

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.4., 2017 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

DISPLACEMENT EXPERIENCE OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT CHARACTERS IN CHITRA
BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S "THE MISTRESS OF SPICES"

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to explore the displacement experience of Indian immigrant characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Mistress Of Spices". Divakaruni is one of the eminent South Asian diasporic poet, short-story writer, novelist and essayist. Her works expresses her own country, legends, folk-tale, her mother land with all its shades of caste and class segregation, the eye-catching of rich Bengali cuisine, customs, marriage and family and in a way how an insider's and outsider's viewed with the truth. Her works relate two different types of worlds, particularly about Indo-American struggling for peace in America. Her nostalgia for displacement land mingled with fear in the freakish land makes her difficult to adjust to the new environment. She longs for the shaping of diaspora existence by implicating themselves in ethnic-culture problems. This paper explores the displacement experience in "The Mistress Of Spices". It mainly deals with the agony of character's who displaced from India to America. The character's are Tilo, the protagonist, Haroun, Jagjit, Geeta and her grandfather, Lalita, Shamsur, Hameeda and Rahan Saab.

Keywords: Immigrants, Segregation, Nostalgia, Diaspora and Displacement

INTRODUCTION

The words diaspora, exile and displacement are synonymous. But the inner meanings of these words are varied from each another. Exile means forceful migration from one place to another. The term diaspora refers to the people who scattered from their ancestral land and settled in freakish land. Diaspora is the place of eminent between countries and cultures. Diaspora is a fancy term in literature. Diaspora authors convey their obscure position in the universe and their fluctuating situation between the birthland and newland. Displacement means the process of moving from the original place to new place. Displacement has two perspectives, one is forceful displacement and another one is voluntarily displaced to seek a job or commercial purpose or due to relationship.

"The Mistress of Spices" (1997), is about an Indian immigrant women named Tilo (Tilottama), who is trained as mistress of spices and she displaced to Oakland to maintain spice shop. She supplies the spices for her customer not only for cooking and she gives spices to cure the problems of immigrant customer. She has three rules to obey, which her First Mother told to follow. When she met a lonely American in her store, she is confused to find correct spices and suppose she fall in love with him, her magical power will destroy.

DISCUSSION

Tilo, which is short for Tilottama, a young woman trained as mistress of spices and displaced to Oakland (California) through Shampati fire and she runs a spices shop for the Indo-American people. "I Tilo architect of the immigrant dream." (TMOS28) She gives spices for her customer not only for cooking and she give the spices to cure the problems of her customer because the spices has power to solve the problems.

Tilo knows the origins of the spices and what their colours signify and their smells. She will call each spices by their true name which is "given at first, when earth split like skin and offered it up to the sky." 3 The heart of the spices runs in her blood. She knows from amchur to zafran and each spices obey to her command. Spices whisper's to her about their secrete properties and their magic power. Tilo recollects her life and memories before she migrated. "But before the store was the island, and before the island, the village, when I was born." 7 Tilo was born in village, an astrologer named her Nayan Tara, star of the eye. Her parents were feeling sad because of the female child will bring a dowry debt. By birth she has a power to find, who stolen Banku, the water carrier's buffalo and which servant girl was sleeping with her master. She sensed where under the earth gold lay buried, and why the weaver's daughter had stopped talking since last full moon. She told zamindar, where his lost ring was there and she warned the village headman about floods before they occur. Her fame spread to neighbouring towns and even beyond the mountains and cities, people travelled to meet her because she could change their luck. Her parent fearing upon her and sisters too has fear. She received gifts from the travelers.

The travelling bauls sang her praises, gold-smiths impressed by her ability and merchant sailor carried tales of her power across the harnessed seas to every land. That is how the pirates learned about her. Pirates decided to abduct her. The pirates burned the village and killed Nayan Tara's parents and carried out through the burning village. The chief of the pirates named her Bhagyavati, Bringer of Luck; like that she was lucky for them. While moving in a ship, she asks forgiveness from her parents and sisters because when she was named as Nayan Tara, she wanted their love but she gained only their fear. And she is asking sorry from her village because she disappointed them.

