

The Self and Sovereignty

Contextualizing the Sublime in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Mistress of Spices*

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Abstract: In this article, the novel *Mistress of Spices* (1997) evinces the interaction between two socio-cultural environments, at times resulting in disillusionment. This concept of disillusionment will further debate on the feelings of terror, reason, and freedom to showcase the formulation of the sublime within diaspora studies. Immanuel Kant's account of the sublime will help to propose exile and diasporicity as natural stimulus that permits humanity to revel in some extraordinary power of their own minds. The sublime describes the awakening of a certain psychological phenomenon, especially in the subjugated woman, aiding her freedom from the masculine construct of the society and reaching the sovereign self.

Keywords: The sublime, diaspora, femineity, postcolonial literature.

Introduction

"To inhabit the sublime is to confront one's borders and boundaries." Jennifer Wawrzinek, 13.

The confrontation of boundaries in literature can be discussed from different aspects such as agency, cultural dominance or even as a process of decolonisation, opposing the imperialist construct. But at the heart of the confrontation, as Bonnie Mann observes in her book, *Women's Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* (2006) lies the "[...] special kind of terror" (Mann vii) which on the one hand threatens the boundaries of an individual, and on the other hand forces to challenge the familiar conditions and eventually elevate the self. This terror may infest the life of an individual from time to time, through extreme occurrences such as war, communal riot, catastrophic accidents and sexual abuse and the individual internalises this feeling of terror and pushes survival beyond the societal imposed limitations. Elevation of the self, amid challenging conditions of reality to construct a self-aggrandizing identity, is called the sublime. The paper will cultivate the definition in selected Indian American literature to negotiate the sublime theory and its relationship with women, their subjugation and eventual emergence as a sovereign subject under the conditions of exile and dislocation.

To construct the sublime in Indian American literature, one must recognise the presence naturally of certain kind of terror hidden in the prefix of the 'post' that Bhabha mentions in his *Locations of Culture* (1994). A "tenebrous sense of survival" (Bhabha 1) as Bhabha mentions entails sense of fear, anxiety and disorientation within the people living beyond the borders—of both location and

the self. In diasporic literature, this sense of fear may not be the kind of fear that is usually related to the aesthetic notion but "it is a more pedestrian emotion: the mundane, daily fear" (Mann 4) that grasps an individual dependent on its sphere for survival, yet unable to exert control neither over itself nor anyone else's contribution in its disruption. It is naturally a pursuit in search of a force or power that one encounters and subsequently feels out of control, therefore insignificant and alienated. The sublime in diaspora manifests through the abstruseness of existence in three steps — the life-threatening or violent occurrence, the confrontation with the self, and the subsequent disruption and restructuring. The plausibility of the sublime theory and its repeated transformation through changing theories, political and cultural events persisted since the 18th century. The aesthetic experience of terror in its materialization showcases the need of the sublime and its association in describing the process of destroying the self; it feels awkward yet demanding to engage or confront that process of disruption, and the exhilaration from the power to destroy. The process mandates recognition of the conflict, its moments of illusion and subdued form under a violent power, eventually invoking the sense of this confrontation both in the characters and in the readers. The impact of the fictionalized terror manifests and seduces the passions of the readers. In the presence of the disjuncture reality, this chapter discusses the notions of terror, power, reason, and freedom with sublimity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Mistress of Spices* (1997) on account of the events. By choosing these specific elements, the chapter orients the argument on the Immanuel Kant's theorization of the sublime and the aesthetic judgment. In contrast to the Kantian sublime, Mann establishes woman's authority of reason and focuses on both demoulding of the self and achieving the state of sublime by confronting patriarchal and masculinist traditions of society at large. The relationship between postcolonial and the sublime is the unprepossessing excess that persists after reason's unifying teleology has done its work. To establish the authority of reason, the "Idealism of Kant" is constructed upon the notion that "reason, as a faculty of mind, is forged in and through its mastery over the conscious excesses that characterise the sublime" (Nicholls 20). The need of the sublime in the procedure that created the authority of reason, indicates that reason is at once in control of its conscious domain, and yet susceptible, since its dominion is established with the possibility of its collapse. There always lingers in the discourse of reason's practices an unaccounted for excess that opens up the prospect for a politics of disruption and reconstruction. This additional excess opens up the possibility of the relationship between diasporicity (and its postcolonial manifestations) and the sublime.

To link the trope of the sublime to the term diaspora is to embark on a journey to work upon both the sublime and its possible relationality with the postcolonial elements, especially the motif of transculturation. In many ways, the term 'postcolonial' remains obscure and unfamiliar. Alongside the haunting accounts of the colonial past, the struggle of the self in conscious spaces have become more uncertain, indeterminate, and transgressive. This stress upon unfamiliarity indicates that the referents of 'postcolonialism' — the condition of postcoloniality, the political strategy of postcolonialism, and the postcolonial self— remain obscure (Nicholls 3). The term postcolonial is "engaging" yet "unformed" so much so that its usage has become diverse and instable, and it seems to provoke

diasporic discussions “signalling the social and political concerns of the late 20th century such as cultural elimination, alienation and eventual loss of identity” (Bera 71). David Spurr advances to give a concise understanding of postcolonial as a critical term:

‘Postcolonial’ is a word that engenders even more debate than ‘colonial’, partly because of the ambiguous relationship between those two and I shall refer to postcolonial in two ways: as a historical situation marked by the dismantling of traditional institutions of colonial power, and as a search for alternatives to the discourses of the colonial the second is both an intellectual project and a transcultural condition that includes, along with the new possibilities, certain crises of identity and representation (Spurr 6).

