

CHAPTER 3

THE THIRD SPACE OF AUTONOMOUS SELF-HOOD IN THE WORKS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

“It [Magical Realism] has also become a commonplace narrative mode for fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered, for instance indigenous people living under a covert colonial system such as Native Americans in the United States, women writing from a feminist perspective, or those whose lives incorporate different cultural beliefs and practices from those dominant in their country of residence...” (Mary Ann Bowers, 31-32).

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Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices* is the narrative of an immigrant, Tilo living in the US. Tilo is the mistress of spices who owns a spice shop, *Spice Bazar* in Oakland, California. Tilo's past and her capabilities as a mistress of spices create a narrative fantasy, while her experiences as an immigrant and that of her customers, mostly Indians, make for a realistic narrative. Divakaruni uses the postmodern technique of magical realism in her novel, as she points out, “I wrote in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth and magic in my attempt to create a modern fable” (www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0597/divakaruni/essay.html). In the formal beginning to the novel, she talks about the spices, as not only an integral part of Indian cooking and culture but also as something used by the Americans, who toss the spices “unthinking into your cooking pot”. She takes a lot of pride in declaring, “But the spices of true power are from my birth land, land of ardent poetry, aquamarine feathers. Sunset skies brilliant as blood. They are the ones I work with. If you stand in the centre of this room and turn slowly around, you will be looking at every Indian spice that ever was – even the lost ones – gathered here upon the shelves of my store” (3). She also reveals her present reality as an immigrant in Oakland, “For even here in this new land America, this city which prides itself on being no older than a heartbeat,

it is the same things we want, again and again” and declares her task as a mistress of spices in Oakland; “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” (4). Being an immigrant in America, Tilo too can’t escape the sense of ‘homelessness’. For instance, when she steps out of her store for the first time, she experiences a longing for a place to call home, because she does not have a home in the ‘traditional and permanent sense’, as she points out in the novel, “I run my hand over the door, which looks so alien in outdoor light, and am struck by the sudden vertigo of homelessness” (128).

As the mistress of spices, Tilo is given an identity which is in tandem with the way she appears to the people, who came to her store. She feels sad that no one would ever know her true self as she puts it, “They do not know of course. That I am not old, that this seeming body I took on in Shampati’s fire when I vowed to become a mistress is not mine..... Sometimes it fills me with heaviness, like of black ice, when I think that across the entire length of this land not one person knows who I am”. The store serves as ‘a land of might-have-been’ for other immigrants who visit her store. A place which was according to Tilo, “A self-indulgence dangerous for a brown people who came from elsewhere, to whom real American might say *why?*” (5). The store serves as a mini-India for the nostalgic immigrants.

Divakaruni depicts the experiences of female immigrants like her in her works. Immigration from India to America has been nothing short of a ‘trail’ for her as well as the other fellow immigrants. She showcases her own experiences as an immigrant and that of other women she had come across over a period of time in America. Balancing oneself as one experiences culture shock and alienation is a difficult task for the immigrants especially the women. As Chakravarti and Ghanshyam point out in their article, “Shifting Identities: Re-invention of the Self in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*”:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has very dexterously juxtaposed the world of spices with that of women, as a metaphor of her life and identity, the ever

changing, altering world of the spices that creates something new whenever they are used. A woman also assimilates, transforms and evolves with the changing circumstances of her life, especially when she is placed in the position of an immigrant. Tilo's search and final realization of the self is a result of the ongoing process of self-identification that characterizes the shifting nature of a woman's identity. (84-85).

As women are considered to be the carriers and transmitters of culture and traditions, living up to the cultural values and adapting oneself in an alien culture is a daunting task for them. Women like Divakaruni, are successful in assimilating into the new alien culture as well as defining a self-identity. Tilo, the protagonist in the novel *The Mistress of Spices*, is one such female immigrant. Tilo as the mistress acts like a bridge between different cultures. She believes that she can lessen the miseries of the fellow immigrants by the magical powers of her spices. The spices have medicinal qualities which can decrease physical ailments, but Tilo's belief in her powers as a mistress and the supernatural powers the spices are said to have, add the magical dimension to the realistic portrayal of the immigrant's experiences in America.

Tilo has an equally fantastic history of her origins, her arrival at the enchanted island, where she is taught everything about the spices and trained to be a mistress of spices by the First Mother, an ageless old woman, whose age is not known to anyone. The warning the First Mother gives to Tilo time and again shows her deep understanding of Tilo's personality. The rules and traditions which a mistress is required to follow strictly are like some of the discriminatory cultural norms, which eventually stifle the true identity of an individual, here Tilo's. Change is required in a new place, in an alien culture. The need to assert one's identity, to be recognised, is felt by every individual. Tilo also has similar desires. She wants to step out of the prison of her spice store, explore America and create an identity of her own. She is frightened by the fact that in the vast land of America, there is no one who knows her. She wants to be free, to be with Raven, whom she loves, but not at the cost of her work and identity as a mistress, whose primary work was to eliminate the suffering and miseries of people, especially the other fellow immigrants.

Tilo inquires after the welfare of her regular customers, details which they had actually never shared with her. It is Tilo's supernatural power as a Mistress of spices, which tells her what ails each of her customers, and she has a remedy for each of them in the form of some appropriate spice or a concoction of spices. So even if her customers look at her in disbelief initially she knows that they would come back later, after darkness to express their desires, sorrows and to ask for a remedy. She keeps her purest spices in an inner room where she takes her customers and prepares concoction of the spices onto which, "I will chant I will administer. I will pray to remove sadness and suffering as the Old One taught. I will deliver warning" (TMS, 7). Delivering happiness and warning to her clients of impending troubles; this was the purpose of her life as a mistress, for which she had been trained on the island and later left the island. The island, which was her home, "where each day still is melted sugar and cinnamon, and birds with diamond throats sing, and silence when it falls is light as mountain mist" (7). She had left her home for this store in Oakland and she has brought along with her, 'everything you need in order to be happy'.

