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Representation of Transnational Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The
Mistress of Spices*

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract

The present research paper analyzes the fictional postcolonial text The Mistress of Spices authored by the notable south Asian postcolonial writer, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It argues that the writer employs her central protagonist as an agency of transnational identity as a tool to settle the cultural clash between the two cultural worlds: Eastern and Western as represented by Tilo, Geeta, Lalita and Raven respectively. It further explores how Divakaruni offers the new social phenomenon of transnationalism as an instrument to address the cultural complexity instigated by the encounter between the eastern and western cultural values in the multicultural society of America. The state of being transnational represents the possibility of having two identities, two homes, two families, and two cultures at the same time. Despite being deterritorialized from her original culture and geographical locations, Tilo exercises the typical Indian tradition of Ayurvedic business in Oakland and also serves the non-Indian people. Her romantic affair with Raven, an American boy, further shows her transnational simultaneity. To further support the argument, the paper incorporates the theoretical insights from the theory of Transnationalism accompanied by Paul Jay, Natasha Garrett, Nyla Ali Khan, Steven Vertovec, Jahan Ramazani, Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical notion of Hybrid Identity. Likewise, The paper sheds the light on the postcolonial encounter between eastern and western values in the multicultural society and concludes with findings that transnational movement can replace the essentialist notion of fixed identity and practically resolve the cultural clash in the multicultural society.

Key Words: transnational identity, diaspora, transnationalism, globalization, agency

The present research paper makes an literary investigation upon the agency of Divakaruni's protagonist from her novel *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, as the representative of the transnational identity and argues how Divakaruni employs the central protagonist as the agency of transnational being accompanied by the transnational narrative in order to settle down the cultural complexity as instigated by the encounter between the Western and Eastern world views. It further explores the way Divakaruni creates the space for the negotiation between Tilo's intimacy with her Indian fellows and her compassionate relation with the non-Indian nationalities in the multicultural land of America where Tilo and other Indian characters have migrated and settled. The paper scrutinizes upon the characters including Tilo as the transnational subjects who have two homes, families, identities oscillating between the origin- India and the new land, America. No national territory confines them within any rigid identity. As a theory, Transnationalism argues about the multiple identities of an individual at a time beyond any territory. So, the paper probes into the multiple forms of identity Tilo embodies while journeying from India to America with no border bound and it also explores Divakaruni's poetic invention of a third space where two different cultures co-exist together while still maintaining one's own original identity. It shows how Divakaruni intends to negotiate the cultural conflict between two worldviews by making the Indian characters engage with the cultural values of the host country while still following their Indian identity simultaneously. Before Tilo's migration to America from India, she has one trend of culture, tradition, values and so on. But when she migrated to America, new land, she begins to balance the American culture and her original Indian cultural lifestyle. Apart from Tilo, there are other several characters representing Indian immigrants who adopt the simultaneity as a tool to pursue the transnational being.

The primary objective of the research paper is to explore Divakaruni's protagonist, Tilo as an agency of transnational identity by showing how she carries her Indian values along with her assimilation of American system and its people's sentiments while being in the land of settlement but not the land of origin. In doing so, it investigates Divakaruni's narrative moving from diasporic to transnational mode. Besides the protagonist, the paper also scrutinizes the other characters whose living in America while still following the values of their origin further supports Divakaruni's transnational style of narrative. However, the research won't focus much on the diasporic qualities found in characters. Rather, it pays attention to transnational features embodied by the characters including protagonist.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian novelist, poet and writer of Diaspora, delineates the clash, confrontation, primarily the cultural negotiation, and an alternative value of collectivism in order to avoid the Western notion of 'melting pot' for the celebration of 'salad bowl', where the cultural divergent is replaced by the cultural diversity. Through the novel, *The Mistress of Spices* she simply not only demonstrates the cultural encounter in the American multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial and multi-religious society but also emphasizes on the contemporary issue of how humanitarian values can be celebrated with due respect to each other's culture and the cultural practices.

As the novel sets and published after the rise of post colonialism, it largely encompasses the dilemma and struggles of the diasporic immigrants for the preservation and construction of their culture that is ultimately their identity. Fictionalizing the social history and the current societal phenomena and cultural practices, Divakaruni shows her humanitarian point of view by rejecting the Western philosophy of extreme individualism and logocentrism. Instead, through the persona

of the protagonist-Tilo, a South Asian American girl, and her close tie with Raven, a white American boy, she offers unity in such diversity. It can be seen in her portrayal of Tilo who is from Indian culture. She does business of spices in Oakland, America but she moves beyond the rules and restrictions of the business and dedicates in the services of other people from different backgrounds and cultural origins. She makes a close observation on the existing problems of the people from diverse cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds and origins. She, with the help of her magic, solves their problems such as racial violence of Jagjit, family violence and disputes of Mrs. Ahuja and other cultural problems. This humanitarian characteristic of the protagonist becomes a strong tool to dissolve the boundaries between the western and eastern cultural clash as seen in the American society.

