

Introduction

Over the last few decades, Indian diasporic writing has flourished immensely and has resulted in the output of major literary productions – Naipul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Amit Chaudhari's *Afternoon Raag*, Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*, Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*, Bharti Kirchner's *Tulip Season: A Mitra Basu Mystery*, to name a few. The commonly prevalent themes in the works of the diasporic writers are alienation, quest for identity, racism, unhomeliness and the cultural confrontation of the oriental and the occidental worlds.

As depicted in most diasporic fiction, to cope up with the sense of loss and come to terms with the hyphenated identity, the diasporic community seeks refuge and solace in many socio-cultural activities. The culinary activity is one of these, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's employment of the culinary motif in her fiction is the thrust of this thesis.

Within the diasporic context, food and kitchen space, with its associative memories and emotions plays a pivotal role in forging a connection with the lost homeland and home. As a socio-cultural marker, food helps in mitigating the trauma accompanying the migratory journey and enables the displaced communities in the process of assimilation and adaptation in the alien country.

In this study, an attempt has been made to capture the cross-cultural experiences of the displaced diasporic women depicted in Divakaruni's fictional narratives and the manner in which the culinary motif is strategically employed by the author to help them navigate their challenging journey. The chosen texts have been analyzed using the theoretical framework of Barthe's and Saussure's semiotic perspective and Northrop Frye's archetypal lens.

Terminology Used In the Research Title

Derived from the Latin word *memor* (mindful, remembering), the word memory has many categories and functions. The Cambridge dictionary defines Memory as “the ability to remember information, experiences, and people” as well as “something that you remember from the past”. As per the APA dictionary of Psychology, memory is “the ability to retain information or representation of past experience, based on the mental processes of learning or encoding” . In psychology, memory comprises of three significant processes, namely Encoding (changing the form of the new information to suit our memory system), Storage (the process of placing or storing the information) and Retrieval (ability to recollect the stored information). As mentioned in Psychology Today, when we are able to recollect a specific event or episode connected to our past, that can be termed as “episodic memory” and this category of memory brings back to mind the details and emotions evoked or associated with that particular experience or episode – irrespective of whether it has transpired recently or decades ago. Another category of memory that has been elaborated upon is “procedural memory” which involves remembering the procedure of doing things – both physical and mental activities can come under this term.

The word ritual is derived from the Latin word *ritus* which means “habit, custom, usage, ceremony). According to M H Abrams, social rituals are “set forms of procedures in sacred ceremonies” and Oxford dictionary defines rituals as “ a series of actions that are always performed in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony”.

The term Culinary is used to describe any activity associated with kitchen or cookery – it could involve activities including but not limited to preparation,

serving, presentation and consumption of food. So, from procuring the raw ingredients, cutting, slicing, preserving, cooking to laying the table, serving the cooked dishes and consuming food – everything can be said to be a part of the umbrella term ‘culinary’. Food aroma, food aesthetics as well as dining etiquettes are an integral part of the culinary space.

Etymologically speaking, the word ‘heal’ has a Germanic origin and is derived from the Old English word ‘Hælan’ which meant ‘restore to sound health’ . ‘Hal’, which means ‘whole’ is also the root word of the religious term ‘holy’ . It is noteworthy that this centuries-old word had connotations of wholeness, completeness and spirituality implying that only when a person’s original sense of completeness and wholeness has been restored can he or she be considered to be truly healed, in the proper sense of the word.

Rationale of the Study

It may be observed that there has been much interest around Divakaruni's fiction since the last few years and numerous research articles as well as doctoral studies have been conducted on her fictional narratives. Most of them compare and contrast her linguistic strategies with other women diasporic writers and usually focus on themes such as women bonding, alienation, acculturation, identity issues and the stylistic narrative strategies reflected in her work. However, the culinary aspect of her fiction has not yet been discussed adequately. The significant role that the culinary plays in her works has remained largely unexplored, as is also reflected in *Shodhgaganaga*, a compendium of research work done in the Indian universities.

Considering the pivotal role that the culinary plays in Divakaruni's fiction and the manner in which she effectively employs and exploits the culinary metaphor to transcend the regressive patriarchal boundaries and to make a positive impact on the diasporic individuals in particular and the diasporic community at large, it is worth examining the food and kitchen dynamics, as depicted in her works.