Divakaruni's use of postmodern techniques foregrounds the magical elements in the novel. As Gita Rajan points out in her essay 'Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* Deploying Mystical Realism', "Like the novel, Tilo too is balanced on the thin line separating the potency of mysticism from the power of reality, and admits that life often works on a double register of real people with identities that extend into virtual spaces. She says, "Sometimes I wonder if there is such a thing as reality, an objective and untouched nature of being. Or if all that we encounter has already been changed by what we had imagined it to be. If we have dreamed it into being. (TMS, 16)" (Rajan 219-220). The narration of Tilo's supernatural powers as a child also foregrounds the magical quality of the narrative, for instance:

No pirates had been sighted around our little river village for atleast a hundred years.... But I believed. Long after the stories were done I lay awake and thought of them with yearning..... I was using the calling thought, though only later on the island would I learn its name. The calling thought which, as the Old One told us , can draw to you whoever you desire – a lover to your side, an enemy to your feet. Which can lift a soul

out of a human body and place it raw and pulsing in your palm. Which used imperfectly and without control can bring destruction beyond imagining. And so others may blame the merchant sailors who carried tales of me to every land for the coming of the pirates. But I know better. (17-18)

In the story reference to snakes also heightens the magical element of the narrative. Snakes are worshipped in India as Gods since ancient times. The snakes are the Guardians of Tilo right from her childhood when she was known as Nayan Tara.

Snakes. Oldest of creatures, closest to the earth mother, all sinew and glide against her breast. Always I have loved them. Once they loved me too. In the heat-cracked fields behind my father's house, the land snakes shielded me from the sun when I was tired with playing. Their hoods spread ripple-wide, their smell cool as wet earth at the bottom of banana groves. In the streams that ribboned the village, the river snakes swam with me skin to skin, arrows of gold cutting through sun-flecked water, telling stories. How after a thousand years the bones of drowned men turn to white coral, their eyes to black pearl. How deep in a cavern underwater sits the king snake, Nagraj guarding mounds of treasure. And the snakes of the ocean, the sea serpents? They saved my life" (21).

They continue to serve and guard her, Bhagyavati, even when she becomes the queen of the pirates. The snakes tell her about the enchanted island of spices and the Old One, who has been there forever. They had seen Old One on the nights when she climbed the highest point of a mountain and sent 'the thunder-writing across the sky'. She appeared like a 'pillar of burning' and according to the serpents, only her powers prevailed on the island and the waters touching it. Tilo has an intuition that her destiny and future was on the island in the hands of the Old One. She defies the warnings and pleadings of the serpents and goes to the island, as 'the call of the spices coursed up my veins'. Tilo is tempted to go to the enchanted island of spices, but the serpents persuade her to go with them. They offer to make her the 'sarpa kanya'. "We will take you to the seven seas on our backs. We will show you where the Ocean Samudra Puri sleeps, bidding its time. Perhaps you will be the one to awaken it" (24).

Tilo is too attracted to the island of spices to heed their words. Chakravarti and Ghanshyam, in their essay, 'Shifting Identities: Re-invention of the self in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*' points out, "Tilo's fascination with snakes symbolizes the deep connection that Divakaruni establishes with the feminine principle integral to the nature and to woman. The snakes renew themselves and are also mythologized to have the shape shifting ability; likewise Tilo also renews herself every time in a new situation and in a new environment" (81).

The First Mother represents the values and traditions of the Indian culture. And her rules for the mistresses are like the chains which bind them in their stereotypical roles, depriving them freedom to assert themselves or form a self-identity, apart from that of a mistress. The job of a mistress is noble; however, Tilo craves to be recognized and have an identity of her own in the alien land and did not want to be anonymous as the mistresses were required to be. Talking about her usage of myths and fantasy in her novel, Divakaruni points out:

With *The Mistress of Spices*, I wanted to bring in another facet of what I was growing up with: the elements of the folktales, the tales of magic and mythical tales. They contain important and powerful women figures, usually older wise women, who have learned the secrets of the natural world and can use those secrets to help others. In the process, they become very powerful. They become leaders of their community. Such stories from my culture relate to those from many other traditions with wise women in other Eastern contexts or maybe in Eastern Europe considered as
witches
(<http://cww.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/01/10/cww/vpro2>).

Using the myths, folktales, tales of magic, which are part of a culture in the narration depicts the performative aspect of the culture. It brings forth rich variety which is a part of the historical cultural heritage of a country. Magical realism, as a narrative technique enables Divakaruni to not only portray the lived reality of, especially the Indian immigrants, but also depict the fantastic, magical elements

which are a part of the Indian culture. For instance, whether it is the magical qualities of the spices, which were used in ancient ayurveda or the folktales, which were spread by the word of mouth, the snakes, which are worshipped in India as gods or the lives of people in ancient India who lived close to nature and had learnt and mastered some of its powers, like the First Mother in the novel. She is the leader of her community of mistresses and those girls who wanted to learn the powers of the spices and use them for the benefit of humanity. The first mother, who is also called the Old one, is a rigid disciplinarian and matriarch, very strict with the young girls who wanted to become mistress of spices and the adherence to the rules and regulations laid down for them. But at the same time, “The First Mother is elderly and maternal, representing the traditionalist notion of the South Asian woman in the domestic sphere. Yet at the same time, she is outside the boundaries of conventional culture, for she lives on an isolated island, possesses magical powers and urges the young girls towards progression and change rather than the maintenance of the status quo. She is at once the “old world” and the “new”, a juxtaposition of differing geographical spaces, times and cultures” (<http://library.williams.edu/theses/pdf.php?id=6>).

Spices are an integral part of Indian cuisine. Apart from the medicinal and culinary uses of the spices, some of the spices like the turmeric, for instance, are used in traditional rituals, which Tilo points out. This is a performative aspect of the Indian cultural nationalism. The medicinal value of spices have been known since the ancient times in India, as for instance Tilo describes the uses of turmeric, “Bring it to your face. Rub it on cheek, forehead, chin.....For a thousand years before history began, brides – and those who long to be brides – have done the same. It will erase blemishes and wrinkles, suck away age and fat. For days afterwards your skin will give off a pale golden glow. Turmeric the preserver, keeping the foods safe in a land of heat and hunger. Turmeric the auspicious spice, placed on the heads of newborns for luck, sprinkled over coconuts at *Pujas*, rubbed into the borders of wedding saris”.

Spices, apart from these uses, are endowed with supernatural qualities, which guide Tilo’s course of actions and destiny; as Tilo points out, “When I hold it in my hands, the spice speaks to me. Its voice is like evening, like the beginning of the

world. *I am turmeric who rose out of the ocean of milk when the devas and asuras churned for the treasures of the universe. I am turmeric who came after the poison and before the nectar and thus lie in between*". Divakaruni here refers to the ancient Indian myth of *Samudra Manthan* out of which Turmeric evolved, and this myth adds to the magical dimension of the narrative. The supernatural powers attributed to the spices add to the magical aspect. The spices speak to Tilo and she sways to the rhythm of their power, describing, here, for instance the power of Turmeric, "You are turmeric, shield for heart's sorrow, anointment for death, hope for rebirth" (13-14).

