

## Struggle of Immigrants in Divakaruni'S, "The Mistress of Spices"

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### Abstract

In this globalisation age, immigration becomes an inevitable stage in human evolution. As immigrants are able to absorb both the native and the alien cultures, they grow into international citizens. Immigration takes place due to various reasons and in Indian context the migratory movements are governed by historical, political, economic reasons including higher education, better prospects and marriage. Though the Indian immigrants have shown greater sense of adjustments and adaptability and accessibility, they also suffer a sense of homelessness and it is genuine and intense as a refugee. The immigrant seeks security and protection and as ambassadors project their own culture and help to enhance its comprehensibility. This paper mainly gives a telescopic insight into the life of Indian immigrants in America and the harsh reality of their lives there. It tries to expose the struggles and conflicts both at physical and psychological level of the immigrant life apart from their joys and happiness.

**KEYWORDS:** Struggle, Immigrants, globalisation, citizens

### INTRODUCTION:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a post-colonial writer who deals with the theme of immigration and focuses on the Indian immigrants' struggles and psychological conflicts. In her first full length novel "THE MISTRESS OF SPICES" she adopts a more complex strategy for portraying diasporic identity. She makes use of fable in order to explore the various kinds of problems encountered by the Indian immigrants. The mistress of spices adopts a more nature structural configuration in order to discuss the diasporic and each chapter contains a vignette about an individual about a cultural encounter.

"The Mistress of Spices" symbolically represents the Indian immigrants' struggles in America and is trying to come to terms with a new existence in an alien land. The protagonist Tilo owns a Spice Bazaar in Oakland, California and she tries to help the Indian immigrants there to re-establish their ties with India. She consoles them and solves their problems using various spices. These spices and their mystery is a unique link which makes them reminisce about their common past with nostalgia.

Divakaruni portrays the cultural diversity without bias and stereo types. Several subaltern voices emerge in the course of the narrative which is legitimized by the novelist. Indians residing in the bay area of Oakland exhibit their Indianness unconsciously in their dress food habits, values and ideology. Tilo herself would never step out of her spice bazaar to venture into American society as she has vowed abstinence from worldly desires. A string of mango leaves is hung across the entrance of her store to ward off evil. This spice bazaar is a microcosm of India with its sacred

shelves and it functions as a geographical space that is the repository of a monolithic national identity. To the immigrants their spice bazaar is a reminiscent of their homeland(India) as “There no other place in the world quite likes this”. It is here where they feel mostly at home. The homely nostalgic and magical atmosphere of the spice bazaar makes the Indian immigrants confide in Tilo their problems and sufferings. Tilo is the architect of the immigrants dream in this story.

Tilo as the owner of the Spice Bazaar encounters different people every day. People with different ethnic and religious backgrounds visit the spice bazaar to fulfil their needs. The routine Indian immigrant customers are Lalita, Jagjit, Daksha, Haroun, Kwesi, Geeta, the Bougainvillea girls and Mrs. Kapadia. In the process of supplying groceries and other Indian commodities, Tilo gleans out their problems and tries to help them out by dispensing the appropriate spice.

Divakaruni adopts a complex strategy for unfolding the diasporic dilemma of the Indian immigrants. It is through the eyes of Tilo that Divakaruni takes the readers to the private realms of her customs to encounter their hardships and frustrations. All the Indian immigrants suffer from diasporic nostalgia. The wending of characters with the suitable spice is excellently done by Divakaruni. Another character, Lalita who prefers to be called Ahuja's wife faces a different problem. Daksh would not forget to buy ingredients for dalia pudding for her mother-in-law's ekadesi a typical Indian religious rite for a widow. Many characters like Geeta, her grandfather, Haroun, her parents, Rama and Sheela Bougainvillea girls, Jagjit face many struggles as Indian immigrants in America.

Haroun is from Kashmir. He has settled in Oakland, America. He drives a cab. Whenever he visits Tilo's store, he calls her as LadyJan. Once during his visit Tilo's store, Haroun request her to read his palm, but after looking at his lines rising dark and rigged, she refuses to do so. He narrates how the terrorist assailed and assaulted his village and home. Then she foretells Haroun's life that he would have riches and happiness and beautiful women with dark lotus flower eyes. Tilo sees Haroun and Hameeda absolutely fitting into the loneliness of each other. She realizes that they will get united soon. Both seem to be happy. America has given nothing to Haroun the way he wanted, but he got it in a different way.

During one of the nights, Haroun gets physically injured. As he wanted treatment, he and Tilo called Rahman-Saab, another Indian immigrant in order to avoid the legal complications. Moreover, they think that American laws are more favourable to the natives. Rahman-Saab migrated to America with great hopes and huge expectations. He wanted to be an eminent doctor in 'Phoen' (America). He wished to earn in dollars. But even a learned person like him finds it difficult to accommodate himself in America.. He treats few Indian immigrants, who really need him. he also left the thought of returning to India. Immigrant mother's struggle is painful while raising their children. Jagjit's mother scolds at him instead of rendering emotional support when Jagjit used to come home with his shabby appearance, with muddy clothes and with a big tear on shirt after having all the horrible experiences on the playground and in the classroom. Due to fear of dreadful experiences Jagjit refuses to go to school. His mother was least interested to know the reason behind it

