

Hybridization in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*

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Postcolonial literature is the literature of the colonized countries and it focuses on the consequences of colonization of a country based on the political and cultural grounds. Even after decolonization, the impact created by the colonizers prevail in the colonized countries and it is reflected in the literary works of these countries. Hybridity is one of the discourses of post colonialism which means the mixing up of language and culture. It arises questions about the colonized people, their own culture or identity. Writers of postcolonial literature focus on the struggle of the colonized people in adapting themselves to the new socio-cultural mileau of the foreign land. Like any other colonized country, India has also produced a wide range of postcolonial literary works. Their writings reflect the inner turmoils faced by immigrants in getting accustomed to new culture and identity with the nostalgia of their homeland. The works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depict the immigrants' plight in a foreign land as she herself is a first generation immigrant. Her works contain myths and stereotypes with the help of which she is able to dissolve boundaries. She, in her work, *The Mistress of Spices* has made use of the spices which signify myth, in order to escape from the harsh realities of America where the events of the novel take place. The characters, with the help of spices, are able to overcome their hurdles and crave an identity of their own. This paper attempts to analyze how the hybrid culture and the struggle for identity impose psychological trauma in the characters in *The Mistress of Spices*. Literature broadens our perspectives of world and life as it helps us to probe into the minds of many people. Postcolonial literature depicts the life and sufferings of the people who were colonized by the foreign countries. It further reflects the aftermath conditions of the people and society that had undergone colonization. The colonized people found it difficult to differentiate between what they had been in real and how they had been made into someone new. This sort of amalgamation resulted in hybridity.

Hybridization is the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism and is the result of colonization. The trace of the colonizer is pungent that the mind finds it difficult to separate itself from the colonial experience and the colonized finds it difficult to revive the past. Thus there is a mixing up of language, culture and identity. India, being once a colonized country

has undergone changes in many ways. Writers in India took up English as a tool for expressing their sufferings as it reveals, not only to the native readers but the readers worldwide, their plight under colonial masters and also their suffering to adapt to a new society and culture. Some of the Indians were taken abroad with their masters who found it difficult to identify themselves either with their own culture or with the foreign culture. They pick up the language in their own accent, practice the native customs in a foreign land and by doing so they are torn between the two cultures and customs. Even using English as a tool to express their experience is a form of hybridity as they stick to a foreign language for giving expression to their emotions.

Hybridity is best explored by diasporic writers who live outside their native land. Diasporic literature helps in understanding various cultures and it breaks the barriers between different countries localizing the global and even spreading universal peace. Nostalgia, quest for identity, displacement, sense of guilt and homelessness are some of the common themes found in the works of diasporic writers. Further, as immigrants, they speak about colonialism too.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, well acclaimed for her works, is one among those diasporic writers who has brought out the sufferings of immigrants in her works very clearly as she herself is an immigrant. Immigrant sensibility is the major theme prevalent in her works and her characters gradually evolve into new 'individuals', creating an identity of their own which is the result of mixing up of varied experiences and culture.

Her novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, deals with the immigrants' experience in a foreign land (America). It not only expresses the plight of the central character as an immigrant but also highlights the displacement from one country to another and acquiring ethnic culture and holding on to their native culture which brings dilemma and a sense of rootlessness in the migrant community. As the story is presented in flashbacks every fragment of it needs in depth reading to understand the development of the character resulting in hybridity. Almost all the characters in the novel undergo hybridization with reference to culture, identity and language.

Tilo, who is the mistress of spices is the central character and the whole story revolves around her. Tilo, who is an immigrant in Oakland acts as a bridge between India and America as she tries to cure and solve the problems of other immigrants like her, with the help of spices which possess magical properties. In her attempt to help the immigrants, she comes to know and experience the sufferings of the immigrants in reasserting or assimilating and adapting themselves to the life in the new land. It also helps her to introspect herself and emerge as an individual with hyphenated identity.

