



CULTURAL INFLUENCE IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S NOVEL *THE MISTRESS OF SPICES*

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ABSTRACT

Culture plays a prominent role in Divakaruni's novels. Divakaruni is an Indian-American writer adopted different techniques and styles in all her novels. The present study aims to highlight the characteristic of cultural influence of the protagonists in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices*. Cultural influence analyses the protagonists' journey in the host land and in their homeland. Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices* deals the importance of cultural values and significance of Indian culture, the protagonists' connection with their culture and inner conflict of them in the alien land. Divakaruni's style of writing exposes her influence on her own culture. By representing the ancient spices and its medicinal values, she tries to prove our heritage and cultural beliefs to the world.

Key Words: Culture, Influence, Tradition, Cultural beliefs.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Concise Encyclopedia Britannica defines, culture is an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, behaviors, and culture are the result of integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Culture thus consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, and works of art, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols. It has played a

crucial role in human evolution, allowing human beings to adapt the environment to their own purposes rather than depend solely on natural selection to achieve adaptive success. Every human society has its own particular culture or socio-cultural system. Variation among cultures is attributable to such factors as differing physical habitats and resources; the range of possibilities inherent in areas such as language, ritual, and social organization; and historical phenomena such as the development of links with other cultures. An individual's attitudes, values, ideals, and beliefs are greatly influenced by the culture or cultures in which he or she lives. Culture change takes place as a result of ecological, socioeconomic, political, religious, or other fundamental factors affecting a society.

India is highly known for its cultural heritage and cultural beliefs. From the ancient period, India is addressed as a country of cultural heritage and spiritual land. Preserving one's culture is the prestige to all country. Each country has the pride to expose its own cultural identity wherever they go. But some people have crazy love on their own cultural identity and their traditional values though they live in host land. It is a country of multi-culture and multi-language even though, the English language occupied India very earlier. English is not our native language even though it has occupied a permanent place in India. Indian literature gives an extraordinary place in contributing to world literature. It involves a variety of cultures and languages. Indian dramas are one of the old customs which made its presence felt from the Vedic period. The Indian culture, custom are presented in Indian theatre through *natya*, *lasya*, *mudras*. Indian drama and Indian theatre had the base in the origin and development of Sanskrit literature. Indian drama has the longest and richest tradition.

Culture is considered as one of the most complicated words in the English language. One's culture depicts their origin, art, moral traditional values history, region, religion belief and customs. Each country has different cultural values. Culture is part of the external influences that impact the consumer. That is, culture represents influences that are imposed on the consumer by other individuals.

As a woman writer, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni secured world fame by her modern writing. Divakaruni was born in India, at Calcutta (Kolkata) settled down in the United States. Currently, she lives in California, working as a creative writing program at the University of Houston. She got her master degree from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and her Ph.D. from the University of California at

Berkeley. She did many part-time jobs including baby-sitting, selling merchandise in a bakery, and washing instruments in a science lab for her studies. She temporarily lived in Chicago and Ohio, before she settled in Sunny Dale. Currently, she lives in Sunny Dale with her husband and two children. She teaches creative writing program at various universities in the United States including Foot Hill College in Los Altos Hills, California. Her Debut novel *The Mistress of Spices* speaks about two different cultures, Indian and American, further, the novel discusses magic and realism and immigrant experience. Divakaruni has gained world popularity by her debut novel itself, proven herself as the remarkable writer of India.

Divakaruni is not only concentrating on women-centric themes but also she concentrates on other themes. Those are magic realism, myth, cultural diversity, traditional values, and human relationship. The present study attempts to make a comprehensive analysis of the selected work of Divakaruni with an emphasis and significance of Indian cultural values. Her novels are a piece of evidence to prove it. Her novels portray the possibility of establishing cultural identity. Divakaruni's approach to ethnic identity is conditional within the view of South Asian Diaspora that believes in the necessity of integrating. Her novel *The Mistress of Spices* is connected with the evidence of cultural values and traditional moral values. The protagonist's novels Tilo from *The Mistress of Spices* maintain her cultural value though she lives in California.

Culture is normally considered as a social heritage of humanity, which is maintained to create community and communication in society. It comprises different ideas and things, in another term, it is called tradition. Ways of living style related to other members of the same group belong to a particular tradition, area and culture, according to G.Hostede "the collective programming of the ways, which distinguishes the members of one category of people from the other." Every human society has their chain of culture and intellectual system. Each culture society maintains its own systems of meanings that gradually develop through different norms, values, attitudes, ideas, rituals customs, faith and beliefs.

Culture and tradition have a vital role in the lives of people of any nation. That determines their attitude towards other people, their culture, religion and way of living. Each region and culture follows certain rules, as far as Hinduism concerns that human beings are their fellow beings and they have to treat

them equally and respect the other views. System of rules is not only followed by Hinduism, as far as Christianity concerns each humanism reflection of God, so they have to pour true love on other beings. According to Islamism Allah gives rewards if one follows truthfulness in his or her entire life. India is known for multiculturalism even though each culture and religion preaches and follows moral values to shape their community. The golden rules not only preach moral values, and it also teaches how to live a peaceful life and satisfying life.

Preserving the culture is a significance of all countries. Each group, society or countries have the pride to reveal their own cultural identity wherever they go. Though some people settle down in abroad, they are not ready to leave their own cultural identity and traditional values. Banerjee's novels are a piece of evidence to prove it. Her novels portray cultural values importance of one's own cultural identity. India has highly known for its rich culture and traditional heritage. The people may be migrated to all over the world but their culture and tradition accompany them to survive in any circumstance and situation.