Reference to the old myths and legends of a culture is a common practice in a magical realist narrative. The narration of these myths and legends foreground the performative aspect of the Indian cultural nationalism, they allude to the culture of origin. The legend of the celestial beauty, Tilottama is a metaphorical reference to Tilo's own future, as she transgresses the rules laid for the mistresses. She falls in love with Raven, which eventually leads to the loss of her powers. As Daphne Grace points out:

Magic is used to postulate positive social change. Magic drawn from an alternate, parallel world is accessible, utilisable as an alternate mode of living. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the postcolonial expatriate experience of cultural displacement is personified in the character of Tilo. She must straddle two cultures, two worlds – one real and the other magical as well as the "diametrically opposed worlds of India and America". Here, rather than fantastic serving to protest against "tyranny" of fact, the magical elements serve to incorporate sense of old values and beliefs (including stories of the Indian epics) into the modern world. Magic has a socializing rather than subversive function. (124)

Earlier Tilo was too arrogant to believe that she could break the rules. She is eager to enter the new world; "My heart is filled with passion for the spices, my ears with the music of our dance together. My blood with our shared power. I need no pitiful mortal man to love. I believe this. Wholly" (43). The Old One knew how impulsive Tilo could be. Her reprimands made Tilo believe that the Old One saw herself mirrored in Tilo her 'headstrong self, her own girlhood'.

‘You’ll be tempted,’ said the Old One before I left. ‘You especially with your lava hands that want so much from the world. Your lava heart flying too easily to hate, to envy, to love – passion. Remember why you were given your power. (49)

Despite the warnings, Tilo is unable to control her feelings. She feels tempted to break the rules laid for the Mistress of spices and also uses the spices to fulfil her desires. In order to keep her safe from temptations, the Old One gave her a knife as a ‘going-away’ gift to keep her chaste and steadfast to her vows. The knife is apparently an ordinary one yet special, as Tilo points out, “Most ordinary, for that is the nature of deepest magic. Deepest magic which lies at the heart of our everyday lives, flickering fire, if only we had eyes to see it” (51).

There are rules which the wannabe Mistresses need to adhere to very strictly. Tilo’s journey to becoming a mistress of spices from an ordinary girl is quite magical. Much against the wishes of the serpents, she manages to reach the island of spices. Initially she is rejected by the Old One, who finds her unfit to be a mistress. However, the Old One allows Tilo to stay on the island because she was the only one in whose hands the spices ‘sang back’. On the day the girls were about to leave the island, the Old One gives them a new name and a new identity with which they would be recognized wherever they went. Tilo is the brightest pupil of all, ‘quick to master every spell and chant, quick to speak with the spices, even the most dangerous, quick to arrogance and impatience....and quite bold’. While the First Mother gave each of the Mistresses a new name based on the spice they identified with, Tilo chose her own name arousing the displeasure of the First Mother. “You’ve been nothing but trouble ever since you came, rule breaker. I should have thrown you out at our first meeting itself” (41-42). The First Mother knew that Tilo was too headstrong to be trustworthy; however, she accedes to Tilo’s desire. The First Mother refers to the legend of Tilottama, ‘the chief dancer of Indra’s court’ to warn her against falling in love with a man. However, Tilo is too confident about keeping the rules and vows she had made, the Old One warns her – “Remember this too: Tilottama, disobedient at the last, fell. And was banished to earth to live as a mortal for seven lives. Seven mortal lives of illness and age, of people turning in disgust from her twisted, leperous limbs” (43).

The fate of the trained mistresses, who enter the fire of Shampati, alludes to the tale of the phoenix birds, as Tilo points out, “We danced around it singing of Shampati, bird of myth and memory who dived into conflagration and rose new from ash, as we were to do”. Apart from this there were ‘stamped on the lintels and doorposts of the motherhouse the runes of the bird rising, its flame-beak angled toward sky’. This indicates the new life the mistresses would be getting and a new world they would enter passing through Shampati’s fire. If the Shampati’s fire could be a giver of new life, it could also take back what it bestows and punish a mistress who fails in her duty, as the First Mother warns, “‘Look well Mistress, grown rebellious and self-indulgent, fails her duty and must be recalled. Warning is sent to her, and she has three days only to settle her affairs. Then Shampati’s fire blazes for her once more. But this time entering she feels it fully, scorch and sear, the razors of flame cutting her flesh to strips. Screaming, she smells her bones shatter, skin bubble and burst’” (56-57). The Old One also added that the spices decided which erring mistress would return to the island to ‘learn and labour again’ and who would be reduced to ‘crumbled charcoal’.

Once settled in her Oakland store, Tilo begins to dream of a life beyond the store, having an identity of her own in this alien land; desires, which were forbidden for the mistresses to even, think of. “When I lie down, 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, through the thoughts that roll into me. Tilo whose life is so calm so controlled so always same, is it not fine as wine, this taste of mortal sorrow, and mortal hope” (60). Tilo is tired of the monotonous life of being in the store all the time, attending to the needs of the customers. She now desires a normal life, which lay beyond the store, in spite of its hardships. A mistress was not allowed to fall in love with a man, according to the rules. “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 is attracted to the ‘lonely American’. She wants to be young and attractive like the ‘bougainvillaea girls’ for him. She feels lonely as she could not transgress the rules. For every individual there is a special spice called the ‘*mahamul*’, the root spice. The mistresses didn’t have one as they could not use the spices for themselves according to rules. Tilo is distressed to find that the special spice meant

for her 'lonely American' was Asafoetida – 'antidote to love', which she does not wish to give him because she does not want to lose him. She feels dissatisfied with her life as a mistress, however, she is reminded of the Old One's words, "When you begin to weave your own desires into your vision; 'the true seeing is taken from you. You grow confused, and the spices no longer obey you'" (72). Tilo is unable to resist her attraction towards Raven; however, she gets timely warnings of an impending danger, an earthquake to come.

Yes, I admit it, he's the reason. And yes I want to see him again. And yes I'm disappointed when the sight falls on me like fever; and shuddering I look among the faces to come and do not see his. *He promised*, I tell myself, and am angrier because he didn't really. Suddenly I want to sweep the *mithais* from their case to the floor *laddus* and *rasogollahs* sent rolling in dust, syrup and splintered glass sticking to shoe soles. And the shock in the eyes of the customers whose desires I'm tired of. It's *my* desire I want to fulfil, for once. (82)

However, the next moment Tilo feels guilty and wonders what the Old One would say 'to this wanting'. The Old One worried the most for Tilo because of her 'Life-lust, that craving to taste all things sweet as well as bitter, on your own tongue'. Geeta's love story reminds Tilo of her own love for the 'lonely American'. She has a dream in which the First Mother warns her, "“When the Mistress uses her power for herself, when she breaks the age-old rules - she tears through the delicate fabric of the balanced world, and - *and to all whom she has loved as she should not, chaos comes*” (94).