According to Spurr, the word postcolonial is twofold; On one hand, it marks a historical trajectory, on the other, it proposes transcultural upheavals. In the historical debate of postcolonialism, cultural practises of the diaspora “expand the umbrella term from colonial reparations to transcultural issues” (Bera 71). Therefore, diasporicity concerns the life beyond the homeland, as Bhabha puts it,

‘Beyond’ signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future but our inclinations of exceeding the barrier or boundary dash the very act of going *beyond*— that are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the ‘present’ which in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced (Bhabha 4).

The motif of transculturation manifests Bhabha’s concept of boundaries and „beyond” and establishes the bridge between postcoloniality and diaspora. The process of territorialization and deterritorialization merges the concepts of deculturation and acculturation and carries the idea of the subsequent creation of new cultural phenomena in which the combination of cultures politicizes the migrant image. The process of transculturation hence marks the ambiguity of time and space that migrants live in, structured by massive chaos of material and social circumstances, challenging an individual to come to desperate conditions, taking desperate measures, and (dis)locating the self in relation to others (Bhabha 2). The essential elements of the sublime, such as terror, power, and pleasure, thus unveil the need for the sublime to characterize the migrant image through the sorceress, Tillotyoma and her relationship with divinity and examine the dialectic of self consciousness, the desire and the morality to reasoning Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fabricated world of terror.

Homi Bhabha while commenting on the process of transculturation, asserts „the borderline engagements of cultural difference” which may challenge the normative expectations of a multicultural society (Bhabha 3). In Indian-American scenario, here is a need to understand the customary boundaries between traditions and modernity (pertaining one or more cultures) to conceive the creation of minority identities— that acts estranged to individualities and articulates into a collective body or community. „the political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multicultural cause,” as Bhabha observes might as well be read as a rational approach to perceive community as an „envisaged project”— going beyond the idea of individual desire to reflect and reconstruct a communal identity (4). With this in mind, the word „beyond” in diaspora makes promises of an unknowable and unrepresentable future. Indian diaspora, hence represents the sequentiality of ‘post’ in postcoloniality and gestures constant existential

transformation. This idea of constant communal progression foregrounds the projects fears, anxieties and dominance within the the dissonant voices of the colonial past (16). If the sublime, according to Jennifer Wawrzinek, “in its traditional form depends on hierarchies that (re)instate mechanisms of power and domination” (16), then the mechanism of power and domination are also observed in the politicized space of diasporic existence. In the following chapter, hierarchical versions of the sublime depending on the mechanisms of fear, power and dominance showcase the transformation or elevation of one element over the other, such as mind over the body, morality over desire. Alongside *Mistress of Spices* (1997), the sublime becomes a strategy that constructs the Tilottiyoma’s sublime self, by driving the self towards “an overwhelming force and to appropriate that power as one’s own serves as the impetus of both the traditional sublime and the (re)consolidation” (Wawrzinek 23) of her displaced identity.

Mistress of Spices: an Aesthetical Analysis

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has a prominent position among Indian American writers for her innovative style, pure curiosity, and unconventional response to the consequences of diaspora and cultural transposition. Each novel of Divakaruni contextualizes the experiences of immigration not in the context of geographical dislocation only but also conceives the fabric of the plots of her novels in the background of magic, dream, fantasy, and myth. Her prominent novels are *Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of my Heart* (1999), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *Oleander Girl* (2013). She also creates a female-centric approach to establish her vision of immigration and exile in the context of cultural dislocation, loss of personal relationship, otherhood and the troubling associations of the homeland. Divakaruni in America set a path of an unusual mode of diaspora writings in which women protagonists exist to be trapped in the conflict of two worlds. In the process of acculturation, their struggles within the entire canvas of feminine experiences includes the concerns of motherhood, female sexuality, dynamics of marital harmony combined with "the poetics of 'exile,' 'aloofness,' 'nostalgia,' 'nationalism' and the quest for the familial and personal relationship" (Abirami; Nirmala 256). The sense of survival from life-threatening situations also gives a sense of accomplishment and excitement of self-liberation. Treating the feeling of breaking away from constraints through the sublime is essential to an understanding of suffering or terror of that the constraints entailed and perhaps will justify Tilo's association with nature, through her reasoning and determination "...in which the mind can make palpable [*fühlbar*] to itself the sublimity of its vocation over nature" (Kant 5: 262). This comparison and association to Divakaruni's text will reinforce the aesthetic quality of the major sublime elements within the study of migration and exile. In diaspora literature, all women novelists have expressed their concerns for the dilemma of women in bi-cultural spaces. Alongside the illusion of emancipation, Indian women of diaspora are subjected to racial orderliness from both homeland and hostland. Divakaruni's writings assert that "diaspora is not merely a scattering or dispersion but an experience made up of collectivities and multiple journeys" (Khandagale 1). Her works primarily deal with complications

