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Relocating Heteronormativity and Questioning Feminism: A Study in the Fiction of Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni

Abstract: A Critical Study of the Selected Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni deals significantly with the post-feminist literature written by women novelists belonging to the Indian origin. She has delineated upon the thinking women of the Indian diaspora, whose mental faculty compels them to introspect their so long stereotypical status quo in the prevailing customs, traditions, myths, patriarchy, motherhood and marital life, that they have inherited or imbibed genetically to the alien lands far from their imaginary homelands. Due to literacy, technology, science, employment, migration, and the equal opportunities, economic independence, their sense of metaphysics has set equilibrium with their non-conventional discomfort zones and they have attempted to cross customized thresholds of comfort zones. They have advanced further from the set paradigms of women's image which have been popularly prevalent from the historical perspective. the selected writings of the Indian – American diaspora woman author indicates that the dimensions of contextualizing in-betweenness, hybridity of thought in women's personality and psyche have although been

issues of conflicts and contradictions both in private and public space; however, they are more thoughtful to revamp and retrace their old-patterned trajectories for breaking the track of ice-ceiling. They have challenged fragile zones of both expectations and realities. Women characters in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (Contemporary Indian-American Diaspora Woman Novelist) have been projected with the capacities of self-emancipation in their own negative and positive perspective; they represent the modus operandi of self-sufficient, self-independent and self-exploratory to emancipate their lives, although, in their quest of being free, they deviate. They acknowledge the fact of mutual understanding and acceptance of differences which are the metaphorical ways of resistance. They attempt to oscillate their self-disintegration and self-denigration. The selected novels discuss the double standards of society/community in terms of the expected standards and reality standards and that's what makes sense in the author's creative-writing scholarship that analytically, dexterously, meaningfully and emotionally brings out a contemporary critique on the choices, changes and commonalities confronted by women, against women, and for women. The author explores uncommon reoccurrences of gender existential needs, responsibilities and roles in order to demystify the stereotypical, sociological and psychological myths with regard to women's thoughts and actions.

Chitra's novels entitled *Palace of Illusions*, *Sister of my Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* are the examples of women's efforts to overcome self-inhibition, self-centeredness and self-guilt, while the novels *The Mistress of Spices*, *Queen of Dreams* and *Oleander Girl* describe how to get set go as a woman with the Indian values, cultural integration, professional attitude and with one's own skills.

Keywords: - Indian Women, Metaphysics and Psyche, In-betweenness, Hybridity, Self-disintegration, Self-Denigration

Background of The Study –

The first Indian feminist phase emanated a sense of anxiety and prohibition for their betterment regarding their historical/ mythical portrayal, social status, cultural context and political consciousness. The proponents of such awareness against patriarchal monopoly and religious repugnance are the writings of Savitiri Bai Phule and Sarojini Naidu; Rajlaxmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife*, a novel written in 1874, Pandit Ramabai Saraswati's *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1988), The Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain's book *Sultana's Begum* (1908), Toru Dutt's *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878), Krupabai Sathianadhan's novels entitled *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Christian Life* (1895), Shevanti Bai Nikambe's novel entitled *Ratnabai* (1895) and the first female advocate of pre-independent India Cornelia Sorabji's book entitled *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901). Amar Nath Prasad in this context expresses that, "Indian women writers surpassed their male novelists both qualitatively and numerically in an exploration of the inner mind of women and thereby assert their own identity" (Prasad 01)

Many women of regality all across the Subcontinent India such as the Princess of Jaipur (Rajasthan) Maharani Gayatri Devi, the Princess and the Maharani Suneeti Devi of Koonch Bihar (Eastern Indian princely state of Pre-independent India, Maharani of Gwalior Vijaya Raje Scindia of Gwalior, Maharani of Kapurthala, Punjab and many more in the Southern India patronized and promoted girls' education in order to enable them to be free from silence through education and self-emancipation. One of the Maharani's words echoe the constraints that they themselves went through while being in the ceilings of heritage, legacy and lineage, she writes:

"Once again I tried to interest myself in charitable works but it almost always ended in a battle with the Maharaja of Kapurthala. I still wanted to help the poor; I had never been able to forget

the hungry and desperate faces of the thousands of starving people I had for the first time seen on my honeymoon.....I made one suggestion to the schools in Kapurthala. I felt that the young women should remain in school until they were sixteen or seventeen, and offered money to the schools for prizes as an inducement to study for examinations.....But I was quickly condemned for trying to help” (Williams 154).