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A name is given to a child as a mark of identity factor. But in this novel the name of the protagonist gets changed throughout the course of the novel. Tilo is named Nayantara by her parents which means star of the eye or star seer. She is an unwelcomed child in her family and spends her time in loneliness. She yearns for the love and affection of her parents which remains a dream. Her parents see her as their fortune maker and earn money by using her power to foresee things. Later, when the pirates take her away she is given the name Bhagyavati (bringer of luck). When she goes to the island she remains nameless and is introduced as Tilo in the Oakland and at last her name is changed to Maya. These transformations are unavoidable because she has to adapt herself to the living condition of various places. She becomes a hybrid character who tries to cut off the past but finds it difficult. Every time when she takes up new identity she feels that she has cut off her past but it is not so and it is evident when she yearns for the love and affection from Raven which was denied to her by her parents. When taking up her new identity as Maya she represents both Indian and American culture in carving an identity of her own and her ability to control the spices. Her hyphenated identity as Maya represents hybridization.

Tilo's life is controlled by the spices. She can only call them or give commands but it is left to the spices to decide whether they would grant the magical powers or not. This can be taken as an instance for Indianness which persists in her though she lives in America. The problem of immigrants is that their native culture runs through their veins and they find it difficult to adapt themselves to some other alien land. It is a tough time for them till they find a way to transform themselves. The loneliness and the sense of rootlessness experienced by the immigrants can be seen when Tilo says that there is no one in America who knows her real self, considered to be a non- entity.

Lalita, wife of Ahuja, in the novel, explains the concept of hybridization better. She takes up the role of Ahuja's wife unwillingly and suffers in his hands physically and mentally. Though she wants to go back to India, she hesitates and tolerate things, as a married woman is never allowed to leave her husband. This life torments her and Tilo helps her with the spices. Through an organization, Lalita takes up a new life and leaves her husband. She does not go to India but continues to live in America. The American culture gives her strength to lead an independent life. Her new identity which is an amalgamation of both Indian and American culture represents hybridity.

Every spice that Tilo uses signifies the virtues that one should possess to face a new land and a group of new people. For instance, Jagjit, a Punjabi school boy, who suffers in school gets transformed into Jag, and is ready to face the society he lives in. He adapts himself to the new

society in terms of both language and culture which best describes hybridization. Tilo's encounter with another illegal immigrant Haroun tells us yet another story. Haroun wants to adapt to American culture and live happily. But he is beaten up without any reason for he was brown skinned. Tilo crosses the limit of a mistress and touches his hand to foresee and as she foresees the man becomes a cab driver in future. This reflects the hope the immigrants have in an alien land. Geeta is another character who also adapts herself to cultures. Born in an Indian family, she expresses her wish to marry a man who does not belong to her community as she was brought up in American culture. Geeta is an example for hyphenated identity which is evident when she does not go and live with her boyfriend which is wrong according to Indian culture but stays away from home as a mark of American belief that one can lead one's life independently.

Things change when Tilo meets Raven, who belongs to a different heritage and whose mother wants to ape American culture. He is named after a bird which signifies his heritage. He could neither follow his heritage nor the culture in which he was brought up peacefully. The sense of being an Indian is there in him and when he finds that Tilo is from India he is attracted towards her naturally. He is not sure whether it is a pull for her or for her culture. Tilo, only after seeing Raven, wants to lead a worldly life as a result of which she begins violating the role of a mistress. She could not resist herself getting attracted towards Raven who was brought up as an American. Her wanting to take up new identity plays a major role in her being attracted towards him. Then, their culture plays a major role in uniting them. When the time comes to decide between Raven and spices she behaves loyally that the sampathi fire didn't take her and allowed her to take her worldly life and the control of spices as well. Finally, after undergoing all trials she becomes an Indian-American, as Maya, and lives with Raven.

Today we are living in a world of hybrid culture. Tilo's falling in love with Raven and creating a new world of her own towards the end shows the positive outlook in accepting the new identity. It enables a better understanding of the cultures.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has successfully brought out hybridity undergone by the characters with the use of myth and magical realism. Myths are not new to Indians and Divakaruni is not an exception. She has handled the myth of spices effectively. Through the use of myth and spices she has dissolved boundaries. The narrative technique used by her suits the nature of hybridization throughout the novel. Each and every character contributes to the theme of hybridization at various levels and both the positive and the negative aspects of it are brought out in the novel. Usually the diasporic writers try to do justice to both the cultures and Chitra Banerjee

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Divakaruni has also achieved it by giving a new identity to Tilo as Maya – the identity being that of both an Indian and an American.

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