in adjustment, nostalgia for home, inability to 'connect' on either side of the cultures, the fear of confrontation and survival, and schizophrenic sense of belonging with hyphenated identities. The trials and tribulations faced for self-preservation and self-realisation of her protagonists involve the constant flux of memories between past and present, between homeland and host land, between unfamiliar glamour of the west and familiarity of the East. In *Mistress of Spices*, the protagonist Tilottyoma offers through the spices, not only a state of homesickness and alienation but also the realm of nature that surrounds her and manifests its overwhelming power aiding the reshaping of diasporic subjects, reinforcing the immigrational movement. Through her magical realism plot, Divakaruni attempts to renegotiate the elements of fear and power over the human subjects and how Tilo thrives for salvation. The novel incorporates a complicated domain of hegemony by representing an Indian woman in America who deals in the magical, sensorial power of various spices. I shall argue that the mythical representation portrays protagonist's burden with societal expectations, transforms within the mundane world of terror, and evolves the self against the ghastly manifestations, against all odds and horrifying experiences.

The novel potentially combines three commonly othered elements in the portrayal of the protagonist Tilottyoma, or Tilo: a woman's body stripped of its desire, her Eastern origin and diasporic identity, and the sense of her spices. The touch, smell, or taste of each spice she sells can do wonders, such as healing people or fulfilling their various needs and desires. Tilo is an initiated clairvoyant who has to obey specific rules imposed on her by her foremothers to preserve her power. She must stay within the boundaries of her shop and must not touch any of her clients—a code of practice that symbolizes the imposed femininity on and the segregation of a woman who is allowed to associate with only spices. However, Tilo's later physical intimacy with Raven, her American lover, and yet her prioritization of the spices over all else is what enables her to break free from her subjugation and choose her identity. The plot of the novel includes some magical elements inserted into everyday realistic happenings, which complicates reading as well as offers an opportunity to read the text from multiple angles from the very onset; Divakaruni informs us about the presence of an overwhelming power—through the "Mistress of Spices",

I am a Mistress of Spices. I can work the others too. Mineral, metal, earth and sand, and stone. The gems with their cold clear light. The liquids that burn their hues into your eyes till you see nothing else. (Divakaruni 3)

The supernatural aspect of Tilo's existence, her ability to play with the elements enforce the more 'other', looming migrant moment. Her unnoticed hybridity, her grimace body clad in white saree, her constant escapism from physical human contact can be understood only in terms of the possibility of a disorder that seems to be lacking in Tilottyoma's dialectic situatedness. She represents fear and threat of transculturation—as a diasporic woman and as a clairvoyant. The exemplifications of the diasporic way of living, fear of change, fear of destruction, and fear of moving forward constantly hints at the idea of reason and how the conception of will and self-realization reinforces the notion of reason with the sublimity as an essence of the human mind, part of the grandeur of human nature.

Immanuel Kant's first effort to formulate a theory of the sublime is found in his pre-critical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, published in 1764, where Kant expressed his concerns with the correlation between feeling and morality, and Werkmeister asserts that Kant's dilemma made him "to take a closer look at the nature of feelings" (Werkmeister 36). Kant's introduction to the "Analytic of the Sublime" (Kant 23) moves forward from what is considered the cause of sublimity and focuses more on the reflective judgment derived from the object itself. Thus, the liking involved judgments concerning the sublime is different from categorized liking of an object (the beauty) and is "a satisfaction in the amenability of sensible representation to the 'faculty of concepts' – where this is specified as the faculty of concepts of reason..." (Guyer 256). Divakaruni creates Tilo within the boundaries of diasporicity with the ability to have a cognitive approach to her powers and presents her as a rational being constantly in confrontation with her spices. It could be related to the Kantian observation of the sublimity as a product of our minds, a rational capacity of self-determination and will, existing independently of nature—

...sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us). Everything that arouses this feeling in us, which includes the powers of nature that calls forth our own powers, is thus (although improperly) called sublime (Guyer 147)

Even though the Kantian idea of the sublime as "absolutely great" cannot be established in nature, both in terms of size and power, when Tilo describes her spice shop "...there is no other place in the world quite like this" (Divakaruni 4), it enforces the existence of uncontrollable power to which Tilo surrenders, feels insignificant yet feels the pleasure of the power granted to her. Even then, amid the presence of formidable greatness, "calls forth" her own powers of resistance. The spices in the form of magical powers manifest two kinds of reflection—on the one hand, the realization of incommensurable existence of omnipotent power and human limitations of comprehending that power, and on the other hand, finding her moral virtue through daily struggles to find her "determination" and "calling" (Merritt 22). The characters subsequently fabricate a world of terror, made of incidents that seemingly will not appear life-altering, epiphanic but through the mundanity of life bears witness to the terror that accompanies diasporicity. The diasporic displacement that affects an individual's relationship with the idea of body, home, and identity, mostly results from the horror of reality, and the motif of escape or starting fresh in search of one's position in the world can be refigured with terror, power and freedom and the sublime theory.

