

identities and communities find solutions and where the trauma of being uprooted and displaced is mitigated to an extent to get the process of assimilation started. By delving into the psychic aspect of the food semiotic, the diasporic characters in the above-mentioned texts undergo tremendous transformation. They find themselves cured by the emotions and energy of the culinary creations which has worked as healing therapy in their lives.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This last chapter will sum up the core ideas taken up in each of the previous chapters and present the research findings. The study began with locating the food motif in the larger back drop of diasporic fiction and then traversed to the societal and personal space of Indian American community members as depicted in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's select works.

The introductory chapter elaborates on the main thrust of this study, presents the structure of the thesis along with its revised objectives, research questions, relevance, scope, and limitations. It also briefly mentions the relevant theoretical perspectives from which the culinary presence in Divakaruni's works will be analyzed. Diasporic fiction in general, and Divakaruni's place in it has been explored along with an overview of her literary oeuvre.

The Review of Literature delves into the available work done so far and it surveys and evaluates the relevant books, scholarly articles, thesis and papers related to this research study. Beginning with the backdrop of diasporic fiction, it presents valuable insights by authors like Steven Vertovec, Robin Cohen, Salman Rushdie and Homi Bhabha. Further, it investigates concepts like displacement and trauma that are an inescapable part of any diasporic work. This is followed by an

overview of culinary space along with its associative memories, rituals and practices and the crucial role it plays in diasporic fictional narratives. Critical inputs from culinary historians like Adrian Miller, Arjun Appadurai and Mohamed Bernoussi have been included to touch upon the semiotic aspect of culinary motif. The last part of the chapter foregrounds the critical body of research work done on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It highlights the thematic and stylistic aspects commonly analysed in the numerous studies till date and identifies the hitherto unexplored dimension, namely Divakaruni's engagement with the culinary space which the present study offers to focus on and concludes by stating how this thesis would be a significant contribution to the available corpus on the author.

The next chapter, 'Displaced Migrant Women and the Culinary Space' focuses on the condition of migrant women characters as depicted in the select works of the author. Within the larger diasporic context, women are marginalized, relegated to the domestic, kitchen space and are burdened with regressive expectations connected to the original 'home' culture. Critical insights on diasporic fiction and feminist perspective by renowned scholars like Frederick Monika, K.S Dhanam, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Simone de Beauvoir to name a few, have been shared to foreground the place assigned to these uprooted women in their homes and society in the host country. The chapter further analyses the connection between culinary space, identity and power and incorporates relevant illustrations from the texts to emphasize the same. The semiotic perspective through which the texts will be

analysed in the study further has been discussed and Claude Levi-Strauss's pioneering work on this subject has been elaborated upon. The manner in which Divakaruni's employment of the culinary motif to help the oppressed, displaced women gain a foothold and carve their own place in the alien land will be analysed in the subsequent chapters, has been touched upon at the end of this chapter.

In the next chapter titled 'Culinary Memories and Rituals in Divakaruni's Select Novels', the depiction of culinary space along with its associative memories and rituals in Divakaruni's select works has been explored. A brief overview of Divakaruni's place in the South Asian diasporic women writing context is given and some of her narrative techniques used in the chosen texts have been highlighted. Her engagement with food semiotic has been studied using the theoretical tools of semiotic scholars such as Barthes and Saussure. Through food related memories and food rituals, centuries-old traditions come alive even in the host country and provide ample space for identity formation and cultural negotiation. The strategies used by the author to present food not only as a primary need and a consumable commodity, but as a semiotic system that performs various functions have been highlighted. Describing the etymological meanings and salient features of the terms 'memory' and 'rituals', this chapter also highlights how connections between culinary identity and cultural identity are explored in Divakaruni's select works. Freudian perspective on trauma and memory as well as definitions from oral historians like Aanchal Malhotra and theorists like Vijay Agnew, James

Frazer and Tzvetan Todorov have been included to decipher all aspects of the term memory – individual and collective and examine the significance of preserving the past memories for the present generation. This chapter emphasizes how the author presents food as an alternative medium of communication and it critically analyses the chosen texts to reveal how in her fiction, food acts as language, identity marker, signifier of class and status, and as a repository of cultural heritage. Apart from providing insight into the inner realm of her women protagonists, the food motif acts as a cultural marker that establishes the culinary connection with the home country and consolidates their cultural identity in the host country.

The chapter titled ‘Culinary Healing in Divakaruni’s Select Novels’ attempts to understand the chosen texts through the archetypal as well as semiotic theories. Including insights from archetypal scholars like Northrop Frye, Carl Jung, Campbell and narrativity theorist Paul Ricoeur, this chapter explores concepts associated with collective unconscious, myths, individuation, narrative identity, and culinary narratives. From the ancient culinary practices mentioned in sacred Hindu texts to modern medical emphasis on curing ailments through diet, diverse aspects have been highlighted in this chapter to reiterate the therapeutic influence of food. Also, in the post Covid scenario, the intricate connection between healing and food is again in the limelight as is reflected in the numerous hashtags trending on twitter such as comfort food, cooking and healing, kitchen therapy and these have been briefly mentioned in this chapter as well. How the author employs

the food semiotic to serve as a signifier and healer through which the diasporic protagonists are empowered to take on the challenges in their migratory journey, and how they heal the trauma of dislocation, is what is focussed on. Culinary space provides solace to the traumatized characters and functions as an 'interstice' where renegotiation between the diverse cultures can take place and renewal and rejuvenation can occur, be it at the individual or collective level. Whether it is hyphenated identities, complicated relationships, emotional and physical maladies, or communal hardships, healing at all these diverse aspects is made possible through food.

