

I. INTRODUCTION

This research is a study of the Indian American writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's debut novel *The Mistress of Spices*. It examines the central character, Tilo's ceaseless struggle for identity in an alien land. *The Mistress of Spices* is one immigrant woman's journey from established traditional paradigms of the past to an uncharted future in America. It presents the dilemma of negotiating one's cultural and biological identity with the drama of alienation and self-transformation in an adopted homeland, i.e. America. Chitra Banerjee has crafted a splendid coming-to-America novel that explores the grim realities of urban decay within a lush framework of magic, pirates, enchanted islands, Indian mythology, and the mystical powers of spices and herbs.

At the very beginning of the novel, Chitra Banerjee describes India as a "land of ardent poetry and aquamarine feathers" (3). That brief phrase sums up all the magic of the east, the exotic land viewed by the western eyes. *The Mistress of Spices* is about magic, wielded by a woman masquerading as an old and bent creature, but in reality, vibrant, eager for life, hungry with desires. Tilo, the mistress of spices, has many disguises and names that reveal her multiple identities. Like a Chameleon, she keeps on changing throughout the novel. This change shows how complex is the problem of identity crisis is. She, like other Indians, suffers a lot while trying to get herself adjusted in the foreign land.

Accordingly, the narrator changes her name many times. Like Bharati Mukherjee's Jyoti-Jasmine-Jane, She changes from Nayan Tara to Bhagyawati, Bhagyawati to Tilottama, and finally to Maya, the most appropriate name, since it means

spell or enchantment. She has to change her identities many times in order to arrive at a final definition of her selfhood.

Works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author and poet. She is one of the dominant Indian American writers whose works regularly appear in many magazines and anthologies.

She was born in 1957 in Calcutta, India. One of her first memories is that of her grandfather telling her stories from Ramayan and Mahabharat, ancient Indian epics. She quickly noticed that “interestingly, unlike the male heroes, the main relationships the women had were with the opposite sex with their husbands, sons, lovers or opponents. They never had any important women friends” (20). This topic would eventually become very important to Divakaruni’s writing. Divakaruni was raised as and still is a devout Hindu. She attended a convent school in India run by Irish nuns during her childhood. She went on to earn a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Calcutta.

In 1976, at the age of 19, Divakaruni immigrated to the United States. She continued her education in the US by earning a Master’s degree in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph. D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Divakaruni did not begin to write fiction until after she graduated from Berkeley, when she came to the realization that, “I loved teaching but didn’t want to do academic writing. I didn’t have enough heart in it. I wanted to write something more immediate” (Mehta, 5).

Divakaruni once explained her reason for writing: “There is certain spirituality, not necessarily religious-the essence of spirituality-that is at the heart of the Indian

psyche, that finds the divine in everything. It was important for me to start writing about my own reality and that of my community” (Doubleday 20).

Divakaruni’s books, which are set in both India and America, “feature Indian-born women torn between old and new world values. She gives laser-like 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” (Doubleday 7). Most of her work is partially autobiographical and based on the lives of Indian immigrants she has dealt with. She says that she writes to help unite people by breaking down old stereotypes.

Before she began her career in fiction-writing, Divakaruni was an acclaimed poet. She writes poems encompassing a wide variety of themes, and she once again directs much focus to the immigrant experience and to South Asian women. She shows the experiences and struggles involved in women trying to find their own identities. Her first works were books of poetry, *Dark like the River* (1987), *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990) and *Black Candle* (1991). She still was not very well-known for these works. Divakaruni then decided she would like to write prose so she enrolled in a fiction writing class. In 1995 Divakaruni published *Arranged Marriage*, a collection of short stories. “In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni beautifully tells stories about immigrant brides who are ‘both liberated and trapped by cultural changes’ and who are struggling to carve out an identity of their own” (Patel 16). The book addresses issues such as racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion and divorce. The book was awarded the PEN

Oakland Josphine Miles Prize for fiction, the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award for Fiction, and an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation.

In 1997, Divakaruni wrote her first novel, *The Mistress of Spices*. “The book has a very mystical quality to it, and, as Divakaruni puts it, ‘I wrote in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of the twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth and magic in my attempt to create a modern fable” (Patel,19).

Sister of My Heart, published in 1998, is Divakaruni’s most recent novel. The book explores the tension between the desires of mothers, who embrace traditional Indian culture, and the cousins, who embrace the new Western philosophies. Divakaruni has published another collection of poetry, *Leaving Yuba City*, in 1997. These poems also deal with immigrant women and their struggles to find themselves in a New World. These poems also show how boundaries can be destroyed. Selections from this collection have won the Pushcart Prize and Allen Ginsberg prize. In 1991, she established MAITRI, a hotline for South Asian women who are victims of domestic abuse or abusive situations. She is also the editor of *Multitudes*, an anthology she uses in her own classroom. The anthology includes stories about communication styles across cultures, expectations of friendships, the Los Angeles riots, and prejudice against gay people.

The present research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives an introductory outline of the study, also introduces the fictional world and the critical overview of the author and his works.

The second chapter is meant to develop theoretical modality that is to be applied in this research work. It provides a short introduction to cultural studies and develops critical tools by drawing ideas from cultural studies. This part of the work defines

different terms that will be dealt in the course of this research. Terms like identity, diaspora, hybridity, representation and alienation will also be defined in the light of the subject of the study in this chapter.

The third chapter of the research is an analysis of the text at a considerable length on the basis of the second chapter. It will sort out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the study: Tilo's ceaseless struggle for stable identity in American society illustrates the condition of Indian. American women in the contemporary America. This portion of the work should serve as a core of this study.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the entire study. On the basis of the analysis of the text done in the chapter three, it will conclude the explanations and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters. Thus the research work will present a fair judgement of Divakaruni who generally depicts the identity problems of her female characters in the alien land of America.

Critics on *The Mistress of Spices*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has made a name for herself in the world of Indian American writers as a prominent writer publishing poems, stories and novels. Her writing has been included in over 30 anthologies. Her works have been translated into 11 languages including Dutch, Hebrew and Japanese.

Divakaruni's debut novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, blends fantastic and realistic imageries into a delectable curry of engaging prose. In an Oakland, California Indian spice bazaar, the reader parts the veil, entering into the magic world of turmeric, coriander, cardamom, and the like, learning their secret names, healing properties, and subtle powers. The seemingly old woman, Tilottama or "Tilo", unlocks their alchemical

mysteries to purge illness from the sick in body and the emotionally downtrodden, and in the process opens, the lock to the desires of her very own heart.

In the dynamic and fascinating presentation, Chitra Divakaruni explores the writer's craft and how her own background has influenced her creative process. As someone who only started writing when she was in her 30s, Chitra's work is much influenced by specific events and life experiences. In particular, her work with women suffering from domestic abuse was one of the things that first prompted her to put pen to paper. The connection between her activism and her writing is one of the key themes of her talks, and helps audience members from all background understand that writing is not some magic gift. Instead, it is about having something to say and the willingness to put in the time and the work required to get those words down on paper.

She shows the experiences and struggles the women undergo while trying to find their own identities. One of the central themes of Chitra Divakarun's work is our quest to find community and connectedness in a diverse society. In most of her compelling and heartfelt interviews, she challenges audience to think about what diversity means in modern America, how they themselves can contribute to building a community of diversity in their own schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods. Drawing on her own struggle to craft a new identity as an Indian woman in America, she points to the metaphor of the mosaic – not the melting pot – as best suited to building a vibrant, tolerant, and diverse country that celebrates common traditions while making room for and embracing new additions to the American fabric. The Readers will understand how multicultural country has become, and the steps taken to build communities of diversity. With a writer's grace and vision, she helps audiences to see the beautiful possibilities

inherent in a diverse society. In its brief review of Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, *The New Yorker* notes "Divakaruni's prose is so pungent that it stains the page yet beneath the sighs and smells of this brand of magic realism she deftly introduces her true theme: how an ability to accommodate desire enlivens not only the individual heart but a society cornered by change" (34).

Remarks like these help explain why so many Indian writers based in the West have succumbed to the same familiar culinary themes. In her story Indians are postcolonial chickens coming home to roost – as spicy, well-barbecued tandoori.