The intimate relation between Tilo and Raven, representing the two different cultural worlds, further strengthens the writer's aim to show the crisis of cultural identity in the multicultural community and the need of mutual negotiation and integration for the preservation of one's identity by embedding the value of collectivism unlike western metanarration of binarism. Tilo, the protagonist, originally Tilottama, an immigrant from India, runs a spice shop in Oakland, California in America. While she supplies the ingredients for curries and kormas, she also helps her customers to gain a more precious commodity: whatever they most desire. Tilo is a Mistress of Spices, a priestess of the secret magical powers of spices as she learns the magical power with the Old One, the First Mother, the mistress of magic in an island. Through those who visit and revisit her shop, she catches glimpses of the life of the local Indian expatriate community as well as the people from different communities in Oakland.

Tilo dispenses wisdom and the appropriate spice, for the restoration of sight, the

cleansing of evils, and the pain of rejection and even all sorts of familial, personal, and communal problems by means of magical power emphasizing on the humanity and humane. But when a lonely American ventures into her store, Tilo cannot find the correct spices and it cannot help enough troubled people as he arouses in her a forbidden desire which if she follows will destroy her magical powers but instead she makes a close tie with the white American, Raven in order to spread the message of cultural respect and cultural assimilations between the East and the West. Tilo's act of blurring the politics of self and other is the thematic voice of the novel to tackle with the complexity of multicultural community. Tilo's act of running the spice business, which is the typical Indian Ayurvedic traditional system of diagnosis, and serving the non-Indian people which is the eastern vale of communitarianism despite being far from the territorial boundary of her Indian culture and geographical location speaks excellent of her transnational identity. With the means of the state of transnational being, she negotiates the conflicting cultural atmosphere of the multicultural society like America. In the subsequent explanations, the paper broadens its analysis by investigating other Indian characters and their efforts to embrace transnational style of living for the cultural integrity, assimilation and negotiations.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is widely known as the postcolonial writer whose literary works have been approached either from diasporic point of view or from the postcolonial parameter. However, there has been little observation on the embodiment of transnational features in her writings. In a globalized world today, the individual seems to live with multiple identities without being limited to one home, one family, one nation and one identity. The global mobility of people across the national border from one country to another through the means of transportation and communication has challenged the conventional idea of identity which was more monolithic and

essentialist. Travelling from the land of origin and settling to the land of host has created a space for the multiplicity of the identities.

Divakaruni's postcolonial work, *The Mistress of Spices*, deals with the characters that have moved to America from India while still maintaining the touch with their original culture, value, tradition as well as adjusting with the cultural system of America reflects the double identities of the characters. Despite these double identities of Indian characters, Divakaruni makes them assimilate with the values of host country regardless of their cultural difference. It shows how Banerjee intends to negotiate the cultural conflict between two worldviews by making the Indian characters engage with the cultural values of the host country while still being following their Indian identity simultaneously. While going through the novel, few questions strike one's mind such as why did Tilo travel to America from India? Why did Banerjee give magical power to Tilo with which she could heal people? Why did Geeta's father, another female character, insist on Indian tradition of arrange marriage against American practice of marriage? How does Tilo's affair with Raven, Native American boy, help Divakaruni to sustain the possibility of transnational identity without being culturally colonized? These questions lead me to the exploration of Banerjee's use of transnational subject, primarily represented by Tilo's agency. The mobility of Tilo and other Indian characters from India to America and their settlement in the host land with the constant follow of their original cultures along with the flexible adjustment with the values of the host land seems to suggest that Divakaruni employs the transnational narrative with Tilo as the primary agency of transnational identity who cares for her Indian fellows as well as the non-Indian fellows regardless of diverse nationalities. However, it will be further supported under the theoretical light of transnationalism that concern with the possibility of

one's multiple forms of identities despite the territorial boundaries. It looks at the cross-border connections by relating it to the issues of home, family, citizenship, nationality and contends that an individual's identity does not remain absolute because of the globalized world in which people travel and settle from one border to another without being locked by the national border. The land of origin and the land of host are simultaneously maintained by the people who are called the transnational subject. This way, such concept of transnational identification will be found in Divakaruni's characters, especially Tilo. The theoretical insights by Steven Vertovec, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Jay, Natasha Garrett and Nyla Ali Khan will be applied as supporting materials to strengthen the argument.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* which was first published in 1997. The book is regarded as one of the bestseller that flourished Chitra Banerjee's career. In her fictional mode of writing novel, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni especially projects the issue of immigrant people related to their nationality, identity, cultural and also tries to portray about the condition of immigrants in a new land or alien land. Her writing in particular explores the Immigrant experience especially Indian experience in America and the cultural conflict between the tradition of her homeland and the culture of her adopted country is the main focus of Divakaruni's writing. So are the issues presented in the novel *The Mistress of Spices* where the protagonist, Tilo migrated to the America and she runs a grocery, spice shop there. Tilo has a magical power that she can forecast others future as well as she helps to all those people especially Indians who really suffers into alien land. Being an Indian origin, Tilo runs spice shop which aims to flourish her Indian culture in America which shows the intermingling of the culture i.e. eastern culture, Asian culture and Western culture.

