Chapter 3

Displaced Migrant Women and the Culinary Space

Who can really distinguish between the sea and what's reflected in it? Or tell the difference between the falling rain and loneliness?

Haruki Murakami, *Sputnik Sweetheart*

We say A*merica you are magnificent,* and we mean we are heartbroken

Reetika Vazirani, 'It's a Young Country'

The above-mentioned lines have been used by Divakaruni in her epigraph to the novel QD. The pangs of loneliness and of being heartbroken are an integral part of most diasporic journeys; the feelings become doubly painful and challenging for the women who have been uprooted from their native land and have to carry the burden of being the cultural ambassadors in the new land, upholding the traditional cultural values on the one hand and trying to cope with the materialistic work culture of the new land. The term "Trishanku' used by Frederick Monika is so apt to describe the plight of these women. Taken from Indian mythology, the word describes the tug-of-war situation that these diasporic women find themselves in, caught as they

are between two powerful cultures, two opposite worlds. According to Indian folklore, Trishanku remained forever in motion between heaven and earth and this oscillatory state, this in-between state is one that the diasporic community identifies well with.

Women writers often depict the dilemmas and maladies of women living far away in foreign lands. Divakaruni, who has been actively associated with the organizations involved in improving diasporic women's conditions, addresses issues related to homelessness, nostalgia, and amalgamation of cultures through her portrayal of women characters. Her fictional works are replete with diasporic consciousness where women protagonists struggle to keep afloat in the midst of the inevitable chaos caused by the clash between the home and the host land, singular and the multi culture, traditional expectations and contemporary demands.

In her interview to Metka Zupancic**,** she opens about her characters in *Arranged Marriage*] "

My characters are mostly Indian women growing up in India in a very traditional family. In Arranged Marriage, many come from a background similar to my own." Many characters in *Arranged Marriage* are dealing with this sudden change in worldview, at once exhilarating and also terrifying. They have to make sense of the new situation, which begins to transform them as women. It begins to change their relationships with the people in their family- their husbands, who are with them in the new country, and their parents,

who are usually back in India. There are children who are now born in the new environment, still caught between two cultures, yet with a completely different worldview. This is also a very important theme in my stories *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*, with movement back and forth between the two worlds."

In BVG**,** which is one of the most acclaimed works of Divakaruni spanning three generations of women over a period of six decades, Bela Dewan who has eloped to the US to marry the love of her life finds herself in a similar conundrum of estrangement from her motherland and severance. Her initial euphoria, when she has deserted her mother, dropped out of college, and landed at the airport with forged papers, at not being harassed or catcalled even after she kisses Sanjay in public, is short lived. After a while she realizes that the quality of life that she is experiencing in the most sought-after countries of the world is nothing, literally and metaphorically, 'to write home about'. As she watches her husband and his friend struggle, she admits, "that America might have saved their lives, but it had also diminished them." (Divakaruni 102). The burden that she must bear and the daily struggle she undergoes is a far cry from her lavish lifestyle back in India where she was born and bred. Her American dream is quite shattered when she admits to herself one day that from all possible angles – financial, emotional and marital, she is leading a miserable existence, "… everything she had tamped down, all her disappointments since – yes, for the first time she admitted it – her marriage, swirled in her like a dust storm. She was stuck in a dingy apartment, stuck in a dead-end

job she hated, stuck under a load of unpaid loans so heavy that she'd probably never be able to squirm out from under them and go back to college." (Divakaruni 107) Not only does she find herself estranged from her home and homeland, but she is also unable to adapt to the American lifestyle as well. Her situation during the initial years in the US can be aptly described in the memorable lines by Mathew Arnold,

> "Wandering between two worlds, one dead
> The other powerless to be born
> With nowhere yet to rest my head
> Like these, on earth I wait forlorn."

She yearns to be united with her mother and mother land especially during her unplanned pregnancy as the realization dawns on her that she and her yet to be born baby would have been far better looked after and taken care of back in India:

If she had allowed Sabitri to arrange her marriage, she would have been living in India. She would have gone to her mother's home for the birthing, as was the tradition, to be cared for and pampered. Sabitri knew what she liked in a way that Sanjay never would. Her favourite desserts from Durga Sweets, sandesh stuffed with chocolate, or dark, glistening balls of pantuas in rosewater syrup. Her tea made with so much milk that it turned a pale pink. Sabitri would have made sure she got a mustard-oil massage each day, fresh-fried rui fish for protein. (Divakaruni 103).

Fantasizing about the culinary delights that would have been prepared in her honour and the pampering she would have received, makes her feel even more depressed in the strange new country where she is still working at a creche. Her zombie like existence in the US is such a contrast and is quite aptly described by the author in the following lines, “At Tiny Treasure, she moved like a sleepwalker, wiping noses, separating fighting children, vainly trying to soothe the two-year-olds who routinely threw themselves on the floor, screaming. (Divakaruni 103).

Her vulnerability and isolated existence lead to her over dependency on her husband Sanjay. From financial to emotional support, she looks to him for everything and her world revolves around him and her daughter Tara. Bela could not even keep up the Indian spiritual traditions alive in her own home, as Sanjay was against it. Tara later mentions to someone, that her father was so against idol worship that her mother “had to fight him just to set up an altar in the kitchen, where a tiny ten-armed goddess statue shared space with her spices.” Sanjay was opposed to her mother, so Bela could never call her to the US or even take her daughter to meet her in India. Whatever angers or upsets Sanjay, she is ready to forsake it or force herself to forget about it. Due to Sanjay, she is not only physically away from India, but she is also detached from rich Indian traditions and rituals. As a result, Tara’s upbringing is completely devoid of any knowledge about her ancient cultural heritage. Also, as Bela had not assimilated into the American lifestyle, she could not pass on any American values to Tara

as well. Her rootlessness can be easily deciphered even by a stranger like Mr. Venkatachalapati, whose first impression of her is effectively depicted in these lines: “She was puzzle, with her Indian features and Texan boots, her defiant piercings, the skin stretched thin across her forehead. He had read somewhere that it was a style that lesbians affected. what kind of Indian family, even in America, would produce such a hybrid?” (Divakaruni 107). Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* has correctly opined, “The inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. If silences are not resisted, they produce, in Franz Fanon’s vivid phrase, ‘individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels.” Tara’s lack of rootedness and a solid identity increases further after the bitter divorce of her parents. Her father, whom she considered to be the centre of her universe, suddenly shocks her with the news that he would be separating from her mother and leaving them. She is devastated not just because of the shocking news, but also because there is no communal bond, no familial support – either in US or in India, which can aid her and provide counsel to her during this critical period. Being completely distanced from the wisdom and ethical, moral values mentioned in Indian mythical tradition tales, she cannot even turn to the renowned epics and legendary tales to get some sort of solace to help her deal with the stress. Thanks to her upbringing, her only source of knowledge about her motherland has been “from books and movies and the Internet.” (Divakaruni 194). With zero connection with the other members of Indian diasporic community and no idea of