In order to delve deeply into this significant aspect of her work, I have proposed in this thesis to examine the manner in which food functions in her narratives; food as language, as memory, as location and as a space of cultural heritage. An attempt will be made to analyze some of her texts to see how navigating culinary memories and practicing food rituals, alleviates the trauma of displacement and alienation experienced by the uprooted hyphenated identities and heals and empowers them.

Scope of Research

Since not much study has been undertaken to highlight the culinary semiotic in Divakaruni's fiction, hopefully this thesis can awaken interest in the same and open uncharted paths to explore this aspect further in a more extensive and elaborate manner, so that the immense relevance of food and kitchen space in diasporic fiction can be reinforced and reemphasized.

Research Objectives

- To critically examine the culinary metaphor in select works of Divakaruni's diasporic fiction.
- To analyze Divakaruni's employment of linguistic and stylistic strategies to navigate the food motif in order to delve into the inner, psychological space of her women protagonists.
- To explore the connection between culinary and cultural identity, especially within the diasporic context, as depicted in Divakaruni's works.
- To understand the manner in which Divakaruni evokes culinary memories and rituals connected to the 'original home' culture to help her displaced, uprooted characters heal and assimilate in the host culture of the adopted country.

Research Hypothesis

This thesis attempts to explore Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's engagement with the culinary motif. Through the analysis of her selected fictional works, this study will examine the presence of culinary space in her writing, and how she strategically transforms it into a space of refuge and solace for her dislocated characters, especially her marginalized women characters. Using critical and analytical inputs from semiotic and archetypal theories, this thesis will explore food and its associated rituals and memories, as depicted by Divakaruni. It will try to study food and kitchen space as presented in the chosen texts and highlight the strategies employed by the author to make this space an enabling, empowering one for the distraught Indian-American characters.

The texts will also be analyzed from diasporic perspective to explore the manner in which the hyphenated identities based in the host country reconcile and cope up with challenging issues such as cultural clashes, dislocation and marginalization and the integral role that the culinary space plays in this. Focusing on the culinary narratives in the chosen texts, this study will attempt to understand how diverse factors including the spices, aroma, energy and intentions with which food is cooked helps alleviate the pain of dislocation and brings about healing – at the physical and individual as well as the emotional and collective level.

Research Questions

- Where is diasporic writing ‘located’ within the larger post colonial discourse?
- How can culinary space be re-conceptualized and how is this space used in Divakaruni’s works?
- What strategies does the author use in the chosen texts to exploit the food narrative to depict the emotional and psychological landscape of her characters?
- How does the food semiotic work as an active agent that not only evokes the archetype of homeland but also helps her fictionalized diasporic characters navigate through the traumatic phases of their migratory journey?
- Through which linguistic strategies does Divakaruni explore the food motif and depict it as a space of cultural and traditional rooting, especially with respect to its therapeutic, healing aspect?

Research Methodology

- Socio-historical context of diasporic women writers in general and Divakaruni's fiction in particular has been delved into
- Attempt has been made to understand the selected works with the help of archetypal and cultural insights offered by eminent theorists such as Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung
- The selected works have been analyzed from the postcolonial lens and valuable insights of theoreticians like Bhabha, Rushdie and Safran have been included
- Divakaruni's depiction of food as a culinary space has been studied from the semiotic perspective against the backdrop of theories of Barthé and Saussure
- Personal interviews, blogs and live session recordings are being perused in depth to gain the authorial viewpoint.

Limitations of the Study

For the purpose of this thesis, only the selected novels of Divakaruni will be analyzed and her other novels as well as the other genres she experiments with, namely young adult's fiction and poetry have not been delved into. As the main area of focus of this niche study is the culinary, the other thematic aspects in her fiction, such as woman bonding, identity crisis, magic and mysticism have not been highlighted. The scope of this research is therefore limited to the culinary presence in the chosen texts only and Divakaruni's literary prowess in her engagement with the food motif.

Scheme of Chapterization

My thesis contains one introduction (including the literature review), three chapters and a conclusion. In the following discussion I have touched upon the core ideas explained in each chapter

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Review of Literature
Chapter 3	Displaced Migrant Women and the Culinary Space
Chapter 4	Culinary Memories and Rituals in Divakaruni's Select Novels
Chapter 5	Culinary Healing in Divakaruni's Select Novels
Chapter 6	Conclusion

Chapter 1 Introduction.

The first section of the introductory chapter elaborates on diasporic theory. From the etymological origin of the word 'diaspora' to various other definitions, this section highlights the ideas propounded by renowned theorists such as Stuart Hall, Du Bois, Paul Gilroy, Steven Vertovec, Avtar Brah, Robin Cohen and Homi Bhabha. The next part of the introductory chapter gives a brief description about the author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, including some of her personal and professional achievements and the main thrust of her work.

