



## Perpetual Flux of Diasporic Aberration in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*

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**Abstract:** Diaspora is the dispersal of individuals from their long-established homeland. Immigrant experiences are forged intrinsically of expeditions and border crossings. Migrations have both wiped out and re-inscribed patterns of belonging and being, producing a self with numerous and prejudiced identification which is concurrently both individualized and community anticipated. Tilo, the protagonist in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is an imagination of 'diasporic', uniqueness. She experiences impediment in relocation, because of the sway in her migration. This paper focuses on the unevenness in the diasporic life of Tilo, who endeavours to integrate herself in a cross-cultural environment along with the shifting priorities of her life. While other diaspora authors consciously analyse the replica of cultural perplexity in the alien land, Divakaruni accords a pivotal outlook to redefine diaspora in a discrete shade of light. By delineating the experiences and struggles of South Asian immigrant women who live in the United States she unearths their identities. The present paper demonstrates the jaggedness in the immigrant women's diasporic life revealing the complexities of reconciliation with the conflicting entities in their lives.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, culture, identity, predicament, ingenious, dilemma

### I. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian American writer in the United States of America tries to sever free herself from stereotypes and uses her precedent experiences and passion to commune the plight of Indian women in America. As an immigrant writer she has exhibited the predicament of immigrants, especially South Asian Indian women's modern maladies of loneliness, exile, disorientation, dislocation and loss of an identity. Her writings comprise an endeavour to re-connect her, substantially and psychologically with the immigrant's situation. She has examined the vigour of traditional custom in her native country, as well as confronted the challenges ensued by the immigrants in her adopted country. She is more a humanist than a feminist. She delves into the experiences of immigration not only in the milieu of environmental displacement but also formulates the plots of her novels in the backdrop of enchantment, delusion, fantasy and legend. Her works exhibit women immigrants who appear self-independent and determined. Largely, her fictions, furnish confirmation that she is very much responsive by the fact that Indian womanhood is at all times in one means or the other suffused in the social constraints of gendered spaces which cater to persistent responsibility and identity for women.

This novel is about an Indian immigrant Tilo (Tilottama), who exiles her homeland and comes to Oakland. She aids the people of her community, who (like her) belong to the Indian diaspora. Diaspora Literature involves an outline of a homeland, a place from where the dislocation occurs with narratives of an insensitive journey undertaken by migrants on account of economic obligations. It offers an unsullied stance to accommodate the diversity of multicultural reality. The term "Diaspora", literally means scattering or dispersion. The three core elements that constitute Diaspora are dispersal of space, assimilation in an ingenious homeland and boundary perpetuation. People by moving and trans-locating, in general, have enriched the society and given rise to assimilation, inclusion and incorporation. The pursuit for financial betterment, a better life and better positions are the causes for migration.

The contemporary significance of diaspora is its close relations with the intellectual movement in the academy such as postcolonial studies and the process of globalization. Post colonialism, demands the recuperation of native cultures, by challenging the colonial misinterpretations. The notion of identity is imperative for the diasporic people. Identity dilemma or pursue of identity has received a thrust in the Post-Colonial literature. Due to the built-in milieu of globalization, the notions of culture and cultural uniqueness have been wiped out. People, who relish all amenities, time and again fail to remember that they are destitute from the normal aspects in their indigenous way of living. Equipment and strategy by artificial intelligence provides ease and luxury to mankind in their livelihood. Immigrants have petiteto

do with their inherited past and rather take for granted an innovative identity. Far-off away from their homeland, they recreate their abode. Migration, once begun, never ends. Flexibility in their identity makes them transnational. Immigrants voyage from a city to another, moving their homes along with them. The notion of home becomes a persistently poignant object for them and it is alleged that a home can be built anywhere at any instant. Mores of migration is well thought-out as the basis in identity theory being allied with kinfolk, language and mode of enduring.