Divakaruni explicitly sets the mood by displaying the elements of power and fear through Tilo and her spices, establishing that power like that exists to unravel the secrets of human lives that come in contact with the 'mistress' and how the spices control the present, past and future, with their "hidden properties," their "magic powers" (Divakaruni 3). From "amchur to Zafran" all the spices have both the powers to heal and hurt, the powers to create and destruct as Tilo reminds us—

Ah. You have forgotten the old secrets your mother's mother knew. Here is one of them again: Vanilla beans soaked soft in goat's milk and rubbed on the wrist-bone

can guard against the evil eye... A measure of pepper at the foot of the bed, shaped into a crescent, cures you of nightmare. (Divakaruni 3)

Even though, the power of the spices are represented as of formidable nature, it still calls forth the power of imagination. The supernatural existence of the divine powers can only manifest through the conception of human mind. Here, Divakaruni attempts to play with the imagination of the readers to delve into the world of mysticism and be fearful of ancestry, traditions that have turned into mechanisms of power and dominance. Kant focuses his definition of the sublime away from the anglophone traditions, he still bases the aesthetic magnitude or the "absolutely great" (Kant 5: 245) in the greatness present in nature, amid the overwhelming godliness of creation. Yet for Kant, the greatness or the feeling of insignificance in the face of awe-inspiring power, is inbound as well as being outbound. The sublimity, in German traditions, focuses more on rationalism and reason, rooted in the distinction between sensitive and intellectual cognition—away from the subjectivism, sensory stimuli, and find the sublime in human nature. While mentioning the reflective turn, Kant focuses on returning to the object, conceiving all the necessary information from the object itself, and returning the judgment (which he terms 'aesthetic judgment') to go beyond the sensory affiliation. Henceforth, the Kantian sublime concentrates more on the moral virtue, reason, cognitive aptitude of human nature, intellectual rationalism, and the sublime effect is the ability to have a cognitive approach, confront and rationalize and challenge limitations based on intellectual capacity. The objective aptitude as Kant observes, "true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the one who judges, not in the object in nature, the judging, not in the natural object that is better conceived as a mere occasioning stimulus" (Kant 5: 256).

The struggle of Tilottyoma began from her birth as another girl child in a family where girls are burdens too expensive and shameful to bear. Her birth brought nothing to her parents but worry, nothing to the villagers but shame and worry. The loneliness, the secret wish of her death in her parents brought about the stars to the "dark girl" rising in anger, and she from just "Nayan Tara" became the "Star-seer" (Divakaruni 8). She became akin to the priestess, someone who could peek in the future, held power to predict or find out the truth in one touch and made "... grown men trembled", throwing themselves at her feet which seemed "easy and right to her" (Divakaruni 9). Tilo's "deep solitude laced with "dread and melancholy" induces the power that will attract the attention of the people who once disowned her. Her power made the men astonished and rigid. By projecting the past and "unforeseeable future" through her powers, she manifests terror, transfixed admiration within nature and establishes herself as absolute and omnipotent amid the insignificance, evoking sublimity (Guyer 16). This same pride, willfulness, and admiration is manifested throughout Tilo's journey as the 'Mistress' of spices—her spices let it be 'Turmeric', or 'Ginger' or 'Red Chillies', all have magical and divine associations as Tilo chants their otherworldliness to assert the infinite workings in shaping the human existence like "anointment for death, hope for rebirth" (Divakaruni 13). When Tilo observes the workings of the universe on reality and dream, she observes,

[...] if there is a such a thing as reality, an objective and untouched nature off being. Or if all that we encounter has already been changed by what we had imagined it to be. If we have dreamed it into being (Divakaruni 16).

The incomprehensibility of the real-life experiences hints at the Kantian observation of "Natural sublimity" which bequests its origin to unfathomable workings, shapeless and bewildering, requires "a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it" and "which assaults, and overwhelms, our capacity to comprehend it" (Kant 5:244). Divakaruni, in her novel, creates these enclosed yet terrible circumstances where Tilo constantly challenges her limitations as she desires, as desire is the very core of man, determining action (Khurana 1). In her longing for more attention manifested the desire to belong, to be normal. The grandeur of a priestess, her Godly stature all lost its purposiveness in her desires for affection as a child, and in the dead of night she yearned for the Pirates from the tales who "somewhere out in the great ocean they stood, tall and resolute at the prows of their ships, arms crossed, granite faces turned toward our village, hair whipped free by the salt wind" (Divakaruni 17). The more she yearned, the more she used her desire to call upon the "enemy to her feet... [lifted] a soul out of a human body and place it raw and pulsing in [her] palm" (18). Tilo recalls her memories from her childhood, such as the pirates attacking her family, raping her sisters for their "evil pleasures", killing her parents in front of her, and her sheer helplessness despite having divine powers. She reconnects the associations of her fear, throughout her life in the form of magical power to which she surrendered.