The Old One's warnings and reiteration of the powers of spices foreground the magical realism techniques used by Divakaruni. "Ultimately the Mistresses are without power, hollow reeds only for the winds singing. It is the spice that decides, and the person to whom it is given. You must accept what they together choose and even with failure be at peace But when you lean out past what is allowed and touch what is not, when you step beyond the old rules, you increase the chance of failing a hundredfold. The old rules which keep the world in its frail balance, which have been there forever, before me, before the other Old Ones, before even the

Grandmother ‘Don’t let America seduce you into calamities you cannot imagine. Dreaming of love, don’t arouse the spices’ hate’” (139-140). Tilo has numerous desires, forbidden for the mistresses. She wants to explore America; she wants to be with Raven and also the spices to be with her. Tilo has a compassionate heart, she does her best to alleviate the suffering of those who seek her help, - Geeta’s dadaji, Lalita (Mrs. Ahuja), Haroun or Jagjit. According to the Old One, the mistresses were not supposed to take any interest in the outside world, beyond their stores. They were required to remedy only the problems brought to them. In spite of the rules and the guilt of self-indulgence, Tilo decides to step out of the store once more for Haroun, for whom she has a premonition of an impending danger; “I who have held Haroun’s hands in mine and felt the hope pulsating wild through them, cannot let night cast her ink-net over him without a fight” (181).

The spices seek their revenge as per the warnings of the Old One. Tilo has a premonition that something terrible was going to happen to Haroun. Even in Jagjit’s case the spices had seemed to fail. Jagjit had joined a gang of drug peddlers and antisocial elements, whom he called his friends. Geeta’s grandfather looks very expectantly at Tilo to set things right in his family. Tilo is unable to resist the urge to help them and prepares herself to break out from the ‘shell within shell within shell’, in which she was trapped like a bird. “Today I plan to stretch my wings, to crack perhaps these shells and emerge into the infinite spaces of the outside world. It frightens me a little” (125).

She takes the help of the spice Ginger to give her strength to face an America which was ‘calling in its many-tongued voice’ and she had to answer the call. In the process she breaks the rules laid down for the mistresses repeatedly, for which she would be required to pay later. She dresses herself up for America. She soon gets over her guilt and is able to bend the spices to her will. When the spices resist her powers, she pleads them to help her, as it was not for her sake that she was going against them. Tilo knew it in her hearts of heart that she was helping Geeta because she saw ‘in her forbidden love an image of your own’. Tilo desires to have the American fancy clothes, shoes, make up, and the most forbidden thing for the mistresses, a

mirror. Though she is overcome by guilt and gives up everything else, she takes the mirror. She decides not to listen to the spices this time. She is pleased to be able to blend easily in the crowds on the American roads. Geeta blames her grandfather for her unhappiness. "He's the one who turned them against me with all that shit about good women and family shame. They never would have behaved so prehistorically otherwise. Dad especially. If only he'd stayed in India none of this would've - If it weren't for his medieval ideas about arranged marriages I wouldn't have had to tell Mom and Dad about Juan like this" (134-135). In spite of her frustration Geeta does not go against her cultural values, she stays with her best friend Diana instead of moving into Juan's house before marriage. She is pleased by Tilo's kind words and reveals more about Juan; "He's really interested in Indian culture and especially our food. I cook it every once in a while at his apartment. You know Mexicans cook with a lot of the same spices that we ..." (136). According to Chitra Banerjee:

For me Tilo became the quintessential dissolver of boundaries, moving between different ages and worlds and the communities that people them, passing through a trial by water, then a trial by fire and finally the trial by earth – burial to emerge transformed, each time with a new name and a new identity....I was surprised to find how - - how much I identified with her. But looking back I see that it is not so surprising after all. I too have lived in the diametrically opposed worlds of India and America. I too have taken on a new identity in a new land. And I too, in my quiet way, have visited that emptiness, at once vast and minute, that shimmers between life and death" (www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0597/divakaruni/essay.html)

When Raven asks Tilo for an outing, Tilo is unable to resist the temptation to use the spices to make her look young and beautiful. The spices themselves seem to tempt her:

O Mistress what did you think. The voice of the spices is like skipping water, cool laughter that dances over my chagrin. If you want true change you must use us differently, must call on our powers. You know the words.

Spices, what are you saying. My spells were not given for myself to use.

For you, for him, where do you separate the desires. (189)

Tilo tries to resist the temptation aroused by the spices. She reprimands them for luring her 'to break the most sacred promise, to doom myself beyond recall'. Tilo gets carried away in her attraction towards Raven. As he narrates his past to her, Tilo too reflects on her innermost desires. "I Tilo who wanted so much as a child to be different, who as an adult now longs for the ordinary life of kitchen and bedroom, fresh-made bread, a parrot, in a cage to call my name, lovers' quarrels and make-up" (202). Raven's past makes Tilo retrospect about her situation if the spices left her. "Fear breaks over me like a black wave as I listen to Raven. If a single brush with the life of power could leave him so bereft, what would happen to me. I Tilo who have given up all to be Mistress. How would I bear it if the spices ever left me" (210). Raven is full of remorse and regret for being rude to his mother and abandoning her. He asks Tilo if his behaviour towards his parents would have been acceptable in her (Indian) culture. Tilo has no answers for Raven's queries, especially because she had been disobedient all her life towards her parents and now towards the Old One.

Tilo feels belittled in the presence of the 'bougainvillea girls'. Raven instils confidence in her by reassuring her that she was better than those girls, as she was capable of doing things which they could not in hundred years. For him she is 'authentic in a way they'll never be', a 'Real Indian'. Tilo wants an identity of her own, love and an independent life, but at the same time she does not want to lose the spices. When she decides to break the final rule by using the spices for herself, *Makardwaj*, the king of spices questions her love for the spices. Tilo reiterates her loyalty to the spices, as she points out, "Spices why must you always compare. Each desire in the world is different, as is each love. You who were born in the world's dawning know this far better than I" (261). She is willing to sacrifice her future in exchange for Raven, as she points out, "Weigh it yourself: to him I will give one night, to you the rest of my life whatever you choose it to be, one hundred years on the island or a single moment, conflagration and consuming, in Shampati's fire" (262). Divakaruni compares this sacrifice of Tilo to Lord Shiva, who according to an Indian mythological story had drunk the poison, which was destroying the world. As a

result of the poison Lord Shiva's throat had turned blue in colour. Like him, Tilo is willing to face any kind of punishment meted out by the spices in exchange for the fulfilment of her desires.

