

**The Conflict between the First Generation and the Second Generation Immigrants in
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices***

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Abstract

In immigrant literature, the word first generation means the people who have actually immigrated to a host country. On the other hand, the second generation diaspora usually means the children who are born in a host country to immigrant parents. The first generations try to preserve and observe Indian cultural values within their homes. It is generally believed that within the home, first-generation Indian Americans attempt to preserve their cultural and religious heritage and expect the second generation to inculcate and live according to Indian cultural values and traditions.

Key Words

Immigrant, Conflict, Diaspora, First Generation, Second Generation, Heritage

Introduction

Immigrants have enriched Indian Writing in English by producing works of literature. This leads to considerable growth in South Asian community in America. They have naturalised the medium by accepting their changed identities. They have not only assimilated but also formed emotional ties with their place of residence. One basic area that has drawn the consideration of a few authors in gaining new political and cultural reverberation for the South Asian diaspora is the cultural clash.

The novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are an endeavour to discuss between the two cultures with the immigrants changing degrees of achievement by dealing with attitudes, concerns and ways of life. The contention of two cultures relies on the qualities acquired from the birth on one hand and the qualities gained on the other. The changes attained by an eastern nation citizen are presented in the novel when he experiences the Western culture. Besides the immigrants desire for social and cultural amalgamation, the craving for changing into new identity is also implied. The process of adjustment and transformation of the identities of the immigrants is the key factor of immigration.

Immigration brought difficulties like displacement, separation, identity crisis, and a feeling of differentiation. In addition to this it opened new avenues for the Indian American immigrants. It also brought them colonial memories. The immigrants are entangled in two distinctly different universes when they leave their home land and reach the adopted land due to their own interest or out of compulsion. The Indian immigrant women enter America with very mixed sentiments. The difficulties looked by an immigrant woman is two-fold. She undergoes challenges not only by the hackneyed roles which specifies her by the tradition to which she belongs but also from the attitude she faces in her new cultural environment. Along with this the woman remains the bearer of the culture and the preserver of legacy.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni's far reaching endeavour to build the poetics of spices to interpret the Indianness established in the mind of Indian immigrant is a unique effort to explore the basic human nature. Divakaruni reveals a wide range of human encounters with the explicit focus on the dilemma of existence of the life of immigrants.

Tilo has re-produced a little India in Oakland, California. There she runs a spice store. She speaks of her store, “I think I do not exaggerate when I say there is no other place in the world quite like this” (MS 3). This is a little oasis for the diasporic lives who are filled with difficulties. This pulls more number of people to the store which brings pleasant memories of their home. In search of happiness, the Indians visit her store. Tilo feels, “All those voices, Hindi Oriya Assamese Urdu Tamil English, layered one on the other like notes from a *tanpura*, all those voices asking for more than their words, asking for happiness except no one seems to know where” (MS 78).

The Indian-American tangle of culture is well shown in the episode of Geetha and her grandfather. Geeta’s grandfather as a regular client to Tilo’s store grumbles about Geeta’s behaviour. Bengali in America, he is unable to bear with Geeta’s American way of living. Geeta’s grandfather was a military major. His shirt ironed stiff with pointy collars, his steel-grey pants perfect-creased down the front. And his Bata shoes spit-polished to match the onyx wears on his left hand for peace. Physically he is majestic but inwardly he suffers a lot. He is completely worried about his granddaughters behaviour: “But mental peace I am not having, not even one iota, since I crossed the *kalapani* and came to this America, ... But I tell you, better to have no granddaughter than one like this Geeta” (MS 85).

Tilo says she is nice girl, so pretty and sweet-speaking too. She passed out of college with ‘A’ marks and is doing job in some big engineer company. The grandfather dismisses the compliments and complaints that she works late in the office with other men and come home only after dark and sometimes in their car too. In Jamshedpur, they would have smeared dung on our faces for that and who would marry her. The first generation immigrant expects her granddaughter to follow their traditional values but second generation immigrant try to assimilate the inhabited land.