The power that overwhelmingly taken over everything in her life, and even though she kept the façade on, she remained insignificant and fearful. This idea of terror and Tilo's terrible reality is constantly captured through her private and public space, hinting at her desires, her moral commitment towards her spices aligned with her practical reasoning of what is right or wrong. Through her self-determination and reasoning as opposed to the selfish pleasures that her desires propagated, she chose the spices to possess her in granting her the power to help and heal, predict and provide guidance, and revoke her sins. In the *Doctrine of Virtue in the Metaphysics of Morals* (1997), Kant created divisions regarding "duties of virtue into what one owes oneself, and what one owes others"; these follow, respectively, from the free adoption of the two morally obligatory ends of self-perfection and the happiness of others (Merritt 35). Self-perfection evokes the cultivation of one's capabilities and actions, "the highest of which is the understanding as the faculty of concepts" – where this is, once again, construed broadly to include "concepts having to do with duty" (Kant 6:386 – 7). To make oneself fit for one's indispensable rationality is itself a moral commitment, a trait of virtue. While this is initially a question of cultivating one's cognitive capabilities, it is eventually a matter of cultivating the will or "moral way of thinking" (Kant 6:387), agreeing to the standard of virtue that is discussed through the moral law. For Kant, while moral virtue presumes a feeling of fondness for humanity and gets manifested through actions, this feeling brings on its uniquely moral character when it issues an objective principles of conduct, rather than advocating superficial sympathetic reactions. It is, indeed, this very subduing of instantaneous inclination through principle which Kant finds

sublime as he explains, "as soon as this feeling of affection for humanity has arisen to its proper universality it has become sublime" (Kant 48).

Kant construes the sublime feeling as a disposition made occurrent in three distinctive ways—enjoyment with horror, quiet wonder, and a sense of the splendid. However, that will also steer the argument towards morality and the sublime, focusing on Tilo's relationship with her body, home and identity, and moral consciousness. This direction will not only showcase Kant's justification of connecting morality with the sublime but the importance of certain elements that concerns the aesthetic judgment in human nature unique enough to be worthy of termed sublime. The beautiful is an expression of harmony of imagination and understanding, but the sublime is what brings us to a sharp awareness of the incommensurability of imagination (the power of presentation) and reason (the power of cognition). The sublime is deeply concerned with questions about how we perceive the world and its others, understand and represent the relationship between self and world, or between self and other (Ozan 215). It could be said that the sublime permeates the fabric of contemporary society, culture, and politics. It is invoked whenever there is a call for a revolutionary overthrowing of a powerful individual or group, or whenever a minority group claims the right to political agency or self-determination. When silences are invoked as evidence of the suppression of difference, of multiple communities, or of the legitimate place of the other, we are once again in the realm of the sublime. The dynamical sublime also present the unrepresentable, but it is prompted by an encounter with a "power which is superior to great hindrances" (Kant 109) potentially lethal. Fear is, therefore, the first emotion aroused by the dynamical sublime. Any attempt to resist this superior force is futile. The subject consequently becomes acutely aware of the limits of his bodily powers. This experience of physical helplessness is, however, merely the prelude to an experience in which the "forces of the soul [allow us to rise] above the height of the vulgar commonplace . . . [so that we] discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming impotence of nature" (Kant 111). This power of resistance is evident in our ability to act ethically, whatever natural or human forces are arranged against us. The physical impotence experienced in the face of natural power highlights "an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature" so that what is revealed in us is the "basis of a self-preservation quite different from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us" (Kant 120-121). The dynamical sublime foregrounds the autonomy of moral sense as inner freedom over and above the physical limitations of the perceiving subject. In the confrontation with natural might, the subject discovers inner humanity and a sense of moral good that is superior to nature (Ozan 218). Once again, this experience provides strong evidence for the subject's supersensible destiny. Although Kant distinguishes between the mathematical and dynamical sublimes, the sublime operates 'negatively' in both cases. In other words, the failure of imagination or the limits of bodily strength negatively represents what cannot be represented. Kant aligns the sublime with respect for the moral law as the work of reason, arguing that the aesthetic pleasure resulting from the sublime operates negatively:

The object of a pure and unconditioned intellectual delight is the moral law in the might which it exerts in us over all antecedent motives of the mind. Now, since it is only through sacrifices that this might makes itself known to us aesthetically, (and this involves a deprivation of something — though in the interests of inner freedom — whilst in turn it reveals in us an unfathomable depth of this supersensible faculty, the consequences of which extend beyond reach of the eye of sense,) it follows that the delight, looked at from the aesthetic side (in reference to sensibility) is negative, i.e. opposed to this interest, but from the intellectual side, positive and bound up with an interest. (Kant 123)