In her search for her identity, Tilo discovers that her happiness and future may not be with Raven as he did not love her the way she was, but because of the uniqueness he found in her as a result of her culture. Her time was running out. She had to enter Shampati's fire on the third and last day before dawn. "Our love would not have lasted, for it was based upon fantasy, yours and mine, of what it is to be Indian. To be American. But where I am going – life or death, I do not know which – I will carry its brief aching sweetness. Forever" (292). When Tilo tries to invoke Shampati's fire nothing happens. She tries to call the spices but there is no response. The spices have left her bereft of all her powers. She gets back her middle-aged, plain appearance. "Spices, I Tilo accept your decree. In spite of terror and heartbreak, the loneliness of love lost and power turned to ash, I take it upon myself to live this way as long as I must... This is my atonement. Willingly I undergo it. Not because I have sinned, for I acted out of love, in which is no sinning. Were I to do it over, I would do the same again" (298).

There is an allusion of Tilo becoming beautiful and ravishing for Raven, like Tilottama, the dancer of the Gods. Tilo knows that she has to pay for the rules violated. She has to restore the balance that has been upset by her for the fulfilment of her desires. She understands that the only way to do so was to take upon herself the suffering of all those for whom she cares and loves. Here, Divakaruni alludes to the tale of 'Samudra Manthan', to compare Tilo's sacrifice with. The fumes of the poison 'halahal', which emerged as a result of the 'Samudra Manthan', started covering the earth and destroying life on it. In order to save the world, Lord Shiva drank all the poison which burned his throat rendering it into a blue colour. It dawns on Tilo that drinking the poison might have been painful to Shiva too, and in comparison she was no goddess but an ordinary woman. "I Tilo am no goddess but an ordinary woman only. Yes, I admit it, this truth I have tried to escape all my life. And though once I

thought I could save the world, I see now that I have only brought brief happiness into a few lives” (298).

Oakland is shaken and destroyed by an earthquake. Raven manages to save Tilo and they head north, towards the mountains, in search of Raven’s ‘Earthly Paradise’. Tilo is back to her normal appearance. She is no longer the ravishing beauty she was for Raven, for a night. However, she is pleased to see that ‘the eyes are the same Tilo eyes. Still curious-bright. Still rebellious. Still ready to question, to fight’ (306). Tilo’s dreams and desires are different from those of Raven’s. She knew that their relationship would not work as, “Each of us loving not the other but the exotic image of the other that we have fashioned out of our own lack.....” (310). Though Raven is able to convince Tilo of his love for her, Tilo is not convinced about the existence of an ‘Earthly Paradise’ of Raven’s dream. She wants to return to Oakland and serve the injured people. Much of the destruction that had taken place in Oakland was due to fire and not the quake itself. Tilo knew ‘what burning smells like’. She had witnessed the destruction of her village, and her own family burnt to death by the pirates. She was powerless then to do anything to save them. But today, she had a choice of either ignoring the human suffering that the earthquake had caused and head to the ‘Earthly Paradise’, a life of bliss with Raven, or return to Oakland and serve the people, something she was trained to do as a mistress of spices. She tries to convince Raven that there was no ‘Earthly Paradise’, except the one that they could make in the devastated city, by extending help to the needy. Tilo decides to leave Raven though ‘every cell in my body cries out to stay’, because she knew that ‘in the end some things are more important than one’s own joy’. Raven decides to follow Tilo though reluctantly, as he did not want to lose her. He gives Tilo a new name that suits her new identity, now that she was no longer a Mistress of Spices. She is given the name ‘Maya’, which according to Tilo ‘spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now’. The name ‘Maya’ according to the Indian culture connotes many things as Tilo points out, ““in the old language it can mean many things. Illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day”” (317). At the end of the novel, instead of escaping with Raven into some illusory utopia of Earthly Paradise, she opts to return to Oakland, which was devastated due to earthquake.

Maya is rooted in her Indian culture and the speaking serpents, which followed her through, bless her. Thanking them, she surges ahead with Raven to become involved in the human world. After a diasporic journey from her birth land India, changing names with multiple identities, negotiating power with traditional restraints, Maya arrives at a realistic definition of selfhood in America. Though she has culturally identified herself with Indian Americans, she has formed a cross-cultural identity with Raven and as the sun rises; she recreates her personal space in her new 'home' with Raven. (Usha 143).

Humanitarianism, the highest and noblest attribute of a human being and of a culture is reflected here. The Indian cultural nationalism is defined by this, a kind of Humanitarianism that Sri Aurobindo talks about in his works and Tagore foregrounds in his novel *Gora* through Anandamoyi's character. Finally, Tilo not only gets back Raven, but she has discovered America, the desires, fears of its people and the fulfilment of her own desires. She has acquired a new identity of her own along with a new name. Her desire to serve people, even after she lost her powers as mistress of spices, makes her a winner for her selfless love for humanity and her desire to alleviate the suffering around her, as Chakravarti, et al rightly point out in the context of Lalita (Mrs. Ahuja), "Tilo, true to her name is the giver of life and strength to this battered woman. The magic she creates that results in the emergence and assertion of Lalita's identity are not merely the magic of spices but her own; it is inherent in her empathy and concern for another human being" (83-84). Her selfless love for all, irrespective of the community, caste, gender and religion as a mistress, at the cost of transgressing the strict rules laid for the mistresses, depicts her success at assimilating and adapting to the American culture, an alien culture.

Magical realism is used in this text as a "means to fill in the gaps of cultural representation in a postcolonial context by recuperating the fragments and voices of forgotten or subsumed histories from the point of view of the colonized" (Zamora & Faris 422). The subdued voices of the female immigrants find voice against the discrimination they face due to the patriarchal society, not only back home in India

but even in America, as Stephen Slemon reiterates in his essay ‘Magical Realism as Post-colonial discourse’, “the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our own dominating systems can again find voice” (422). However, every time Tilo takes action, her mind switches back to the enchanted island she claims she came from, and to imagined conversations with First Mother. Tilo’s purpose in the narrative is to ease the pain of those around her with a potpourri of hope and spices, indeed to attempt to alter external reality through her own subjective mechanisms of belief. She soothes Haroun’s anguish, saying “great things will happen to you in this new land this America” (27), with utmost conviction, because she believes that she “can make it all happen, green cards and promotions....I am Tilo, the architect of the immigrant dream” (28).