the gloriousness of her wonderful cultural heritage and a personality devoid of core principles and values, she goes astray and flits from one job to another, one relationship to another. Her sense of being directionless is reflected in her driving skills as well as is observed by Dr. Venkatachalapathi as he notices that even though she had been hired to drive him around, she possessed "less-than-perfect knowledge of their destination" and so he is really regretting the fact that she is his designated driver for the day. (Divakaruni 124). Even later when they somehow manage to navigate their way to the temple, Tara is completely out of place in the traditional set up. Having no knowledge of her birth sign, her star, her clan – important details for a Hindu, she is rendered speechless when the Hindu priest asks her questions regarding these. The following excerpt clearly provides the reason for this: "Far as I know, I've never been inside a temple. My father, who was a Communist in his youth, was dead against it . . . Because he was the fulcrum of my existence, I grew up convinced religion was the opium of the people." (Divakaruni 125). At times when she finds herself imagining about her grandmother residing in India, she cannot relate to that too. When her supervisor at the University transportation, Yvonne had mentioned to her that her client that day would be an Indian, she is anything but excited to know that as is clear from her response: "I was certain this person – whoever he might be – was nothing like me. I'd never been to India, I didn't hang with Indians, I didn't even think of myself as Indian." (Divakaruni 120). Many second-generation Indians born in America face identity issues, as they

try and navigate their lives through two diverse cultural pulls – the culture they were born into and the culture where are brought up in. The much-acclaimed Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri makes an observation about her experience as a second generation Indian diasporic in America: “I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they are . . . I think that for immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for their children . . . But it bothered me growing up, the feeling that there was no single place to which I fully belonged.” (Rajput 2)

As regards a hybrid culture, Anthony Appiah feels that one can be a rooted cosmopolitan – that one can preserve one’s original identity and roots as well as learn and appropriate relevant features from the new cultures and hence celebrate the differences too. “The cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural peculiarities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people.” (Appiah 120) Yet, as far as Tara is concerned, this is not the case at all. Instead of being a role model of the best of east-meets-west, she comes across as a drifter, a rolling stone who is truly gathering no moss. Her exile from her motherland and later, after the divorce, from her mother, renders her more vulnerable and rootless than ever before. Her mother Bela too fairs no better. During her initial days as newly arrived immigrant she

had faced identity issues and was painfully aware of being routinely stared at but she has somehow devised a coping mechanism to deal with it, “although it annoyed her, she accepted it as a cost of living in America.” (Divakaruni 117).

Sandra Ponzanesi’s statement in this regard is relevant as in her work *Paradoxes of Postcolonial culture: contemporary women writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian diaspora*, she observes that due to the “separation from tradition and obligations, [immigration] is not a process devoid of pain and alienation”. Pain, alienation, isolation, identity crisis, displacement – are challenges that most of Divakruni’s diasporic characters, straddling their lives between Indian and American cultures, endure. Commenting on Divakaruni’s gender portrayals, K S Dhanam opines:

Divakaruni’s books are directed mainly to women of all races and faiths who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their cultures and religion . . . she also contrasts the lives and perceptions of the first-generation immigrants with that of their children born and raised in foreign land. And inevitably, it includes the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities. She has her finger accurately on the diasporic pulse, fusing eastern values with western ethos. Her writing course with her identification is with a brave new world forging to life. Her sensitivity to contemporary voices, today’s

issues are threaded through with an ongoing search for identity beyond anthropology, beyond sociology and beyond academia. (62)

Whether it is Bela or Tara, both are unhappy and unhinged personalities, displaced from their original roots, distanced from the richness and glory of their ancient cultural heritage.

Such is the state of the immigrants, as the birds portrayed by Surjeet Kalsey in her poem Migratory Birds:

We
the migratory birds
are here this season
thinking
we will fly
back to our home for sure. (40)
But
no one knows
which invisible cage imprisons us?
and the flight begins to die slowly
in our wings. (40)

These lines appropriately depict the inherent uncertainties that any diasporic existence comprises of. All the illusions and fantasies woven around the new far way magical land that propel the migrants to sacrifice their parent homeland have been effectively described in the

lines and further how this “invisible cage” starts to trap and “imprison” them.

The alienation is felt even in a character like Sudha, who is a visitor in the US. In VD, when Sudha nurses her best friend and soul sister Anju back to health, she initially feels contended at Anju’s recovery. But when Anju starts studying at college again, Sudha finds that she is finding it difficult to relate to the new Anju, as it were. Arunita Samaddar, in her paper, *The Subterranean ridges of sibling relationship in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels* comments on this traumatic phase in Sudha’s life:

There is a sense of jealousy and possessiveness in the love that Anju expresses for her sister . . . We see the same for of envy in Sudha in *The Vine of Desire*. When Anju befriends new people in her college in America, who share her radical ideas about feminism and her love for literature, the readers can sense Sudha becoming gradually alienated and enveloped in a shroud of insecurity for being excluded from parts of Anju’s life which are unfamiliar to her. (Samaddar 120)

When Anju talks about writers like Kate Chopin and Zora Neale Hurston, Sudha feels uneasy and when she asks Sudha whether or not she should join the writers’ group, she is at a loss for words, “I want to interrupt. Does she like her unsweetened tea? Is she too tired to go for a walk? Did she answer her mother’s letters? *These are things I understand*. I’ve made ghugni with chickpeas and flaked coconut, does she want some? (Divakaruni 107). As these lines reflect, Sudha is

comfortable talking on culinary and other domestic matters, not on the topics that the newly Americanized Anju is mentioning. And when Anju shares the praise, she has received for her writing skills and that she "owed it" to herself to develop it further, Sudha is totally nonplussed, "Owed it to myself. It was not an idea we'd grown up with in Calcutta. Owed it to my parents, yes. My ancestors. My in-laws. My children. Teachers, society, God. But *owed it to myself*? Yet how easily Anju says it today. (Divakaruni 108).