The second phase of Indian feminist voices indeed originated from the writings of the female advocate Cornelia Sorabji, who took up in her narration legal cases as case studies in the form of the collection of short stories entitled as *Between the Twilights* (1908), then there was the first Indian woman political activist namely Swarnkumari Ghosal whose fictions entitled as *The Fatal Garland* (1910), *An Indian Love Story* (1910) and *An Unfinished Song* (1913) presented narratives on issues related to western impact on social life, structure and relationships. This phase of feminism had seen the novelistic contributions by male writers such as Munshi Premchand’s *Nirmala*, Rabindra Nath Tagore’s short novels *Ghaire Bhaire* and *Gora*, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Devi Chaudhrani*, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhaya’s *Devdas*, Srikanta, Parineeta promote the cause of education of women through their writings.

The two novelists of this phase that disclosed the anguish against social taboos and evils candidly are Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s *Purdah* and *Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim House* (1944) and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain’s novel entitled *Essence of the Lotus* (1924). The social feminist women leaders on Indian soil that emerge at this time and post-independent era were Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Kamini Roy, Kumudini Mitra, Mrinalini Sen, who besides struggling for women literacy, also focused the protesting voice for the demand of suffrage and livelihood rights. Subsequently the third phase of Indian feminism began to see the light of sensitivity and sensibilities in context of women’s identity and dignity in place of gender discrimination, while marking their status quo in public sphere, although in private sphere they

still susceptible to subservience as expressed by Kamala Markandaya, quoted in Anita Myles' book entitled *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists*. It says:

In her novels such as *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1957), *A Handful of Rice* (1966) etc., which she terms as the 'Literature of Concern', Kamal Markandaya always attempted to probe in the social, economic and cultural life of Indians due to the impact of westernization in India or she portrayed strong Indian characters that are prepared to meet the challenges of life, come what may. (Myles 16). Similarly, Nayatara Sehgal in her books entitled *Rich Like us* (1985), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A Situation in Delhi* (1977), *Mistaken Identity* (1988) articulated about women's assertion and strong claims to be free from domestic liabilities and guilt and from employment front to have equal employment opportunities. So, the idea of Women's liberation got its spurt in this phase of Indian feminism movement, whose seeds got its soil and formation as the women authors from diaspora and from far corners of Indian subcontinent spread the light the flame of women's language and feminine point of view through their varied creative literary pieces. The women authors such as Anita Desai in *Cry the Peacock* (1991), Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence* (1990), Shobha De in *Surviving Men* (1997), Meena Alexander in *Manhattan Music* (1997), Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine* (1989), Jhumpa Lahiri in *Namesake* (2006), Gita Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), Kiran Desai in *The Loss of Inheritance* (2006), Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997) etc. have delineated their women characters in the world of modernity and post-modernity from the point of either being in the state of rebel or as fallen in abyss. They have tried to mirror the cost of freedom with the sense of alienation, despair, withdrawal or they have projected women's ability of self-expression, individuality or their subversion at the cost of being in seclusion, anguish and the lack of support. Another aspect of modernist feminists' women writers of diaspora have been to engage their cultural cross-overs, to explore "conflicting loyalties" (Dhawan 23) their cultural acculturation within home and family, to

theorize patterns of family advancement, child-rearing and emotional needs of parenting, which they have subjectively relocated and restructured in women's language and in psychological negotiations. In this process of enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment for home and family, one of the critics describes the Indian diaspora women characters' dilemma in their novels such as Dimple Das Gupta in Bharti Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975), Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughter* (1972), Feroza in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993). He writes, "In more recent writing we find changing meanings of home in diaspora and complicated rehomeing processes" (Dhawan 22).