The New York Times Book Review sees the novel in this manner: "*The Mistress of Spices* becomes a novel of ordinary love and compassion. If Tilo's choice is rather predictable, the way Divakaruni gets us there is anything but" (4). Amy Tan makes a critical remark on the book saying, "*The Mistress of Spices* is a dazzling tale of misbegotten dreams and desires, hopes and expectations, woven with poetry and storyteller magic"(8). Carter Kristin also puts his critical response on the book in these forms:

The Mistress of Spices presents the dilemma of negotiating one's cultural and biological identity with the drama of alienation and self transformation in an adopted homeland i.e. America. The writer presents the disruptiveness of change and the power, beauty, strength and validity of redefining one's own individual identity within a broader universal context. (15)

As a whole, Divakaruni presents the life and experience of Indian women desperately trying to make a stand for themselves in the alien land. She basically focuses

on the problems a person faces when he leaves his culture and adopts the culture of the new land. Her characters are mostly torn between two cultures and looking for a stable identity by doing everything they can in their adopted country.

Looking at some of the critical responses of the renowned writers and critics, we can clearly say that Divakaruni presents the life of Indian American women having tough time in America due to identity crisis. Her main characters go through agonizing wait before settling into a kind of stable identity. Their identity remains on the flux and they get shuttled between identities. The succeeding chapter will have precise definitions of some terms related to identity like diaspora, dislocation, alienation, culture and identity crisis and place and displacement.

II. A THEORETICAL MODALITY

Man, Meaning and Identity

Identity is the meaning or self-concept that one gives to oneself or the meaning in general that human beings give to themselves. In other words, it is the sum totality of values attached to individuals by an age and a community, in terms of their class, caste, group or culture and institution of any kind. Thus, with the change in values, or the intellectual developments in human history, man's self concept has always changed. It sometimes only gets modified, and at other times radically changes. For instance people have changed from 'subjects' to 'citizens', from their constant 'class' of 'birth' to being 'potentially able to achieve any status', and from 'restrictions' to 'rights'; this is because of socio-political changes. Similarly, from the religious point of view, people have changed from being 'mortal servants' in the hands of the God to being their 'own masters', free to contemplate or refuse God himself. Also, they have changed from being in a firmer place in the family to being in a much looser family structure, this change has also influenced man's self-image and has also entailed problems like alienation and isolation in modern times. In terms of nationality too, the change in its concept as being determined by race or birth to being determined by will and law has also influenced man's self-definition. In general, the historical changes in social, moral, religious, philosophical and any other values have determined man's self-definition or identity, too.

Man is a thinking animal. From all the evidences in written history, it is very much clear that man's curiosity, questions and debates about their existence, identity and values for life have lasted "as long as man has lived on this planet" (Gaarder 12). Ideas arising out of the simple sense wonder, which we now call philosophy, were a part of

even the ancient men's thoughts and common values that they lived by, besides food and shelter.

The first world picture that included man's self concept was the "mythological world picture" as Jostein Gaarder discusses in his book *Sophie's World*, men saw themselves as a part of a system that their religious myths explained. The Greeks, for instance, saw themselves as the descendants of the "fifth generation of mortals" made of iron (Lohani 12). In the Vedic ages in the East, the Hindus conceived themselves as being the children of sages like Kashyap, Bharadwaja, Mandabya etc. And strangely enough, later transforms into Hinduism like the Nepalese have also attached themselves with these clans or 'gotras'. The mythological self-concepts have descended to our times and have even caused overt conflicts of races, castes and religious groups. Such mythological self-concepts have permeated all cultures through ages. This dimension of identity may also be called the religious self-concept. But new dimensions or modifications have emerged with time. The Greeks, for example, started recording and discussing their myths. "For the first time (around 700 B.C.) it was said that the myths were nothing but human notions" (Gaarder 26). The Greeks then began to base their understanding on experience and reason. This mode of thinking reached its apotheosis with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. But, the rational thought of classical Greece was not widespread outside the thinkers of the city-states. The rest of the world continued with the mythico-religious concepts. With the rise of the Roman Empire, the Greek rational outlook was undermined, and it remained underground: it underwent a setback due to the political system of totalitarian authority under which powerless men were always deemed inferior and the powerful was constantly supreme. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the

European world remained dominated by the Hebrew mythico-spiritual world-picture for many centuries, and has actually been mostly influenced by it since then. Religion was also aligned with politics and made stronger barriers between men and men who were defined differently. But all were inferior to God and all saw themselves at the mercy and will of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God.

In the West at least, and for a time, the attempt to rationalize the religious doctrines failed with the all-pervading resurgence of human-centred thought during the Renaissance. Martin Luther, for example, said that every man was in a sense his own priest, and the old hierarchy was threatened. The Renaissance mind conceived of man as of “divine lineage in mortal guise” (Gaarder 199). The unrestrained worship of genius in this new view of mankind posited man and his potentials at the center of everything. Thus, the Renaissance man was probably the most self-confident and with the highest self-esteem in history.

The following age showed two contrary concepts of idealism and materialism. On the one hand, science and determinism went side-by-side defining man in terms of matter. But these materialist thinkers emphasized man’s power of reason and intellect. Beginning with Descartes, man was seen as a rational being: “cogito ergo sum”. The rational, thinking subject only could define itself or anything in terms of its perception, and that intellectual perception was trusted as more or less reliable. Locke, Hume, Kant, Voltaire and Rousseau represented, broadly, the new spirit that contributed to a high evaluation of the individual. That was followed by the ideas of liberty and equality, in the French American revolutions. The Romantic philosophy also taught the same: man was not a puppet in the hands of god, king, priest and the landlord; every individual was

now a potential genius to explore experience and interpret the world, life and himself. He was now politically free to live and follow his own “pursuit of happiness” (80); he was free to establish his own relationship with the divine; he trusted his own reason and intellect to conceptualize anything including his own life and meaning. On the other hand, the idealist kept sticking to the religio-mythical concept of man, his identity and ‘purpose’ of life.

In the age that followed, the high estimation of both the rational man as well as the spiritually ideal man encountered a setback. The Darwinian man was only a special monkey, and the Freudian man was nothing more than an animal with its basic instincts. In these deterministic views, man is decided and driven by heredity and inherent sexual fantasies though his environment also plays some role. Man’s self-concept received a serious blow when the Freudian science flattened his ego, which had always given him all the height and pride. Since then, men have conceived of themselves as more and more vulnerable to forces outside of their own will and reason. Subjected to heredity limitations, unconscious impulses and inevitable conditions of existence, human beings now seemed to be less free and powerful than ever before. Men in the past used to conceive of their identity as comprising of several concrete and reliable components like religion, culture, caste, class, family, traditions, nationality, regional identity, historical features of identity, and so on. Some of the strongest pillars on which the individual or the collective identity of human beings depended have themselves been questioned and doubted about their reliability. The individual doubts what good there is to be introduced as a Christian rather than a Jew, as an Irish rather than a Swedish, as a Brahmin, a relative of some royal family, a grandson of a poet laureate, or the like. What good is it if values

attached to these things are themselves artificial, uncertain, provisional, or illusory? Uncertainties have given rise to skepticism and disillusion.

From the viewpoint of another school of thought that was gradually becoming influential, man was also free, in the sense that he was ‘condemned to be free’. Jean Paul Sartre, one of the most influential philosophers in this mode of thinking, defines man’s freedom as a curse: “Man is condemned to be free ... condemned because he has not created himself – and is nevertheless free. Because having once been hurled into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (73).

The next topic will throw some light how culture and identity are interrelated. Identity of a person can’t be defined properly if he/she doesn’t belong to a culture permanently. The change of cultures brings instability in the identity of a person.

Culture and Identity Crisis

People express their identities but it is more rigorously expressed in the situation when the identity itself is in question. People often disregard the notion of identity when it is not questioned i.e. when their culture provides them their identity. The old identities and fragmenting the modern individual as unified subject. This so-called ‘crisis of identity’ is seen as part of a wider process of change, which is dislocating the central structures and processes of societies and undermining the frameworks, which give individuals stable anchorage in the social world. Hall claims that “modern identities are being “decentered; that is, dislocated or fragmented” (“The Question” 274). He sees the fragmentation of the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which once gave us firm locations as social individual, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subject. So, there is the loss of ‘stable sense of self’ which is

also called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject, creating the crisis of identity for the individuals (274). He quotes Kobena Mereer and says that “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis; when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displaced by the experience of don’t and uncertainty” (275). Identity, in fact, is formed in the interaction between self and society. Wherever there is the disturbance in such relation, the subjects get the problems of cultural identity. Hall adds, “Correspondingly, the identities which composed the social landscapes ‘out there’, and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective needs of the culture, are breaking us as a result of structural and institutional change” (277).