Divakaruni’s main focus in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* is mainly the discrimination and abuse faced by the immigrant women. She had started an organization, - *Maitri* for women, who are victims of domestic violence.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, a woman in a similar situation, brought about partly by her immigration, is cut off at once from her entire support system of family and other women who might help her, and she has to make a decision. At the end of much painful thinking and trying out different things, she decides to leave the relationship. (<http://cww.oxfordjournals.org/content/6/2/85.short?rss=1&ace=mfr>).

Ahuja’s wife, Lalita, one of the characters in the novel, is a typical case of domestic violence. She is married to the man of her parents’ choice and tolerates the brutality of the man for the honour of her parents. Lalita, Mrs. Ahuja, is a housewife, fond of stitching. Back home, in Kanpur, before her marriage she attended sewing classes. Tilo knew Lalita’s heart’s desire was to start a shop of her own – ‘Lalita Tailor works’. Tilo can sense her sorrow and the miserable life she led with her husband, as Tilo points out, “Here is what she wants to tell me, only how can she, it is not right that a woman should say such things about her man: all day at home is so lonely, the silence like quick sand sucking at her wrists and ankles. Tears she cannot stop...and Ahuja shouting when he returns home to her swollen eyes. He refuses that his woman

should work. Aren't I man enough man enough man enough...." (15). All that Lalita wanted was a child to 'negate it all'. She comes to Tilo with the hope of getting a remedy for her predicament. However, Tilo is bound by the rules for mistresses even if she would like to help Lalita. Tilo has a remedy for her troubles but is at the same time helpless till Lalita is ready for it. So Tilo gives her turmeric meanwhile, with 'the words of healing whispered into it'. Lalita is disappointed as she gets no help but some spices whose powers she cannot relate to like Tilo. Tilo is aware of having transgressed her boundaries, but in a final attempt, she hands over Lalita a packet of fennel, the spice that gives mental strength and a copy of a magazine. Tilo assures Lalita that she made no mistake by sharing her sorrow. "No man, husband or not has the right to beat you, to force you to a bed that sickens you" (105).

When Lalita finally left the shop, Tilo tries to invoke the spices to help Lalita. The spices, fennel here, at first don't speak and when they do it is not their usual song but a 'booming, a wave crashing in my skull'. The spices are enraged. "*Why should we, when you have done that which you should not? When you have overstepped the lines you willingly drew around yourself ... Do you admit your transgression, your greed in grasping for what you promised to give up forever? Do you regret?*" (106) Tilo had touched Lalita in order to wipe her tears, violating the rule for the mistresses. Tilo however does not have any regrets for her actions and she is willing to give her life for it or 'pay in whatever way is decided'. Though the spices are appeased momentarily, it is with a warning that she would know her punishment at the 'proper time'.

Tilo transforms after meeting Raven. She became more sensitive to the 'hopes and sorrows of humans', which she knew was not a good sign. She is worried for Mrs. Ahuja, who was a victim of domestic violence. Lalita, Mrs. Ahuja, had not turned up at the store for the past few months, which makes Tilo doubt her own capabilities and those of the spices too. Tilo tries to use 'the sight, to train it like a searchlight' to find out what was wrong. However, Tilo knew that the Mistresses were not supposed to 'pry into a particular life'. They were not supposed to get too close to anyone

according to the rules. Nothing could be more important to the Mistress than the spices. If the mistresses acted otherwise they brought destruction to both.

My fault my fault. A refrain so many women the world over have been taught to sing..... I didn't really want to get married. I had a good life, my sewing, my women friends I would go to the movies with and then to eat *pani-puri*, even my own bank account, enough so I didn't have to ask my father for spending money. Still, when my parents asked, I said, all right, if you want. Because in our community it is a shame if a grown girl sits in the house not married and I did not want to shame them. But till the last moment I was hoping. Maybe something will happen, may be the marriage plans will break. 'Ah, if only I had been so lucky'" (100).

As Tilo prepares for her last day before entering Shampati's fire, to be burnt down or to be resurrected on the island in the place of the Old One, she wishes to know the welfare of all the people who she cared for. Geeta's grandfather gives happy tidings of the family reunion. Tilo is still worried about the fate of Ahuja's wife, Lalita. Her prayer to the spices is answered when she receives a mail from Lalita. Lalita had called up the helpline number, which helped women, victims of domestic violence. She had left her husband's home and was living in another town in the home for destitute women, she recounts her experience to Tilo in the letter; "*The woman on the line was very kind. She was Indian like me, she understood a lot without my telling. She said I was right to call; they would help me if I was sure of what I wanted to do. I packed a bag, took my passport, some wedding jewellery that was in the house, whatever money I could find. I didn't want to touch anything of his but I knew I'd have to survive. Two women picked me up at the bus stop. They drove me to this house in another town. I don't know what I'll do now Mataji. They've given me lots of books to read. My rights, stories of other women like me who now lead better lives. Stories of women who went back and were beaten to death. They tell me if I want to file a police case they'll help me. Also they can help me set up a small tailoring business if I like. They warn me things won't be easy*". Lalita is still unsure of what course of action she should take. She sometimes regrets her decision of leaving her

husband's home, but she reminds herself, "I tell myself, I deserve dignity, I deserve happiness" (272).

II

Chitra Banerjee's characters in the short story collections – *Arranged Marriage* and *The Unknown Errors of our Lives* are about the first generation diaspora, who immigrated to the US in the 60s and 70s. The characters can be found to be in a sort of dilemma regarding their loyalties towards their culture of origin and the newly adopted culture, which they find difficult to assimilate into. The female characters/protagonists of these stories are subjugated by their cultural stereotypical roles, which they are unable to break free from or they are trying to break free from. As Chitra Banerjee points out in an interview:

I have great deal of hope for people who pass through traumatic situations and difficulties, and part of it does come from seeing the women that I have been working with all of these years, who come out of terrible, terrible situations that many of us can't even imagine happening here in the 21st century or in the 20th century in the United States, which is one of the most advanced places. And they come to these things or suffer through these things and they make new lives for themselves, so I am aware of how resilient the human spirit is, and I wish in my writing to honour the human spirit that is capable of this, to come through the fire and to prevail. That's why I find it ironic when people tell me that my stories are so sad, that all these terrible things happen to the women, and I think they've missed the point. Yes, these terrible things have happened to the women, but look how the women came through them with greater self-knowledge, with greater strength than if they had just had an ordinary happy life. And it is those possibilities of human spirit that I find most intriguing. (http://www.unisaarland.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Professoren/fr43_Pr_ofGhoshSchellhorn/Tas_Datenbank/South_Asia_Diasporas/Divakar_uni_Interview_WeberJournal.PDF)

