

**A Critical Analysis of Immigrant Experience in
Divakaruni's *The Mistress Of Spices***

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an eminent award-winning author and poet. Divakaruni writes and unites people and she does this by destroying myths and stereotypes. As she breaks down these barriers, she dissolves boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities, aged and even different worlds. Divakaruni's writing often centers around the lives of immigrant women. Her interest in women began after she India, at which point she came to reevaluate the treatment of women there. She writes about the abuse and courage of immigrant women. She shows the experiences and struggles involved in immigrant people trying to find their own identities. Divakaruni's writing deals with the rootless and restless lives of Indians' living abroad. Human relations and inner feelings find no place in foreign land. It is also found that Divakaruni's themes are unmistakably Indian and the problems are essentially Indian. Foreign rule over nearly two hundred years gave rise to some distinct themes like a crisis of identity following a close association of the East and the west, and the difficulties the Indian immigrant face in the country of their domicile. Divakaruni's novel is also an exploration of own identity, a study of their arrival at self-awareness. It is also her daring attempt to fuse the cultural heritage of the people into the socio-political realities centered around the life. "The Mistress of Spices" is unique that it is writing with a blend of prose and poetry. Much of Divakaruni's work is partially autobiographical. She also deals with the immigrant experience, which is an immigrant's voice is rarely heard.

The novel "The Mistress of Spices" follows Tilo, a magical figure who runs a grocery store and uses spices to help the customers overcome difficulties. Tilo provides spices, not only for cooking, but also for homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop. In the process, she herself develops dilemmas when she falls in love with a non-Indian. This creates great conflicts, as she has to choose where to serve her people or to follow the path leading to her own happiness. Tilo has to decide which parts of her heritage. She will keep and which parts she will choose to abandon.

Tilo, has many disguises and names that reveal her multiple identities. Tilo was born in a village and was named 'Nayan Tara'. True to her name, as she has supernatural powers, she began to foretell what would happen. In this early life of Tilo, Divakaruni points the main issue in India that Indian's consider

girl child as an unwanted thing. Tilo loves her family very much who doesn't love her at all. She feels frustrated in life. She wishes for the pirates. In the end, she is carried away by the pirates and with her special powers she becomes the queen of pirates and she is called 'Bagyavati'. For becoming mistress of spices She changed her name into Tilo. She keeps changing throughout the novel, making clear how complex is the problem of identity crisis that Indians try to cope with in a foreign land.

Accordingly, the narrator changes her name many times, she has to change her identities many times in order to arrive at a final definition of her selfhood. The spice shop, where the whole Indian community coverage, is like a microcosm in itself. We see many of the people who came there, their immigrant dreams lie shattered in the dust, but there are also some success stories. Lalita is another pathetic character in the novel. Lalita's story is the same story of the women in India. She did not want to get married. She wanted in India by going to the movies and eating pani-puris. At the same time, she did not want to sit in the house as it would shame her parents. It was only before three days to the wedding she had seen her husband. He was totally different from the photo shown to her. He came from America. She did not like him but the wedding had been arranged and all relatives had come from different places. So she had to marry him. She didn't want to share anything with him on the bed; but one night, using force, he had sex with her. It was a terrible shock to her. She had to be silent with tears as she could not explain her desires to her parents. In America too, she was watched by her husband. She wanted to kill herself.

'The Mistress of Spices' is cloaked in fantasy and the prologue, with its strong poetic overtone convinces us that this is literature of fantasy. However, a strong undercurrent of realism runs at the very beginning of the novel and becomes manifest later on. Then there is Jagjit, the shy frightened boy transformed to Jag by the endless hostility and abuse he has to bear for his accent and turban. He hits the road with a yearning for the power of the steel blade and gun. But the boy who dreamed of the grandmother's kheti has the desire to start a new life over as he promises Tilo. Not all of the characters are underdogs though. The three generations of the Banerjee family are in a war over their values, only to realize that their love and understanding for each other can overcome every barrier.

In the section, dealing with Reven and Tilo that knits together the many themes they run as separate strands throughout the book. It also vividly illustrates of the complex conflicts that multi-ethnic group 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 finally, like the raven, a counterpart of the mythical bird shampati, the resurrected himself from the ashes of his old identity. It is at this moment that Tilo helps him and is in turn helped by him. Tilo has fallen in love with Raven and decided to leave the arthritic body of an old woman to be young with desire. She had to choose between the life of the super natural powers and immortality and the ordinary one of love and compassion or worldly and bodily pleasures. Tilo accepted her lot by choosing to stand by Raven. She was renewed Maya, meaning illusion, spell, enchantment and so on.

The story ends on a positive note- the familiar immigrant tale of dreams, desire, pain and struggle that ends with hope. Divakaruni develops a little into the backgrounds of the characters, so they come out as realistic and understandable. Divakaruni's portrayal of Native American is rather like the way

some non-south-Asian authors write about Indian women. The minor characters are all Indian immigrants to the Bay area, varying from wealthy to struggling. Divakaruni's sympathizes are clearly with the struggling group, and their problems are detailed with warmth. Quiet apart from the blend of fantasy and realism, Divakaruni succeeds in presenting to us a balanced picture of the world of immigrants in America. Not all of them are winners, but not all of them are losers either.

Chitra Banerjee also explains that immigrant life "is interesting to see how people lose touch or continue to keep in touch or continue with their own cultures." Her story proves that she is one immigrant who came to the land of opportunities under the combination of auspicious stars. It spells a message of hope for many people in the future.

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