Hall, thus, posits the problem of identities in what he calls structural and institutional change. In such situation contradictory identities grow within us, pulling us in different directions, so that our identification is continuously being shifted about. Hall furthers the same thus:

If we feel we have a unified identity, from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or “narrative of the self” about ourselves. The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities – anyone of which we could identify with – at least temporarily. (288)

Hall, however, considers the role of globalization to be crucial to bring such crisis of identity. Globalization suggests that global culture is brought about by a variety of social and cultural development: the existence of a world satellite information system, the

emergence of global patterns of consumption and consumerism, the cultivation of cosmopolitan life styles, the emergence of global sport such as the Olympic Games, World football competition, and international tennis matches, the spread of world tourism, the decline of the sovereignty of the nation-state, the growth of global military system, recognition of a world wide ecological crisis, the development of worldwide health problems such as AIDS, extension of the concept of human rights; complex interchange between world regions and many more.

Cultural identity is questioned and the 'crisis of identity is felt when the cultures go across and intersect national frontiers, and when people are dispersed forever or for certain time from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their tradition. They bear upon the poised culture the traces of the particular culture, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. Hall gives the name "culture of hybridity" to such emerging culture ("The Question" 274). They have irrevocably been translated in Rushdie's words as "bearing across" (17). The feeling of alienation necessarily haunts them. The newly emergent identity never gives them the sense of unity within. The identity as such is forever questioned and this 'crisis' remains at the heart of any form of expression. Most of the contemporary writers, most notably V.S. Naipaul, express the same nostalgia for the root from the junctures of cultural crisis. They think themselves as 'culturally exiled' and they continuously try to rejoin themselves with the root especially in their writing, and it has been a source for their creativity.

Identity and Its Formation

Identity is a discourse of culture. It is an acquisition out of power exercise. The powerful West continues the profoundly sexist and racist legacy of their predecessors. A large number of people have been culturally degraded and politically oppressed. Discourse produces identity through supplying and enforcing a regulatory principle. Identity, in other word, is a subject in the process of being produced. Always being in the process of evolution, identity is never fully constituted.

Name, though an identity marker, is not a proper name but a social category. Hence a signifier that is capable of being interpreted in a number of divergent and conflicting ways. Disciplinary discourse does not unilaterally constitute a subject. The fixed subject becomes the place and occasion for a further making. Judith Butler, a cultural critic, writes: “A subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject. It may be that this dependency of the coherence of the subject on repetition constitutes the incoherence, the incomplete character of the subject” (242).

The repetition and reiteration becomes the non-place of supervision. In this way, the subject gets established in the symbolic. But this establishment does not get permanence. Identity transforms from one category to another but the transformation is not a finished project. Though an identity is formulated, there is a plurality of resistances. They can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. The discourse produces the possibility of its own subversions. These subversions are unanticipated effects of symbolic interpretation. Power not only consists of the reiterated elaboration of norms but power is productive, multiple, proliferative and conflictual. Power plays direct role in

forming and reforming identity. Identity is not a transparent and unproblematic as we think. Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, it should be thought as a production which is never complete. Identity is always constituted within representation.

The disciplinary apparatus of the state operate through the totalizing production of individuals. This totalization of the individuals extends the jurisdiction of the state by transforming individuals into subject of state. It is remaking of subjectivity beyond the shackles of the juridical law. Judith Butler says “Identity politics is produced by a state which can only allocate recognition and rights to subjects totalized by the particularities that constitutes their plaintiff status” (242).

By inventing negative stereotypes, especially the West practices identity politics upon the East. The texts written during the colonial period showed the natives as heathen, demonic, exotic, barbarian and feminine. It was white man’s burden to uplift the uncivilized natives. In order to provide pious justification to their oppression the colonizer’s invented certain identity markers to denote the so-called inferior and ‘other’. Identity politics is not so simple to understand. Directly and indirectly, it is related with power.

Colonial writing is noted for revealing the ways in which that world system could represent the degradation of other human beings as natural, an innate part of their degenerate or barbarian state. The blacks yellow, brown and red were represented as less human, less civilized, as child or savage or heedless mass. They were depicted as inferior only because they were different from the whites. When imperialism was at its zenith, the writers cherished the idea of white superiority. They maintained and celebrated the

dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’. They represented the ‘whites’ as the civilizer, of the world and apostle, of light and the ‘blacks’ as degenerate, barbaric and in need of European masters to civilize and to uplift them out of their filthy ditch. Elleke Boehmer, in her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, writes: “Stereotypes of the other as indolent maligners shirkers, good for nothings, layabouts, degenerate versions of the pastoral idler, were the stock-in-trade of colonialist writing. In contrast, the white man represented himself as the archetypal worker and provident profit-maker” (38).

An interesting issue that really draws the attention of the postcolonial critics is the exclusion of the indigenous people. If any role is given, that is always a negative one laden with stereotypes and injurious terms. Such kind of strategy is governed and guided with by the ethos of identity politics.

The hegemonic culture mobilizes the classic syndromes of purity and danger and acts out a kind of defense of the boundaries of the primary group against this threat perceived to be inherent in the other’s very existence. Group loathing in the form of modern racism is a political programme. Negative stereotypes are developed out of racial hatred. Stereotypes are imaginary entities. No individual mind is able to intuit it concretely. Stereotype is the place of an illicit surplus of meaning. Stereotype is the abstraction by virtue of which our individuality is allegorized and turned into an abusive illustration of something else, something not concrete and non individual. In this regard Fredric Jameson says:

For group loathing the group must be abstracted or fantasized, on the basis of discrete individual contacts and experiences which can never be generalized in anything but abusive fashion. The relations between groups

are always stereotypical in so far as they must always involve collective abstractions of the other group, no matter how sanitized, no matter how liberally censored and imbued with respect. (“On Cultural” 274)

Loathing and envy are very precisely the affective expressions of the relations of groups to one another. So group loathing is also nothing more than a form of identity politics.

As a conclusion, what we can confidently say is, in reality there is no identity only identification, either with the institution itself or with other subjects by the intermediary of the institution. Identity is only the ideal goal in the process of identification. Identity is an imaginary referent.

Diaspora

The concept of diaspora goes back to human history. The term was initially used by the ancient Greeks to describe their spreading all over the then known world. But, the term traditionally refers to Jewish community. In this context, diaspora refers to the Jews who were scattered after Babylonian captivity and in the modern period to Jews living outside Palestine and latterly Israel. For them the concept of diaspora implies a traumatic exile from historical homelands and dispersal throughout many lands. They try to create cultural form of their own. The concept of forming own culture in an alien land is a special feature of diaspora.

Irrespective of its traditional meaning, in recent times the term is associated with colonial experience. When we examine Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, they believe diaspora can't be separated from colonialism, as it was this historical condition that led to the displacement of people across the world. Ashcroft et al. argue “Colonialism itself is

a diasporic movement” (Ashcroft, 69). Under colonialism the meaning of diaspora has been extended to cover a range of different cultural and ethnic groups held together by shared cultural or religious commitments and having some sense of ‘exile’ from a place or state of origin.

Within cultural studies, the term is used to describe the dynamic network of communities without the stabilizing allusion to an original homeland or essential identity. Diaspora has been used in the studies of race and ethnicity to describe a range of cultural affiliation connecting the groups dispersed voluntarily or involuntarily across national borders.

The term with the transformation of time has also been extended now to include the descendants of diasporic movements generated by colonialism, which have developed their own distinctive cultures, which both preserve and often extend and develop their root cultures. Observing diaspora from this standpoint the critic Thomas Blom Hansen views diaspora in these terms: “The term ‘diaspora’ not only transmits a certain sense of shared destiny and predicament, but also an inherent will to preservation and celebration of the ancestral culture and equally inherent impulse toward forging and maintaining link with the ‘old country’” (Hansen 12).

To live in diaspora is to experience the trauma of exile, migration, displacement, rootlessness and the life in a minority group haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back. Rushdie, in this regard, says, “I have been in a minority group all my life – a member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay, then Mohajir – migrant – family in Pakistan and now as a British Asian...creating an ‘Imaginary Homeland’ and willing to admit, though imaginatively, that s/he belongs to it” (Rushdie 4).

Displacement

The idea of displacement is a very complex experience of colonized people. A large population of colonized people has been physically alienated through forced migration, slavery or indenture. A sense of displacement and a sense of lacking fitness between language and place may be experienced by those who speak English as a second language.

Displacement can be defined as erosion resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or voluntary removal for indentured labour. A supposedly superior racial or cultural model may oppress the indigenous personality and culture consciously or unconsciously. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of postcolonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two. Displacement produces the alienation of vision and the crisis of self-image. Social, linguistic and cultural alienation results from such oppressive form of colonization such as slavery and conquest.