Identifying theorists such as Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, have promoted difference, denounced Eurocentrism, and represented a postcolonial voice. Postcolonial theory in particular is about hybridity for its intrinsic worth of uniqueness and disparity. It becomes feasible to identify a space between opposites, since the fabrication of hybridity occurs in an interstitial zone which does not just seize a space amid two contrasting elements, but as alternative disturbs, deconstructs, and eventually reconstructs those disparate forces. This 'third space of enunciation' by Bhabha challenges the obligation of colonial rule in the immigrants' lives. This hybridity leads to the third space that immigrants create for themselves or they discover "the others of ourselves" (Bhabha 56). Bhabha proves himself to be an advocate in re-establishing a national or community identity but his resolution to regain self-identification through voicing and speaking can only pertain to the other members of the elite class. Immigrants infatuated by the rich cultural acquaintances of their homeland and the yearning to commune the significance of these values are engulfed in the disharmony of other marginalized groups. They find themselves unable to recuperate and this destiny is especially tough for women immigrants to surmount. They are unable to accustom themselves to the alien environment feeling psychologically and culturally alienated. Uprooted from the inhabited soil to strike roots in the alien soil, their lives are perpetual belligerent for belonging and identity. Their desires are turned into delusions and their expectations into disappointments. Burdened by the original felony and tinge of overseas marginalization, immigrant females find themselves put through a tyrannical force of patriarchal racism and ethics. Gender is a fundamental organizing code in a migrant's life. Spivak, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", emphasizing on the dichotomy between men and women says, "both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28). Subaltern Studies and the postcolonial feminist group have made special contributions and focus on the least privileged, the most marginalized and those submerged at the bottom of social hierarchy. Subjugation is a likely outcome of marginalization. She further remarks that women are not in an enhanced position than men in their diaspora and are being "super dominated, super exploited" (249). Divakaruni effectively refutes the assertion of Spivak and demonstrates how an implausible medium can endow voice to the doubly-oppressed humanity of immigrant women in the United States. A Subaltern women's voice can be vocalized from a self-consciousness coming from within. Divakaruni profoundly concerned with the emotions of the native, transcends stereotypes to present a treasury of facts, concealed in the allegory of mythical events in *The Mistress of Spices*. She also thrives to develop a women centric approach to ascertain her vision in the framework of cultural displacement, trounce of personal relationship and the poignant images of the native land.

Globalization has created a cultural and social intuition and has also probed in the dissemination of cultural identities. For multitudinous reasons, people have begun to gather in other nations in full swing. Over the duration, this congregation has created a communal by giving a multicultural identity to these people who have grown multiplicatively. Many Indians have left their homelands and migrated to a new land where they are never wholly acknowledged. Hence they forever linger as outsiders both in their homeland and the adopted land to which they have migrated. The general indispensable problem experienced by them in their diasporic existence is nostalgia, isolation and the dilemma of adaptation. According to Jasbir Jain 'immigrants in exile' endure forced isolation and nostalgia anchoring their past. Alienation is the most common situation faced by immigrants of all generations.

The first generation immigrants are not only the ones who visage the new ambience (psychologically and racially) and feel estranged but also the subsequent generations too become a fraction of the new tradition. "For first-generation south Asians; issues of belonging becomes increasingly complicated the longest they stay in North America, and even more profoundly complex as they bring up children here" (MS 127). This leads to an identity crisis in their existence. Though, immigration is agonizing, it is predestined to them. Stuart Hall in his book *Cultural Identities and Diaspora* expounds: "Not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybrid culture. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference." (402).

Lack of cohesion in the lives of immigrants creates a place where an immigrant can no longer feel at home anywhere, and subsequently loses his/her sense of past, present, and future simultaneously.

At the very outset of the novel, *The Mistress of Spices* Divakaruni describes India as a “land of ardent poetry and aquamarine features” (MS3). An aroma of spices is extended throughout the novel by the author to give it an atypical Indian touch. Divakaruni recreates a humanity of mythology in which spices occupy a noteworthy role in the life of the protagonist and the lives of the immigrants. She entwines a legend that assimilates enchantment and mysticism side by side with the resolute reality of life for a range of distressing characters. Tilo, the Mistress of Spices uses the veiled powers of spices to restore the poignant and intuitive griefs of her customers. For Tilo self-perception is the basis of identity construction. She develops many consciousnesses that are noticeable in both her ensuing relationships and experiences with her ethnic and sexual identities. Divakaruni’s characters are generally diasporic people who have an inherited origin in India.