"Their pain stung like live coals in my chest as the pirates flung me onto the deck of their ship, as we took sail, as the flaming line of my homeland disappeared over the horizon" (19)

After getting her power again, she overthrew the chief and she became queen of the pirates. This made her to feel guilt. So she welcomed the punishment. For one or two or three years, she lives as queen led pirates to fame and glory, so that bards sang their fearless exploits of pirates. There she feels sickens, so she planned to stop it, sent for another calling thought over the water. The typhoon she had called came from the east. The pirates were screamed in terror and she jumped into the sea. When the typhoon stopped, her body became weightless and shining. The sea serpents, always sleeps at day in a coral caves and come to surface, when Dhruva, star of the north presents, pours its vial of milk-light over the ocean. Sea serpents only saved her and described about the island of spices and they told about old one. They showed her the way to island. The island was far, but she was confident to reach, she sang a chant for weightlessness and she reached the island. When she reaches the island she could not sing a chant, her arms and legs grew heavy and would not obey her. Waters were charmed by a great wizard, so her power was nothing. She struggled hard to reach onto the sand and she was in a dream, but she does not remember the dream.

Bhagyavati once again migrated to another place. When reaches the shore the Old one or First mother and neophytes surrounded by her. First mother asked about her, she couldn't answer because she forgot everything.

"Who are you child"

Who was I? I could not say. Already my name had faded in the rising island sun, like a star from a night that has passed away. Only much later when she would teach us the herbs of money would I recollect it – and my past life – again." (33)

First mother thought her about the powers of spices along with the several mistress of spices. Old one gave new names to each novices but Bhagyavati named herself 'Tilo short for Tilottama.' First Mother scolds her always rule breaker and she told that she should leave thrown out at their first meeting. First Mother asked about meaning of the name. She explained about the meaning of the name "Tilottama, the essence of Til, life-

giver, restorer of health and hope.” (42) First mother taught some rules that mistress should follow, the rules are: they should not use the spices for their own purpose, should not go out of the store, must not touch any human being, should not use mirror, should not love anybody except spices, should express neither more or less concern for customers.

After the completion of apprenticeships, the mistresses of spices were sent different places through the Fire of Shampati with some gifts given by Old one. Tilo migrated to Oakland at dawn as an old woman in a store with spices, when she was woke up from dream. Many South Asian immigrants seek Tilo with their problem and Tilo finds their problem by seeing their faces and some by seeing their hand. All the problems and causes were diagnosed by Tilo and she offers exact spices to cure the problems. Lalita, Haroun, Jagjit, Geeta and her grandfather, Kwesi are some of the immigrants who get their problems solved.

Tilo or Tilottama as a young woman who is wanted by domineer of the order to pretend herself as an old woman, thus shows her non sexuality and prompting obscurity and limits. She cannot get to know about her own body: “Once the mistress has taken on her magic Mistress-body she is never to look on her reflection again.” (59) She is needed to put away her own wishes and prioritize those of others: A Mistress must carve her own wanting out of her chest, must fill the hollow left behind with the needs of those she serves.” (69) Tilo, disobeys many conditions for those who seek her help, but she cannot be live within this boundaries. Similarly we can see this in ‘Arranged Marriage’, Divakaruni expressed the idea of women’s rebellion opposed the force to hold on their desires and physics. The rules of mistresses represent patriarchal scuffles and Tilo made to free them. She strives with her own desires as she constructs soul-string association with a Native American man, whom she calls Lonely American at first and latter Raven. She changes herself into a woman, feeling accusable about her ‘self-indulgence’, but she make up her mind to be brave, so that she can face the punishments. At the point of body-politics, Tilo reformed her body, her passion to have a close intimacy with Raven outside of institutional punishments, go against the laws of the order of Mistresses. But Tilo learns the hazard, she can constantly feel it. Hence, she bids Raven, who requires to get away with her to an earthly Paradise: “Our love would never have lasted, for it was based upon fantasy, your and mine, of what it is to be Indian. To be American....There is no earthly paradise. Except that we can make back there, in the soot, in the rubble, in the crisped-away flesh. In the guns and needles, the white drug dust, the young men and women lying down to dreams of wealth and power and wailing in cells, yes, in the hate, in the fear.” (292) Anyhow, the novel proves women’s suffrage through voices of their desires. In Divakaruni's short-stories, the protagonist fights for gratitude of women’s restraint of their bodies. Once Tilo feels her own sexuality, she cannot soothe other problems or even cannot gaze into future, but she can lead as a young woman. The mistress has to destroy her into fire instead that the woman finds her voice, accompany her desire and search for an identity in the migrated land. She must give up her spice store, to fulfill her desire. She suggests Raven to keep her new name that denote both the land. “One that spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now.” (316) Tilo changed to Maya, the young woman who has lost her special powers, “I who now have only myself to hold me up” 317 and endow her new inland over an act of cultural adaptation.