Normally, displacement is substituted by dislocation. Dislocation is the occasion that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. Dislocation may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement. It is a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to unknown location. Dislocation is also an experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial home to the colonial margin. Because of colonial practices, those people need to be reinvented in language, in narrative and in myth.

The experience of dislocation indeed becomes the mother of invention. The disruptive and disorienting experience of dislocation becomes a primary influence on the regenerative energies in the postcolonial culture. The writers of *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* write: “Diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation and regeneration” (74).

The concept of dislocation is similar to the concept of exile which signifies the separation and distancing from either a literary homeland or from a culture and ethnic origin. Exile implies involuntary constraint, expatriation implies a voluntary act or state.

The situation of a diaspora is a problematic one. Where should the exiled or expatriated ones be located? In the place of birth, in the displaced cultural community into which the person is born? Or in the nation-state in which diasporic community is located? Exile was produced by colonialism as pressure was exerted on many colonized people to exile themselves from their own culture, language and tradition. The production of this ‘in between’ class, white but not quite was often a deliberate feature of colonial practice. It is a consequence of cultural onslaught resulted by colonialism.

Representation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines representation primarily as ‘presence’ or ‘appearance’. Representation can be clear images material reproduction and also can be performances. It can also be defined as the act of placing or stating facts in order to influence or affect the action of others. So, the term, representation has a semiotic meaning in which something is ‘standing for’ something else. But presently representation is a much debated topic not only in postcolonial discourse but in the larger cultural arena, too.

Representation, in cultural studies, focuses on how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us. Indeed, cultural studies can be understood as the study of culture as signifying practices of representation.

For cultural critic, Chris Brooker, representation plays a key role in the formation of cultural identities. Representation for him is “bound up with the object of study (texts, events, social processes), the preferred conceptual armature (discourse, ideology, institution, economy) and the methods of investigation which map out these changing fields” (Brooker 192). Representation is thus verbal formations, which are the ‘ideological products’ or ‘cultural constructs’. So, they are produced, enacted, and understood in special social context.

In contemporary postcolonial theory, ‘representation’ is closely related with Foucauldian concept of ‘discourse as representation’. He takes discourse as inseparable from power. For Foucault ‘discourse’ unites both language and practice and refers to the production of knowledge through language which gives meaning to material objects and social practice.

Edward Said in *Orientalism*, following Foucault’s point, argues that ‘images’ and ‘stereotypes’ about the east are formed by western discourses aimed at governing and controlling the Orient. Said’s *Orientalism* explores how the east (the orient) is created through western discursive practices. Orient can, however, be known by the dominant discourse of the west thus assimilated in practices pronounced as inferior or as ‘the other’ as it does not come up to these representation. Representation then can never really be natural depiction of the orient. Instead, it is constructed.

Orientalism is a set of western discourses of power, which have constructed on Orient. According to Said “Orientalism is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient but a created body of theory and practice with considerable material investment for generations” (Said 6). He further adds that Orientalism is the system of representation bringing the Orient into the western learning and the relationship between Occident and Orient is that of complex hegemony.

Hybridity

The term ‘hybridity’ is generally used in horticulture referring to third species produced by mixing or grafting plants of different species. But understood within the domain of postcolonial discourse, hybridity is the result of the bringing together of people and their cultures from different parts of the world. The term is related to the traumatic colonial experience. Hybridity, as defined in Bill Ashcroft’s Gareth Griffith’s and Helen Tiffin’s book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, is “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft 118). In cultural theory these meanings have been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities.

Once the colonial settlers arrive in alien land they feel the necessity of establishing new identity since they are displaced from their root culture. In a colonial society there emerged a binary relationship between the peoples of two cultures. It is the ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden and meaning of cultures, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity and its importance. Recently within the domain of cultural studies the term has also been associated with the analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Hybridization, for Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin, takes many forms: “Linguistic, cultural, political, racial etc. Linguistic examples include ‘Pidgin’ and ‘Creole’ languages” (Ashcroft 118). The term hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of ‘ambivalence’. For him ‘ambivalence’ is the “complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer” (Ashcroft12).

. Hybridity, Bhaba argues, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant colonized cultures. Although it borrows from these both cultures, Bhaba believes hybridity is a position in which hybridized do not belong clearly to the world of either colonizer or the colonized. They are rendered as ‘other’ from both the culture. So, hybridity becomes a cultural mix and creates a new form of identity.

Hybrid culture exists also in colonial society where people occupy an in-between space by the ‘mimicry’ of the colonizer. European colonialism has left its cultural mark across the globe and the impact of ‘external’ culture influences on once colonized society in more complex way than the simple cultural imperialism. In the post imperial era, neither the colonizing or colonized ‘culture’, ‘race’, ‘language’ can remain in ‘pure’ form. At the same time, they cannot be separated from each other. This ambivalent situation gives rise to hybridity.

Alienation

Alienation is the position of estrangement of individuals from the society or from the culture. It is the state of being isolated in the newly located land. It is the cultural and social estrangement under which the individuals feel a loss of the cultural belonging. The situation of dislocation and displacement in the alien cultural ground gives the sense of being alienated. It is the feeling of being far away from the original ground of culture and feeling insecure and lonely in the foreign culture and society. Individual feels powerless, meaningless in the unknown location.

Thus, alienation is the negative results of migrating to the unknown territory. It is inextricably synonymous with its akin terms: displacement, dislocation, diaspora and exile. Most of the critic now readily accept that all these terms are related to homelessness. An individual, who has been abandoned by original society and culture, is a 'homeless' man, who is alienated and haunted by the root and culture. People often realize the importance of cultural loss when they are displaced, dislocated and alienated. The displacement and dislocation of the individual give the sense of alienation. Diaspora does the same because the diasporic subject also feels the same loss of culture and loss of dignity which ultimately makes the individual 'homeless' creature.

The contemporary societies have the history of alienation in the full volume. Individuals after moving to the unknown territory, their high expectation does not meet reality. Instead they have to undergo the experience of discrimination in the newly migrated land. They feel inferior and isolated which results into angst because of the loss of one's values. The process of mimicking the cultures of foreign land makes an individual belonging to nowhere, which gives the feeling of estrangement to the

individuals. The individual is not fully accepted and is not given to entertain fully in the alien land and culture. The individual experiences a sense of loss in the unknown location, which paved the way for the formation of frustration in the mind of the individual. Alienation is the state whereby individual experience gets stultified in the alien culture and society. The rapidly increasing interest in globalization reflects the changing organization of worldwide social relations. However, there underlies the discrimination in the very process of globalization. The situations of Third World's people or non-westerners are the very example who are pathetic in the alien land. The people from these zones face uneasiness in the western culture and society. The alien culture and people do not readily accept the people from other than the western culture.

Thus, alienation is the very process of being isolated from the culture and society in the alien land and also from the indigenous culture and people. Desertion and isolation surrounds the individual in the unknown land and culture. It becomes the fate of individual to live the life of solitariness and isolation in the alien culture, with the sense of alienation and discrimination. The nostalgia of roots haunts the individual in the alien land and culture as she/he gets alienated in the unknown society and culture.

Dislocation

Modern society has witnessed a number of internal ruptures and fragmentation in cultures. Dislocation, as a phenomenon, is the consequence of willing or unwilling movement from known to unknown location. The very term dislocation is defined in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* in this way:

A term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. The

phenomenon may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location. The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those, who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth. (Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin 73)

Diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation and regeneration. Dislocation, in a different sense, is also a feature of all invaded colonies where indigenous or original cultures are often dislocated, if not annihilated. At best, they are metaphorically placed into a hierarchy. This hierarchy ignores its institutions and values in favour of the values and practices of the colonizing culture.

Dislocation can also be extended further to include the psychological and personal dislocation resulting from cultural denigration as well as voluntarily chosen status. Dislocation is a structure which is characterized by never ending process as the societies have no single articulating or organizing principle, rather it is constantly being dislocated by force outside it.

The discussion of the above mentioned terms provides the platform on which the thorough analysis of the text will be made in the coming chapter. These terms have provided the theoretical background for the textual analysis of the novel. The terms helps

the theorize the condition of the Indian Americans fighting tirelessly for fixed identity in the new environment and the culture.

III. A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

General Outline of the Novel

In her novel *The Mistress of Spices*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni creates a woman who heals with spices, a woman who has undergone mystical transformation and is able to work healing magic through her ability to communicate with both her patients and the spices she uses to heal them. Once fully initiated in a rite of fire, the now immortal Tilo – in the gnarled and arthritic body of an old woman – travels through time to present day Oakland, California, where she opens a spice shop from which she administers spices as curatives to her customers. Living and working in a small storefront, Tilo's healing powers are contingent on her absolute allegiance to her craft and the spices. Tilo can see into people's hearts and minds, but it is a mistress' duty to keep herself at a distance. She is enjoined by her teachers never to leave the physical boundaries of the shop and never to become involved with her patient's lives beyond it.