The exile one feels from the cultural value system when one is uprooted is much tougher to deal with than the physical exile. The concept that one should "live for oneself" is another one that Sudha cannot comprehend, and she blurts out one day in front of Lalit, "I am not sure what it means. I'm not sure how to do it. . . . There's a terrible pull to the idea of living for myself, and a terrible emptiness. I feel like a flyaway helium balloon – all the people I know are on the ground somewhere, but so far away and small, they hardly matter". (Divakaruni 177). The feeling of estrangement from one's familiar terrain – geographically, emotionally and psychologically and the complexities of unknown territories is something Avtar Brah has effectively commented upon : " territories to be patrolled against whom they construct us as outsiders, aliens and the Others; forms of demarcation where the very cut of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where the fear of the other is the fear of itself, places where claims to ownership, claims to 'mine', 'yours' and 'theirs' – are started out, contested, defended and fought over." (Brah 198).

For Sudha, even the American grass seems different from Indian grass, "It smells more male – you know, tough and fertilizer-fortified." (Divakaruni 175), she tells Lalit. "If you stop taking care of it, it'll die off right away. Indian grass looks more delicate – that startling new-green colour – and yet it survives, in spite of droughts and cows and all the weeds that try to choke it." (Divakaruni 175).

The Indian calendar which Sudha got along with her when she came from India and hung it on Anju's refrigerator seems to be of little use in the drastically different surrounding. Along with festivals, auspicious days for fasting and numerous other holy days the calendar also cautioned and forewarned the readers about dangerous hours and inauspicious dates. But Anju would snicker at these warnings as she would read them out aloud for fun. After a while, even Sudha observes that "juxtaposed against the pasteurized convictions of America, I had to admit they seemed a bit suspect. And yet our people had followed them for centuries. Could they be totally wrong? (Divakaruni 150).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty explicates on the identity crisis faced by diasporic Indian community: "Since settled notions of territory, community, geography, and history don't work for us, what does it really mean to be "South Asian" in the United States? Obviously, I was not South Asian in India: I was Indian . . . However, in North America, identification as South Asian (in addition to Indian, in my case) takes on its own logic. "South Asian" refers to folks of Indian,

Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Kashmiri, and Burmese origin." (127)

Divakaruni's women protagonists reflect diverse aspects of diasporic life and represent different sections of society – from the peripheral, the central, the traditional and the rebellious, belonging to the first generation and to the second generation. On the one hand we have Korobi, Tara and Rakhi representing the modern young Indian women and on the other hand we have Mrs. Gupta, Bela and Sabitri who reflect the traditionally bound middle aged Indian women. Certain themes like 'quest for identity' found in her work are seen in other diasporic South Asian women's writing as well. Lisa Lau observes about the theme of self-identity frequently explored in South Asian Literature:

Identity is one of the most common themes in South Asian Literature, and in many cases the search for self-identity is portrayed as confusing, painful, and only occasionally rewarding ... Women writing in South Asia write with a sense of attempting to make their individual voices heard over a cacophony of long-standing stereotypes and expectations, diasporic women's writing has different characteristics.... Women of diaspora, instead almost always, without exception, testify to a sense of dual or multiple identities. (252).

Along with the inevitable challenges of dealing with racism and enduring the physical hardships that are part and parcel of any diasporic journey, the Indian immigrant women, especially the ones who get married and arrive in the US, must bear the additional burden

of patriarchal expectations and regressive mindset. According to Uma, the Indian woman is:

*"*inculcated with the ideas of martyrdom, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the mythical models of Sita, Savitri, Gandhari etc., Following these models, she is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife, and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother." (2)

Divakaruni also reflects on the same lines in the interview to Metka, admitting that the traditional Indian perspective about virtuous women is "based on the notion that a good woman makes sacrifices." Even Mr. Bose, (in the novel OG) hailing from an aristocratic intellectual family expects his wife Sarojini to yield to his will regarding all decisions – trivial or significant. When he threatens to disown their daughter Anu, incase she decides to go against his wishes and marry the American guy she has chosen for herself, Sarojini has to essay the role of a mute spectator who is powerless to intervene even in such a personal delicate matter. Mr. Bose thunders at her protests and threatens to pack her off back to her village in case she doesn't agree to cut off all ties with Anu, "I will have nothing to do with a wife who does not stand beside me in a crisis." [Girl 59] Sarojini is heartbroken, yet completely unable to salvage the situation and she confesses to her granddaughter Korobi later in the story that her traditional upbringing wouldn't allow her to stand up to her autocratic husband, "Every day when your grandfather was at work, I wept, certain that I would never see Anu

again. But I said nothing to him. That was the way I had been brought up. If he noticed my swollen eyes when he came home, he said nothing, either. Perhaps that was the way he had been brought up." [Girl 59] Even Sudha in the novel *Vine of Desire*, during her US sojourn, realizes how difficult it will be for her to return to India with her daughter, as she observes, "I can't go back to India, to the way I was. Helpless, dependent – I can't love like that. I can't bring up my daughter to think that's how a woman needs to live." [Divakaruni 104] This expectation from a woman that she remains an amiable accommodating suppliant delicate creature who has to always be taken care of by a male authority figure is deeply embedded in our culture.

Many such instances abound in Divakaruni's novels, describing the unrealistic demands and restrictive boundaries set up for women and how 'good' women are expected to meet those extremely tough standards. In the novel VD, the author describes the plight of even rich Indian women, after the death of their husbands. Anju, in her essay mentions:

My father's death was the greatest loss in my mother's life.... It turned her from a wife into a widow. In a society where property and destiny were controlled by men, it was not a good way to be. These are the three things my mother put away after my father's death: expensive saris, jewellery, romantic thoughts. The rest of her life, she would not eat Irish fish or read poetry, both of which my father had loved. For a Bengali woman, those were serious sacrifices. These are the things my

other made herself forget: that she was afraid; that she was a sexual being that she needed to weep. [VD 99 – 100]

The birthday gift for Sudha from her mother is a bedspread with a floral design and a script which reads '*Pati Param Guru'*, the husband is the supreme lord. And the entire bedspread must be embroidered by Sudha. The girls Sudha and Anju imagine her Mom's instruction to the bedspread maker, "I want something that will teach my wild and wicked daughter the proper womanly virtues . . . "and the bedspread maker must have said, "Madam, by the time she's finished embroidering the hundredth Param Guru, I guarantee you she'll be the perfect wife." [Divakaruni 63] The changing mindset of the women in recent years has been reflected in the younger characters of Divakaruni's works, but they still have a long way to go as far as establishing a completely independent identity of their own is concerned, As Simone de Beauvoir opines in her seminal text, The Second Sex : "The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete way; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of human being." (Beauvoir 30)