Moreover, different scholars and critics have done reviews on the Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spice*. Similarly, Robert Ross observes, *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni's one more present the immigrant experience in starkly realist terms, but at the same time mixes in generous helping of methodology and fantasy" ("Mission of Independence", 2002). Furthermore, Lara Merlin notes that Divakaruni's purpose in much of her writing is to address the immigrant experience in its particular. "Divakaruni's builds enchanted story upon the fault, line in American identity that lies between the self and the community... the immigrant experience in particular, she asks how to negotiate between the needs of each self and community" (*World and Literature Today*, 1998). Here, Lara reflects upon the thematic and humanistic overtone that occupies the dominant mission of Divakaruni's literary writings. She discovers that Divakaruni's literary postcolonial novels appeal for the cultural negotiations, unity and cultural integrity as Deepika Gurudev claims, "Divakaruni's story wonderfully explores a whole new gamut of human relations and the inevitable divide between east and west" (2). *The Mistress of Spices* is one of her literary endeavor that suggests for the adaptation of transnational living as the proper way of addressing the cultural clash and conflicts in today's multicultural and globalized society.

So far as the critical analysis of *The Mistress of Spices* concerned, many scholarly critics have emerged with their own scholarly dissertations and research articles. Many newspapers, articles, research journals came up with the efforts to analyze the novel from different perspectives. Some critics dealt the novel in the lens of the migration whereas some of them raised the issues of the identity and belonging. Since many of the leading characters are female including the protagonist, many critics approached the analysis from the sufferings of south Asian American

immigrants and their experience of dislocation as well as the cultural confusions. Many writers began to re-evaluate more reflectively the myths and stereotype but Divakaruni here is much aware of such myths and stereotypes among the Indian women, which she consciously explores after her immigration and sets out to question and deconstruct. The themes include immigration, the South Asian experience, history, myth and celebrating diversity. She draws her materials for her writing from her own experiences and also from the vast canvass of the other Indian woman. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Bengal. After her marriage, she migrated to America. Though she is living in America she discusses the ordeals of Indian women in the Patriarchal society, Indian cultural and traditional values in her novels. According to Nita Shah, women belonging to recent immigration waves find it difficult to integrate themselves into the host culture than men : “An inassimilable segment of society, they are impeded by poor communication skills, the women even more so than the men” (qtd. in Grewal 98). Her novels revolve around women’s issues especially immigrant women. Divakaruni combines unfamiliar female Indian experience with the familiar urban life into a narrative which relates a gifted young women’s plight as an outsider in southern California, similar to Divakaruni has.

In this context, many critics have attempted to interpret their analysis of the text from the light of diaspora theory. While some of the critics analyzed the novel from the postcolonial perspective. But there has been rare discussion on her literary discovery of the third space for the cultural negotiations and assimilations through the means of transnational subjectivity of the characters. Being an Indian diaspora herself, she experienced the cultural confusions and conflicts during her stay in America. She found herself pressed by two cultural boundaries. Based on her experiences of life under cultural duality in America, she says, “I am a listener, a

facilitator, a connector of people” (qtd. in Miri 83). Her experience of immigrating “caused Divakauri to re- evaluate her homeland’s culture, and specifically its treatment of women” “migrants cross borders, they also cross emotional and negotiation boundaries.... One’s life and roles change. With them, identities changes as well” (Espin 241). Thus, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni creates narrative of transnationalism migration that go beyond the one-way definitive movement from one place to another, capitalizing on the dynamic, multiple between connectivity’s between identity and place.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s artistic endeavor *The Mistress of Spices* has been discussed and analyzed differently from various perspectives. Her literary works follows the cultural ethics morality and religious believes maintaining a humanitarian value and cultural negotiations to overcome the dichotomy between self and other. The critic Chakravarti Devasree in “Shifting Identities: Re-invention of the Self in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*” argues:

Divakaruni, one could argue, has reconfigured the traditional meanings of ethics. In other words, traditional ethics work through absolute parameters of right and wrong and rely on quasi-religious bounds of conduct to be effectively deployed. Tilo, in contrast, practices the new kind of communitarian ethics in the haphazardly globalized space of Oakland . . . All her actions show that she does not commodify the desperate desires of her customers. Instead, she generously gives away her special spices with her blessings and a dash of her own prayers. (227)

In these lines, the critic reflects upon Tilo’s humanitarian actions as the required course of actions and practices to deal with the globalized world of Oakland. He emphasizes on how Tilo has resituated the traditional notion of my religion, my

nationality, my ethnicity. Such traditional and hierarchical thoughts only promote the discrimination, cultural division and cultural clash. For the critic, Tilo dismantles the conventional notion of singular culture since the globalized world contains people from different cultures, practices, traditions and values. Tilo spreads the message of humanitarian act in which she is able to assert her Indian Ayurvedic science of treatment in another land of Oakland and use it for the service to the non-Indian communities.