Tilo’s inborn endowment is to extract the precise powers inbuilt in the spices and employ them to alleviate the maladies of people around her. Pirates’ storm into her home, in her preteen year’s, slaughter her entire family and kidnap her. They take her on board in their ship as a captive. Eventually, she overthrows the pirate chief to become the pirate “queen, leading [her] pirates to fame and glory, so that bards sang their fearless exploits” (MS20). But Tilo again abandons this dignified place when the magical sea serpents enlighten her about the subsistence of an island where she, can build up her mystical talents and utilize them for the humanity. This cut off island is under the care of the First Mother, the wisest and eldest instructor of all women. They call themselves the “Mistresses of Spices”. They are qualified in the art of listening and authorising the spices, and then sent forth into the earth to abet human race. The Mistress of spices learns the undisclosed power of the spices in a private island, which is far-away spaced out from the materialistic world. An incessant sense of ‘nowhere’ and ‘anywhere’ accords prominence for Tilo to endure. In order to feel complete and whole, endurance, in particular, for her is chiefly the demand to survive the agony of up-rooting and the humiliation of re-rooting. At the core of each diasporic motion lies the perception of ‘home’. According to Bhabha the Diasporas dwell the lives of ‘in-between’ state which results in estrangement. Tilo finds herself persistently in an unsteady state of being broken and realizes it is time for to stretch her wings and fly like a bird. Indian women immigrants are frail, apprehensive and doubly marginalized. There is steady interplay of nostalgia and realism in Divakaruni’s novels. At a deeper level they demonstrate a variance between tradition and modernity. The twinge of exile has been exposed through the protagonist Tilo who is nostalgic of the past. Divakaruni’s experience as an immigrant writer has given her the ability to define the past and the present through incessant communication with both the cultures. Her characters incessantly defy dislocation and renegotiate their identities in the facade of destitution.

Tilo’s diasporic journey has begun. The First Mother assigns her a new. She takes her name from Tilottam, the divine danseuse in Indra’s court. She is then shoved into the newness of a culture and commotion of American life into which she must acclimatize. Tilo both as a personality and representation represents diaspora. Physically she is expatriated from her home village to the pirate’s ship and then to the lonesome island where she acquires the magic of spices. From there again she is sent to Oakland, US. Her substantial form is transformed from her existent body to an elderly old one, then to an exceptionally attractive and young one and then reversed back to her factual form. Tilo, the mistress of spices, too has to espouse many guises to conceal her unheard-of abilities. Her name is altered from Nayan Tara to Bhagyavati, Tilottama and ultimately Maya. She keeps changing her identities along with the varying people and location around her. With all these changes her identity, transforms in her desire to search for her true identity. Bharati Mukherjee anticipates the possibility of transformation of identities in diaspora and opines that erosions and accretions come with the act of emigration. Tilo has many names and guises that reveal her multiple identities throughout the novel like a Chameleon which keeps varying, making it obvious how multifaceted the dilemma of identity crisis is. Tilo takes up diverse roles and each role conflicts the other. Divakaruni tries to depict through Tilo how complex it is for immigrants try to survive in a far-off land.

Tilo is positioned in Oakland by the First Mother. She caters to the people of diverse communities there. For Tilo, this catering of spices is an awe-inspiring duty which she considers a sacred one. She bequeaths the First Mother not to relinquish the spices at any cost. According to the rules laid by the First Mother Tilo will be profaned if she violates the promise. Like any common human being, Tilo too faces ups and downs in her life but she neither feels dejected, nor neglects the spices. She finds contentment amidst the community in America. She is neither fretful of her personal desires nor fulfilment but to a certain extent takes pains attention to others’ woe. She serves the humanity for its betterment. People come to her with predicaments and she tries to find a solution for their problems.

Tilo's altering self brings forth the diasporic sensibility in Divakaruni. Tilo represents the estrangement in immigrants belonging to a new generation. She often dreams of the island and feels unmoored spatially. Tilo is explicitly banned to look in a mirror while she accomplishes her duties as a Mistress of Spices. "Once a Mistress has taken on her magic Mistress-body, she is never to look on her reflection again" (MS 61). Although Tilo dwells in California, she perceives that she is incapable to ebb her period on the Island with the First Mother and the other Mistresses. The memoirs swarm her day and night. Cautions and admonitions of the past gush into her beliefs, developing dissent in her current life. As her acquaintance with her lover Raven progresses, she notices the times of yore inexorable. The yearning for assimilation and the sensation of alienation both exist within her. Raven's presence changes this speck of aspiration into a blaze inside Tilo. It is Tilo's desire that sets her to explore her uniqueness and self realization. There is the craving for adaptation in her by calling Raven "My American" (MS 72). Both of them accommodate themselves with the imbalances of their lives and come across their 'earthly bliss' in a dilapidated city. Divakaruni disintegrates boundaries between individuals of diverse backgrounds and communities. She says, "Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them, women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships. I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to [be] prejudiced when they meet them in real life" (Softky 27).