Now let us discuss about other displaced characters such as Lalita, Haroun, Shamsur, Hameeda, Jagjit, Geeta and her grandfather .

Lalita, who is displaced from Kanpur to Oakland, she faces racial segregation, vagrant, assimilation and cultural identity. She comes to the store every week after pay day. She has a power, though she does not think of it. “Every cloth she touches with her needle blooms.” (14) When she gazing at the palloo of a sari embroidered with zari thread. She thinks about the days which she spent in Kanpur. “I used to a lot, once. I loved it. In Kanpur I was going to sewing school, I had my own singer machine, lot of ladies gave me stitching to do.” (15) She has a dream that to start her own shop, ‘Lalita Tailor shop’. Later she got a marriage proposal and she got married and came to America. Tilo asked her ‘why don’t you work in this country’. Lalita was interested in work but Ahuja, husband did not allow her to work. “Aren’t I man enough man enough man enough.” (15) Before, getting married, she was independent and she enjoyed her life. Actually, she is not interested in marriage, but accepts because of community “Because in our community it is a shame if a grown girls sit in the house not married and I did not want to shame them.” (100)

Ahuja arrived to India only three days before the wedding. So she met him before three days of wedding but earlier she saw him in the picture. Actually, Ahuja looks different from picture because the picture taken many years ago. This made her anger and she thinks it's too late to cancel the wedding because all the invitations sent, few relatives arriving, news was announced in the paper. If the wedding stops, her poor father's money will become waste and sisters would get a bad name too. "Everyone would say, O those headstrong Chowdhary girls, better not to arrange a match with that family." 100 So she married him. She did not talk to him and did not allow him to touch her. Ahuja wants to make love with her badly. His friends were kidding him. Next time he forced her and made love with her until he goes to America. She thought of getting away from that place but she does not know where to go? She thinks suppose she left home, she will suffer a lot. At least living with him, she gets honor as a wife. Her parents did not ask anything about her worries even though they sensed it, "Silence and tears, Silence and tears, all the way to America." 102

In early days of her marriage, she pleased her husband; he too behaved in a sweet manner. She cannot forgive him in bed. So she is stiff and not willing even though he tried to be gentle. Ahuja puts more rules "no going out. No talking on the phone. Every penny I spend to be accounted for. He should read my letters before he mail them. And the call." 103 He calls every twenty minutes to her to check her. This kind of activities made her to think about death. Actually, Lalita is not that kind of person. She thinks a baby could bring her a new life. Tilo gives 'fennel' to solve her problems told to take after a meal and suggested it to offer to Ahuja also. It will freshen the breath, and aid digestion and gives mental strength for what must be done. Along with fennel she gave magazine.

She asked permission from Ahuja to consult a doctor, why she is not becoming mother. He said "ok, he said as long as it is a lady doctor. Indian is better." 269. But she couldn't find an Indian doctor but the American lady doctor said nothing problem with her may be with him. When Lalita conveyed this to her husband, he got angry and beat her cruelly. So Lalita fed up with him and she seeks a help from a helpline found in a magazine. Two women picked her at the bus stop along with her things and the jewelry. They drove her to another house in another town. They told that they will help her to set up a small tailoring business. If she is willing, but they warned her that things won't be easy. In her head voices whisper to her that, "He's learned his lesson, things will be different now, would it be so bad to go back? 272 She thinks herself that she deserves dignity and happiness.