Even though this novel deals with the burning issues of dilemma of the diaspora, discriminated and subjugated immigrants, sense of alienation and rootlessness in a superficial way, but at the core it urges for continuity, integration and assimilation which helps them in defining their own roads of adjustment and that eventually follows the path of cultural negotiations, harmony and co-existential relationships. Naidu in the same line in “Women Writers of the South Asian Diaspora: Towards a Transnational Feminist Aesthetic?” insists:

The co-existence of change and continuity then is a defining element of diasporic communities and identities. The tensions and struggles which arise from this paradox have a radical impact on the construction of female subjectivities, as represented in the literature produced by women of the South Asian Diaspora. (87)

Naidu also highlights the ideas that in a co-existential community the sense of harmony and cultural negotiation go hand in hand. For the sake of one’s cultural and communal identity she/he has to retain their tradition, ethnicity and cultural heritage. For accomplishing this goal of co-existence and cultural negotiations in the wake of the globalization and the subsequent consequence of cultural conflicts and clashes, Divakaruni artistically proposes the idea of being transnational through her central

protagonist's agency of transnational being. Tilo's transnational agency is manifested at her ability for adoption of life in Oakland and assertion of her Indian values.

The Mistress of Spices bridges the Western world with the Eastern that is occident with the orient through cultures, values, norms, traditions and shared beliefs as they live in a multicultural society in a migrated land like America. Divakaruni hereby interlinked her original Bengali Indian cultural identity with the Western modern American world through her diasporic novel and female narration. As Denuba Shrnaa in "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Diaspora" argues:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tries to fuse the oriental values with the occidental ethos. She often focuses on characters balancing two worlds, particularly on Indian immigrants' struggle through life in America. Most of her works are about the Indian immigrants in the United States from the author's native region of Bengal and the stories are often told by female narrators from the first person point of view. Living in the United States, Divakaruni becomes more aware of the differences in culture which urges her to explore it in all its essentials. (214)

As Denuba argues Divakaruni simply tries to intertwine both the cultures from the West and the East particularly of the Indian culture. She, with the depiction of the culture of forecastination prevailing in India merely in the Hindu community plays a vital role to mingle the diverse world in a common ground where each can see his/her own originality, culture, tradition and one's own world view of living. Divakaruni for the very purpose brings the story of Bengal along with the American cultural values in her novel. In the quest of cultural co-existence and cultural integration as well as the cultural harmony, she portrays her characters, especially women characters in the mode of translating cultural forms, creating transnational families and redefining the

concept of home to fit into the context of the globalized society of multiculturalism. Identifying Divakaruni's characters in the struggle to adopt the transnational life in order to survive the cultural clash and confusions, Maria Alexandru in her dissertation observes:

In this migrant context, Divakaruni specifically tends to focus on women and the challenges they encounter in both India and the United States. Migrant women's relocation stories are based on the liberating potential of narrative to articulate the trauma of dislocation, translating family traditions across borders and/or creating transnational families, translating cultural norms, building self-esteem and redefining the concept of 'home' and the related experiences of homelessness. (2)

In these exploratory lines, Maria exclusively exposes the fact that the creating the possibility of transnational life either through the transnational families, translating one's original cultural norms in the line of host country's cultural norms and relocating the sense of belongingness remains the quintessential theme of Divakaruni's postcolonial writings. *The Mistress of Spices* has the Indian female characters like Geeta, Lalita and Tilo who seek for the third space for developing transnational life so that cultural integrity is maintained without any cost of their original cultural identity. In such context, I have also brought the theoretical ideas and insights from the lens of transnationalism. Thanks to all these articles and reviews that facilitate and enrich my understanding about the existing knowledge on *The Mistress of Spices*. For approaching the novel from theoretical notion of transnationalism and strengthening Divakaruni's literary mission for the importance of the emergent social movement of transnationalism in the course of battling the cultural issues and conflicts, identity crisis, I have borrowed the theoretical insights

from the prominent critics in the study of transnationalism namely Steven Vertovec, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Jay, Natasha Garret and Nelson Shake.

The novel contains some of the transnational issues of our contemporary society. The theoretical movement of transnationalism refers to the possibility of having two homes, families, identities, and two cultures at the same time. Broadly speaking, theory of transnationalism is concerned with the contemporary way of living in the current era of globalization that has enabled the cross-border connections, movement and mobility due to the modern means of communication, transportation and technology. The cross-border movement of people, objects, and cultural practices has penetrated into the living structure of the people. It looks at the issue of identity, family, nationality, citizenship and home affected by the possibility of the cross-border movement. Such notion of transnational living has directly challenged the conventional notion of identity as absolute and fixed.