Little by little, curiosity, connection with the patients, and loneliness drive Tilo to transgress the boundaries and to walk among the community, where she sees the contexts in which her patients live and meets their families. Her inability to resist involving herself in the lives of her customers, however, brings her into conflict with the “old one”, her teacher and mentor, who watches her over her from afar. Her romantic pursuit of a handsome stranger – an even greater offence – threatens not only the course of true love but her very existence. Eventually she falls in love. She is forced to choose between the supernatural life of an immortal and the vicissitudes of modern life. She is faced with the choice of being an ageless healer (for that is part of her gift; she will always be beautiful as long as she stays within the confines of the spice shop and her calling) or an aging

mortal, she chooses life with a newfound lover and is forever cut off from the spices' communion and power. Indeed, her beauty fades, but she has become human.

Cultural Identity and Expression: Question of Belonging

The expression of culture is inextricably bound up with the notion of identity. People express their identity; they question it if they find the difficulty of belonging; they even seek their relation to the source culture; and thereby try to establish their identity. Identity as such has been a topical issue in the study of culture, and the scholars like Kobena Mercer say that the concept of identity is in Crisis (109). Almost everywhere people say that this crisis is caused by Globalization, a concept responsible for the experience of migrancy, altering relations between Western and other cultures and the sense of identity of the individuals whose lives have taken them across the borders between so-called the first world, the second worlds, and the third worlds, or across in effect, pre-modern and postmodern societies. The globalization in its long run has caused the interfusing of identities, which can be termed as "the hybridity of cultural identities". This notion of hybridity suggests that it has the relation to racial and 'ethnic' identities. Moreover, these identities are not pure but are the product of mixing, fusion, and creolization, following the mixing and movements of cultures. Specifically from the slave trade to mass media, there lies the great shape of modern identities. The result is the fusion or hybridity of identities, which cannot be taken as the product of 'assimilation' of one culture or cultural tradition by another, but the production of something new. This new notion of identity is equated with the studies of the hybridity of cultural identity that are closely allied to accounts of Diaspora identities.

Diaspora is a term that was initially used to refer to the dispersal of Jewish people across the globe, but is now regularly used to describe black and other Diaspora. These identities are shaped by this sense of having been, in Salman Rushdie's phrase 'borne across the world'; of being in but not entirely of the west (17). A number of Anglo American critics now agree that V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and some prominent black writers find a unique and a fertile place from where they can write about their anguish toward the west as well as they can express a haunting search for their true cultural identity. They, therefore, seek their belonging and write about that. Their writings are full of cultural expression relying on the fact that the notion of cultural identity in fact is problematic and they struggle to adjust as well as assimilate with the new notions of identities by both aspects: failure and success. In this context Boehmer's views seem more accurate. She finds that colonial writers always lacked their concrete identity. They belonged neither to their own homes nor in their adopted homes. She adds:

In short, colonial writers, postcolonial between diametrically different cultural worlds, were able to borrow from several traditions, yet belonged to no one. In the face of their uneasy marginality or supplementarity, they would turn in time to what might be called their own experience of environment, migration, or invasion, as the case might be – to find a position for self-reconstruction. (Boehmer 116)

It becomes clear that the identities are fluid, and are both consciously and unconsciously delimited. Any numbers of factors are likely to be under negotiation in either cases; whether of religion, nation, language, political ideology or cultural expression. One example can be Islam; a religion faith that shapes the social, economic and political

character of entire regimes and can reach into the detailed social and sexual lives of its adherents.

The reality should expose the fact that developments in theory have accompanied the general social processes indicated above and have played their part in underlying, and providing a vocabulary for, a changing awareness of many subtleties of identity and the allied affirmation of a given identity in relation to its supposed binary opposite. Stuart Hall observed the scene with the people creating their new but both constructed and emergent subject. Hall believes that cultural identity exists only in the representation. He argues:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead of, identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the terms 'cultural identity' lays claim. ("Cultural Identity" 110)

His idea is that whoever "write and speak from a particular place and time, from history and a culture which is specific", get their 'I' "enunciated" (110). He, nevertheless, agrees to the point that, cultural identity is defined in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (110-111). So, our cultural identities, "...reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous

frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting division and vicissitudes of our actual history” (111).

This is, in fact, true to ‘Caribbeanness’ of the people whose cultural identity played a critical role in the entire post colonial struggle which have so profoundly reshaped their world, “It continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized people. In post colonial societies, the rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon once called a ‘passionate research’” (111).

Hall’s idea of identity is that it has no fixed archeology but has become a “retelling of the past” (112). The retelling creates crucial images that offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation which is the history of all enforced Diaspora. The African past of Caribbean people lies in the veil as they have their “Africa as the name of the missing term”, creating a great aporia. Hall argues:

No one who looks at these textural images, now in the light of the history of transportation, slavery and migration, can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the loss of identity, which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are more set in place. (112)

Since their history intervenes, the idea of ‘difference’ plays a vital role to define themselves as “what we really are” (112). This traumatic condition of identity can be understood as the “character of the colonial experience.” Hall unfurls it thus, “The inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms ... they produce without horizon,

colourless, stateless, rootless a race of angles. Nevertheless this idea of otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of cultural identity” (113).

Hall, after all, comes to conclude the fact that cultural identity “is not fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture” (113). But it cannot be a mere phantasm either, as he says:

It is something – not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories – and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always already ‘after the break’. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification of suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin. (113)

Hall’s emphasis quoted above throws a light to the spectrum of the dynamics of cultural identity. His idea that cultural identity is “always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” can be taken as his great contribution to the thinking that there is the relation existing between cultural identity and expression. The representation of identities themselves is expressed through writings. V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe and a number of writers come in the name concern. They identify the “Difference” (114). Hall posits the view that Caribbean people have neither their earlier

identity (i.e. just an illusion) nor a new European identity (i.e. imposed upon them) but their unique doubleness and the search for it results in “the shock of the ‘doubleness’ of similarity and difference” (114). So, Hall finds the term, cultural identity, unstable with the play of difference. The play of the presence and the absence of cultural identity can never be settled. Hall ultimately comes to the concept of “New World” for the people like that of Caribbeans, which is itself the beginning of Diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and of difference, “It is because this New World is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plentitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’, to be once again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” (120).

This is the case of many postcolonial subjects in the world. They have been trying to recreate themselves to establish their identity through varying ways of expression, which is not possible. They are narrating the stories of their self-torture and self-actualization in the world of cultural confusions.

The Motif of a Journey in *The Mistress of Spices*

The narrative in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* can be divided into four parts, parallel to the names the eponymous Mistress takes. The passage between each of them is marked by a journey the narrator and the main protagonist of the novel has to undertake. First the reader is presented with a vision of Nayan Tara's childhood spent in a small village in India. As an unwanted girl child Nayan Tara avoids death at birth, but is compelled to lead a life of a neglected, unloved one in the patriarchal society. She escapes the dreary existence owing to the gift of foretelling the future, changing bad luck and reversing ill omens. She becomes a powerful sorceress, but her talents bring also destruction to her people and to her old self – her wish for change, her hurt feelings and latent grievances, “the calling thought” (17) are detected by pirates who raid her village and take her along as a guiding star. With her new identity as the queen of pirates she is given a new name: Bhagyawat, Bringer of Luck (19), or, elsewhere, bringer of death (22). The old pain is buried within her and she still does not realize what she longs for. She suspects it might be death, or another life, one would choose for herself.

Sea serpents, mysterious creatures who love her, save her from her pirate-self and bring her to the island where she will learn the art of spices and become the Mistress. After a long training she is ready to fulfill her new fate. Again she takes a new name, but this time chosen by herself: Tilottama, after sesame seed, “spice of nourishment” (5), the spice which “restores luster when one has lost interest in life” (42), “restorer of health and hope”(42). She is also warned by the first mother, her teacher and gurani on the magical island, that Tilottama was the name of the most beautiful dancer in Indra's court; when she was appointed the chief dancer, she was required to give up love to man for the dance (43), so Tilo is warned to commit all her passion for the herbs and spices and

restrain from any bonds with men. Magically she is transported to a small spice shop in Oakland, California, and as magically her body takes shape of an old woman. Now she is ready to fulfill secret desires of the customers who come to her shop in search of spices, but also in search of an 'ancient' knowledge.