The process of the sublime experience is based upon the ability of the perceiving subject to esteem and respect that which is on occasion opposed to the subject's sensible interests. The imagination's failure and the pain this causes allow the moral law's power to make itself known as an aesthetic pleasure. Because moral and ethical frameworks dictate or proscribe actions that are often in contradistinction to those resulting from pure desire, reason must have what Kant argues is "a power of infusing a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction in the fulfillment of duty, and consequently that it should possess a kind of causality by which it can determine sensibility in accordance with rational principles" (Kant 144). In the Kantian sublime, the reason is elevated over imagination and understanding in service of a moral framework. The recourse to an ethical and moral framework is of interest to twentieth-century (re)formulations of the sublime attempting to use force and power as the means for enabling the abject and the subaltern. Moreover, tension between the sublime, the faculties of imagination and reason (as the power of representation and that of the idea) opens a space for transcendence. In its Kantian formulation, however, the sublime remains vertical: reason rises above the imagination, and the sensible world of the body is negated in favor of transcendent principles and realities.

„Dynamical Sublime” presents immense natural power that challenges our default sense of what is worth going after, what is valuable. The enjoyment of natural sublimity is ultimately explained in terms of an interest in a standard of goodness that is proper to us as rational beings. This transition is made in the following:

[I]n our aesthetic judgment nature is appreciated [beurtheilt] as sublime not insofar as it arouses fear, but rather because it calls forth our power [Kraft] (which is not part of nature) to regard these things about which we are concerned (worldly goods, 73 health and life) as trivial [Klein], and hence to regard its might [Macht] (to which we are, to be sure, subjected in regard to these things) as not the sort of dominion over ourselves and our authority to which we would have to bow if it came down to our highest principles and their affirmation or abandonment. (CJ 5:262; translation modified, Merritt 32)

Whatever worldly goods one has, and even one's health and life, could be taken away in a flash of nature's might. Ultimately, we are without any means to resist: we will die, and our bodies return to dust. Moreover, to whatever extent we win the material and social goods we go after, and whether we have even good health and the continuance of life, is not entirely up to us: this is nature's dominion over us as Divakaruni reflects in the *Mistress of Spices*, "most ordinary, for that is the nature of magic. Deepest magic which lies at the heart of our everyday lives, flickering fire, if only we had eyes to see" (51). However, how can we regard

worldly goods, health, and life, as 'small' or 'trivial' (Klein) in a contest against 'our highest principles'? We must recognize some other standard of value, "a unit against which everything in nature is small" (Kant 5:261). This standard must lie in our freedom from the dominion that nature exerts over us as merely animal beings. With this, Kant shifts the discussion from absolute greatness of size and power that can only be apparent to a principle of unconditioned value that is supposed to be authentic within.

Tilo keeps a knife under her pillow, and the existence of a knife under her head signifies the need to keep her from dreaming, keep her from wanting the mundanity of life that the first mother and the spices cannot approve. The knife represents dangers that cut "moorings from the past, the future" to keep her "always rocking at sea" (Kant 51). Tilo's nature is flawed, and the reference of the knife is redundant in cutting her ties off with her human form. The first mother, the high priestess who introduced Tilo to the world of spices and the magical power of the ancient land, observes Tilo "shinning but flawed with a crack running through it" (Diivakaruni 83). The store full of spices that creates a natural habitat for the 'mistress', also resembles the uncontrollable, awe-inspiring, and fearful elements that though makes Tilo powerful yet makes her feel vulnerable and yearn for the world outside the doors where she will have choices and consequences of her own, where she will be touched, enticed, longed. With raven's introduction, she realizes that she, too, is a woman who deserves to thrive beyond her past, the survivor's guilt, and the powers granted to her by the stars. She yearns to be Nayantara again from Tilottyoma, to be a simple village girl (who wants love), from the 'mistress of spices' (who could only win fear).

Tilo casts out the human form while being constantly pushed by the dilemma between her role as a human and a sorceress— living along the lines of unmediated existence between man and nature, power and subservience, between terror and peace. Her exile from the village to a hidden land of magic and later exiled again to the United States through the "shampati's fire" are reminiscent of her journey as a migrant who belonged nowhere but was pushed into the flow of the ones who have no home. The safe yet cursed distance from which she witnessed the pillaging of her village, the killing of her parents, and the rape of her sisters juxtaposes her finite existence riled up in front of tremendous force—the one that the pirates had and the one she had. The powers assured her safety but with a price of sacrificed morals, the life of guilt and unattainable freedom. In simple words, Kant reflected that freedom for it to be sublime must be free from empirical obligations (empirical causations are priori, set of intentions, influenced by pre-rounded information, judgment) humans should conceive themselves as moral agents and noumenally free to act on their reason and understanding to deliver their judgment, making a moral stand without the interference of natural causality—the transcendent being.