In OG, we see the Mr. Bose bringing up his only daughter Anu: "as the son he never had. But he could never forget that she was a girl. Thus, his two main passions – that Anu should excel in whatever she did, and that she should be brought up as befitted a daughter of the cultured Roy family – crashed constantly against each other." [Girl 56] This

desire to give the child an all-round development and yet not step out of the restrictive boundaries prescribed by the traditional patriarchal value system has been elaborately described by the author. We see how the very talented, strong, independent, and capable young woman Anu has to resort to leading a double life to appease her grandfather whom she loves and respects immensely. So, the accomplished and amiable girl adapts to fit into the typical patriarchal expectations and learns how to transform herself from being "assertive and competitive at school and college" to "compliant and voiceless everywhere else." [Girl 57] This conditioning of how 'a good Indian girl' should behave is so deeply entrenched that no matter which geographical space the migrants might inhabit, their values and behaviour are automatically directed in alignment with the ancestral cultural values and expectations. Divakaruni herself confesses to the fact that this is applicable in her own case too, "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." So, this image of a submissive 'voiceless' Indian woman, being the upholder of ancestral values in the alien country becomes quite an arduous task to maintain, as is reflected in Anu's character in the novel as well as in the experience of many diasporic women. Anita Mannur through her seminal work extrapolates on some of the underlying reasons due to which Indian women have been associated with domestic space. She quotes Partha Chatterjee's argument that:

in the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture. Its spiritual essence … The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external condition of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (i.e., feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially westernized" (239). The home site becomes a space in which to produce a version of Indianness. (Mannur 34)

The Kitchen Space

The kitchen space reflects the place that has been assigned to women in society. Anita Mannur explores the crucial role that the domestic space plays within the context of Indian diasporic setting, and she states that "The home site becomes a space in which to produce a version of Indianness." She elaborates on how the onus is placed on the women immigrants to reproduce and retain culinary Indianness: ". . . nationalist discourse frequently casts the woman as broker of cultural traditions. Diasporas produce their own version of this gendered logic by repeatedly insisting that the task of the female Indian immigrant subject in diaspora, or in this case, in the cookbook, is to be vigilant about the *faithful reproduction of Indianness*." (Mannur 17) (my emphasis). The need to recreate the authentic taste is rooted in the deeper desire to recreate the original home in the host land. As Sumana

Maira opines, “desire, in the cultural politics of the diaspora, is closely intertwined with the collective yearning for an authentic tradition or pure place of origin” (Maira 194).

The culinary space is not simply a space where dishes are prepared, it is a space heavily coded with deeper undercurrents of meaning, where women, especially in the diasporic setting are learning to cope with the multiple issues in the host land. The culinary interstice thus can be looked at from the Bhabha’s perspective, as a space where new identities might be formed. Annam Ragamalika mentions in her thesis *Intoning Culture, Gender, and Space in the Diaspora: A Study of Select culinary Narratives by Women*,

The interstices of kitchen and food, in the writing of diasporic women are therefore contesting and conflicting spaces that allows diverse, plural “presenting” (Bhabha 7). Bhabha’s introduction to *The Location of Culture* discusses the interstice that accommodates new identity formations. This formation could be individual or communal, negotiated or contested in the borderline. The interstice articulates ideas of political and cultural empowerment. It presents the appearance of heterogenous voices of “women, the colonized, minority groups” (16).

Analysing specifically from the perspective of Indian diasporic women, it is mostly seen that in traditional patriarchal society, women are counselled from childhood onwards to make their way to their man’s heart through the alimentary canal and that requires considerable

expertise in the culinary skills. In other words, the better their cooking and kitchen practices, the higher their chances of having a reasonably stable marital life. Whether it is admiration from the in-laws or from the neighbourhood ladies, supremacy in the kitchen helps women gain a better, more powerful position in their household and hence in the society. Rebecca Swenson in the article *Domestic Divo? Televised treatments of masculinity, femininity, and food* talks on similar lines within the context of American televised presentations of food and kitchen space, how the relationship between masculinity, femininity and cooking gets constructed:

Social institutions and popular culture, as described by Weedon, have made the kitchen a gendered space in which deeply held ideologies about "natural" feminine or masculine behaviors are evident. Inness (2001b) writes that kitchen culture transcends the "passing down of Aunt Matilda's recipe for Swedish meatballs" to include recipes on "how to behave like 'correctly' gendered beings" (p. 4). The idea that food preparation is fun and pleasurable has its roots in its assignment to the happy homemaker, a wife and mother whose unpaid labor is done for loved ones because of natural, altruistic, and maternal instincts. (Counihan and Esterik 139)

Further the author describes how in most of these culinary shows, the female hosts "describe recipes as valued personal possessions that preserve family history, values, and generational legacy. "The family that eats together stays together" is the opening line for Sara's Secrets

"Sunday Dinner with Aunt Fanny" episode. . .." (Counihan and Esterik 144). In other words, even the popular food shows reiterate the significance of the culinary space in maintaining happiness and harmony in domestic life and preserving generational legacy. In QD, the protagonist Rakhi, is shown to emulate the traditional Indian culinary rituals and practices when she wants to maintain harmonious relationships, be it with her father or her husband. But when her relationships go awry, her culinary skills seem to be thrown off tangent too as is reflected in the mess and chaos that prevails in her kitchen space as well as her failed culinary experiments during those times. Yet, the memories from the ancient Indian cultural milieu seem to be wafting to her domestic space from time to time, and she tries to adhere to it to the best of her capabilities. Whether it is her mother's instructions and observations regarding the authenticity of her tea café, or some of her cherished childhood culinary memories with her parents, she tries to recall those and put them to good use. She realizes that her café is not a "real chai shop" as her mother aptly phrased, but a "mishmash, a westerner's notion of what is Indian." (Divakaruni 89). This is also in a way a comment on the bi-cultural tug-of-war situation that immigrants frequently find themselves in. Their clients-cum-musicians who frequent the café once it becomes successful, are also caught between a similar time-wharf – physically located in one country but psychologically living in their memories of their motherland – and this yearning for everything Indian, be it music or food reflects that Mrs. Gupta too, even after all those decades of living

in the US, still cannot let go of even her tea preferences. her favorite brand is the Brook Bond tea; it is not simply the brand that matters, it is the underlying nostalgia to reclaim and reconstruct the notions of home and homeland. The following lines taken from the book *Food and cultural studies***,** the authors highlight the minute details that go behind the scenes before the actual culinary presentation and how culinary expertise is not simply a mechanical, physical activity but a skill that involves a variety of faculties to be synchronised harmoniously:

. . . Luce Giard's work which captures the nuances of activities which go into 'doing-cooking': In cooking the activity is just as mental it is manual; all the resources of memory and intelligence are thus mobilized. One has to organize, decide and anticipate. One must memorize, adapt, modify, invent, combine, and take into consideration Aunt Germaine's likes and little Francois's dislikes, satisfy the prescriptions for Catherine's temporary diet, and vary the menus at the risk of having the whole family cry out in indignation with the ease of those who benefit from the fruit of other people's labour. (1998: 200) or (Ashley, Hollows and Taylor 130-131)

Emily R. Zinn, in her dissertation, incorporates an extract from Margaret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman*, which describes in an elaborate manner the process of baking a cake. She opines that Atwood could have simply mentioned the ingredients and then briefly described the process; but as she reveals Atwood is excessively slow in detailing the entire process of making a cake from scratch. In her words, "its

excess is almost nauseating" and she feels that Atwood's strategy serves important functions apart from the obvious one which is to present the metaphor of a woman as a consumable item to be devoured. She states, that "the slow, detailed nature of the description lends significance to domestic, embodied tasks that are often devalued by a patriarchal culture as mundane, repetitious and unimportant." She further states that "by concentrating on the exact steps in making the cake" Atwood captures the attention to "the material presence" of the ingredients used and "the labor that would transform these raw materials into a cake." [Rewriting .... 11] By making the readers aware of the monotonous and time-consuming nature of the culinary arts and the perseverance and dedication required to achieve culinary success, the authors drive home the point that maintaining a harmonious kitchen space and a balanced domestic space is quite a daunting task and the picture perfect lavish spread laid down on the dining table is the result of a great deal of planning and micro-managing and tireless sacrificing by the women of the family. This is especially true in the case of Indian women immigrants, as Indian cuisine is not something that can be fixed instantly, in fact it requires prior planning and elaborate preparation.

The following lines taken from the book *Food and cultural studies,* describes women's role in the creation of family and the culinary labour that goes into it. Elaborating on Marjorie DeVault's work, the authors discuss how DeVault's study:

demonstrates the skilled planning and co-ordination that goes into providing food. This involves pleasing the family, producing the proper meal, making meals interesting and producing the meal as an event through which family life is created. In planning meals, women employ a large and diverse amount of tacit knowledge. Shopping is not simply an activity in which purchase are made, but involves 'screening and sorting' products, monitoring both the family and the marker and making improvisations. (Ashley, Hollows and Taylor 130)

The displaced migrant women are entrusted with the burden of preserving the original culture and food becomes one of the most significant aspects in this context. Cooking the authentic dishes, adhering strictly to the traditional recipes and methods, presenting and serving it in the traditionally prescribed manner are part and parcel of the daily chores that the duty-bound Indian women are expected to be trained in, at least in the case of the first-generation immigrant. The rules may be relaxed for the second generation however as is depicted in the portrayal of many of the fictional characters in the chosen novels, who fluctuate between their fondness for the tasty Indian dishes on the one hand and the more-convenient-to-eat American junk food on the other. Rakhi in QD, embodies the typical America born confused desi, yearning for all things Indian while simultaneously incorporating the modern American value system, unable to cut off completely from the 'original' home and so not completely at home in the adopted country. Bell Hooks opines on the matter: "Home is no longer just one place. It is locations one confronts and accepts

dispersal and fragmentation as part of the constructions of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become." (65) The culinary space occupies a special place in Divakaruni's fiction. It is often the site where along with culinary transactions, values and love and culture are also meted out. As food is one of the main connecting links between migrants and their motherlands, the food space gains tremendous relevance in the domestic areas of diasporic families.

Uma Parameswaran in her work "Home is where your feet are and may your heart be there too!" also expresses her views about women's innate flair to balance two different homes at the same time, and how this skill helps the diasporic women somehow feel a bit settled in the host nation. In the midst of facing alienation too, the displaced women, using memories and nostalgia are often able to recreate the semblance of the true authentic home that they have come apart from. In today's digital era, many young social influencers like Avanti Nagral and many others who are studying or have studied abroad, share, and narrate their diasporic experiences – live or recorded ones. These narratives, that could be in the form of pictures, podcasts, or videos, offer glimpses of social, cultural, culinary experiences of the newly arrived person. From humorous personal anecdotes, to trying out homemade authentic Indian recipes from scratch, to reliving certain traumatic moments – these digital memories impart basic idea about diverse cultures and creates a common platform for Indian migrants abroad.

This thesis will be analysing many of Divakaruni's novels, illustrating the relationship between preservation of traditional culinary practices and the mechanics of cultural transfers. It will seek to inspire observations on the nature and significance of food in the diasporic setting, and how the culinary space transforms into a vital space in the diasporic lives, not just individually but culturally as well. The vital space corresponds to the vital aspect of migratory journeys as well. Regarding migration Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore expressed his views thus: "To study a banyan tree, you not only must know its main stem in its own soil, but also must trace the growth of its greatness in the further soil, for then you can know the true nature of its vitality." (Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, iii*)

Even though the migration phenomenon has been a continuing process since ages, the underlying reasons, and the myths around it have kept changing. From migrating due coercive reasons to voluntarily departing from the parent nation to seek better prospects in the host nations, there are a host of circumstances underlying the shift from the home country to the host country. Food besides providing nutrition and sustenance to the migrant communities, also enables them to establish and strengthen their roots in the adopted nation.

Of course, in the diasporic context, the migrant women must face not merely the challenge of being displaced from their home country but also to face the inevitable patriarchal mindset as well as the imminent

generation clashes that follow. In QD, after Mrs. Gupta's untimely demise, the father daughter's memories of Mrs. Gupta abound in the culinary space. "They sit at the dining table late into the night, father, and daughter, compiling lists, trying out ideas. Through their excitement, they are dimly aware that this is a first ever event. Before this, all their interactions took place in the presence of the mother, through her, as it were. She was their conductor, their buffer zone, their translator." (Divakaruni 165). They are both haunted by Mrs. Gupta's memories and are clearly uncomfortable with each other in this new situation. The shifting evolving dynamics of the father-daughter relationship is shown to begin in the culinary space – the dining area where the first step is being taken, the initial hurdle is being crossed to mend matters between the two.