Tilo told him, this is America after all, and even in India women are now working, even in Jamshedpur. He questioned, “*Arre baap*, so what if this is America, we are still Bengalis, no?” (MS85) Geeta’s grandfather told you were talking like Ramu and his wife Sheela who brought up her girl too lax, without scolding or beating her. The first generation immigrants though they live in America they strictly follow their culture and had a sense of nativity. Tilo gives him a bottle of brahmi oil to cool his system. She thinks, “Geetha who is India and America all mixed

together into a new melody, be forgiving of an old man who holds on to his past with all the strength in his failing hands" (MS 87). Geeta's grandfather was traditional and conservative, he is not ready to accept changes. In America, the liberal ways of personal relationship was not accepted by the first generation immigrant.

But each week, Geeta's grandfather comes in with newly indignant tales. He is shocked when Geeta cuts her hair short, the hair being the essence of womanhood. He tells how much make-up she is using all the time, she is having 'mascara blusher foundation eyeshadow' and lipstick with shameless bright making all the men stare at her mouth. And further he continues, in my days only the English women and prostitutes are doing that. His fury towards American culture nurtured by his granddaughter makes him to speak that. She has bought a new car for herself spending thousands of dollars which she would save it for her dowry. Geeta's grandfather admonished his son Ramu stating, this is no way to bring up children, girls especially saying 'yes-yes' every time they want something. He told him to get her daughter married off as she has finished the college and why to wait for misfortune to knock on their door. When they found out a match for Geeta in India, she refused the match and tells she cannot use a veil over her head sitting in a sweaty kitchen all day with a bunch of house of keys tied to the end of her sari. And she told she has already found someone she loves, him name is Juan. This was a total shock to their parents who never expected this. Ramu trusted her a lot and Sheela shouted, "Your father and I will think we're childless" (MS 90). Geeta left the house and stayed with Diana, her best friend with a hope that she would be reunited with her parents. Also she told Tilo if they come to the store tell them that I am not living with Juan because she could not do injustice to their parents. The new land has not corrupted this immigrant, she follows the Indian tradition of not tainting the relationship before marriage.

Despite staying abroad for years Geeta's parents, Ramu and Sheela, cannot brush aside their bias against inter-racial marriage. They still consider the Indian belief of arranged marriage as the only and best possible way of fixing the marriage of their only daughter. Terribly stunned and disturbed on hearing that Geeta intends to marry Juan, her mother in tears says, "I never thought you'd do this to us, is this how you repay us for giving you so much freedom . . ." (MS89-90).

Tilo blends several ingredients for Geeta. She mixes 'amchur' for choosing right path, ginger for profound strength and fenugreek for curing breaks. Geeta is a part of a diasporic family. The conflict between the first generation and second generation South Asians is unavoidable. A lot of freedom was given to Geeta by her parents. But they are not ready to accept her boy friend. They are shocked that she has chosen to live with a chicano man. Geeta, the second generation South Asian is stunned by the components of racial prejudice that she sees in her parent's response to Juan. Sunaina Maira and Rajini Srikanth talking about the clashes between the generations in the American diaspora say,

The relationship between the generation is complex and nuanced. Second- generation South Asians, having come of age in a post-Civil Rights era, often refuse to be treated as Other by mainstream culture; at the same time many question the uncritical acceptance of the need for assimilation. The resulting political involvement of the second generation, in its building of alliances with other people of color, often conflicts with the first generation's political agenda, which is typically more rooted in home-country interests. (Qtd. by Debanjee Banerjee 25)

The questions about identity are distinctly poised for the second generation Indians like Geeta. Her grandfather is connected with male dominated society. Tilo attempts to alleviate Geeta's agony and succeeds in re-establishing harmony within the family.

Conclusion

In the process of world-wide dispersal, with promises of better opportunities the immigrants from different parts of the world are moved to the centre of imperialistic power, in contrast with their lack of opportunities in homelands. The immigrants retain the best of both the home culture and the adopted one. The diasporic individuals who begin from Asia yet living in western nation give an exciting example of the new hybrid culture.

Reference

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