But is she a free person to achieve the state of the transcendent being? Helping Jagjit, an Indian immigrant, to survive better in school from the bullies because of his cultural signifiers, or aiding Haroun into forgetting his traumatic past during the war in Kashmir, or even helping the American lover, Raven, with his wounds from an accident— all contribute to the fact that she has desires born from her preconditioned trauma and guilt. Desire is part of the empirical causation, which is intentional and predetermined foundation. It is also the forces

Tilo has no control over, part of the "natural law" that regulates desires in a human. In her case, the spices are part of her natural law controlling her desires. In the Kantian sense, no one is free and autonomous moral agent if acts on desire. In the *Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni explicitly plays with the motif of desire, where "desires are natural forces that we passively endure; they control and 'enslave' us" (Ortiz-Millán 321). Kant sets the perspective "Inclination is blind and servile", whether it is under kindness or not, and when morality is in question, reason must not act as a guardian watching over desires or inclination but must disregard it completely (Ortiz-Millán 328). Desires are also part of the powers she has received (while wanting attention from her parents and being worshipped) and the "earthly paradise" of the everyday life she yearns for. But if one hand, her desperate and rebelling yearning for a normal life is a desire, the reasoning and understanding of self-immolation in 'shampati's fire' is her pure practical reasoning, her moral agency. The reasoning she applies to disrupt diminishes herself altogether and the power that should not exist in the first place controlling the lives, their fate, desires, and eventual freedom of other lives. Her reasoning is to break free from the bondage of servitude and destroy the powerhouse to free the lives under servitude of the spices and free her spirit of human desires. Her final disenchantment from all her desires, longing, and guilt as she steps into the fire is the core of her rational autonomy, as the proof of self-governance. This selfless act does not represent prudential reasons or self-love but an act of morality, a virtue that invokes the sublime.

This thought of reasoning can be extended in discussing another Kantian concept, the „Dynamic Sublime“. Kant, in his introduction to the *Analytic of the Sublime* (Kant 23) "moves from what is generally true about the aesthetic judgement of reflection to what is specifically true of those judgements which concern the sublime" (Merritt 16). Kant then divides his exposition of judgements concerning the sublime into those that express satisfaction in greatness of size, and those that express satisfaction in greatness of power, calling them the "mathematical" and "dynamical" sublime, respectively. As we will see, this division aligns with the different roles that ideas of reason play in theoretical and practical cognition, respectively (Kant 5:247). According to Kant, "the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality" (Kant 90). The Mathematical sublime instead can be found in form, as in quantified form yet also in its limitlessness. Its existence lies in the cognitive concept in the mind to create concepts of quantity or numerical perception trying to conceive the totality of limitlessness as in of a pyramid or stary sky or an unendingly stretched field of daffodils.

On the other hand, the dynamic sublime focuses on the realisation that humans have power over nature and its awe-inspiring elements. Since humans are fragile in knowledge of their own insignificance, they are also aware of the force of nature that threatens the physical boundaries. But the realization of the cognitive superiority over nature defines the dynamic sublime. For example, the tornado can violate the humans physically and its limitlessness, overwhelming stature is conceived by humans in their minds and gradually, from a safe distance, even in witnessing its tremendous power, it gives the satisfaction of dominion over the "fear" that it represents. hence, the dynamic sublime occurs in the

process of that confrontation with nature, reasoning and realizing dominion over natural power and hindrances as Kant observes—

If we are to estimate nature as dynamically sublime, it must be represented as a source of fear (though the converse that every object that is a source of fear is, in our aesthetic judgment, sublime does not hold). For in forming an aesthetic estimate (no concept being present) the superiority to hindrances can only be estimated according to the greatness of the resistance. Now that which we strive to resist is an evil, and, if we do not find our powers commensurate to the task, an object of fear. (Kant 109-110).

The idea of terror and the dynamic process of confrontation with it is the core of Divakaruni's fiction *Mistress of Spices* (1997). Tilo's existence as a "Witchwoman" from the beginning of the novel, who could only win fear but not love, goes beyond the story of an immigrant woman. The protagonist's mysterious journey from the past and her mystical power granted by the spices saturating the reality and magical realism within the plot. The representation of fear through Tilo's imagination and reminiscences gives shape to the internalized and abstract fear such as "Dark of evening" or the looming shadow of fear that surrounds us and feeds on the uncertainty and despair. Tilo feels this fear in American, the land of "Skyscrapers of silver glass by a lake-wide as ocean...overpowering like singed flesh, the odour of hate which is also the odour fear" (Divakaruni 53). Dynamical sublimity presents immense natural power that challenges our default sense of what is worth going after, what is valuable. Our enjoyment in natural sublimity is explained in an interest in a standard of goodness that is proper as rational beings. Tilo's internal conflicts and her imbalances with the self and the spices should be represented "as a source of fear (though the converse, that every object that is a source of fear is, in our aesthetic judgement, sublime, does not hold)" (Kant 109). Kant observes—

we may look upon an object as fearful, and yet not be afraid of it, if, that is, our estimate takes the form of our simply picturing to ourselves the case of our wishing to offer some resistance to it, and recognizing that all such resistance would be quite futile (Kant 110).