Gaston Bachelard, in his seminal work *The Poetics of Space*, comments on how besotted we are with cherished memories of home, and how it evokes inner poetry, " memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and intense longing for and recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost. (Bachelard 87) Nostalgia, incompleteness, sense of displacement all together further increase the need to belong, to feel at 'home'. The deep-rooted connection a migrant has with his ancestral home. has been explicated by Brah when he notes that the term diaspora "embodies a notion of centre, a locus, a 'home' from where dispersion occurs" (181). This

reiterates the strong bond that the migrants have with their home, their place of centeredness from where the dispersion or scattering to new destinations begins.

Culinary Space and Identity

The fulcrum of Divakaruni's fictional world is immigrant women, especially those on a quest to seek their authentic identity. She candidly admits in an interview: "Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them – women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships, . . . I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to [be] prejudiced when they meet them in real life".

Identity issues are an inescapable part of any diasporic journey, and the same is reflected in the portrayal of many of Divakaruni's protagonists. In the novel *Queen of Dreams*, the protagonist Rakhi Gupta is also someone on a quest to seek her authentic identity. Bemoaning in an exaggerated manner about her slightly unorthodox upbringing, she introspects, "What cruel karma had placed me in the care of the only two Indians who never mentioned their homeland if they could help it?" (Divakaruni 82) From childhood she observes how other Indian diasporic families describe India in overtly flattering terms, comparing it to a place "as close to paradise as you could get" (Divakaruni 82). Rakhi on the other hand yearns for any titbits of information that she can get her hands on about her original country and is quite sure that her parents, "were hiding things from me,

beautiful, mysterious, important things, as they always had." (Divakaruni 82). Once when she happens to hear an old record playing songs about Bengal monsoons, she finds herself besotted and listens to the songs obsessively, trying to figure out some of the meanings by herself as the translation pamphlet couldn't cover every word. For months after that she finds herself imagining the lush Indian foliage, "the storm-whipped palm trees, the red-breasted bulbuls taking shelter among the hanging roots of the banyan. . lightening . . . dancing peacock." (Divakaruni 81-82) Her craving to visit India somewhat subsides after some incidents in her personal life, such as the birth of her daughter and the break-up of her marriage, her own small snack shop starts up and so on. Yet, she still harbours the desire to travel to India at least once before her death, as she says, "if only to lay to rest the ghosts that dance in my head like will-o-the-wisps over a rippling sea." (Divakaruni 83). Brought up as another American desi, she symbolizes the second-generation Indian diasporic immigrant, who are swayed towards both the eastern and western American culture and trying to chart a middle path between the two. As Malathy. R describes in her paper, *Quest for identity in Chitra Banerjee's Queen of Dreams*, "Having imbibed the American culture by birth and Indian culture through blood Rakhi trapezes between the two cultures. Rakhi never had liked Indian food as she was growing but eventually started liking it." (29)

Food is an inseparable part of how our identity is constructed. Our specific manner of engaging with the culinary: from buying from

certain stores, preparing and preserving it in a certain way to actually serving and consuming the food, is reflective of not only ourselves as individuals but also of our ancestral, cultural and collective history. Through Food and food rituals, diasporic communities can re-establish their ambiguous status in the host society. Food helps them to maintain their subculture and interact with the dominant culture of the host society who get informed about the typical culinary style of the diasporic community's culture. Anita Mannur in "Introduction: Food Matters" emphasizes the significance of food amongst diasporic populations and the manner in which food becomes "one of the most viable and valuable sites from which to inquire into the richly layered texture of how race is imagined and reinterpreted within the cultural arena, both to affirm and resist notions of home and belonging" (8) As the culinary functions both as an identity marker as well as stereotype, the positioning – be it positive or negative, assigns a dominant or marginal status to some races and ethnic communities in comparison to others.

Marie-Aude Baronian opines, "Displacement is seen as a semantic intersection of diaspora and memory [...] Just as diasporas can transcend local boundaries, memories can travel, be adapted and integrated into new contexts without becoming placeless." (Baronian 13-14)

In Divakaruni's works, these alimentary memories collected from bygone times are adapted according to the changing context and the

strategies she employs for this purpose is what this chapter focuses on. Most of the protagonists in her bildungsroman stories are shown to be strong women who fight for what they want, while still retaining their feminine essence; in fact, they chose to celebrate it. Whether it is Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*, Durga and Bela in *Before We Visit the Goddess*, Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams*, all of them at some point or the other use the traditionally feminine culinary weapon to combat the hostile situation that they find themselves embroiled into. Divakaruni herself admits that there are many such traditional things that women do, but somehow these things are never valued or highlighted, simply because they are done by women. So, through her female protagonists, Divakruni tries to revive some of these practices which have been devalued for decades, by making them into powerful weapons in the delicate, yet capable hands of the feisty heroines of her novels. In an interview given to Scroll, she narrates,

in Bengal and probably in many other places in India there's this whole tradition of the village medicine woman: you go to her, and her medicines are always spices and herbs and things like that. It's devalued, and she often makes very little money. And generally, women will go to her, men will not. [...] Spices are only exotic if you look at it from some kind of "other" gaze. For us it's not. It's very central to the woman's experience.

So, by making the connection between women and culinary, she helps not only the protagonists regain their strength to face the hostile

environment in the host land, but also helps revive the memories of some long forgotten and swept under the carpet practices and rituals related to the culinary, for instance healing through spices and herbs. As these ancient healing practices involve curing not just the outwardly manifested physical symptoms but the underlying psychological ailments at the root level, so to speak, these can be considered as a holistic approach as it uproots the underlying cause beneath the outward disharmony.

In *Food and Femininity in Twentieth-Century British Women's Fiction*, regarding food consumption, the researcher elaborates how her study will explore the belief that "female consumption provides a basis for explorations of many aspects of female experiences and of constructions of femininity, and that the idea of a consuming female anticipates social and cultural anxieties about female empowerment and agency."