Tilo struggles with her own passions and revamps herself into a female, sentimentally accountable about her extravagance, yet chooses to countenance the retaliation. From an appalling circumstance, she makes herself sense the twinge of others. Tilo seeks a new name for herself - Maya when she unites with Raven. Her expedition is a hunt for her 'self' which is speckled in the various contradictory roles played by her throughout the novel. Her altering identities and shifting ultimately to Maya (illusion) attributes to the facet of delusion with her concluding permanent identity. Bhabha goes on to assert that "What is so graphically enacted in the moment of colonial identification is the splitting of the subject" (46). The distinct manner in which Divakaruni utilizes the mirror notion is exceptional since she empowers Tilo to make resolutions on how much 'seeing' ultimately happens. It becomes eminent because what is seen 'in the mirror' is as imperative as that is not perceived. According to Jasbir Jain "Indian women writers adopt the strategy of foregrounding the female body as they try to handle the problems of communicating a cultural inheritance and creating space for construction or recovery of a self" (139). Divakaruni has tried to debunk stereotypes while using the tropes of eroticisation. She explores the typical immigrant experience revealing the mirror to Indian women evading out of stereotypes in American landscapes. Tilo's steps may be viewed as an affirmation of individualism and selfhood. Bhabha assumes that everyone can have a word in postcolonial nations and survive in male-dominated societies.

In the conclusion of the novel Tilo forgoes her ancestry, her spices and her supernatural powers which abandon her. So her hyphenated identity comes to an end severing all ties with which she pursues to acquaintance. Tilo feels comprehensive with what she possesses. In her apprehension of reality, delight does not make ends meet and she comes in terms with her identity, trounce of ancestry and the requirements of obliging the conflicts inside her which are ultimately the requisites of her diasporic experience. Finally, she does have 'nous of identity' but it is a consequence of her personal talent to come to stipulations with herself than a remote phenomenon altering her life. She accepts an Indian-American identity. Suffering from a severe supernatural ordeal and wedged in the middle of a series of binary intangible oppositions, immigrants have no other alternative but to dismiss themselves as 'hybridities'. Hence, regardless of her assurance to the First Mother, she prioritizes Raven over spices.

The identity of a personality is created by one's self-perception of the world adjoining her/him reflective of the race, creed, class, economic and communal position of family's religious and cultural values pooled by the society in which the individual lives. The progression of identity construction in diaspora changes in accordance with the immigrant's situation, history, language and experience in their lives. The progression of acculturation is one-sided along with a feeling of defeat. It is also not a lucid transformation but in turn gives rise to hybridity tarnishing diverse stages of acculturation. Identity according to Bhabha is structured through time and is allied with the monetary situation that one endures inclusive of their position in diverse cultural contexts.

A woman is in perpetuity a preserver of culture. An expatriate woman is not a 'whole' since she is half each of her, ethnicity and vicinity. Not all the Diasporas have the liberty of choice in their migrations. In search of their identity, they lose one and unearth another. Jagdish Batra observes: In *The Mistress of Spices*, we find several roles that women play. They appear as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. Tilo's character, however, is singular as she is a brave-heart from the very beginning. She charts her own course of life. She undergoes transculturation and dedicates her life to empowering women so that they do not suffer injustice. Of course, she has magical powers to support her lone existence in the U.S. (Batra 63). Tilo

experiences self-consciousnesses and is competent enough to reformulate herself. Tilo has to transform her identities numerous times in order to disembark at an ultimate definition of her selfhood. Divakaruni has unveiled the trance of immigrants through this novel. She has projected them as champions who fruitfully surmount adverse circumstances. Bound by thriving the manoeuvring of fragmentation, the migrants are competent to reformulate their wisdom of self within their new milieu on their individual stipulations.

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