One of them is Raven (this being a chosen name, too), Native American, who will become Tilo's forbidden lover. The story regarding Raven is that he has been uprooted from his native culture and of a painful comeback to it. Raven's spell proves to be more powerful than that of the spices; they become lovers and thanks to the love. Tilo escapes her fate of being consumed by Shampati's fire which is the punishment for the disobedient mistresses. They both survive an earthquake which Tilo holds herself responsible for and they start a new life. With this life the protagonist requires a new name. She describes the needed name to Raven: "one that spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now" (316). Raven chooses it to be Maya, "illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day" (317). In the last section, dealing with Raven and Tilo that knits together the many themes that run as separate stands throughout the book. It also vividly illustrates many of the complex conflicts that multi-ethnic groups experience in this country. Raven's mother had concealed from him his background, his ancestry that made him ashamed of her. He also underwent a crisis when he took to drinks and drugs; but resurrected himself from the ashes of his old identity. It is at this moment that Tilo helps him and is in turned helped by him. In a truly American fashion the novel ends with Raven and Maya approaching the car in which they will travel toward the new, American destiny. In this way Divakaruni succeeds in presenting to us a balanced picture of the world of immigrants in America.

The novel basically makes us acquainted with immigrant stories, most of them displaying shattered hopes and disillusionment with the new country. The Mistress of Spices is the one who can aid those who need it: “I will split once again tonight ‘kalo jire’ seeds for all who have suffered from America All night ... I will whisper into air purifying prayers for the maimed, for each lost limb, each crushed tongue. Each silenced heart” (173).

Given the mysteriousness of the tale, the power of the eponymous mistress, one may feel entitled to ask the question if *The Mistress of Spices* is merely an Orientalist fantasy, acting out a set of stereotypical renderings of India as an unchanging, eternal, ancient land of magic, inscrutable customs, abundant sensuality. Definitely all these elements appear in the novel, combined with the stereotypical presentation of a Native American who is pictured as the possessor of the ‘ancient’ knowledge of land of his ancestors. Indeed, being a successful businessman who remains in touch with his ‘roots’ for whom freedom is the most vital value, he seems to represent America, his native land, just as Tilo stands for India with all its sensuality and inscrutability. These figures act as the epitomes for their respective countries of birth, now coming to contact, and reluctantly but inevitably, falling in love with each other.

If they are to represent their countries, or their “cultures”, then the task seems impossible, since it is based on an assumption as to the relative homogeneity of cultural traits, but also as to the readability of these signs erected here and there. As Meenakshi Mukherjee claims:

The Mistress of Spices ... contains the kind of exotic colours to evoke the country that might have embarrassed an Indian writer....In this tale of a

mysterious eastern woman, the distinctly 'Indian' flavour of the title is intensified by naming the sections 'Turmeric', 'Red Chilli', 'Peppercorn', 'Lotus Root' and ending, for good measure, with a climatic chapter called 'Maya', in case the seasonings have not been sufficiently cooked. For those in India, spices are taken-for-granted ingredients of daily cooking and do not carry any cultural connotations. (200)

The narrator reminisces the days she enjoyed the fame and affluence of the sorceress:

People traveled so I could change their luck with a touch of my hand. They brought me gifts...so lavish that the villagers talked about them for days. I sat on gold-woven cushions and ate from silver plates studded with precious stones...I cured the daughter of the potentate, foretold the death of a tyrant, drew patterns on the ground to keep the good winds blowing for merchant sailors. (8)

The novel also relates indirectly to the Oriental tales about the impenetrable cruelty of the tyrants: "When I looked at them, grown men trembled and threw themselves at my feet, and that too seemed easy and right" (8).

One can admire the stereotypical Indian seriousness and beauty when Tilo describes her magically transformed new, young body: "Forehead flawless like a new opened shapla leaf, nose tipped like the til flower. Mouth curved as the bow of Madan, god of love, lips colour of – there are no other words for this – crushed red chillies" (279) and Kama Sutra style sexuality, when the spices tell Tilo how to make love to her sweetheart, Raven: "Give and take back, teasing. In the same way as the great courtesans

used to do in the courts of Indra, the god king. Let him be discovered of the land you are, mountain and lake and cityscape. Let him carve out roads where none went before” 288).

Raven talks about the authenticity, being a real Indian, which for him is embodied by Tilo: the two of them discuss young women, named by Tilo as “bougainvillea girls”, Indian Americans, beautiful and self-assured, for whom India is a label attached to exotic food or clothes. Raven remarks: “You’re authentic in a way they’ll never be” to which Tilo thinks, “Authentic, A curious word to use. ‘What do you mean, authentic?’” she asks, and he answers, “You know, real, Real Indian” (255). The discussion of the meaning of authenticity could probably go on, since the two do not agree on the case. Tilo muses upon the difference in their perception of the genuineness of being an Indian and directs the thoughts to Raven: “Raven, despite their fizzy laughter, their lipstick and lace, the bougainvillea girls are in their way as Indian as I. And who is to say which of us is more real” (256). She is “about to tell him this” (256), but she does not, because she is distracted by the customers. Raven, thus, is not allowed to acknowledge the rift, the split that seems to be an inherent feature of the ‘realness’ that introduces divisions between the qualities attached to the term. Curiously enough, such interruptions reappear when Raven remarks upon the Indian culture, calling it “less authentic” (245) in comparison to his American one. On Raven’s statement Tilo does nothing again: “I let it pass. Another time, Raven, I think we will discuss this” (246). It seems that the time is never right for examining the matter of “authenticity” and its meaning. Even during the night the couple spends together and which seems at the same time to be the last night they have, Tilo does not let Raven know she might be troubled by the perception of her Indianness. He calls her his “tropical blossom” and “mysterious Indian beauty” (290), to which she

answers again only in her thoughts, calling him, interestingly enough, “American”: “You have loved me for the colour of my skin, the accent of my speaking, the quaintness of my customs which promised you the magic you no longer found in the women of your own land. In your yearning you have made me into that which I not” (290). The reader will never know what is that Tilo “really” is, since there are always other things occupying her. She answers Raven only in the thoughts, without confronting him, allowing the remarks to pass without her commentary. Her doubts go unnoticed by Raven, even if the reader is made aware that she could have her say.

If the couples are epitomes of their respective countries or cultures, then the relationship between them has complicated future ahead. It may be a relation based on love, but definitely not upon good communication and understanding. Tilo understands Raven’s misconceptions and is sympathetic: “I do not blame you too much. Perhaps I have done the same with you” (290), she wonders. The lack of understanding, then, and fantasies replacing real exchange of information are presented as inevitable in the situation of a contact between the representatives of diverse cultures.

The question about considering *The Mistress of Spices*, as an oriental tale, then perhaps the answer is equivocal. The strength of Orientalism (which was lucidly argued by Edward Said) as a cultural formation and the mode of imagining and writing about the Orient depended partially upon its ability to incorporate diverse, often contradictory discourse. Behdad reminds us of the circulatory way in which Orientalism works, and asserts:

Orientalism is not divided into accepted discourses of domination and excluded discourses of opposition. Rather, such a discourse of power

makes allowance for a circular system of exchange between stabilizing strategies and disorienting elements that can produce variant effects Diffused and fluid as its formation is, Orientalism depends for its economy on the capacity to bring into contact a plurality of subject and ideological positions. (17)

The subversive elements in Divakaruni's novel are inscribed within the more encompassing framework of an Oriental fantasy; the disrupting elements may appear and function in a novel written from an unexpected ideological position, by a post-colonial, Indian America writer. Perhaps what is needed here to explain this curious propensity is withdrawal from the category of difference and move towards hybridity. Salman Rushdie attacks the purist who supposedly know how to draw clear border between the races or cultures and states:

Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history. Perhaps we all are, black and brown and white, leaking into one another, as a character of mine once said, like flavours when you cook. ("Good Faith" 394, in Friedman 84).

The image of flavours pervasive here as well as in Divakaruni's novel bears the mark of the "melting pot" metaphor, compromised by multiculturalism and then in turn replaced by hybridity. What both Tilo and Raven could benefit from is the lesson of reclaiming the label of the hybrid for themselves, and calling themselves the "bastard children of history." The step they are reluctant to take is the one towards recognition of

the hybrid elements in them. Perhaps that is what Tilo cannot admit, what she refrains from telling Raven. For her, the question of being hybrid remains unspeakable. She prefers to stick to the absolute categories of identity, believing it will work somehow, trusting it is love that makes the world go round.