Haroun is another immigrant from Kashmir, who does not do a single job at single place. He comes to Tilo's store on every Tuesday and gets his spice. One day he came to store and asked Tilo to read his palm. She learns that he did many works such as "Shovelling coals on ship when I came over, and then in a car shop. Wrenches and tyres irons and in between road work with jackhammers and pouring pitch." 26 Before doing this work, his family was boatmen on Dal Lake, his grandfather, his father and he rowed their Shikara for tourists from America-Europe. One day rebels broke out in their place, he asks his father to leave the place but his grandfather was not interested. "Toba, toba, where will we go, this is the land of our ancestors." 27 One night again rebels, arrived in his lake village so escaped to America.

At first he works under Kapadia memsaab, he quit his job because he was treated as animal. "All these rich people, they think they're still in India. Treat you like janwaars animals. Order this, order that, no end to it, and after you wear out your soles running around for them, not even a nod in thanks." 28-29 Later, he got offer from Mujjibar, from his uncle's village was Pahalgam, as call taxi driver and later a chance to buy it. He is a caring person, when Tilo didn't close the store at late night and when he finds a man inside the store. He advises her to be careful, "Ladyjaan, you must be more careful who you let in the store after dark. All kinds of bad people roaming around this neighborhood." 111

Tilo went to his place to ask sorry but he was not there, so she waited in Hameeda's house till he arrives. Hameeda, who is Indian neighbor of Haroun she lives with her brother Shamsur and her daughter Latifa. She got divorced because she gave birth to girl child. Shamsur when he hears this news, he took one month leave and came to India. He helps her to get good divorce settlements and deposited money in savings account and took her to America in a temporary visa. Later he asks her to be stay with him and told to attend college, get a job and stand on her own feet. Here no one will call Latifa, bad luck girl child. Hameeda, afraid to accept her brother's wish "I am a little afraid of this new country but at last I say yes." 227 She is teaching

Angezi class for free, learnt to read and write American language. May be she will study computer. Shamsur is now become manager of another hotel. So they have money to change best apartment but Hameeda do not want to change because of kind neighbors. Hameeda secretly loves Haroun.

Haroun arrived with crusted on his forehead and his face with his blood. Hameeda and her brother Shamsur called Rahman-Saab, he was surgeon in Lahore, army hospital. He gives anesthetic to Haroun to stop the moans. He says nothing to worry about Haroun later he became friend with Hameeda family and decided to marry her. His dreams had come true. "Haroun who has so much to live for, for whom the immigrant has come true in a way he never thought." 284

Jagjit who is migrated from Jullunder, he faces a racial discrimination, cultural identity and language issues. He is ten and a half old year boy and tall boy. Jagjit means world-conqueror. He has trouble in school. "Jagjit with his thin, frightened wrists who has trouble in school because he knows only Punjabi still." 38 In school the teacher told him to sit in the last row next to the drooling boy with milk-blue eyes. 'Idiot. Idiot. Idiot' was the first word he learnt in English and the second word is 'asshole'. In the play ground American students tried to pull his green colour turban. They pulled the cloth and laughed at his long uncut hair and pushed him down and he is bleeding in his knees. He did not allow cry let out. He picks up his muddy turban and wears it. He got scoldings from his mother, has though he wantedly did this. He feels don't want go to school but his mother scolds him that this is why your father killing himself at working in the factory and two slaps will make you to go. In his own native land he lived content and free but in America he feels discontent because he faces a racial discrimination, language issue and cultural identity among American students.

Jagjit first time gone to the store with his mother like a innocent boy. In the long run, he went to the store but his appearance and behaviour changed totally. He changed his hair style like American. He became teenager.

"Jagjit Sullen in t-shirt and baggy Girbaud jeans and untied laces, the uniform of young America, speaking its staccato rhythms already." 119

Cinnamon, strength giver, and friend maker, worked for him. So that he got new friends. He changed into real American.

"And one day they'll give it to me, cold and black-shining and heavy with power in my hand, pulsing electric as life, as death, my passport into the real America." 121.