The novel is the literary production of the time which is characterized by the advanced telecommunications and transportations. Due to the comfortable means of transportations and communications, an individual can connect himself or herself beyond the nation's fixed boundary. Seated in the four walls of the house, people can reach out and travel across the world virtually. The technological revolution is a blessing that has transformed the world into what Marshal MacLuhan terms "the global village" brought about by the compression of time and space (164). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows in the novel the age of globalization. The novel sheds light on how the cross-border migration appears in the rapidly growing trend of globalization. Natasha Garret claims, "A better way of understanding migration in the context of globalization is by reconceptualizing it as transnational migration" (4). This novel also presents the characters that have migrated to another land and settled

there. Their migration is possible because of the different means of transportation and technologies. But, the central protagonist Tilo migrates through her magical power that she acquired from the Old one. Although Divakaruni gives her a magical power of spice to travel but her movement is an act of migration from India to Oakland of America.

The novel is a transnational narrative since it depicts the physical migration of the characters from one border to another, one geographical location to another, one cultural world to another and the characters' virtual back- and -forth movement between their original culture and the cultural demands of the host country. Cross-border is transnational because it leads to the cross connections of the people both physically and virtually. The physical migration and virtual mobility has been facilitated because of the internet-mediated communication technologies: emails and phone cells. The concept of mobility holds very significant role in the literary studies of transnationalism. In the era of colonialism, the mobility was merely limited to the understanding of physical movement from one physical space to another physical space. But the emergence of transnational studies has redrawn the idea of mobility. Following the rise of the globalization, the distance between the local and global has been blurred. The world is easily and virtually accessible at any local space. There is thin distance between one corners of the world to another corner. One can be physically present at one place while simultaneously exist in any other geographical location in the virtual form. The virtual travel in the form of internet, emails, fax and other social media such as facebook etc. has completely dismantled the earlier concept of absolute form of living as Sheller and Urry argue, "The new mobility paradigm currently manifesting itself in social and human sciences highlights the multiplicity of forms that mobility takes" (212). The physical form of mobility has

been rapidly surpassed by the virtual form of mobility boosting the push on the cross-cultural, national and geographical exchange.

The immigrants can not only travel to another country but also temporarily return to the land of original culture. Such possibility of back -and -forth mobility opens the space for the integration between the homeland and the host land. Crediting the modern means of technology and communication as the root cause for the possibility of transnationalism, Natasha Garret, one of the notable scholars on literary transnationalism, observes:

The relative ease of communication and travel allowed by the modern technologies advances, propelled the age of globalization...migrants become more increasingly able to travel their home country, communicate frequently with people back home, or engage in cultural or business ventures while, at the same time integrating into the host society. (4-5)

Here, Garret highlights the life in the globalized world where the use of technology and means of communications enable the idea of living or engaging into two countries simultaneously. The cross-border mobility encourages the transnational living in which the people are not confined by any territorial barrier. In *The Mistress of Spices*, The letter by Lalita to her mother back in the India embodies the essence of transnational living resulted from the virtual mobility via means of internet-mediated communications.

One of the Indian diaspora women, Lalita has been living in Oakland, America with her husband named Ahuja. They always have confrontations and familial issues. Lalita has been frequently abused by Ahuja: “He slapped me hard, two, three times...He pulled me to the bedroom, threw me on the bed” (270). He tends to be violent and aggressive. His aggression and anger is caused by her inability

to bear the child. Following his repetitive abuse and physical assaults, she writes a letter back to her mother in India “Mataji, Namaste. I don’t have your full address so I don’t know if this letter will ever get to you, but I have heard the U.S postal service is a good one, so I will hope” (269). In this narrative dialogue, the mention of the postal service to deliver the letter to another country evidently displays the manipulation of the means of communication that makes it possible for Lalita to live simultaneously between the two countries. Her physical presence in the host country and the accessibility in the homeland challenge the conventional idea of absolute national identity. The national borders fail to limit her exchange of belonging between the two countries which is the central essence of the literary movement of transnationalism as Paul Jay, one of the notable critics and scholars in the literary transnationalism, defines transnationalism as a “model of migration characterized by the back-and-forth movement of people across borders” (12). Standing on this definition, Lalita’s ability to live in the America and be simultaneously in the touch with the original land back to home establishes her as an example of Divakaruni’s transnational agency. Being transnational allows Lalita to resolve the difficulties that she has suffered because of her position as a migrant diaspora in another land. It opens space for her to integrate the two worlds for her easy living.

