her novels conclude with a synthesis of cultures on the protagonists terms what was once unspoken is left expressed, proving that in utilizing the diametrically opposed characteristics of magical realism female immigrant writers do have a voice.

Magic in most cases springs from everyday reality and from the real world. Reality is only distorted in order to achieve the feature of magical reality. Substantial concern with other realities with the world of dreams and fantasies is peculiar in the writings of Divakaruni. The inword world of our mind and our psyche is no less important to her than the concrete material world of verifiable facts. The grafting to the realist dimension is a part of magic realism, transforms the novels into an effective tool to approach reality from a critical perspective. Myth often ends up expressing pride in a past grandeur and nostalgia for a time when that culture was both unchallenged and pure.

The essence of Banerjee’s novels stems from cultural tradition of old legend, fairy tales, myth, superstitions, mysterious occurrences which create the world of her magical reality. Much of the magic arises from the description of a special atmosphere and from a specific approach to the time concept. Her magic often tends to be taken as its natural element. Though the contrast between the real and the magical is a source of amazement on the part of the reader, the characters often take it for granted. The quality of combining the real and the fantastic is in particular qualities prove Chitra Banerjee as a magic realist author. In most of her novels, she succeeds in creating a charming world full of mysteries
and of fabulously enchanting stories that all happen against the background of the real world.

It is believed from the novels of Chitra that the world of myth and magic associated with magic realism neutralizes any potential of resistance or criticism in the narrative. In fact, the use of myth in magic realism is not different from its use in traditional legends, nor is it the only way via which magic occurs in it. Yet magic in magic realism is often subjected to the same charge of regression and distraction from the real pending problems in the postcolonial world. However, in magic realism and with the mingling of magic and realism, the ideological implication of the magic and realism, the ideological implication of the magic realist narratives is not a promotion of mythical past or a regression to a pre-colonial state of “purity”. The point in resisting a strict use of realism even in addressing social, political and historical issues is that it presents the reader as well as the writer with an alternative mode to express an alternative perception of a “reality” which has always existed. The outcome has often been an attempt to bring together elements thought to be representative of both cultures. Magic realism in this sense seems to be propitious for this kind of hybridity or diversity. According to Wendy Faris, magic realism often gives voice in the thematic domain to indigenous or ancient myth, legends and cultural practice and the domain of narrative technique to the literary traditions that express them with the use of non-realistic events and images; it can be seen as a kind of narrative primitivism (103).

The Indian literary market is dominated today by novels dealing with the mythical past. These novels often rework the Indian myths creatively to address contemporary concerns as well as eternal human issues. This reworking of mythological subject matter through new modes of expression has proved to be an effective strategy that connects one to the cultural past on the one hand and helps to assert the present cultural and socio-political identity on the other. Moreover, a re-definition of the Indian reality is intended through explorations of the past and the re-creation of the present. Some characters and events are to be understood for the way they have been presented and others for the things they represent.