Tilo is stunned and amazes either it is her cinnamon spice- remedy, Jaggi's parents or America that have directed him to evolve into drug trader, who is possibly on his action to become an outfitted goon. When he clutching his past memories on those mocking voices, the spitting mouths, the hands in the play ground that had abused him, these memories made him to become Jagjit. For every displaced person who comes to America, they assimilate and succeed financially. Some of them lost their jobs and their children. Sunaina Maira and Rajni wrote introduction to an anthology of writing in South Asian in North America:

"For first-generation South Asians, issues of belonging become increasingly complicated the longer they stay in North America, and even more profoundly. Boundaries between ethnicities, class, gender and religion dissolve and re-form of belonging (or not belonging) in North America."

The entanglement of diasporic discussion are builds by inquiries of identify, and Divakaruni novel tries to catch the traces that challenge the trite images of Indians as ideal minorities and low-profile citizens. The Mistress of spices presents a keen look at a wide range of Indians exist in the diaspora. Similarly in the structure of any clan of Indians too become rich diasporic persons they changes their cultural identity:

"The rich Indians descend from hills that twinkle brighter than stars.... Their cars gleam like waxed apples, glide like swans over the potholes outside my store." 75

Geeta is actually belongs to Indian daughter but she was brought up in America. Her grandfather belongs to first generation man of immigrant who believes in Indian culture. Actually he came to America by compulsion of his son Ramu, mostly he wanted to be live in India only. "That Ramu he said come come baba we are all here, what for you want to grow old so far from your own flesh and blood, your granddaughter. But I tell you, better to have no granddaughter than one like this Geeta." 85 Geeta belongs to third generation, she completely grown up in American culture. So many clashes comes between Geeta and her grandfather. When she started to work her appearance and behaviour changed that her grandfather dislikes it. He hates coming

home late night with mens and sometimes in their car. "chee chee, back in Jamshedpur they would have smeared dung on our faces for that." 85. When he tells to Ramu, he supports for his daughter. Ramu belongs to second generation, so he accepts American behaviour but he follows few Indian behaviour.

Grandfather received letter from Jadu Bhattachaj, his old army days friend. He sends a marriage proposal from him for Geeta. He informed this to Ramu but Ramu and his wife Sheela told that Geeta should decide this. Geeta reveals about her love with a American man named Juan Cordero. Her parents got shock and opposed her love because they think arranges marriage is better than love marriage. "I never thought you'd do this to us, is this how you repay us for giving you so much freedom even though all our relatives warned us not to." 90 Geeta gone out of the house because of her parents opposing for her love. She stayed with her friend and she thinks she will get a permission from her parents.

At first, grandfather who was against her but later he supports her and tries to bring back home. So he seeks help from Tilo. Tilo went to Geeta's office she met her and found that still she did not get marry and she was staying with her friend. Geeta asked who sent her and she got shock by Tilo's answer because grandfather who made her parents against her. "they never would have behaved so prehistorically otherwise. Dad, especially. If only he'd stayed in India none of this would've?" 134 Tilo says that grandfather loves her. Tilo made arrangements to meet her father, according to the plan of Tilo and grandfather. Geeta and Ramu met and convinced each other. Geeta went along with her father to house, her mother geared up Geeta's favorite foods. Ramu accepts her love. Grandfather is also very happy.

CONCLUSION

The novel is a best example for Indian diaspora. This novel examined the displacement, racial discrimination, culture identity, feminism and magic realism. Divakaruni expressed her own country people's sufferings in new land. She described how Indian immigrants suffers in America and how they are overcoming their problems and how they became high-level in the new country.

The process of displacement and migration Oliver Blackwell has stated:

"Both migration and displacement can be understood as process which bring about changes in people's physical location as a result transform economic, social and political relationship." (Koser. 19).

The process of migration and displacement occurred in Divakaruni's characters such as Tilo, Haroun, Lalita, Jagjit, Geeta's grandfather. Tilo, is an immigrant women, who longs to live as a normal women couldn't succeed in it as her fondness of spices takes an upperhand. Later, she did not obey the rule and she destroys her power and lives as a normal women. Haroun is also a displaced person, he transforms his condition in America by doing many odd jobs. He finally, decides to marry Hameeda, also an immigrant, who changed her personality after coming to America. Jagjit has also adapted American culture by transforming his appearance and behaviour. Geeta's grandfather gave up his idea about Indian culture to get back his granddaughter. So every character finally choses a multicultural notion which prevails to be the crux of diasporic discourse.

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