Being unable to state her version of what authenticity means, Tilo not only plays the role of a submissive (and mysterious) Oriental but also the part of an acquiescing woman. What can one call her identity, then? The very term, as Susan Stanford Friedman reminds us, is equivocal:

The term identity has a double and contradictory resonance. On the one hand, identity means sameness, as in the word identical, and involves the perception of common qualities This requires the foregrounding of one aspect of identity and the backgrounding of others in an emphasis on what is shared with others in that group. On the other hand, identity requires a perception of difference from others in order for the recognition of sameness to come into play None of these categories, of course, is fixed in a priori fashion; all are produced in history and undergo change.

(75)

Friedman here points to the performatory quality of identity, stressing its fluidity and historical determinacy. When Tilo is angry with Raven for attributing her with the typical Indian traits, she performs one side to her identity. When, however, she chooses otherwise, she can play upon the stereotypes and act as a representative for her country: when she presents the mailwoman with a small gift, she hands it to her with the words “From my country. A gift” (268). The exchange of gifts (a mock version of Kula

ceremony) is completed when the woman gives Tilo a pack of chewing gum, "Something from America, you know, for your journey" (268). One might wonder whether Tilo is aware of the fact that in a situation like the one mentioned above she is required to take the role of a cultural interpreter, of a representative who is required to translate her culture to the world she is visiting. If the final answer is love will conquer all, then perhaps the conscious performance of her identity remains in the sphere of wishful thinking. She not only responds with silence when it comes to a declaration about her individuality, but also she is in a position of an ignorant person herself, the one who cannot read the cultural signs: she does not recognize the gift at first, but then she learns to appreciate its "generous sweetness" which gives her "the courage" (269). She also mistakes Raven for the mainstream American, takes him to represent "the" American, typical and integrated, only to learn his story of the quest for his "roots", his "people". Still, it is reversal of the old categories of difference. She learns her lesson only skin-deep. She does not speak up to challenge Raven's vision of what it means to be a real Indian. She cannot call herself "the bastard child of history".

The present she got from the mailwoman is intended for the journey Tilo is going to undertake, the journey back through Shampati's fire, which will supposedly destroy her in an act of revenge for her disobedience and breaking the rules mistresses have to comply with. It turns out that the earthquake becomes the punishment for Tilo, and thanks to the love Raven feels for her, she avoids death, but she is no longer a mistress, now she is an ordinary woman. The last journey, then, proves to be the journey toward her new identity, with a new name.

Identity on the Flux

The situation in which the protagonist sets out on a journey and changes her name is typical for her; she was born as Nayan Tara, then she becomes Bhagyawati when she roams with the pirates. The period of being nameless at island, where she learnt her magic, finishes and she chooses the name Tilottama for herself. When she casts aside her vocation as a mistress of spices and she starts a new life with her lover, she is given a name “Maya”. Each of the names has a double, even contradictory significance, just like each of the new identities she tries.

She must set out, change the place to enter the new identity. Transformation of the outer landscape brings about the conversion of the inner space, but it is not mere different rather, it is an accumulation of some traces and abandonment of others. The change in the protagonist’s identity takes place in violent and liminal circumstances: she is either taken from the land to the sea, she has to go through the fire, or survives an earthquake. She goes out of these trials with a new identity signified by a new name, and often, a new body. Can she be called hybrid then? Friedman characterizes hybridity in relation to the spatial motion and states:

As a discourse of identity, hybridity often depends materially, as well as figuratively, on movement through space, from one part of the globe to another. This migration through space materializes a movement through different cultures that effectively constitutes identity as the product of cultural grafting. Alternatively hybridity sometimes configures identity as the superposition of different cultures in a single space often imagined as a borderland as a site of blending and clashing. (24)

In *The Mistress of Spices* there is the movement from one culture to another and the protagonist travels between places and cultural formations. She is even aware of the stereotypical image of an Indian woman, and she reacts when Raven voices such stereotypes. However, her reaction is – outwardly – silence. She is unwilling, or unable to perform, to present her hybrid identity in a conscious act. There seems to be always something preventing her from acting, some hindrance disabling the realization of her hybridity.

Tilo herself hints at this mysterious quality with which she can only deal employing silence: “I want, I want I whispered. But what I longed for I didn’t know, except that it wasn’t this. Was it death? I seemed possible” (21). She cannot articulate her desire, she becomes mute; just as the reticence is the only answer she can offer when discussing stereotypical cultural traits. Silence becomes even deeper when she tries to verbalize her yearning; she cannot mention it even in her thoughts. If it is death that she wants, it appears as well at other times, as the unmentionable, the frightening and simultaneously the tempting. It is the indispensable condition for the transformation of the identity to take place. When the protagonist acquires a new body through the magic of the spices, she owes the transformation to makaradwaj, “the conqueror of time” (261). The change is hazardous: “Makaradwaj most potent of the changing spices must be handled with most respect. To do otherwise can bring madness, or death” (262). What she longs for may be lethal: this is the aspect of the change she is afraid of. Unlike the transformation of her body under the magic of Makaradwaj, other variations in her identity are irreversible, and because of that they are linked to death.

Tilo cannot claim the label of the hybrid for herself, because she perceives the changes in her identity as the moments of death, which separate her subsequent lives. When she whispers that she wants, without mentioning the object of her longing, the lacking element is the ultimate change in her life, and when it comes, it is always connected with the movement through space, with travel. When the protagonist tries to describe her craving she can only characterize it negatively: “What is longed for I didn’t know, except it wasn’t this” (21). The desired is deferred and infinitum. Behdad argues:

Desire always lies where the subject is not, in a beyond that, once achieved, points to another beyond in a chain of signifiers that can end only in death. For this reason, the desired Orient is essentially identified as death by the subject It is death that protects and transmits the subject’s journey through the ‘defiles’ of signifiers, and it is precisely this primordial absence that motivates the subject’s quest for Oriental paradise, the search for a beyond that always lies somewhere he is not. (29)

Tilo plays the role of an Orientalist traveler, though she reverses the direction in which such a person usually moves and she is a kind of a “drag” traveler, being an Indian and a woman, playing with stereotypes of an Oriental promiscuous beauty, mysterious and magical. She claims some of the power the colonial traveler enjoyed, the power of description. She explicates what she sees and she gives an account of the people she meets, the “natives”. She is deceived by her power just like a colonial traveler: she describes Raven as her “American”, attributing him with the traits she takes to be representative only to find out that she treated him in the same way as he dealt with her. The post-colonial comedy of manners is acted for instance in the scene when the lovers

present their “true” names. Raven speaks first: “He hesitates, then says, ‘My name is Raven.’ 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” (163). She calls him “her” American, indicating by such a title his nationality understood, a label, hence quite a homogenous, readable and understandable quality, but also pointing to the fact that she in a sense created him, it is “her” perception of him that enables her to use this curious title. The fact the he is a Native American is a gesture intended perhaps to him essentially American, the possessor of the “truth” of his land and his “culture”.

However, the remarks following Raven’s presentation of his “true name” play the same essentializing and stereotypical tune: “But it is beautiful, I say, tasting the long wing beat sound of it in my mouth, smell of hot sky rising and falling, dark wook in evening, bright eye, tail feather formed charcoal and smoke. And right for you” (163). Apart from the fact that this is the image of a Native American that could fit within the frame of any Wild west movie or James Fenimore Cooper novels, this fragment emphasizes the element of the mutual negotiation of identity, the fact that Tilo construct her version of the identity of her American referring to the image taken from earlier texts. What would be the figure needed to describe her stance? As Merleau-Ponty claims the relationship between the self and the world is the one based on the mutual engagement and it is impossible to distinguish one from another, because the borderline cannot be drawn, the former is at the same time the latter, “What describes the relation to the ‘world’, then, is not hiatus, an emblem of the dichotomy subject-object, but chiasm, the figure of the double belonging” (Markowsk 375). This figure partly explains the

difficulty Tilo has with recognizing the identity of her American. She projects her version upon him, thus the describing subject and the object of the description become one.

If this can be the figure to describe her relation with the American, how does she describe her own identity? It is not based on the negotiation of various elements, the blending mix of hybrid components. Rather, finished with one identity, she taken on another, or so she tries. She exhibits the “difference” of her culture as an inherent feature of her self. Homi Bhabha reminds us about the performative aspect of such cultural manifestation:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (Friedman 77)

The negotiation mentioned above, as Bhabha points out, acquires the mode of a “restless movement”, a hither and thither, back and forth” (Location 1 in Friedman 77) which is reminiscent of Tilo’s journeys. However, what she lacks to accomplish is the journey back, through Shampati’s fire. She is saved from this kind of punishment and perhaps she is saved from the discovery of her bastard, hybrid self.