The post-feminist phase in Indian women writers' context begins with the writings of Amulya Malladi's *Serving crazy with Curry* (2004), Chitra Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* (2004), Iqbal Ramoowalia's *The Death of a Passport* (2004) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) "sniff around for ways to secure salvation from uncertainty" (Dhawan 131) in the encircling pressures of homeland's "history, identity, gender, cultural and racial purity, ethnic and religious situatedness" (130). Such works refer to the reality of constant quest for self-reliance and self-supporting representations? Subsequent writings both by Indian Diaspora and by native Indian women authors and critics raised these problematic dimensions to examine and analyze - What makes the later novels of Indian women authors especially as the illustrations of post-feminist phase? What suggests that feminist discourse cede the ground to the post-feminism? How does the post-modern feminism erase women as a political agency to nation and gender? The theorists such as Sushila Singh in her article entitled "Outlining Feminist Literary Criticism" (1996), John E. Mary in her renowned work entitled "Discrepant Dislocations; Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories" (1996) relate their queries with regard to the appropriateness of relationships for harmonious socialization and to the great difference between U.S.A. Feminist issues and Indian Women Immigrants issues (Goswami 29). Given that frame of problematization, the 'post-modern feminism' is portrayed as a

territory over which various women have to fight to gain their ground; it has become so unwieldy as term that it threatens to implode under the weight of its own contradictions (Whelehan 78). Many Indian women writings while representing social construct, initiate feminist discourse analyses in the theoretical framework opined by Jasbir Jain in her book entitled *Indigenous Roots of Feminism: Culture, Subjectivity and Agency* (2003), she writes: Feminism is not necessarily an ideology of resistance to patriarchal control but a movement that seeks integration of the public and the private space and the collapsing of the divisions between two different kinds of sexuality and moral values. It is expressive of the need to be heard, to have a choice as well as the freedom to act in accordance with that choice (121).....No reconstruction of feminine space can come into being in a one-sided manner; it has to interact with the notion of masculinity (Jain 124).

The post-modern feminist wave in Indian English Writings context indeed claims self-empowerment, but without being anti-male (, secondly it removes politics and to do away with the existing dissatisfaction on account of personal politics, thirdly to mark a shift from the 'old' and the 'new', fourthly it means going beyond to evolve oneself in 'a process of ongoing transformation and change' (Brooks 1), fifthly it manifests an interminable search for meaningful existence, sixthly to supersede boundaries of traditional ascriptions of gender politics (Mambrol 1). Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2008) and *Custody* (2011), Samina Ali's *Madras on rainy Days* (2004), Bharti Mukerjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004), Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* (2013), Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* (1997), Vijay Laxmi Chauhan's novella *Pomegranate Dreams and Other Short Stories* (2002), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), Kavita Daswani's novels *For Matrimonial Purposes* (2003) and *Salam Paris* (2006), Sonia Singh's *God for Hire* (2004), Abha Dawesar's *Miniplanner or The Three of Us* (2000), Hilpi Somaya Gowda's *The Secret Daughter* (2011), Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* (1998) and *Goddess of Fire* (2016) are the novels that have

got acclaim in geopolitical background and in the sense of mental transformation from ‘an episteme of real or imagined displacements’ (Mishra 01).

The Area of Study –

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American Diaspora Writer who has demolished the deep structured totalism of dominance and male subordination by way of either assuming the guilt or denying any harm. This has been the figurative intervention of the author to let its women protagonist in a certain kind of magic realist tendency either to bear the cost of their decision or to deter from self-denial or internal ambivalence to exactly formulate the preferred stance and notion of their meaningful existence. Her feminist protagonists redraw their boundaries to break away from stereotypical image and myths. Indeed two of the novels’ plot take their stand on “feminism’s relationships to sexuality, that is sisterhood which is an attempt to destabilize heteronormative sexuality that is observed as a site of danger and oppression for women, but later it turns into a troubled one, because of their incommensurable differences that liberates body and sexuality, but does not obscure male/female binary, nor it stops the risks of moving between the polarized worlds” (Martin:1994). Moreover, Chitra Divakaruni does not confirm to the homo-affirmative aim, rather stakes sustenance on heterosexuality. Chitra Divakaruni’s three novels *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), *The Sister of My Heart* (1999), and *The Vine of Desire* (2004), if analysed in the abovementioned theoretical framework, then “questions feminism and its role in producing the discursive strictures that require to be there to be women, the feminine, and the femininity, that cannot escape the charge of heteronormativity and thus cannot hardly merit the name of feminism” (Halley 610). The other three selected novels namely *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) *Oleander Girl* (2013) and *Queen of Dreams* (2004) depicts the journey of overcoming dilemma and celebrating the victory, manifesting an image of a strong and independent women with their self-worth and self-