The concluding chapter discusses the findings, briefly summarizes the analyses of the previous chapters, provides avenues to future scholars for further research in the area and draws forth the conclusion that Divakaruni's incorporation of the culinary motif works towards empowering the alienated marginalised subjects. It re-establishes the significance of the culinary space in Divakaruni's select fictional narratives and highlights the strategies she uses as she navigates the migratory memories through the food semiotic. The culinary semiotic evokes the archetype of the utopian home away from home and continues to nourish and nurture the diasporic subjects. Through associations with memory, rituals, homeland and home, food builds an anchor for the un-homed and provides roots for the uprooted.

As the scope of this study was confined to culinary realms of Divakaruni's selected Indian women immigrant fiction, there

undoubtedly remains a vast treasure to be explored further in her diverse fictional works. From comparative studies with other diasporic women writers, studies analysing intercultural aspects embedded in her works to thematic research exploring her trademark stylistic strategies such as magic realism and mysticism, Divakaruni's writings are an open hunting ground for upcoming South Asian women writers and research scholars alike and they will remain relevant and significant to the study of New Writings in English in the years to come.

This study demonstrates that Divakrauni's fictional characters have subverted the patriarchal authority that assigns a marginal, restricted space for women and have creatively used the culinary space and transformed it into a central dominant one. According to Shanti Menon, some women in Kerala, South India convincingly pretend to play a submissive role in their families. even when they are not being marginalized at all, in order to maintain the status quo of expected femininity in patriarchal society. Commenting on how women negotiate the power play that exists in the home space, the study explicates that "within their separate sphere women create a space from which they can resist male authority in subtle and silent ways. Their resistance is never articulated; it is a shared secret among women. (Menon 2001:359) The study further elaborates how this is done in an implicit manner and so actually the food space enables the women to become fulfilled, empowered and gain a central position in the household, albeit in a discreet manner. Brown and Miller (2002a), in their work explore this phenomenon wherein women, who are the main nourishers

and nurturers of the family, derive fulfilment and strength and enhance their decision-making capabilities from the various chores related to procurement, preparation, presentation and consumption of food. American women often relish the feeling of independence and control they derive from such activities. (Brown and Miller 2002a). This and many such studies emphasize that the domestic domain should not merely be seen as a restricting, imprisoning one, rather it can be harnessed to become a potential site for completeness, healing and liberation.

Through a rigorous investigation and interpretation, this thesis adds to the given corpus of work on Divakaruni and provides an in-depth analysis of the culinary presence in her works. Divakaruni has used the culinary in her fiction to enable her diasporic characters to come to terms with their individual as well as collective identity, reactivate their cultural memory and resurrect their unexplored narratives. The present study paves way to better understanding of women's position in society, the trials and tribulations they face and their condition in alien countries where they are doubly marginalized as they find themselves caught between diverse cultural pulls between the expectations of the patriarchal culture of the home country and the challenges of assimilating in the liberal western culture of the host country. Whether it is at the personal level or at the collective level – the culinary space offers them a creative escape as well as a safe cocoon, where they can find solace and refuge. They are able to heal from the trauma of dislocation, isolation and double marginalization that are an

inextricable part of the journey of every diasporic subject. The culinary helps them construct new narratives for themselves, and they are empowered to occupy the dominant position in their personal lives as well as in their diasporic communal life. According to *New York Times Book Review*, Divakaruni's stories are "as irresistible as the impulse that leads her characters to surface into maturity, raising their heads above floods of silver ignorance." And this thesis has attempted to explore the way the author has used the culinary space strategically to enable her characters recover and heal from the wounds borne along their migratory journey and eventually 'surface into maturity'.

Divakaruni ensures that her women protagonists, however frail, confused, problematic they might be, and however trapped in hopeless situations they find themselves in – are, at the end of the day – fighters all. Instead of succumbing to their daunting circumstances and surrendering to their fates or cursing their karma, they learn to use the existing limited resources available at their disposal and give it all they have got. While being interviewed by Atiya Hasan about the book *BVG*, she declares that she wanted this story about how to "find courage within ourselves when the world throws at us all that is unexpected and new" and this holds true for most of her stories as well, where her heroines – be it first generation immigrant dealing with cultural and identity crisis or second generation settled abroad struggling with dual narratives – the one at home and one outside, try and most of the time succeed in swimming with the tide and staying afloat in the midst of "unexpected and new" hardships and challenges.

Be it Sabitri, Bela and Tara in BVG, Korobi in OG, Rakhi in QD, Sudha and Anju in SMH and VD, Tilo in MOS, Draupadi in POI, most of her women protagonists are able to move out of the marginal space ‘assigned’ to them by regressive patriarchal ideologies and take the rein of their lives in their own hands. The definition of an autonomous person, as per James L Christian, Professor Emeritus Philosophy, Santa Ana College is – an individual who acts, who “determines [her] own behaviour and makes decisions consonant with what [she] really is, in contrast to the norms set by others that may be discordant with [her] own needs.” And in Divakaruni’s fiction, the culinary space helps her women characters recover from trauma, heal and finally embark on an autonomous journey.