

Diasporic Literature in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Abstract

In the galaxy of women writers Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the diasporic writer. Diaspora is a new literature of immigration which springs from a thorough going engagement with the host country on the part of the immigrant. Immigrant literature captures the wrenching experience of relocation in an alien country for the immigrant. In today's literary field, it is accepted by all that diaspora or expatriate writers are those writers who have preferred to settle in countries other than home country distinguishing them from Desi or rooted counterparts. The expatriate writer always tackles a number of buzz words like diaspora, immigration, nationality ethnicity marginality hybridity. William Safran applies diaspora to expatriate minority communities which have dispersed from an original center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions, to people who retain their myths about their motherland and feel alienated in the new land (Safran, 1991). They are referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as "unhomeliness". To be unhomed is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home at even in yourself, your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak.

People migrate to foreign lands with the expectations of liberty, gratification and existence which clashes with the traditional values of their homelands. The immigrants fluctuate between crisis and reconstruction. They are alienated from their homeland. In adjusting to new countries issues of acculturation and assimilation.

Chitra depicts the struggles of women in foreign land. She affirms that diaspora is not merely scattering or dispersion but a matrix of consciousness. Being an immigrant lady she through her stories depicts all the experiences of Indian immigrants in all its colours. Thus, all

her work *Mistress of spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams* clearly shows the immigrant feminine experience.

Diasporic literature is a very vast concept and it includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. In this context all writers, who write outside their country but remained related to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation.

Diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement.

The diasporic Indians too do not break their relationship with the ancestral land There is a search for continuity and „ancestral impulse“ an effort to look for their roots. Dislocation can be considered as a break with the old identity.

Immigrants, whatever their reason for migration may be, financial, social political, no matter whether they migrated for trade and commerce, as religious preachers, as laborers, convicts, soldiers as expatriates or refugees, exiles or as guest workers in search of better life and opportunities have shared some common things as well as differences.

Mostly the migrants suffer from the pain of being far from their homes, the memories of their motherland the anguish of leaving behind everything familiar agonies the minds of migrants. Migrants continue to relate personally or vicariously to the homeland in a way or another and their ethnic - communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

Chitra Banerjee is a first-generation diasporic writer living in the United States. Her books have been translated into 29 languages including Dutch, Hebrew and Japanese some themes in her works include South Asian diasporic experience, particularly, those of women immigrants, history, myth, magic realism diversity, etc. Divakaruni's works are largely set in India and the United States, and often focus on the experience of South Asian immigrants much of Divakaruni's writing centres on the lives of immigrant women. She says in an interview "Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships. I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to be prejudiced when they meet them in real life."

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a diasporic writer in the realm of Indo-American literature. She contributes, 16 books which are set both in India and America. Chitra confesses that Immigration is such a major fact of life in United States. You could come from different parts of the world but that whole experience of being in a whole different environment almost a new world where are you to learn the rules over again that is something a lot of people.

Her novels discuss the themes of cultural conflict, racism, identity, women, alienation and integration. Here we analyse the experience of Indian women migrants in America as depicted in Divakaruni's novel. Divakaruni's main focus is on portraying the condition of women immigrants from India.

Women who face greater problems in their homeland also deal with the loneliness of their new country. Even the second-generation immigrants are embroiled between the lifestyle of their birth country i.e. America and the life style of the birth country of their parents.

The immigrant characters after struggling with the problems of immigration, find a foothold in America through integration. They learn to adapt to the new life style by adopting the positive aspects of the American culture. All the same time, they retain positive aspects of their native culture while letting go of the more orthodox traditions and beliefs.

The Mistress of spices is the story of Tilo, a young woman born in another time in a far away place she develops mysterious insight in the powers of spices and her identity is universally acknowledged as "the mistress of spices" Tilo in the arthritic body of an old woman travels through time and space to Oakland via California where she opens a store of spices.

In Divakaruni's *Sister of my heart* is a narrative account of the plight of two families in which father was lost. Sudha and Anju, the cousins after the loss of their father used to live like the sister of my hearts. They used to share common clothes worries, dreams and conflicts in the aggrieved matriarchal Chatterjee household. Gauri and Mali their mothers try their best to find out suitable matches for their daughters, Sudha gets married to Ashok her marriage she was forced to move to her-in-laws home in rural Bengal. On the other hand, Anju gets married to a software engineer named Sunil and she migrates to California.

In the next novel *Vine of Desire* which is a sequel to the novel *Sister of my hearts*. It appeared in the year 2002. Sudha being disgusted with the repulsive behaviour of her husband and mother-in-law breaks-up her relationship with Ashok. On the request of Anju, she plans to visit to California along with her little daughter Dayita. Anju had already lost her unborn son in an unexpected abortion. Anju looks forward to return to her past. In the background of the conflict of personal relationships, Divakaruni presents the conflicts born out of immigration. Through the crisis of Anju and Sudha, the writer admits that people can't get rid of their past.

She seems to follow two divergent tracks personal and impersonal, but it moves in the direction of uniformity.

In the novel *Queen of Dreams* which came out in the year 2004 marks a growth in Divakaruni vision of immigration. In this novel the mother, who comes from the native slum area of Calcutta is endowed with the exceptional power of interpreting the hidden messages of the dreams of her customers like that of mistress of spices, she wants to spare Rakhi from the tales of her strange and painful past. Rakhi in spite of her birth and nurturing in American life unconsciously retains her innate bonding with Indian life, Indian scenery and Indian Culture.

Displacement, in Divakaruni's novels resulting due to migration, immigration, travel or exile offers possibility of providing positive spaces of assimilation. It largely offers a chance for development and cross-cultural dialogues resulting both in alienation and assimilation. Diaspora thus experiences various kinds of displacement but it is their inner consciousness which makes them adjust accommodate and even adapt. Desperateness, conflicts, worrier, doubts, suspicions characterize the people who relocate to new places but their struggles in Divakaruni's novels are evidences of chronicles of time and contribute towards betterment of self-perception in relation to past and memories.

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