Lalita’s case further includes another characteristic of the transnationalism. The current movement of transnationalism ignited by the globalization has also redefined the concept of family and home. The traditional notion of home refers to the absolute and fixed place. But the regular movement and mobility of the people from one geographical space to another has redrawn the understanding of the home and family. For Lalita, her family is both: the one in India and the one with her husband in America. The transnational migration has provoked the possibility of two

families, homes at the same time. Talking about the same phenomenon as the outcome of transnationalism, Natasha Garret in “Finding One’s Place in the World: Transnationalism and the Notion of Home” clarifies what the home and family are for the transnational people:

The redefined concept of immigration has pushed for reconsideration of the concept of home. Home has been traditionally conceptualized as a fixed place; being at home means being stationary, centered bounded, fitted engaged and grounded. In the context of transnational migration, the connection between home and place becomes problematic. This is because transnational travel a lot (many of them don’t) or live in more than one place...with the conception of the so-called ‘astronaut families’...some people living for economic and educational purposes. (46)

In these lines, it is evidently shown that the transnationalism has stood responsible for the changes in the concept of home and family. Lalita’s diaspora migrant status establishes her two homes and two families simultaneously that designate her as a transnational subject.

As mentioned earlier in the light of the famous transnational critics and theorists, the transnationalism refers to the back-and-forth physical and virtual movement regardless of any national territory. Being transnational in the era of globalized world is the ability to belong to two families, homes, identities and geographical locations. The cross-border movement facilitated by the means of communication and transportations and the possibility of having two identities simultaneously remain at the core of transnational movement. However, I hereby feel the need to mark a point of departure from these definitions, understandings and insights about the phenomenon of transnationalism. My point of departure doesn’t

intend to radically refute these views but aims to contribute substantial understanding so that the notion of transnationalism is further extended. The back-and-forth movement is not only found at the physical and virtual form but at the same time, it can be found at play in terms of the mind as well. The act of travelling from one place, space, national border to another is manifested at the level of mind too. It should not be limited to the physical and virtual movement as discussed above in the light of the transnational critics. To further substantiate the argument, one of the critics who reviewed Divakaruni's postcolonial works and explored transnational consciousness in her characters, Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru identifies:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni creates narratives of transnational migration that go beyond the one-way, definitive movement from one place to another, capitalizing on the dynamic, multiple connectivities between identity and place. Her novels are less concerned with migrants' radical choices for one country over another, but tend to leave open the possibility of both integration in the host society and the temporary and/or partial return home, whether in reality or just in the characters' minds. (78)

In these exploratory lines, the critic evidently expands the horizon of transnationalism from the limited understanding of physical and virtual cross-border movement to the act of cross-border travel in the mind. It further recognizes that Divakaruni's literary works are embedded with the narratives of transnational issues and her characters are transnational subjects because they are portrayed struggling to adopt the multiple connectivities between identity and place. Structured in the narrative of transnational migration, her literary works deal with the characters who pursue for the space to establish the integration and negotiation between the host-land and the homeland. This integration is manifested either in reality or just in the character's mind. Tilo can

be considered as an evidential character to discover how Divakaruni's characters master the transnational living for the formation of the cultural negotiations. Tilo's transnational life enables her to dissolve the boundaries between the two cultural and national borders. Contrary to the common understanding of transnationalism as the cross-border back-and-forth physical connectivity with the possibility of having two homes, families, identities, Tilo builds her transnational subjectivity by the mind. She doesn't make any physical return back to the homeland from America but she maintains her Indian values, traditions and practices without fully getting encroached by the cultures of the host country.

The central protagonist, Tilo travels from India to America. She is powered with the magical power. She was trained by the First Mother about the magical power. With the help of the magic, she is able to make her way to another land, the land of multiculturalism. She migrates and settles in the Oakland, America. Her migration crossing the national border of India and settling in another land of America presents her as the south Asian American immigrant. When she arrived in the host land, she begins to run the spice shop. She plays the role as a healer, reformer "In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, a specialist in the secret power of spice, dedicates her life to helping those in need within the South Asian community in California" (Maria 82) because she has possessed the magical power to apply the varieties of medicinal herbs for the diagnosis of the people's sufferings. The spice shop has its rules and regulations. It mandates the healing of the Indian immigrants only. However, Tilo breaks the rules and extends her humanitarian service towards the non-Indian communities. Gita Rajan, in the same vein, in "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*: Deploying Mystical Realism" remarks that:

The inclusion of Kwesi, the African-American, Juan, the Mexican-American,

and Raven, the Native-American, makes the novel a theater of global culture. Thus, as Tilo senses the pain of those around her at a local level, and unleashes the mystical power of her spices for the greater common good, she works for the global citizen. (222)

Here, Gita Rajan's review evidently stresses on how Tilo stands above any national, cultural and ethnic boundaries and dedicate herself for the service of the people from diverse communities such as African-American, Mexican American, and Native American etc. Rajan describes Tilo's humanitarian efforts as the works for the 'global citizen' which is an out of the transnational practices. Cities like California have become the theatre for the diverse ethnic contacts. People from various nations, religions, ethnicities, communities, cultures encounter in the theatre of the city landscape. These conflicts, confusions, clashes and confrontations are resolved through the transnational acts as exemplified by Tilo's service to her own community as well as non-Indian communities like Maria argues:

As concepts such as transnationalism and socio-cultural nomadism are becoming increasingly relevant nowadays, cities have become major theatres of ethnic contact and conflict. Older spatial-political determinations, such as the motherland/ otherland dichotomy, tend to make way to urban transnational agglomerations that lose the insignia of national identity. (79)

Going by Maria's point of view, it is evidential to see Tilo as a transnational agent whose humanitarian service "All who come to my store . . . I love them" (84) by breaking the cultural, national, ethnic and communal barriers dismantles the previous notion of absolute national identity. Despite her physical presence in the host land, she essentially follows her Indian values of communitarianism inherited from her homeland. No national border blocks her identity and belonging. This is how Maria

treats Tilo as an example of Divakaruni's transnational agency.

On the other hand, Tilo's spice shop is the typical Indian traditional method of Ayurvedic science "the ancient Indian medicinal science of Ayurveda" (Agarwal and Kapil 1). It represents Indian values and its traditional identity. Tilo, despite being deterritorialized from her Indian home, carried with her the Indian science of Ayurveda and uses it to heal the difficulties of the people in the foreign land of America. Tilo's deep realization of her Indian Ayurvedic tradition can be sensed in the narrative lines that read, "You have forgotten the old secrets your mother's mother knew. Here is one of them again vanilla beans soaked soft in goat's milk and rubbed on the wrist bone can guard against the evil eye. And here another: A measure of pepper at the foot of the bed, shaped into a crescent, cures you of nightmare" (3). Divakaruni places high importance on the spice and treats it as a symbol of eastern cultural values that are essential for healing the ills and evils in the western cultural world through the transnational image of Tilo as Agarwal and Kapil in their research journal argues, "Tilo, as a healer who knows the spices' magical properties or the ancient science of herbs and spices i.e. Ayurveda, and uses them to heal both the body and the spirit, to change the path of events, and to remove the issues encountered by the characters of different race, religion and gender" (38). Tilo's transnational subjectivity gets revealed at her continuity of Ayurveda, her Indian tradition, and uses them in the host land. In doing so, she asserts her original identity and at the same time, adopts the host land serving the people from different backgrounds.

Apart from Tilo, another character travels back to his home land via mind despite physically being in the host land. Geeta's grandfather represents the older generations of the Indian diaspora living in Oakland. His transnational subjectivity is revealed in an occasion. Geeta's grandfather dislikes the western doctors. When he

falls sick, his family members attempt to take him to hospital where he will be treated in the western style. He is already familiar with the western doctors and their healing styles. He strongly denies being taken to them but insists on being taken to spice shop where he receives the Ayurvedic healings. When he says, “I beg don’t make me go to those firing doctors, who knows what drug they are giving me, messing up my mind and body both. Go instead to the old lady at spice bazaar, she is good at such things, she will be knowing what to do” (238), his consciousness travels back to his Indian tradition of Ayurveda. His cross-border movement plays in his consciousness and his insistence for traditional healing reflects his assertion of original identity in spite of being in the foreign land. It clearly portrays his transnational living.

Another textual evidence of her transnational subject is Tilo’s affair with an American boy, Raven. Raven and Tilo represent two completely different worlds: Western and Eastern respectively. Tilo is a specialist in the secret power of the spice. She is a healer and reformer. However, her intimacy with Tilo poses a threat in her power. The conflict begins because of their cultural and territorial differences. The Westerners create binaries in thoughts, beliefs, traditions and ultimately the western and non-western cultures. The writer through this novel rightly depicts derogatory perceptions and perspective or looks of the white westerners towards the non-westerners along with the clash between them. In the novel, when Tilo and her American man meet each other frequently she asked him to tell his name but he embarrassed and “. . . hesitates, then says, ‘My name is Raven.’” (163). She furthermore adds:

And traces a pattern on the floor with his toe. He will not look at me. In tender amusement I see that my American is embarrassed, a little, by his un-American name. ‘But it is beautiful,’ I say tasting the long wing beat sound of

it in my mouth . . . ‘And right for you.’ ‘You think so?’ Quick flash of pleasure, as quickly hidden in his eyes, Raven feels he has made himself vulnerable enough for one day. (163)

This clearly shows how the western world regards the eastern cultural values, norms and practices. Raven, with his name, given by his grandmother, embarrasses and hesitates as it seems and sounds to be Indian cultural name even though he loves the Indian Mistress of spices. This clearly exemplifies that the west believes in secularism, individualism, and individual freedom whereas the non-western world believes in communalism and spiritualism. The relationship confronts few obstacles initially when Raven looks at Tilo as ignorant woman. The dichotomy as westerner and easterner sets the barrier between them. However, both of them dissolve the any boundary between them and grow intimate.