Sceats comments on how the culinary is a rich resource for many writers and analyses how certain women writers navigate around the issue of writing about specific culinary and cultural conventions and how they feel their readers will respond to that. She opines about Toni Morrison, "Part of what Morrison is doing, it seems, is to evoke (eating) experiences in which her characters and a proportion of her readers feel very much at home; those who do not can experience what it feels like to be an outsider." (Sceats 127) She further mentions Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood and their culinary incorporation of

archetypal English food like tea and cake and simple comfort foods like oatmeal porridge and poached eggs respectively to emphasize the point that, "What it means to feel at home in a culinary tradition – where the practices are understood and some of the meanings attaching to foods are familiar – is important to many women writers".

In Unbraiding tradition:an interview with Chitra Banerjee, Frederick Luis Aldama states: "While Divakaruni explores many different, richly descriptive storytelling forms, her subject remains steady. She is centrally concerned with giving shape to South Asian women's lives in a gendered India and United States society." (1)_As in typical Indian society, women are considered to be the epitomes of feminine virtues and mostly are given control over the kitchen space, most women protagonists in Divakaruni's works are too depicted in relation to their expertise in the kitchen space. Some of them like Sudha in VOD and SMH, Draupadi in POI, Mrs. Gupta in QD and Durga, Savitri and Bela in BVG are shown to be excellent in the culinary department, others like Anju in VOD and SMH, Rakhi and Belle in QD, Tara in BVG and Korobi in OG seem to be struggling in this area. Also, as food and emotions are interlinked, most of the culinary experiments of these women in their respective kitchen spaces reveal a lot about the goings on in their lives. Through the depiction of the women vis a vis their relation to their kitchen spaces Divakaruni addresses larger issues such as marginality, deprivation, external and internal pressures, gender politics and patriarchal mentality and each of her characters develops her own unique coping strategy to face the same. In VD, when Sudha is

unable to deal with the uncertainties that await her, she resorts to cooking: “

To save myself, I pour my attention into preparing Uncle’s meals. I nag Myra until she goes to the Chinese market for fresh catfish. I salute it with black jeera and turmeric and make jhol, the traditional clear soup one drinks after a long illness to build strength. I curdle milk and make fresh paneer sprinkled with sugar. I soak almonds overnight in warm water until they are soft and give them to him for breakfast. (Divakaruni 340)

Divakruni’s uses the culinary space to symbolize the various phases of life in her protagonists’ lives. In QD, the first description that the reader comes across of Rakhi’s culinary space is also a comment of her inner space, her personal life; “The small kitchen is in its usual *disarray* of good intentions gone *awry*. The dinner dishes haven’t been washed. The mung beans she soaked with virtuous resolution three days back, intending to cook dal, have begun to sprout”. (Divakaruni 16) (My emphasis) The disarrayed state of Rakhi’s life is evoked here – her personal life where after the marriage breakup, she is struggling as a single mother, her professional life where she is struggling to keep her small tea shop afloat and so on.

We get an insight into Rakhi’s experiments in the kitchen space again after her mother’s tragic fatal accident, when she is forced to take care of her father, who is holds partly responsible for her mother’s death, and is trying to cook an authentic Bengali dish.

I've never cooked banana squash ever before, although it was a dish my mother was fond of making. . . . In her hands, it never turned into the *disconcerting* orange glob that stares at me from the pan. I add several spoons of mustard oil to *redeem* it and mix in salt and pepper. It looks just as *unappetising* as before, only greasier. I sigh and place it, along with overcooked rice, on a tray. (Divakaruni 109) (my emphasis)

Use of words like disconcerting and unappetising evoke the underlying state of Rakhi's own 'disconcerted' self-post her mother's loss where she has lost all zest, all 'appetite' for life. Although she is making efforts to 'redeem' herself through channelizing her energies in the right direction, the readers can see that there is a long way for her to go and can also sense her underlying hesitancy at helping her ailing father.

At times Divakaruni's writings depict the manner in which the culinary space is charged with negative emotions and how it conveys warning signals to the readers about the awaiting impending clashes. As Sarah Sceats in her book *Food, consumption and the body in contemporary women's fiction* opines on the connection between betrayal and food,

"Betrayal is a concept that seems to have a ready affinity with food, though not necessarily with any one food. There are various possible explanations. To begin with, both cooking and eating experiences always run the risk of disappointment, of the mild betrayal of hopes and expectations. Eaters are always vulnerable, since eating is an act of

trust, and history and literature are full of poisonings that show such trust betrayed. (Sceats 134)

In VD, when the Sudha's date comes to pick her up from Anju's residence, the culinary space is imbued with shades of jealousy and competition as a volley of sarcastic exchanges takes place. The extra spicy chillies that the fiery Sunil adds to the omelette prepared to torment his arch enemy along with humiliating doctor jokes served like French fries on the side adds fuel to the fire. All four are soaked in this atmosphere brimming with animosity and feelings are running high and tempers are barely kept under control and the intricate connection between food, power and gender is revealed through this volatile culinary space. As mentioned in the book *Food and gender: identity and power*: "The power relations around food mirror the power of the sexes in general. Whereas men's economic status is demonstrated by their control of food purchasing (Charles and Kerr 1988), women wield considerable power in all cultures by their control of meal planning and cooking." (Counihan 3)

In SMH, we have the domineering Mrs. Samyal, who wields complete control over her large household and her instructions to her daughter-in-law Sudha regarding all matters culinary are in tune with the generally prescribed Indian cultural norms. Be it the manner of preparing meals, the serving arrangements, the cleaning up after meals – everything has to be accomplished by Sudha according to the patriarchal standards. Even at the bride viewing, Mrs Samyal makes it

clear that she is the most important authorial figure in the family and so she is the one who has to be satisfied with Sudha's demeanour in order to decide if she is suitable enough to be their daughter-in-law. Sudha's accurate response to questions related to culinary preparations and her submissive and meek posture makes her, in the eyes of the Samyals, a suitable candidate worthy of the honor to marry their son. As Sudha comprehends later, her mother-in-law had gained this control and power over the years due to her unflinching loyalty to her family and her complete mastery over all domestic and culinary matters. Sudha therefore, looks at her mother-in-law with a mix of awe, admiration and trepidation and labours on day and night to make peace with her new regimented routine. Much to the dismay of Anju, who pays her a short visit and is pained to see the downfall of her friend who has sacrificed all her dreams and is twenty-four seven hours occupied in being the perfect daughter-in-law, a role model for the family and society. Much later when Sudha flees from the tyrannical clutches of her in-laws and starts living with Anju, in the US, she remembers those bygone days when she led her life according to the traditional expectations and rules and followed the Indian customs: "She [Anju] doesn't know the one hundred and one faces of my cowardice. My resentment. Someday I will tell her, I did care. All the things I had to leave behind, not only my clothes and jewellery but my good name. The legitimacy of wifehood that I had worked so hard to earn" (Divakaruni 43). It is this "legitimacy of wifehood", and "good name" that all good Indian women are brought up to earn and enable

their family and society to be proud of these accomplishments. And these are multiplied manifold when the women are based in the new host country. Anita Mannur in the essay *Nostalgia, Domesticity, And Gender*, opines, "diasporic married women are often wedded to the belief that the faithful reproduction of "culture" inheres in accurately replicating, for instance, the perfect mango chutney. The domestic arena, so frequently associated with femininity, also becomes a space to reproduce culture and national identity. (Culinary Fictions 30).