identity. These three novels examine women's psyche and strength in view of their assertion, will to power, conceptual priority to suspend the assumption of subordination and dependence. They believe in draining brain from gender lens in place of believing in the 'feminist power masquerading as servitude and 'moral perfectionism and magic realism'' (Ibid. 609). To understand Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's simplistic notions regarding taking the break from feminism is to interpret paradoxically the given case studies in view of the maladies and fragility of realities, expectations, quests and challenges faced by women against the dominion of males or existing social norms. The author while recognizing the diversity within feminism and ideological divisions within feminism focuses on the proposition which is aptly stated in the words of Joan Scott. He says, "Gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott: 1988); then feminism, liberation and existence need to be managed with "a sense of governance and to decenter gender as an axis of power" (Cossman 618).

Other Approaches and Theories for Analyses –

Chitra Divakaruni's novels weave a thread of "realist aesthetics to trace how the form of Bildungsroman unravels the individual agency and meaning-making in a modern world" (Anjaria 213). There is a congruence of realism and modernism, magic realism and moral perfectionism, post-modernism and feminism, aesthetics and fiction. To illustrate her in-between "modern realism and indigenous modernities" (South Asian Review: 196), Chitra quotes about her writing fiction in these words:

"First of all, there are many similarities, you have to be inspired, you have to use imagination, you have to pay attention to language and these are all things in common. You have to have something important to say and a different way of saying it but when I moved to fiction the world just opened up for me....that allowed me to create a whole world and to bring characters

to life and talk about social issues that were important to me. I could do all of that in the fictional world that I was creating” (Interview: 2010).

Concerning her usage of language while entering the realms of women’s psyche or while delivering their dialogues, Chitra Divakaruni’s works are different from other contemporary women writers such as Anita Desai, Shobha De, Samina Ali, and Meena Alexander whose works identify realism in portrayal of ethnicity, racism, indigeneity, womanhood, motherhood and gender relations, whereas Chitra focuses on magic realism either to demystify the archetypal image of subverted women protagonist or to break from the stereotypical ceilings of conventional historical realities and myths regarding women’s deification or subordination. Divakaruni’s Karobi in the novel *Oleander Girl* seeks strength, identity and independence by going beyond the conventional trajectory and searching alternative path to counter discomfort zones. Divakaruni says in her interview that “Perhaps one area in which I am doing something different from the other writers...is my exploration of magical realism in novels” (Zupancic 85-101). The novels that have been studied for the development of analyses and approaches regarding her being a postmodern feminist make representations of gender, social practices “and considers that people’s identities and relationships are performed through spoken interactions. The approach that Chitra Divakaruni’s novels project explicitly is Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis in which the women protagonists are positioned by different and often competing discourses – for example they either realise their subject positions or they shift from subject positions to a self-emancipatory or transformative ones. For instance, in the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, the communication between Draupadi and her old caretaker Dhai Ma (Midwife) presents paradoxically the matrix of relationship between education, power and the position of justice that attempts to indoctrinate or paralyze the notion of education, knowledge and equal opportunity as a morally justifiable path. The author through the conversation between two women characters shows constriction of the society, family and by

women for other women. The author questions the sense of social justice, inter-dependence and responsibility for themselves and towards the world. As readers, we find novelist's discursive radicalism who through such exchange of dialogues problematizes "ethical model for the representation of cultures and nationalist narratives" (Parry 10). From the point of postcolonial literary piece, this narrative posits Draupadi/Panchali as an agency of insubordination, who constitutes contention regarding self-consolidating instead of sharing a concern with the specific historical conditions and social purposes of ideological representation (Goswami 109). Secondly if a woman protagonist tries to move from powerless to powerful or from powerful to powerless strata, their perspective interplays the "social construction of gendered subjectivities" (Prasad 165).

