

Metamorphosis Of Woman Character In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Mistress Of Spices"

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Abstract: *Metamorphosis is a biological process by which an animal physically develops after birth or hatching, involving a conspicuous and relatively abrupt change in the animal's body structure through cell growth and differentiation. "Some insects, fishes, amphibians, mollusks, crustaceans, cnidarians, echinoderms and tunicates undergo metamorphosis, which is usually accompanied by a change of habitat or behavior". (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>). But this change has been incorporated to human's life and an attempt is made to establish it to the characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel "The Mistress of Spices"*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a famous woman writer, who explores the nebulous and fastidious labyrinths of women psyche trapped in the universe of emigration. An attempt has been made as how she put forth the emotional world of women characters bows down their heads and struggled to cope with the changes in foreign lands. The theme of change and conflicts in identity through the change of skies that is from eastern to western world is photocopied in the works of her. The metamorphosis of this has been stage-wise visualised in this paper.

Keywords: Accommodation, Assimilation.

Literature is a well of facts and imagination of life and there is no parapet in respects of origins and boundaries. In this global village, everyone can have space to exhibit their identity. "Having been born across the world, we are translated men," Salman Rushdie says in *Imaginary Homelands*(17), thus describing the identity of Indian writers living in Britain Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni undoubtedly stamps her identity through her psychopathological novels.

Indian American writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning author, poet, activist and teacher. Her themes include the Indian experience, contemporary America, women, immigration, history, myth, and the joys and challenges of living in a multicultural world. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, and her work has appeared in over a hundred magazines and anthologies. Several of her novels and stories have been made into films and plays. She has won an American Book Award and a Light of India award. Divakaruni teaches Creative Writing at the University of Houston and writes for both adults and children. In 2015, she was chosen by the *Economic Times* for their list *Twenty Most Influential Global Indian Women*.

An essentially subjective novelist like her writes about the inner emotional world of characters struggling against the absurd's of life or trying to cope with the changed skies, that

is, in the foreign land. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni belong to Indian Diaspora and the literatures are the outcome of diasporic consciousness – a unique feeling emanating in the mind of people who go through an avalanche of anguishes and emotions while taking efforts to acclimatize to new cultural environment. The immigrant writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has an obsession with the common plight of immigrants, especially Indian women's modern maladies of exile, loneliness, bewilderment, dislocation and loss of identity and she treats them as her subjects for factual discussion and imaginative expressions in her poetry and fiction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a versatile writer and her novels have won many literary awards, her eloquent novels treat the subjects of cultural accommodation, adaptation, assimilation, and acculturation. This paves way for a metamorphic change of women characters drag the readers to the edge of the chair.

Perspectives that emerge from at least two cultures, identities and in some cases, languages, forge the recent literature of emigration and exile. The themes in migrant literature, however, vary depending not only on country of origin but also on the pattern of migration itself. The main focus of migrant literature is often directed at the act of

migration to another country, issues of rootlessness and racism, nostalgia and longing. Recently, there is recognition that global uprootedness is a global phenomenon and the focus is not on the country of origin of arrival but on community.

In today's global world, the urban/ rural opposition is increasingly becoming a more relevant marker of the acculturation of foreigners whose adoption of national values is reflected by the spaces they inhabit. As they bring with them traditions related to the healing and balancing forces of the earth, immigrants prompt a reconsideration of the urban/ rural dichotomy in the metropolitan spaces they come to inhabit. Rural landscape in American culture has a long tradition of acting as a source of an alternative symbolic imaginary, responsible for boosting people's feelings of patriotic commitment that are crucial to national integration.

Alienation is a modern human condition. In the Encyclopedia Britanica, the modern people has been described as "anonymous and impersonal in an urbanizing mass, uprooted from the values, yet without faith in the new national and bureaucratic order." (Encyclopaedia Britanica, 270) The theme of exile and alienation, lost and loneliness parades before us the meaningful relationship in the era of global interaction.

This has been projected in Divakaruni's bestselling novel *Mistress of Spices* written in a unique style that blends prose and poetry, magic and reality was named one of the top 100 books of the 20th Century by the San Francisco Chronicle. Divakaruni comments, "I wrote the book in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth in my attempt to create a modern fable." (Video: PBS Interview on *Sister of My Heart*, *Mistress of Spices*, and *Creative Writing*)

The *Mistress of Spices* is unique blend of prose and poetry, as Laura Merlin in a review in *World Literature Today* says "in this exuberant first novel builds up an enchanted story upon the fault line in American identity that lies between the self and community" ('Review of *The Mistress of the Spices*', *The World Literature Today*, 207). She presents her own experience through Tilo who faces many troubles in search of her self identity. It spells a message of hope for many people in the future. Thus Tilo's direct confrontation with the alien culture leads her to a discovery of her innerself.

