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## Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni's Literature on the Dilemma of Women Living in Alien Culture

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The women who either live abroad or happen to be visiting India are caught between two opposing world. They think more rationally, but they mentally retain some of the traditional beliefs. They are torn between old and new values. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni focuses on the diasporic Indian women caught between two opposing world. They find themselves in an in-between state, struggling to carve out identities of their own. They try to discuss their own lives amidst joy and heart- break. In the works of Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni the gender-specific representations of character development are explored. Most researchers agree that gender plays a crucial role in the way in which immigrants experience diaspora.

The writings of Indian women and the portrayal of women characters in their fiction depends or is tied up with a number of factors i.e., the situation of the female, within the historical and regional background, the degree of liberty given to a woman and the restraints imposed on her. The traditions are so deeply rooted that women in spite of their success in attaining professional and financial independence find their paths are still beset with peculiar difficulties of one kind or the other. In fact traditions and patriarchy have led to woman's subordinate position. Simone de Beauvoir rightly points out 'one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature- which is described as feminine!' A specific subset of testimonies is made up of women writing narratives that cross geographical boundaries following India's independence, such as Anita Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Many of the immigrants during that time were women and some were able to read and write in English and thereby started to contribute their narratives. As the Diaspora has grown, so has the production of Diasporic women's literature, which project the dilemma of women living in alien culture. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one such writer.

In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work we have women who either live abroad or happen to be visiting India. These women are no doubt conditioned by the Indian upbringing but have risen above the traditional constraints. They think more rationally, but they mentally retain some of the traditional beliefs. They are torn between old and new values. They question the nature of their lives, and their roles as mothers, wives, daughters and professionals. This awareness leads them to rethink about their own lives as women, and instils in them the confidence and strength to go ahead. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni focuses on the diasporic Indian women caught between two opposing world. They find themselves in an in-between state, struggling to carve out identities of their own. They try to discuss their own lives amidst joy and heart- break.

Diaspora is, in fact both a material condition of dislocation and a postmodern intellectual notion that expresses existential dispersion. Diasporic spaces allow for the representation of

those who straddle two or more cultures, languages and ethnicities and offer a way of rethinking post colonialism as blurring the lines of national enclaves. However the notion of diaspora does not do away with gender inequalities. On the contrary, it makes them more acute and urgent since women must negotiate the conflicting politics of home and abroad, of tradition and emancipation, and of ethnic belonging and metropolitan fusion.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in July 1956. She grew up in Calcutta, with the “girlhood ambition to.....be a teacher”. She moved to Dayton, Ohio, in 1976 to obtain a master’s degree in English at Wright State University. She left Ohio in 1978 to go to the University of California at Berkeley, where she obtained her Ph.D. in 1984.

The kind of truth Divakaruni’s writing explores focus on the familial, social, and national pressures faced by women and immigrants. Her first book of short stories, *Arranged Marriage*, which won the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award in 1996, exhibits women’s turmoil in the absence of decision making powers. Divakaruni’s novels *Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of my Heart*, *Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams* also deal with similar themes. She writes to shatter stereotypes and myths as in *The Palace of Illusions*. She breaks down the barriers between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages, and different worlds. She focuses on the bicultural lives of Indian women struggling with cultural shackles to carve out an identity of their own. Magic and imaginary worlds are very important in her works.

Divakaruni’s literary output treats all shades of Identity Crisis such as alienation, marginalisation, despair, nostalgia, readjustment, assimilation, adaption or adoption. As a woman writer her writings are autobiographical. She portrays a kind of cultural in-betweenness. Such ‘marginal’ people are found in ever communal group, where a cross fertilization of cultures takes place. The United States of America, a land of opportunities and a culturally pluralistic society, is no exception to it. She also contrasts the lives and perceptions of first-generation immigrants with that of their children born and raised in a foreign land. And, inevitably, it includes the Indian-American experience of grappling with two identities.

In the works of Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni the gender-specific representations of character development are explored. Most researchers agree that gender plays a crucial role in the way in which immigrants experience diaspora. Divakaruni acknowledges in *The Mistress of Spices* that at each step of the migration process, women and men encounter different experiences. She goes one step further by challenging expected gender-based responses, reactions, and resolutions in regards to fractured identity issues. In doing so, she is able to provide commentary on identity formation and the fracturing process that is involved in settlement into a new culture that is unique to each gender. Simultaneously, Divakaruni provides a reaffirming message of hope and strength within specifically female negotiation of fracturization.

Divakaruni does offer empowerment to women of diaspora on various levels, including solidarity with other women and acknowledgment of the supportive, healing role women often play (individually and communally). On the other hand, Divakaruni also challenges traditional gender-biased expectations of South Asian men. This indicates she is questioning multiple assumptions based on gender, not just those that affect women.

Ultimately and perhaps most powerfully, Divakaruni provides a multi-layered site upon which the strength of women is highlighted. Not only do strong female characters in Divakaruni’s novel come to a point of independent, autonomous success but they also serve as support systems for the men in her novels. This emphasis on the resolution of fracturization by diasporic South Asian women provides a scenario in which they can be successful as women, as Indians, as Americans, as individuals, and as members of their new communities.

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