In the short story collection *The Unknown Errors of our Lives*, according to Frederick Luis Aldama, “Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni uses the short story form to bring to life a complex array of South Asian characters and their struggles to survive within the restrictive social conditions of a rural and urban India and a suburban USA. Characters at the social margins take center stage in these stories” (112). The very first story of the collection, ‘Mrs. Dutta writes a Letter’ is a fine example of this. Mrs. Dutta, a widow, migrates to America to live with her only son. She experiences a culture shock. She is unable to sleep comfortably on the ‘Perma Rest mattress’ (1) that her son bought for her. Mrs. Dutta is unable to overcome her old cultural habits and survive the cultural differences and pleads to be sent back home. For instance, even in America, she is unable to break the rule her mother-in-law taught her “when she was a bride of seventeen, *a good wife wakes before the rest of the household*” (2). Her daughter-in-law follows none of these rules and Mrs. Dutta’s son supports his wife, clearly shown when he tells, “Mother, please, don’t get up so early in the morning. All that noise in the bathroom, it wakes us up, and Molli has such a long day at work . . .” (UEL, 4). She is unable to feel at home in her son’s house, she has to keep reminding herself that “*this is home now*” (1). Mrs. Dutta is unable to decide what she should write to her dearest friend in India, Mrs. Basu’s query:

Are you happy in America?” (5). Mrs. Dutta, however, finally decides to go back to India and she writes to her friend – “I cannot answer your question about whether I am happy, for I am no longer sure I know what happiness is. All I know is that it isn’t what I thought it to be. It isn’t about being needed. It isn’t about being with family either. It has something to do with love, . . . Perhaps we can figure it out together, two old women drinking cha in your downstairs flat (for I do hope you will rent it to me on my return). . . (33).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni became engrossed in the women’s issues and founded *Maitri*, as Mrinalini Thaker points out, “A hotline for South Asian women who are sufferers of domestic cruelty and abuse. It was her involvement with *Maitri*, that ultimately led her to write *Arranged Marriage* – a work that includes that story about the abuses and bravery of immigrant women. A good number of stories in this

collection are based on the lives of Indian immigrants that she has dealt with. Her other works also namely *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sisters of my Heart*, etc. are set in India and America and features Indian born women sandwiched between old and new world ethics” (<http://www.philica.com/displayarticle.php?articleid=350>). Divakaruni’s short story collection *Arranged Marriage* deals with immigrant Indian women, who are modern but at the same time feel trapped within the process of cultural transformation. They are struggling to forge an identity of their own. As she points out in an interview conducted by Metka Zupancic:

... the frequent theme of immigration in my stories and how it changes us, particularly women. My characters are mostly Indian women growing up in India in a very traditional family ... I grew up with very definite notions of womanhood, of who is considered a good woman and how she is to behave, especially within the family context. Much of that was based on the notion that a good woman makes sacrifices. As a result of immigration, when we find ourselves in the West there is quite a different notion of what a good woman is and what she is expected to do. (<http://cww.oxfordjournals.org/content/6/2/85.short?rss=1&mp%3bsource=mfr>)

Sumita, the protagonist of the story ‘Clothes’ is a good example of this ‘cultural transformation’, as she points out:

But at other times I feel caught in a world where everything is frozen in place, like a scene inside a glass paper-weight. It is a world so small that if I were to stretch out my arms, I would touch its cold unyielding edges. I stand inside this glass world, watching helplessly as America rushes by wanting to scream. Then I’m ashamed. Mita, I tell myself, you’re growing westernized. Back home you’d never have felt this way. (AM, 26)

There is a sense of resentment towards the rigidity of the stereotypical traditional roles that these women are taught to follow back home. As a result of which, “Sumita develops different perceptions of herself in response to this emotional tension; while in the home, she sees herself as the traditional sari-clad Indian housewife –

subservient, meek and modest living life “the Indian way”. The moment that she entertains thoughts of leaving her home, however, she views herself as independent, confident and progressive. But Sumita is also aware of her conflicting desires and her liminal psychological position, thus she perceives herself as “in between” the guilt-ridden subservient wife and confident yet claustrophobic woman” (<http://library.williams.edu/theses/pdf.php?id=6>).

Divakaruni’s characters in her short story collection *Arranged Marriage* seem to be constantly struggling between dual identities and values which are culturally imparted. “Living in sin, indulging in an extramarital affair, the issue of personal space and the real meaning of love – the author holds up these concerns under a spotlight, concerns that have a completely different shade of meaning in an Indian context – and presents the interpretation in a western context. Her characters examine these concerns in the light of their evolving identities as American citizens and make choices that reveal a new emerging reality.” (<http://calitreview.com/58>). Life had been wonderful for Meera, the protagonist of the short story ‘A Perfect Life’, in America, with Richard, who was the man of her dreams. Richard gave her the ‘space’, the independence that she never experienced in India, at home. Richard was open-minded and ‘easy-going’, which gave Meera the space and freedom she needed, which she never experienced back home in India. Meera was in no hurry to marry and have kids, which was the Indian way. Her mother kept sending her photos of eligible bachelors and with every letter ‘she decried my crazy western notions’ (76). Everything seemed perfect till an orphan child came into her life. She begins to look after him, much against the wishes of Richard and her friends. Meera nurses the small boy and names him Krishna. She is extremely happy enjoying the glory of motherhood, till she decides to adopt the child legally. She begins the adoption process earnestly, however, Krishna runs away from the house of the foster mother, where he has to live for a week, before the legal adoption procedures were completed. Meera is shattered; she keeps hoping day by day that Krishna would come back, which never happens. Though she finally agrees to marry Richard at the end of the story, she does so on the condition that they would not have kids of their own.

In the story 'The Word Love', the protagonist is in a live-in relation with her American lover, but is unable to reveal to her mother about her affair. She is divided in-between the two world views, one of her mother and the other of Rex. She tries to explain to Rex about the Indian traditional norms; "You tried to tell him about your mother, how she'd seen her husband's face for the first time at her wedding. How, when he died (you were two years old then), she had taken off her jewellery and put on widow's white and dedicated the rest of her life to the business of bringing you up. *We only have each other*, she often told you" (AM, 58). When she finally reveals about her relationship with Rex to her mother, she is devastated. Her mother refuses to talk with her; Rex is annoyed with her for her inability to decide for herself. Finally she decides 'to live for yourself' and she is 'ready to begin' (71), to create an identity of her own, to live for her own happiness. The theme of conflict between living up to traditional values and the urge to forge an identity for self is reflected in *Arranged Marriage*, as Divakaruni points out in an interview that her stories dealt with:

I figured I had to start writing about what was of importance in my life, and one of the big things was the act of immigration and the ways in which it had changed me, the way in which it had really made me see the world differently and see my place as a woman in the world differently, the ways in which it had made me appreciate my own culture, and question my own culture, and question my life in India, and that was very important to me

(<http://weberstudies.weber.edu/archive%20c%20vol%20.winter2001.vol18.2>).