Although both of them come closer and grow intimate, Tilo still maintains her original identity without fully adopting Raven’s western identity. She shows the positivity for the assimilation and cultural integration but puts a condition forward. She makes him change her name which can have typical Indian meaning. By making him give her new name, she is indirectly proposing him to integrate with her Indian origin. It is the symbol for the cultural unity, integrity and negotiation as envisaged by Divakaruni. Here, the process of becoming transnational emerges from the ground of cultural integration. Raven retains his western identity while Tilo retains her own Indian belonging despite them coming together. Such cultural integration and negotiation is symbolically suggested in the following narrative dialogue between Raven and Tilo:

‘Now you must help me find a new name, my Tilo life is over, and with it that way of calling myself.’

What kind of name do you want?

One that spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now. Is there such a name?

He considers. 'Anita, he says. 'Sheila. Rita'

I shake my head.

He tries a few more. Then says, 'How about *Maya*?' (316)

In the given narrative lines, it is evidently shown how Tilo proposes a space for the cultural integration when she says 'I belong to both now'. Her readiness to abandon her 'Tilo' reflects the challenge to the conventional notion of absolute and fixed national, cultural and geographical identity. She chooses to transform, translate and relocate her identity by being a transnational being in the form of her cultural integration with Raven's American culture. She opens the space for the cosmopolitanism instead of the binarism, individualism and logocentrism in which the multiple cultures, connectivities co-exist. Rendering it as the fundamental ethos of transnationalism, a critic Priya Kumar in the same way opines that:

As an ethos of transnational/trans-local affiliation, cosmopolitanism is offered precisely as a means of creating a more open, welcoming, interconnected- and hence cosmopolitan-world. The new cosmopolitanism's conception of cultures and nations moves away from the notion of pure and discrete cultural and ethnic enclaves to the idea of shared and interlinked cultures, religions, communities, and allegiances. It endorses multiple and discrepant affiliations and belongings rather than a detachment from all bonds. (50)

In the lines, Priya Kumar characterizes the significance of transnationalism which has the power to dissolve the boundaries between the religions, communities, cultures and warmly endorses the beauty of multiple and discrepant affiliations.

Divakaruni artistically employs transnational narrative to bring Tilo and Raven together creating the third space where the fixed and absolute cultural, communal, national and religious boundaries are dismantled for the possibility of co-existence and cultural integrations. She breaks the hierarchical barrier of self and other politics and invents what postcolonial critic, Homi K. Bhabha terms as “Hybrid identity” (qtd. in *Reader*, 208). The term hybridity refers to the creation of a new cross-cultural form like identity. Another critic, Chris Baker informs that Bhabha views such hybrid identity as a “Third self that destabilizes and blur the fixed cultural boundaries” (202). Tilo and Raven adopts such hybrid identity by turning themselves as the transnational self which dismantles the conventional notion of fixed national, cultural and ethnic self. Both of them become negotiate their Indianness and Americanness but not confined and controlled by either as a critic Nalini Lyer in “Embattled Canons: The Place of Diasporic Writing in Indian English Literature,” emphasizing on the cultural negotiation and integration in immigrant world, argues: The Tilo-Raven relationship becomes symbolic of many things: of the need for minority groups to come together in political action and also in romance; of the displacement of Native Americans and newer immigrants by dominant white culture and the diasporic status of each group; of the need for Indian immigrants to negotiate both their Indianness and their Americanness and not be imprisoned by either. (16)

Here, the lines emphasize on the need for the cultural negotiation among the diaspora. The best way to make cultural negotiation is developing transnational living as exemplified by Tilo and Raven. Divakaruni creates these symbolic characters in their transnational subjectivity in order to advocate for the cultural integrity, negotiation and assimilation as a tool to settle the cultural encounters, conflicts and confusions in the globalized society.

Moreover, the novel is one of the most important transnational narratives that entail many characters who exemplify the features of transnational subjects.

Divakaruni represents her characters like Tilo, who moves from India to America, as a transnational subjects marked by various forms of simultaneity namely of home, identity, belonging, citizenship etc. As a transnational subject, Tilo, Geeta, Lalita and Raven are represented as capable of reaching beyond the nation-state's boundaries either virtually or physically. So, people's capacity of making connections across the borders is one of the prominent features of transnationalism which Tilo and other characters epitomize in the novel.

Therefore, the finding of the research paper is that, transnational moment can replace the essentialist notion of fixed identity and practically resolve the cultural class in the multicultural society flourishes the humanitarian values and brings harmony among the people living across the world. The research paper also investigates Tilo, who is a representative of transnational identity, creates the space for the negotiation between her homeland, India and the host country America. In general, I tried my best to explore Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* as the transnational identity since it has the key features of literary transnationalism known as simultaneity.

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