The journeys reoccur throughout the novel and are connected with the search for identity as well as with death. If Tilo travels, what is her final destination, if there is any? The last chapter in the novel presents the ultimate change Tilo undergoes; she is no longer a mistress, she takes a new name, Maya and starts a new, American life with Raven. Finally with her newly taken name, unlike all but one which has the name of the

spices as their designations. The exceptions are the last and the first, called “Tilo. The journey the protagonist travels, then, is the one from her Tilo identity towards Maya-self, the journey towards an illusion. Tilo was unable to voice her discontent with Raven’s vision of her being a “true Indian” or the “tropical blossom”, trusting that with love the two of them have it is necessary to use words.

Names as Symbols of Identity

What is in a name? As far as the functional role of a name is concerned, it hardly makes a difference whether we call rose by its own name or by the name of jasmine. Nevertheless, symbolically, it makes all the difference. All names have meanings and that is what makes them meaningful and symbolic in life as well as in literature. Names are symbols of identity as well, because bastards, illegitimate children and slaves had no independent names as such, they were called by the fancies of their masters. Christians have first names or baptismal names, followed by the surnames or ancestral patronymic:

Proper names have an odd and interesting status Our first names are usually given to us with semantic intent, having for our parents some pleasant or hopeful association which we may or may not live up to. Surnames however are generally perceived as arbitrary, whatever descriptive force they may once have had. We don’t expect our neighbour Mr. Shepherd to look after sheep, or mentally associate him with that occupation. If he is a character in a novel, however, pastoral and perhaps biblical associations will inevitably come into play. (36)

A name has two or more parts, viz. first name or surname, middle name, title etc. Surnames indicate the occupation of the bearer (Smith, Tailor), place of habitation

(Lincoln, Washington), appearance (Black, Brown, Short), character (Fox, Goodfellow), or father's name (McDonald, Robertson). Surnames pass on with a family from one generation to another and they are a symbol by which ancestors are kept alive in their descendants. Surnames are received automatically at birth, but first names are received in the capacity of an individual.

However, in real life, names may or may not represent personality traits, after all names are given to persons in their infancy and their potential can not be perceived or recognized by their parents. In the past, clergymen used to decided names of children, whereas nowadays parents have become the deciding authority in this regard. In this way, we find that in real life a child's name can reveal much about the parents. Most of the names relate to the appearance of the child, name of a patron, saint, name of deity, good moral quality which he or she is hoped to attain, or natural world. However, this is not true of all cultures:

In the majority of cases, children are given 'good' likeable, and propitious names. In some cultures (e.g. in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, formerly in China, and sporadically in ancient Greece), however, the children are (or were) sometimes given 'bad' names with meanings like 'ugly', 'disagreeable', or 'crippled'. The purpose of such names, which are called apotropaic names, is to make a child undesirable to demons. (124)

Names are considered to have magical qualities in some superstitious societies and to know the real name of a person is tantamount to have a complete hold on that person. In a fictional work, a name becomes the essence or embodiment of personality. The omniscient writer names the character, fully knowing his actions, thoughts and

destiny. In real life, parents are ignorant about the future development of personality or destiny of their children and this is why names are more a projection of the dreams of the parents rather than a reflection of the child's personality, unless they are names after physical appearances.

In the novel *The Mistress of Spices* the central female character undergoes a voluntary transformation that tracks a physical and psychological search for her stable identity. In each case, this transformation is captured by a name change, as the protagonist adopts multiple identities, each representative of a different stage in the process of adopting a new identity. The chameleon type behaviour is typical for Tilo throughout the novel as she constantly goes to reinvent herself in order to fit whatever situation she currently finds herself in. This adaptation is most easily seen in various names that she uses throughout the novel. The name changes throughout *The Mistress of Spices* also herald the changes in relationships that Tilo experiences as she grows from a traditional village to independent immigrant. All in all she uses four different names as her story progresses, and she ends the novel with the new name Maya.

Similarly Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Jasmine* presents the journey of Jasmine from a remote village in the Punjab to the States. She gets different names in the course of her journey like Jyoti, Jane, Jase or Jasmine goes through many transformations. However each identity seems to signify the death of an earlier self; there is hardly any sense of evolution or growth. When Jasmine moves to California "greedy with wants and reckless from hope" (*Jasmine*, 38) in love with the adventure, risk and transformation through which she redefines herself as an American. Each of her different identities occurs in a different space – India, Florida, New York, Iowa and the final movement

towards the west – as nomadism and identity shifting become linked. Jasmine welcomes movement and change: “I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane: “Adventure, risk, transformation; the frontier is pushing indoor through uncaulked windows” (Jasmine 240).

The thorough analysis of the text clearly proves that Tilo is suffering from the problem of identity crisis in the new land having new culture and setting. She is always on the flux with new names coming in her life indicating how instable she is as far as her identity is concerned.

IV. CONCLUSION

Much of Divakaruni's writing centres around the lives of immigrant women. In the present novel *The Mistress of Spices* she focuses on Tilo who is both liberated and trapped by cultural changes and who is struggling to carve out an identity of her own. She has to decide which parts of her heritage she will keep and which parts she will choose to abandon.

As stated earlier, Tilo keeps on moving in the alien land with new names at different stages of her life. It shows us that she is looking for a stable identity. Owning a spice shop in an Indian community in Oakland, California, she gets involved in the lives of the customers and helps them through abusive husbands, racism, generational conflicts, and drug abuse. Tilo provides spices not only for cooking but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants experience. Her life in American city throws light on the struggles of immigrant women to find themselves in a New World.

In the present world, culture has become a defining principle of people. Because of migration, mass media and other elements most notably globalization, cultural shapes have been fading away. People are facing the problem of cultural identity and belonging, and as a result, they need its expression. Cultural values have been transferred to other cultural groups and the cultural loss appears to be a dominant problem among people. People have been alienated and dislocated, and that sense always haunts them. Culture, thus, finds a powerful expression in the writings of immigrant writers. This, according to Hall, is caused by the decline of the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long. It gives rise to 'new identities' and has thus fragmented modern subject. This is the

crisis of identity. Cultural shapes are fading away in the cultural grip. The identities, as both of them highlight, arise from our 'belonging' to distinct ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and above all national cultures. When we find the above stated belongings, all or some of them lacking in us, we are in the position of some pain due to the lack of stable identity. Moreover, the globalization and fundamentalism have endangered the traditional concept of cultural identities.

The culture as a source of identity appears to be critical throughout the history, providing a sense of belonging. People get sense of relief whenever they are in it or with it. The role of culture is considerably important in defining the behaviours of the people who face it. The characters in the fiction also embody the attributes of the real man. The culture in which they are confronted, shapes them. When they find themselves in a new culture, geography and people, their identity becomes more important. A sense of nostalgia, therefore, always haunts them since they find a great division between the past and present. Culture, thus, is a shaping force that shapes our thinking and consequently our action. Whenever we find ourselves detached from our culture, we feel a sense of alienation like Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*. The loss, nostalgia and the continuous sense of hatred toward other culture appear, and we, as individual, suffer them. This problem of cultural identity is vigorously felt elsewhere. And especially in the stories, poems and fictions, the depictions of such reality can be explored and explained in Divakaruni's work to prove culture as a shaping force of the individual.

Everywhere people have the tendency to define themselves along cultural lines: where do they belong? and who are they? These remarks, thus, expose the fact that people are far away from ideological, rational and even national ways of identifying

themselves. Moreover, idea regarding culture and belonging calls forth the issue of nostalgia of the past cultural values. People explore the pleasant and unpleasant aspect of living in two cultures. Similarly Divakaruni has a worthwhile study of her characters that are torn between two cultures.

People think that there is no meaning of life without culture. It gives us a sense of living. Thus, we consider the situation that to be cut off from civilization is to be without future. Then, we can ask these questions in relation to the novel scrutinized in the present study: Do Tilo and Raven have no future? Are they living a life away from future? Do they have their life or not? The change in the time suggests that there is the inevitability of future that it must loom. Raven and Tilo in the novel find themselves in a new land and culture that give them a sense of loss. They seek for belongingness but they do not find it. Nor do they succeed in establishing their meaning of having been there. So, it becomes irresolvable problem resulted by cultural displacement an unsolvable problem created by culture.

Finally, it is to be magnified that cultural identity and selfhood are the source of the meaning for people. It also gives them their valuable identity. When people find themselves in a new cultural environment, they continually feel a loss of cultural belonging.