Panchali has become feminist in her thinking due to her molestation by Kauravas, the cousins of her husbands, Pandavas. Her heart turns against them and her husbands and she decides to rack them in war to regain her respect. She thinks that by taking revenge from the patriarchs of Kuru Dynasty, she will be in peace, but her disillusionment becomes a menace for her own existence, because her 'Self' constructs a castle of revenge, which has been already a palace of illusions; it only casts death, rather any meaning in her life, she meets with death at the time of her molestation, then at the end of the Mahabharat war at Kurukshetra. In this context the author presents the psyche, who instead of peacemaker turns herself as destructor. The author writes: She's dead. Half of her died the day when everyone she had loved and counted on to save her sat without protest and watched her being shamed. The other half perished with her beloved home. But never fear. The woman who has taken her place will gouge a deeper mark into history than that naïve girl ever imagined" (TPI 206).

Most of the women characters learn from their experience and interaction i.e. their social cognition is based upon their cultural knowledge which stimulates their being to becoming i.e. they gain knowledge to realize reality and to work for their existential distinction i.e. they

question their unidentified/ unrecognized entity, they attempt to relate their metaphysical reality to social context, they get concern to be accountable to the perceptual realities of the world that they observe or experience around them. Their “conscious raising experience” (Lehar: 2000) builds some dreams, make-shift reverie, expectations, their conscious internal Self forms a gaze for the external world and its impressions, which causes a conflicting line between inner and outer sphere, between personal and interpersonal, between personal and political or public sphere; subsequently it creates either sensibility to recreate oneself or to be sensitive to the surrounding in order to follow one’s trajectory. The novel *Vine of Desire* illustrates this perspective very poignantly in the characters of Sudha and Anju, who are by birth sisterly cousins and till they do not get to the fact that they are independent entities whose life sail through the dichotomy of separate beings, whose relationship cedes to the masochistic and patriarchal environment right from their birth to separation and finally to self-realization. Sudha is called to America by her cousin Anju with the hopeful pretext that will help them to be together to share their missing moments, but soon both seem to be in a state of resistance and powerlessness at one end, while on the contrary Anju detects the gradual corrosion of sisterly relationship, because they both find themselves in situations – Anju faces anguish due to her miscarriage, due to her husband namely Sunil’s seduction of her sister Sudha, due to her being captured in the antagonistic maneuvering of her husband and her guilt of leaving Sudha in un-freedom which ironically becomes contingent of his freedom to seduce Sudha; while Sudha on the other hand on account of shame and resistance resorts to drink and dance and succumbs to hedonistic western vision of existence which she expresses in these words: “Live for yourself...there’s a terrible pull to the idea of living for myself...I can’t go back to the old way, living for others” (TVD 177). Her negativity even permits her to think that her own daughter Dayita seems to be an obstacle in attaining her desired goals and happiness. Such fallen state of Sudha in continuance of her in crisis one after the other depicts the author’s

critical Foucaultian formulations with reference to ‘three axes’ of genealogy at play while negotiating relationships and sexuality in personal life. Foucault says:

First a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth, through which we constitute ourselves in relation to a field of power; through which we constitute ourselves as subject acting on others; third a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents (262). From feminist perspective, the author relates Sudha’s longing in provocation to cross her private life, while on the other hand the author projects “the micro politics of private life” (Sawick: 1996).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as a novelist of postmodern times metaphorically through the structure of plot and narrative voice and techniques skillfully delineates the determinants of independent and independent variables to identify psycho-social constructivism and cognition (Earnest: 1998). The author conveys that women’s knowledge builds upon on accepted attributes of perception and perceptual defense of her selections. Her internal representation illustrates her knowledge of virtual-reality which is relational to ‘naïve representation of realism’ i.e. her awareness of objects is subjected to the existing perception of properties that are inherently ingrained or by way of representational realism which is outwardly displayed in the form of “patriarchal and hierarchical legal material in context of inhuman laws (while it is actually non-legal material in humane sense) and epistemological dualism”(Lehar: 2012). The theoretical notations are well deliberated upon in the novels entitled *Sister of My Heart* and *The Mistress of Spices*. In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, Anju and Sudha have very close proximity, as they have been since their birth together as cousins. Anju is some hours elder to Sudha, so Anju always tries to protect Sudha and make sure of her happiness as her prime concern. Both women are different from each other, yet they feel as having one Soul. They never feel the need of anyone else in their life. Their society considers them as bad omen for they have brought with their birth the news of the death of their fathers. Because of that either

they are left alienated or they remained alienated to escape outer world's reality that calls them ominous and fatherless children. Anju has spirit and Sudha has beauty. Both have huge expectations respectively from their fate. Unknown of their prospective fates, they remain in anticipation, that nothing can apart them. They both think that they will be able to help each other in handling each other's life difficulties until their last breath of their life. Sudha is dependent on Anju, just like the myths prevalent in popular tales – that a princess develops a sense of protection and remains dependent on her prince. Although Anju is strong and spirited, yet she reclines on Sudha for emotional fulfillment. Anju's affection and affinity for Sudha are delineated well by the author in these words:

“She is my other half. The sister of my heart. I can tell Sudha everything I feel and not have to explain any of it. She'll look at me with those unblinking eyes and smile a tiny smile, I'll know she understands me perfectly. Like no one else in the entire world does. Like no one else in the entire world will.....Sudha and I are when we're together. How we don't need anyone else....Our favourite game was acting out the fairy tales Pishi told us, where Sudha was always the princess and I the prince who rescued her” (SMH 11-12).

The Mistress of Spices is a story of an Indian girl Tilo, who seeks for fulfillment and meaningfulness in her life. Divakaruni makes Tilo tell her life's story to the readers herself, so that, Divakaruni can make her readers feel connected with her protagonist. Tilo is born in a small Indian village as the third girl child of her parents. Being born in a lower class family as a girl child, her parents look at Tilo as a burden, adding another dowry debt into their lives. She informs that: “My parents' faces were heavy with fallen hope at another girl-child, and this one colored like mud” (TMS 07). She remains unloved and unwelcomed by her parents.

Tilo with full confidence assures the First Mother that she will not fall like the mythical Tilottama in her life because she loves her spices and will not disobey them. She says to the Old One that: “But I will not fall, mother...I need no pitiful mortal man to love” (TMS 43).

Tilo's over-confidence and her strength are unique. She is daring enough to decide her destiny her own and she doesn't depend herself on others as generally women do in their lives and get defeated due to their passive nature. Beauvoir also said: "The emancipated woman wants to be active" (Beauvoir 850). Divakaruni wants that every woman must build up the quality of writing their destiny themselves to get a satisfactory meaningful existence and they should learn to struggle and to be bold. Tilo also wants to serve others to get a meaningful life. Froese also says that: "Meaningful life consists in belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self" (Froese 03). Divakaruni preaches to serve the needy in society to find a meaningful life.

The Old One tells Tilo that she should choose any Indian continent, not California because it will be hard for Tilo to adjust in the Western culture but in her stubbornness, Tilo chooses California only. The Old One helplessly allows her but warns Tilo also that if she will disobey the spices, the spices will punish her. Tilo crosses the magical fire to reach in California, America, and the fire also changes Tilo's appearance into an old lady, as a young woman is not considered apt for a business. Divakaruni presents the Indian mindsets where a strong, young, beautiful, independent and free-willed woman is taken as a threat to the patriarchal setup. She is either restrained and confined or stripped of her external glory by the society (Goswami 187-188).