We can see how Divakaruni uses food and kitchen space in her fiction. Not only does it function as a memory trigger for her women protagonists who are reminded of the bygone old-world charm and era that is forever etched in their mind as an integral part of their original home country. But even the readers are suspended in time, as it were, during those precious, transient culinary moments. From being symbolic of status and socio-cultural identity, food and kitchen space is also used by her to further the plot and assist the characterization, reveal hidden traits, concealed motives, and repressed desires. The symbolic aspect of food is also a topic that Kessler touches in the above-mentioned text. "Just as in life, food in fiction signifies," he says, and further confirms that food "means more than life itself. It is symbolic." (156). Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss's insights on this aspect are revealed in his exploration of the "culinary triangle" through which he compared methods of culinary preparation and how these reflect innate human nature. As he states "what we eat and the way we eat it are graphically revealing about our habits of mind"

(Martin). And Diwakaruni's works completely reflect this. The methods that her characters employ in their culinary preparation, the manner in which they serve the dishes, the ambience they create in and around the dining spaces, the dining table talk – amicable or hostile, that they indulge in as they partake of the meals, the manner in which they devour food or abstain from it – all of these reveal the true psychology of these characters and is also symbolic of their cultural identity .

Thus, in an alien environment of the hostile host country, navigating through the maze of food memories, aids not only in culture building but also in the healing process. In the midst of combating her trauma on losing her baby and simultaneously facing her marital woes, Anju looks towards Sudha's arrival as a drowning man looks towards a wooden straw; the only thing to hold on to, as is revealed in the extract:

I can't sit still. I have no interest I food. But for the first time in my life, I've been cooking feverishly until the refrigerator is crammed with all the dishes I remember Sudha liking, which is crazy because she can cook them ten times better than I can. I've also selected a few American dishes – spaghetti sauce, apple pie, potato salad – my repertoire is admittedly meagre. It'll be a good way to start explaining to Sudha about life in this country. (Divakaruni 342)

Thus, the traditional way of displaying care and hospitality to guests is being followed in the new host country as well. More than planning for

any other activity like sight-seeing, partying, visiting exotic locations, it is the culinary preparation which takes centre stage. Even though she is aware that Sudha is far better than her in culinary matters, still the childhood conditioning is so deeply entrenched in Anju, that she cannot resist going overboard with churning dish after dish and cramming the refrigerator to meet the expectations of a good Indian hostess and to show her beloved friend and sister of her heart how much she has missed her and yearned for her in this alien land. Thus, the dishes lining up Anju's refrigerator are symbolic of the underlying desperation, restlessness and vacuum that is a part of her existence. In "*Toward a Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption*", Roland Barthes opines, "One could say that an entire 'world' (social environment) is present in and signified by food" (23). He further opines that the preparatory methods, eating manners and practices, culinary presentation and eating contexts – all together are an integral part of a system of differences in signification that go on to enhance the overall communicative value of the culinary.

The condition of some women becomes truly pitiable as they try to straddle two diversely opposite worlds. In fact, some of them truly regret their decision of coming to the host country and leaving their original country. As they are mostly relegated to the kitchen space, and most of their lives in the new land revolve around grocery buying, looking up recipes, cooking, entertaining relatives, serving, and cleaning up, it takes years for most of them to step out of their domestic shell, to explore the new terrain, to become aware of their

basic rights in the new country. The following lines by Gayatri Spivak reflects the plight of these doubly marginalised women, “Both as object of colonialist historiography and subject of insurgency the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow . . . And the subaltern women will be mute as ever.”

When the women are culturally displaced, the unrealistic challenges hit twice as hard as it hits in the homeland. Divakaruni in POI depicts how the queen Kunti treats Draupadi when she makes her a request to provide her turmeric, chillies, and cumin to prepare food. Kunti retorts, “This is all there is. This isn’t your father’s palace!” (Divakaruni 107) When a woman is geographically displaced after marriage. as is the norm in Indian communities, and must enter into new, mostly hostile terrain of her in-laws, she is expected to submit to the set ways and meet the unrealistic standards as a subordinate. The trauma and angst that are inevitable in such cases are brushed aside as minor issues as most of the women face this. Draupadi’s plight when she is dragged into the court and disrobed in front of the elders is reminiscent of the traumatic outcome of displacement which so many women must endure:

I called to grandfather to protect me, certain that he at least would intervene. Had he not called me his dearest granddaughter? Had he not shared with me tender confidences that he kept from others? Had he not helped me become queen of the Palace of Illusions? But to my

disbelief, he sat with his head lowered . . . And so finally, I turned my gaze on Karna. He was my last hope, . . . I knew what he wanted: for me to fall on my knees and beg him for mercy . . . But I wouldn't lower myself to that, not if I died. (Divakaruni 192)

Divakruni in an interview confesses that she has a special place in her heart for the powerless people who are on the periphery, the "outcasts, the marginalized" who she tries to bring "to the forefront". And as is depicted through the life of most of her women protagonists, who at times are doubly marginalised and mostly delegated to the domestic, especially the kitchen space of the homes, these women learn to make use of those resources and food spaces assigned to them to the best of their abilities and this will be further explored in the next few chapters. The women characters in diasporic fiction of Divakaruni are required to play a larger role in establishing and maintain the connect with their original home and the inherent struggle to meet the traditional expectations as well as to acculturate in the host country is a part of their migratory journey. From accepting their assigned space as per the norms and standards prescribed in Indian culture, using that space creatively and slowly gaining more influence over the other domains in the domestic and societal sphere to slowly transforming it from the marginal one in the background to the central one at the forefront is what will be analysed in the study further.