The novel follows the adventures of Tilo, a mysterious figure who runs a grocery store in inner-city Oakland and uses her knowledge of spices to help her customers overcome difficulties. Tilo provides magical spices not only for cooking but also for the challenges those Indian immigrants in an alien land experience. She develops dilemmas of her own when she falls in love with a mysterious stranger she calls the Lonely American, as now she has to choose whether to serve her people or to follow the path leading to her own happiness.

Tilo is a woman of wisdom and passion. Her relationship with the mysterious spices she sells inspiring and enlightening. Tilo does this by having been trained on the island to listen to the wisdom of the spices not only for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop experience.

Cultural alienation has become a universal phenomenon. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's most popularly read novel *The Mistress of Spices* explores female identity through the story

of an Indian woman whose path takes her from India to Oakland, California with each new move the protagonist selfie herself with new name 'Tilo' as "my name which is Tilo, short for Tilottama, for "I am named after the sun burnished sesame seed-spice of nourishment." (5) With new selfied name she moves closer to her dream of being an independent American as she rightly says "I think that across the entire length of this land not one person knows who I am." (5) Tilo's ongoing journey is an effective device which high lights her rootless position as she describes "with fallen hope at another girl child and this one coloured mud." (7) The search for identity tries to explore the problem of immigration but shows how one face, bear and overcome it. It is an affirmative novel which presents the story of women like phoenix bird which rises from ashes.

The writer has given a kaleidoscopic spatio temporal reality of the American as well as Indian society. As Tilo suffocates 'Nayan Tara', the name which she get from her parents. They thought that "she would face down.... to dowry debt" (7). And later she was called 'Bhayavathi' when she was kidnapped by the pirates to serve as their lucky charm. She survived a severe storm went to ashore there she learnt secret power of spices after that she was sent to America for executing it. As Tilo exhibits different names present a conflict which confuses the very ground of survival.

'Change' is a mark of existence in the world. Nothing in this world is permanent nor does it remain permanent forever. The fruits, flowers, forests and fountains all are different from one another and this variance in dazzling forms shows us that change is inevitable and a part of existence.

The change she experience like the train of thoughts, emotions as she cures everybody with magical spices, she falls into an incurable physical and mental enigmatic state called 'love'. Raven an American who shatters Tilo's mind and the very word which she acknowledges "the spices are my love" (1), is changed into "for the first time I admit I am giving myself to love...not the awe I felt for spices . But human love..." (219).

Man or woman underwent changes through various factors. The chief theme of change arise in language, behaviour, social values and norms Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni ends the story on positive note that the familiar immigrant tales of dreams, desires, pains and struggles end with the hope as making Tilo, the sensitive mistress reaching out and touching the lives of many people at the cost of incurring the spices' wrath. Willing to accept the punishment, but being free from that, she became a mortal woman again by accepting 'Maya' as her new name.

The portrayal of a girl born with magical powers, kidnapped by pirates whom she rules later shipwrecked enchanted island ,where she is tutored by a mystical figure transmigrated in an old woman body to an Indian grocery store, met Raven, an elusive American in quest of an earthly paradise breaks Tilo to Maya. All these ennobling occurrences redefine themselves with their own efforts and will. They emerge as located, confident, empowered strong as independent woman 'Maya'.

With the clear vision and careful introspection, the protagonist is able to carve out a niche for herself. She understands that a brave new world has come into being and in that world; bold decision has to be made. She symbolizes the

necessity of inventing one's self by going beyond what is given and transcending one's origin. The final outcome of the novel is positive that it loads the protagonist to self-contained state and happiness she is ready for the onward march afresh.

Through Tilo, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni talked of the boundaries that separate communities and people. Coming to US gave her the distance she needed to look back on her traditional culture with objectivity.

Accommodated in wilderness epitomised the realities of life undergoes acceptance and vociferous protest against the debilitating situations, acculturalised the variant emotions with the stunning portrayal of Tilo metamorphosed to Maya. Anjana Appachana rightly says "writing is an art of discovery" (Listening Now, 1), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni bags the credit of discovery of alienated world.

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