Tilo becomes the owner of a spice shop in America. She feels content with the spices and is happy. She says joyfully that: "I too sigh my pleasure...from every direction, the city will pulse its pain and fear and impatient love into me. All night if I wish I can live it, the ordinary life I gave up for the spices" (TMS 60). Tilo feels happy in serving the troubled people and is happy to abandon a normal human beings life for her social service. Tilo not only sells spices and other Indian things in her shop but also helps her customers through spices by her magical power of reading their minds and hearts. She narrates her story as: "I am a Mistress of Spices...I

know their origins, and what their colors signify, and their smells... Their heat runs in my blood. From amchur to zafran, they bow to my command. At a whisper, they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magic powers” (TMS 03). These lines present Tilo’s strength, satisfaction, and confidence in her life.

There are many restrictions also for Tilo to save her magical powers like- she is not allowed to use the spices for herself; she is not allowed to indulge herself in the lives of her customers; she can’t go out of her store; she can’t see herself into mirror, she can’t touch her customers, she can’t read the newspaper to know about America and the most importantly she can’t love anyone except the spices according to the rules of her mistress-hood. If she tries to break the rules, the spices will take back their powers from her and will punish her and her customers. Although Tilo is not allowed to live an ordinary person’s life due to the restrictions on her yet she is happy in helping the Americans and the immigrant people there and in living for others only. She says: “I will chant. I will administer. I will pray to remove sadness and suffering as the Old One taught” (TMS 07). Tilo likes to help others and adopts the virtuous path. Tilo feels the pain of immigrants in America and says that, ‘It seems right that I should have been here always, that I should understand without words their longing for the ways they chose to leave behind when they chose America. Their shame for that longing, like the bitter slight aftertaste in the mouth when one has chewed amlaki to freshen the breath” (TMS 04).

Divakaruni says in an interview with Marcus that, “Happiness comes from being involved in our human world. Raven’s mistake is that, like all of us, he’s looking for a gated community. Our concept of earthly paradise is to be separate. I believe we have to look at the problems around us and address them, not turn away. You cannot have personal happiness without caring for the larger good” (Marcus 04).

Conclusion

The feminists' question for the rightful existence consciously means the deliverance of the dignity and development of women as an immigrant in particular and women in general all across the globe. This has been the primary concern in many diaspora women novelists' works such as of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. They express their insecurities, inhibitions and internal pressures regarding with their immigration, their identity, their split-consciousness, their sense of uprootedness, estrangement, and their sufferings due to unequal social-class discrepancies. The cultural difference between India and America in Divakaruni's novels is well illustrated. The novels of Divakaruni have been well received internationally on account of the themes concerning the sensitivity for precariats and sensibility to reframe the outlook of immigrants to assimilate and re-appropriate their identity in context of cultural ethnicity. Besides these issues, her novels have become essentially a voice to discuss women-immigrant issues in diaspora context as well as in general context. The present study is an endeavor to make an inclusive, comprehensive and critical study of the thematic concerns with regard to feminine sensitivities and perspectives in order to build their life on their own terms, although being constrained, or blamed or deprived or dependent. Divakaruni's selected novels namely *The Palace of Illusions*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Queen of Dreams* and *Oleander Girl* are suffused with feminine expectations and the reality of women's life. They do not deter in life, rather accept with grit life with full of challenges in order to be recognized in society or in their day to day surroundings, although at times they fail or proved a failure in life. Thus to sum up the postmodernist feminism of the author Chitra Divakaruni, it is apt to say that she seeks to find remedy for women's drawbacks from the strengths of the other, secondly the notion of desire, expectation is a pre-supposed coherent idea of subjectivity and difference, which is actually a question, a problem before anti-normative politics and reason. It needs deconstructive

framework to rethink upon the gendered consciousness, gender intersect, self-fashioning and self-realization of gendered identities to open up space as the radical uncertainty. The postmodern and poststructuralist assertion is that we need to question the claim that structures of knowledge have a center, origin or 'presence' such as that of man or god, is crucial to feminist refiguring of history in which interpretation and "play" as "disruption of presence' is given significance" (Derrida 278-295).

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