

The Immigrant Experiences in the Society and Culture in Divakaruni's Novels

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In her novels, Divakaruni works are partly autobiographical. They mainly narrate women in India during the 1970s to 1980s and in an immigrant life. Divakaruni started MAITRI with her friends for South Asian Women that particularly help victims of domestic violence and other abusive situations. *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), is the most popular novel written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. *The Mistress of Spices* is unique in that it is written as a blend of prose and poetry.

Diasporic writing generates multiple histories instead of a single view of events and past and presents interweave to form a new space. The writing of history as a part of this effort is important, as the historical narrative is in itself a statement of the self and an expression of the conceptualization of the historical process. It goes over the past to understand the present and seeks to explain and when it fails to explain, it raises the certain question. When women turn to writing history, a third element appears on the scene-traditionally a historic, the conventionally marginal is placed center stage.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni develops a new narrative technique. The narrative she opts for is magical realism, which aims to seize the paradox of the union of opposites. *The Mistress of Spices* Divakaruni's first novel stirs magical realism into the new conventions of culinary fictions and the still-simmering caldron of Indian immigrant life in America.

Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is a juxtaposition of the past and present life of Tilo. The past life of Tilo reveals the fact how she was ordained as a mistress of spices by the Old one, the first mother who trained her on the island to be a mistress of spices. Her past life is dominated by

fantasy and magic. The present life of Tilo is related to her service as a mistress in a spice store in the crooked corner of Esperanza where Oakland buses stop. There are elements of fantasy and magical power in her present life too but it is dominated by reality as Tilo touches the lives of many people who come to her shop and for whom she has given the remedy for their suffering and sorrows with her changed spices. Divakaruni mixes reality and fantasy and the result is enchanting. The Mistress of Spices is cloaked in fantasy and the prolog with its strong undercurrent of realism runs at the very beginning of the novel and as the novel progresses the fantasy element diminishes and the realistic element becomes prominent.

More broadly, a society is an economic, social or industrial infrastructure, made up of a varied collection of individuals. Members of a society may be from different ethnic groups. A society may be a particular ethnic group, such as the Saxons; a nation state, such as Bhutan; a broader cultural group, such as a Western society. The word society may also refer to an organized voluntary association of people for religious, benevolent, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic, or other purposes.

A group of persons unified by a distinctive and systematic set of normative relations, whereby actions of one are perceived as meriting characteristic responses by others. To be part of the same society is to be subject to these norms of interaction. A group of people connected to one another by shared customs, institutions, culture, and to a lesser extent, territory. According to Toynbee, society is a total network of relations between human beings. A society is a kind of community, where members have become socially conscious of their mode of life and are united by a common set of aims and values. Society is the sum of the people's habits, culture, tradition, morality, ethics, Values, memories, all combined together to form individual's characters. A large social grouping that shares the same geographical territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. History provides us with the evidence that static societies dominated by the shadow of custom tend to degenerate, while dynamic societies motivated by the spirit of change and modernity and aided by expanding knowledge, scientific discoveries and advanced technology development.

Society is the major institution that shapes the value system. It is not the government or power zones of politics. It is the common faiths, beliefs, morals, lifestyle and so on. These factors are mostly decided by economic, political and religious domains.

In the beginning, the religion was shaping the value system in the society. Then political ideologies dictated the values in the world. But later and in the present context, economics plays a vital role in determining the nature of the society. The nature of society, in turn, decides the nature of the social values. The social values, in turn, dictate the individual to follow them. The present society has become the consumerist society. Every man has become the consumer. The

consumer in the sense he must live to consume. False needs have been imposed on individuals. Human beings have become one dimensional. They have lost their critical consciousness.

Society could be tamed and controlled if people become aware of the ideological bearings of the society. If society is put on the right track, then the society could influence its own people towards just and fair values. It is the vicious circle. Individuals collectively change the society. A society with its indigenous culture also influences the individual very effectively.

Culture has been defined in a number of ways. Some thinkers include in culture all the major social components that bind men together in a society. Others take a narrow view and include in culture only the non-material parts. Culture is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. It is an organized body of conventional understanding manifest in art and artifact, which, persisting through tradition, characterizes a human group.

Culture is used in a specific sense in sociology. From these definitions, it is clear that in sociology culture is used in a specific sense which is different from the one we have in common parlance. People often call an educated man a cultured man and regard those lacking in education as uncultured.

The word culture denotes acquired behaviors which are shared by and transmitted among the members of society. It is an accumulation which a new generation inherits. It is a heritage into which a child is born. These points of acquisition and tradition have been emphasized by Tylor and Redfield in their definitions. The essential factor in this acquisition through tradition is the ability to learn from the group. Man learns his behavior and the behavior which is learned denotes his culture. Singing, talking, dancing, and eating belongs to the category of culture. Moreover, the behavior is not his aim but is shared by others. It has been transmitted to him by someone, be it his school teacher, his parents or friends. It is the product of human experience, i.e., it is manmade. It is the sum of what the group has learned about living together under particular circumstances, physical and biological, in which it has found itself. Thus culture is a system of learned behavior shared by and transmitted among the members of a group. A man begins to learn it from his birth. The rules and procedures of behavior are there when he is born. He is to pick them up. They tell him how to act. By picking up the culture and by tapping the heritage of his past, man becomes distinctly human. The man has, therefore, been called the culture-bearing animal.

The units into which culture can be divided are numerous. It includes every possible physical activity and mental attitude such customs, beliefs, practices and disciplines, etc. The American sociologist Ogburn has divided culture into two parts:

- (i) Material culture
- (ii) Non-material culture.

By material aspects of the culture, he means things like tools, utensils, machines, dwellings, manufacture of goods and transportation. In the non-material aspects are included family, religion, government and education. When changes occur in the material aspects, these, in turn, stimulate changes in the non-material aspects.

The failure of modern society to make quick and effective adaptations to change in the material culture is not due to its technical ability to do so but due to the rigidity of the ideological system. The lags that have appeared in our society during the past few hundred years have generally been a rapidly advancing technology and old elements like beliefs and social institution. In other words, the man, in order to remove the gaps between the two parts of culture, should adapt his ways of thinking and be behaving according to the state of his technology.

It may also be noted that culture not only influences our social relationship, it also influences the direction and character of technological change. Dawson and Gettys remark that culture tends to give direction and momentum to social change to set limits beyond which social change may not go. The family is a universal social grouping found in every society and climate. In simplest words, a family may be defined as a biological social unit composed of the husband, wife, and children born of their wedlock.

Cross-Cultural conflict has recognized a distinct thrust since the materialization of the modernist movement in the very opening of the twentieth century. The globalization of world economy can be looked upon as a natural subsidiary of multiculturalism and intercultural communication. Every culture has its own peculiarities and predilections which advocate a mixed response in one from a varied cultural environment. The process of immigration to America that started in mid- nineteenth century has reached a new high in terms of immigrant population within the span of one hundred years. People from all over the world are drawn towards this country for a variety of reasons. Those who choose to stay on and finally settle down, experience qualitative cultural transformation, which with men of letters gets appropriated in their works.

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