Myth and culture both are interconnected terms. Myth usually talks about the particular region's tradition, cultural beliefs, and values. Myths are usually considered as sacred and believed as true, but the proof is not considered as a significant one. Sometimes it is addressed as a superstitious belief by people. The contemporary world has so many unanswerable questions regarding culture, myths, and religion. A modern generation needs scientific proof to believe certain myths and customs. Certain ethical, mythical, cultural values are unexplainable but though people follow it seriously. Divakaruni tries to prove her concept consciously with the help of myth.

According to Divakaruni, people who live in abroad have to admire western culture, even though they have a special bond on their culture. Divakaruni novels are most probably located in two different cultures of east and west and obviously, she deals with women characters of all ages. Before she writes her first novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni was intrigued and fascinated by the bond between women. Most of her protagonists are females and they are caught between two disparate worlds. Divakaruni has given place to women characters in her works, because she believes that, women are the protectors and transformers of culture and tradition from the past to the future and the East to the West.

She feels, women are deeply rooted in their culture, tradition, and rituals and struggling hard to make own identities in alien land

Divakaruni reveals the secret in an interview for choosing women as a protagonist in her novels.

She says,

Women, in particular, respond to my work because I am writing about them, women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships. I want people to related to my characters, to feel their joy and pain because it will be harder to be prejudice when they meet them in real life (Lata Chaturvedi, 55).

Divakaruni's writings focus on women from India who are caught between two worlds. Her characters are both liberated and trapped by cultural changes, struggling to carve out an identity of their own. The present chapter analyses the cultural and traditional values of Indian immigrant women who settled down in America. Divakaruni's novel *Mistress of Spices* describes the significance of one's culture and biological identity. According to Divakaruni, her protagonists reflect the real issues of abroad settlers.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni portrays that, spices have functions beyond that of just adding flavour to our meal, moreover it reflects one's or communities' culture. The spices have the power to cure a wound, they can help one to survive, they can evoke love, and last but not least, they can heal one from nostalgia and homesickness. Each chapter is named after one particular spice and each explores how that spice has a unique name, several other functions, and how, as Tilo remarks, "each spice has a day special to it" (MS, 13). The spices can be seen as a representation of Indian culture. They also give Indians the taste and smell of home while in America.

Divakaruni's style of writing exposes her influence on her own culture. By representing the ancient spices, she tries to prove our heritage and cultural beliefs to the world. Moreover, her novels deal with the immigrant's identity crisis also. Divakaruni's way of narration makes readers to know the connection between food and culture. Divakaruni's novels reflect depicts the values system of India and Indians.

Soumyajyoti Banerjee and Amrita Basu in their article in *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies* express their views that as the outside world (in the novel the American society) is non-compliant with Indian ways, it becomes important to revive the Indian tradition by eating Indian food at home. Nation and food are historically inextricably joined. To feel part of a particular nation, to keep one's culture, when one lives in a foreign land, can necessarily involve food of the native land as connect (129). Tilo is one of the characters felt that some of the Indians themselves leaving their traditional values and she said, "My American, how you have romanticized my land and my people... The Indian culture isn't quite what you think" (MS, 213).

In India, the village girls have the habit of tying their hair into a single braid or two braids, "A girl. Her hair tied in twin tight braids, oiled and obedient, her legs pressed together with the way her mother has told her nice girls to sit." (MS, 63). The way of narration and description in Divakaruni's novels is evidence to prove her love on her own land and culture.

The Mistress of Spices is a novel of characters and cultures. Life in India, particularly customs and the way people interact with each other is often contrasted with American society. Divakaruni, for most of the novel, sticks to what she does best the contrasts between two diverse cultures.

Preserving culture is the prestige of all countries. People of a country have the pride to expose their own cultural identity where ever they go. Divakaruni's characters also preserve their culture and feel proud to reveal their identity as India in the host land. But some like to stripe off their own cultural identity and ready to put on a new culture when they stay a new land and some wear foreign culture as an overcoat of the old shirt of their own cultural value.

Culture is an amalgamation of many socio-cultural art facts such as shared rituals, festivals, culinary types, and ethnicity-a kind of heritage, clothes, language, class, race, and a feeling of being together by a particular community. Clothes are being an important component of any culture. Apparently, it seems men suffer less as their clothes representing culture remain more or less the same at the national and international level, but for women the conflict is more severe. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the protagonist Tilo observes her Indian customs remain as Indian by wearing their ethnic costumes.

Culture change takes place as a result of ecological, socioeconomic, political, religious, or other fundamental factors affecting a society. Culture, which includes food habits and language, makes up some of the constituents of diaspora.

The research article critically analyses the cultural values of one's homeland. Culture is considered as a social heritage of humanity, which is maintained to create community and communication in society. It comprises different ideas and things, in another term, it is called tradition. Every human society has a chain of culture and intellectual system. Each culture society maintains its own systems of meanings that gradually develop through different norms, values, attitudes, ideas, rituals customs, faith and beliefs.

Each society has a culture, no matter how simple the culture maybe and every human being are cultured in the sense of participating in some culture. The essential characteristics of culture are learned, it must be commonly shared by a group of individuals, cumulative, change of culture, and it stems from cumulative quality. No culture is ever in a permanent state. It is constantly changing of new ideas and new techniques are added and old ways are constantly modified and discarded. Culture as a whole is a system of with mutually interdependent parts. Culture helps the individual to fulfil their potential as a human being. It provides rules of proper conduct for living in a society. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another generation during the process of socialization and disseminated among members of society.

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