This is followed by an overview of the culinary space, especially within the diasporic context and the significant place that the culinary motif occupies in Divakaruni's fiction has been highlighted. Insights on food motif by popular food

scholars have been included and semiotic theory propounded by Roland Barthes and Levi-Strauss have been briefly touched upon.

The later part of the chapter includes an elaborate review of the literature and then describes the research objectives, research questions, the relevance and scope of the study, its limitations and the overall structure of the thesis. It states the tentative chapterization, highlighting the core ideas that will be elaborated upon in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

In the Review of literature, an attempt has been made to study all the concepts related to the main subject. Previous researches done on the author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as well as other Diasporic women writers has been analyzed. A sincere attempt has been made to peruse and comprehend the numerous journal articles, thesis, available on print and digital media pertaining to the main topic to gain an in depth understanding about the same.

Chapter 3 Displaced Migrant Women and the Culinary Space

This chapter seeks to explore migrant women's condition in the alien country, as depicted in Divakaruni's fictional narratives. Newly arrived, these women are dependent and powerless as they are estranged from their home and homeland and not yet assimilated in the host land. Mostly they are relegated to the marginal kitchen space and they find themselves burdened by the traditional expectations of being the repositories of the 'original' culture. Diasporic theories highlighting the uncertain displaced existence and issues related to identity crisis are briefly mentioned here. Describing Strauss's theory of the 'culinary triangle', the chapter also touches upon the connection between 'culinary space' and identity. The concluding part of the chapter delves into the manner in which Divakaruni's

engagement with culinary memories and rituals will help navigate the journey of her fictional migratory women in the right direction – towards wholeness and completeness.

Chapter 4 Culinary Memories and Rituals in Divakaruni's Select Novels

It highlights basic aspects of culinary memories and rituals as depicted in Divakaruni's works. Starting from the etymological meaning, various definitions and salient features of the terms 'memory' and 'rituals' have been explained here. Culinary writing trends that have gained significance in recent years, especially within the diasporic context have been mentioned. Divakaruni's place in the South Asian diasporic women writing context has been described along with an overview of the narrative techniques she has used in the select novels. Her engagement with the food motif has been delved into in this chapter – the intricate connection between cultural identity and culinary identity as reflected in her select writings has been explored. The semiotic theories of Barthe and Saussure have been briefly explained in the light of which her works are analyzed and will be referred to in the subsequent chapters also. The concluding part of the chapter seeks to understand Divakaruni's use of the culinary semiotic to help her diasporic characters negotiate their challenging migratory journey by remaining connected to their roots.

Chapter 5 Culinary Healing in Divakaruni's Select Novels

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore the transformative impact of food motif, as depicted in Divakaruni's chosen texts. From being a space where women felt marginalized and suppressed, the culinary space becomes a space where women feel empowered, and become active, dominant forces to be reckoned with, plodding on with a sense of purpose and zest for life. By constructively channelizing their

culinary energies, they reclaim the food and kitchen space as their own oasis of sorts, where they regroup, regain their lost confidence and reclaim their lives. From traditional culinary values since the times of ancient scriptures to contemporary post Covid scenario – various food related trends have been mentioned. From prescribed rituals for fasting and feasting to trending hashtags such as comfort food, holistic nutrition, mindful eating and immunity boosting brews and bites – all have been briefly touched upon. This chapter attempts to understand Divakaruni's texts through the lense of semiotic and archetypal theories. Northrop Frye, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell are a few theorists whose viewpoints have been discussed and their definitions and concepts related to archetypal journey, myths, individuation and collective unconscious have been briefly taken into consideration. Contextual references have been taken from Paul Ricoeur's Narrative theory to understand how Divakaruni's diasporic protagonists eventually heal their trauma of displacement through the culinary narrative. From linguistic, stylistic strategies and narrative techniques employed by the author – all have been explored in order to understand how food in her fiction acts as a signifier, healer and home for the uprooted characters.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The concluding chapter will be a summation of the core ideas explored in the earlier chapters. It will reemphasize the relevance of the culinary motif in Divakaruni's fictional world and how her uprooted protagonists navigate their migratory journey through the food and kitchen space. It will reiterate the fact that Divakaruni foregrounds the culinary space as an empowering agency that constructs the personal, cultural and national narratives of the diasporic subjects lives.

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