Geeta's story highlights the theme of immigration more strikingly because of its various aspects. Geeta is second generation Indian immigrant woman, a young

educated girl living in America with her parents. Her grandpa also lives with them. In her family there are three generations of the immigrant Indians and each of them views India and America from different points of view. Her grandpa does not know much except India. He feels proud to be an Indian and is proud of its rich cultural 149 heritage. Geeta's father is in dilemma. Whether he should belong to India or should accept the American ways of living is a problem for him. Geeta is born in America and knows nothing about India and Indian culture. Thus, there is huge gap between the psyches of all of them which results in troubles and sufferings. According to grandpa, Geeta's ideas are never appropriate for an Indian girl. He is worried about Geeta's marriage since she has become young. He has frequently warned his son for that. His existence in America does not prevent him from thinking like Indians. According to people like grandpa girls should be controlled. They should be raised up like woman only. Some conservative Indians think that the constant reminder, occasional slapping or scolding can make their children 'Indian' Geeta's parents have a patience regarding her marriage. They were not in hurry so they did not prefer to talk much about it. Contrast to this Geeta's grandpa want Geeta to get married as early as possible. Geeta's father assures grandpa about Geeta's behaviour and her involvement with the foreigner. He tells grandpa that he and his wife are not willing to send their only daughter far away from them, by marrying her with an Indian, living in India. However, when Geeta refuses to marry a man from India and desires to marry a foreigner, nobody in the family likes the idea. 150 Geeta's idea of marrying a man of her choice creates a huge roar in the family. Geeta tells her parents that the boy she is willing to marry is not American but he is Mexican. Geeta's mother Sheela calls her a shameless, unfortunate girl. However, when Tilo peeps into Sheela's heart, she finds a caring, warm hearted and daunting mother in her. There is a deep seated love and care for the daughter. Indian immigrants want to retain their identity as Indians. They do not want to cut-off their umbilical cord from their country and its traditions. Their inability to get separated from their homeland becomes the hurdle for them while they try to adapt to the new sociocultural environment, into which they are living. For first generation Indian immigrants, marriage has to be arranged by the elders and love marriage is equal to sin. Thus they cannot accept that liberated American culture. Tilo compares herself with Geeta and finds herself quite similar to her, because, in order to have her love, Geeta is ready to leave everything her adoring parents and caring grandpa. Protest to her marriage seems unreasonable to her. She is ready to give up everything because her love allures her. Tilo, the mistress had experienced the same pull of love. First she left the village, then pirates, then island and she knows she could leave the store also. It is worth to quote Tilo's expressions here: There are some possible dangers in case of immigrant parents as well as their children. Sometimes both of them fail to understand each other exactly due to their bringing up in different socio cultural environments. In some difficult circumstances, they have to pay a lot or lose a lot in order to keep themselves close together. Geeta's decision creates a contention in the family. Grandpa considers her an arrogant Americanized Indian who is spoiled due to western cultural influences and the unnecessary freedom. He does not want to speak about Geeta according to him, she has blackened the name of the family. It is notable that though Geeta had left home still nobody hates her. Grandpa wants Tilo to go to her office and to see her. After the controversies Geeta becomes more sensible, responsible and matured girl, who knows well about her doings and what it means to her family. She knows her grandpa's expectations from her. She wants to retain her position in the eyes of her own people and luckily gets Tilo as a helping hand. Tilo breaks some rules but she

cannot resist herself from doing that because in Geeta's past she visualises herself and her past. Both of them have to struggle against their own people to gain their love.

Racial tensions and conflicts surface at various points in the narrative Divakaruni skilfully interweaves tolerance and cosmopolitanism with racialism and marginalization to reveal ambivalence and complexity in human relationship in a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society The ten year old Sikh boy ,Jagjit is regularly bullied by white boys of his school .Since he doesnotknow English they make him funof him and try to pull his turban off his head and push him .Tilo offers him some remedies of spices to jagjit as cardamom-peace .Lavag-Compassion ,Cinnamon – Friend maker and Dalchini is for Happiness

The last chapter of the novel is entitled as 'Maya.' This is the name given to her by Raven. He considers. "Anita,"...then says Shelia, Rita, he tries few more. Then he says " Maya" Maya which means many things- illusion, spell, enchantment, and the power that will keep her going in this imperfect world. Tilo chooses a name that conveys many things. It is a name that embodies the multiplicity of her identities, the many consciousnesses that lie within her. Tilo thinks about her name as the bridge between two countries; India and America. She says: "One that spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now."<sup>45</sup> The novel concludes with the city badly hit by the earthquake store also destroys. Tilo lies under the debris. Raven comes searching and finds her badly injured. He then takes Tilo into his car and starts moving towards the earthly paradise where he always desired to go with Tilo as his companion. But, Tilo thinks they can never belong to each other because each of them loves the other for what they are really not. Divakaruni throws light on the confusion, fear and struggles in the lives of immigrants. She believes that the writers have a social responsibilities.

Thus Divakaruni depicts the harsh realities from the lives of Indian immigrants with the suitable remedy from Tilo's spices in the Spice Bazaar. These spices symbolically represent that an individual can feel comfortable and happy only in his homeland. The homeland will soothe the Indian immigrants in the form oh Spice Bazaar which act as an reminiscent of India. According to Divakaruni, the racial consciousness in the mind of Indian immigrants shakes the feelings of others. She echoes the Indian immigrants' voices and their diasporic experiences.

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