The conflict between traditional roles and desire to form a new identity in the cultural context is also seen in the story 'Meeting Mrinal' too. Asha, who is a housewife wants to break free from the stereotypical role of a homemaker and wanted to become what her friend Mrinal was, independent, beautiful and successful. Mrinal on the other hand, felt that Asha had all that that she missed in her life – a settled life and a loving family. Realization dawns on Asha, with Mrinal's revelation of her loneliness and how she wished for all the love and support of a family that Asha had.

A transition comes forth in Asha's life, she decides to pick up the threads of her life as now she knew 'perfection was only a mirage' (296).

These stories have their source in the writer's own experiences as an immigrant. "It is therefore customary that she draws heavily for the plots of her short stories upon Indian women, Indian beliefs and the changing principles of the Indian immigrants, especially women as they are exposed to the western ideas and values..." (<http://www.philica.com/displayarticle.php?articleid=350>). For instance, in the story 'Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs', Uma Girish, recounts Chitra Banerjee's experience in her essay "Straddling Two Cultures". In 1976, when Chitra Banerjee was nineteen, had immigrated to the US. She was walking down the street with some of her relatives when a few white teenagers yelled 'nigger' and threw slush on them. Banerjee was appalled by the experience, which remained in her mind and acted as a spur for the story. Another experience which inspired her to write this particular story was when one evening her five-year-old son returned from school and tried to wash off the dirty colour of his skin, which his American peers made fun of. In the story 'Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs', the protagonist Jayanti is in awe of everything American and can't wait to experience America. She imagines her Uncle and Aunt's life in America to be successful and modern in tandem with the American way of life. However she experiences a life similar to what she had left behind in Kolkatta in her Aunt's house in the US, as she points out, "As I watch Aunt ladle more *dal* into his plate, I have a strange sense of disorientation, and for a moment I wonder whether I've left Kolkata at all" (AM, 42). Her Uncle criticizes the Americans severely, which further disorients Jayanti's dreams of her life in America. He talks about the racism in America; "We all thought we'd become millionaires. But it's not so easy....The Americans hate us. They're always putting us down because we're dark-skinned foreigners, *kala admi*. Blaming us for the damn economy, for taking away their jobs. You'll see it for yourself soon enough" (AM, 43). She is angry with him 'for trying to ruin it all' (44) for her. She is not deterred from her dream even after the bad experience, when she and her aunt go out for a walk and are called 'nigger' and slush is thrown at them. Her uncle is wild with his wife for moving out of their apartment in spite of his warning, but Jayanti is determined to make it on her own in America, on

her own terms; “And now it makes sense that the beauty and the pain should be part of each other (AM, 56).

To conclude, “A woman has always been an enigma; a mystery that is far more capable of adaption and flexible to change; a capability she imbibes from a very young age as a result of social conditioning. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has given a voice to the enigmatic persona of a woman; the carrier and protector of her culture, and the disguised enchantress possessing secret powers of magic. In *The Mistress of Spices* she represents the shifting nature of a woman’s identity and her powers of transformation” (Chakravarti & Ghanshyam 81). In the novel Tilo is stripped off her youth and bound by the rules for the mistresses, yet her ‘self’ is not destroyed, she keeps it suppressed for a long time till she meets Raven. She desires to be loved and recognised. Like Tilo in the novel *The Mistress of Spices*, the female characters in the two short story collections – *Arranged Marriage* and *The Unknown Errors of our Lives* too wish to free themselves from the stereotypical roles by which they are bound, and create an identity for themselves. The protagonists in the short story collections and the novel succeed in finding a way out to their dilemmas and questions of their identity. As Chakravati and Ghanshyam rightly point out in reference to Tilo:

Her own invisible identity as an immigrant; bound by tradition and aspiring for assimilation into the new is a reflection of all the immigrant identities around her. Haroun and Jagjit face the usual dilemma of an immigrant like problems of adjustment, racism and alienation. The women on the other hand walk on the tight rope between their dual roles of being a preserver and carrier of culture, and their emerging new identity in the host culture. (83)

Divakaruni’s short story collections – *Arranged Marriage* and *The Unknown Errors of our Lives* portray the problems faced by the immigrant women in a realistic manner, based on her own experiences as an immigrant settled in the US. According to Divakaruni, all the female characters in the short stories are “women of potency

and energy who question the value and tradition of the age that has ended.... [They] are women torn between the two worlds. The visualization of the future may not be clear to them but it is accurate....the women protagonists try to strike a balance between the old conventional beliefs and their new life in America” (<http://www.philica.com/displayarticle.php?articleid=350>). However, in the novel *The Mistress of Spices* Divakaruni uses the Magical Realist narrative mode to not only celebrate the performative aspect of the Indian culture and traditions, but also to portray the magical journey of Tilo, as an immigrant and her success in fulfilling her desires and forming a self-identity in an alien land. The transgressive quality of the magical realist narrative makes the presence of the spices and their communication with Tilo a ‘magical real’ experience for the reader. The spices seem to represent the traditional morals and values especially meant for the women as a warning not to transgress the moral code of conduct as dictated by the patriarchy. They are rigid and unforgiving like the patriarchy, while the First Mother, who taught Tilo everything about the spices and made her a mistress of spices, represents humanitarianism. She upholds the cultural values and traditions, but at the same time respects individual freedom and the need to forge an identity for self. She is like Anandamoyi, who is Mother India for Gora, in Rabindranath Tagore’s novel. Gora, is fully enlightened towards the end of the novel, when he realizes that the mother he had been searching for everywhere was at home, sitting in his room, waiting for him to return to her. The First Mother warns Tilo about the dangers of transgressing the rules set for the mistresses but at the same time she is affectionate, and accepts Tilo’s decision to follow her dream to be with Raven, her love and create a self-identity. “Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at oneness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and increasingly, to women” (Zamora & Faris 6).

Divakaruni opposes the patriarchy. Her protagonist, Tilo fights against the discriminative cultural codes in order to create an independent identity. She seeks not only her happiness and selfhood in an alien land, but also helps the other female characters, for instance, Lalita to break free from an abusive marriage, to seek independence and an identity of her own. Creation of an ‘in-between’ third space not

only helps freeing oneself from the bondage of discriminative roles but helps in empathizing with people facing similar situations. In Tilo's case, she is able to move a step ahead and propagate the humanitarian values by her care and the actions she undertakes for the welfare of others, something that the Indian cultural nationalism symbolizes and stands for.

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