Fear exists in two forms in nature— as actual fear and as imagined fear. In the case of actual fear, it threatens safety and physical boundaries. Hence, the sublime can no longer be traced within the emotions that are inclined or infused with desire, the desire to cease the fearful event. The sense of fear also gives rise to two types of negative consequences — on the one hand. The desire to never face the specific situation that caused distress and fear in the past, and on the other hand, the desire to never recall the incidents causing the distress. Divakaruni weaves the negative consequences of fear and its confrontation out of moral determination within Tilo's quest for identity. Tilo's fearful past regarding divination, the pirates destroying her home, killing her family members, her kidnapping, and her brutal training by the first mother as the sorceress contribute to the actual fear and her inclination to escape. Tilo's determination to not repeat the horrors of her helpless existence. Through the sense of this insignificance the sublime occurs from the memory of actual pain or terror. But the spice store, away from the horrors of the village, the pirates or land of the old mother— all positions Tilo in a secured and safe proximity. It aids the re-articulation of the horrors from

her past, does not become violent or life-threatening yet exhilarating, and presents the state of incessant inner turmoil. In dynamic sublime, Kant, while agreeing with Burke (on the idea of the sublime from the cessation of terror), he explains in further—

the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness. (Kant 110).

He also explains why fearfulness is attractive, under the irresistibility of power in nature forces humans to recognize their physical limitations and helplessness. But at the same time, the insignificance provides an opportunity to find meaning in existence independent of nature as Kant explains—

...reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature, and discovers a pre-eminence above nature that is the foundation of a self-preservation of quite another kind . . . it challenges our power (one not of nature) to regard as small those things of which we are wont to be solicitous (worldly goods, health, and life), and hence to regard its might . . . as exercising over us and our personality no such rude dominion that we should bow down before it ...Therefore nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature. (Kant 112-113).

In the case of the dynamical sublime, in contrast, understanding our moral survival performs more of a direct role. When witnessing the robust construction of natural objects from the standpoint of safety, the fear is recognized, but it also challenges the capacity to imagine situations where one remains courageous, even in the face of impending destruction by the powerful object. Faced with inexorable destruction in the presence of raw force in nature, one responds differently. On the one hand, one can merely be astounded by fears concerning physical well-being and safety.. On the other hand, one can, against the natural inclinations, transcend fear and countenance of destruction based on moral determination and virtue—thus acting on standards of moral conduct which demonstrate the true vocation as rational "supersensible" beings The pleasure in the sublime is not explainable in terms of the balance of pain or terror, one rather requires, an alternative study of how the fearful nature of the powerful natural object turns into positive account. The pleasure in the detrimental object is justifiable through its leading the self into its imagined state as an extension of the determination, virtue and moral bearing, confronting that particular power, realising the fundamentals of reason and freedom, and refuting nature's dominion.

Under the guidance of "First Mother," Nayantara renames herself as Tilottyoma. It means "life-giver, restorer of health and hope" (Aruna 99). Tilo is the sesame seed and represents the golden-brown tint under the influence of planet Venus. 'Til', when ground into a paste with sandalwood, treats heart and liver diseases; when fried in its oil restores luster in the one who has lost interest in life. Tilottyoma is also a mythical being, "apsara" or courtesan in the court of God Indra. Tilo passed the ceremony of purification, i.e., entering the Shampati's fire. She did not burn, did not feel pain, yet woke up in a body, free from the bond of perpetual servitude. Like, the courtesan in Indra's court, the Mistress is born

to serve the spices. She called for the fire to engulf her, knowing it will not kill her but will transport her soul. It will only destroy the shop and the spices that express their dominion over her, over the people bound to this store in Oakland, California. Her choice was to destroy the divine Tilo, even at the cost of sacrificing all her inclination to the store, first Mother, customers, and Raven. In the end, "Shampati's fire" called upon an earthquake to wipe away all the signs of the sorceress, also gifts Tilo a chance to live without guilt, without the past. Shampati's fire takes two distinct forms in Divakaruni's novel— on the one hand, it resembles the path of reform, through the destruction, and the other hand, it represents the overwhelming force that stays hidden in nature, amid mundane objects, such as the spices and waits to rewrite the lives that surround it, to reformat and recreate. But Shampati's fire through its painless, unscarring flames, represents the awe-inspiring natural object that demands fear and absolute surrender from Tilo, which she refutes out of her determination and that evokes the power in her to confront the nature— to use the power and not get used by it (Divakaruni 262). Her power of reason and moral decisiveness, devoid of desire and worldly inclinations, claims her identity's sublimity above the spices, above the fire and the earthquake, above nature.

Conclusion

Gita Rajan views *Mistress of Spices* as a complicated story rather than a straightforward diasporic accounts narrative. Though the novel's application of mysticism appears as a drawing of the magical elements on a canvas of realism, Divakaruni's magical realist scheme operates on a compact "Orientalized mysticism" within which Tilo's imaginary mechanisms lend her an obvious mystical power (Rajan 216). According to Rajan, Divakaruni signifies Tilo's mystical power to confront the enforced reality of an imperialist brand. Rajan asserts —

traditional genre of the realist novel works as an instrument of imperialism since the realism portrayed in such novels is essentially Western and requires "realist" novels from other locations to conform to the Western norms (Rajan 216).

The magical components in the novel symbolize emblematic aspects of fear, uncertainty, illusion, desire, and morality of human nature that counterbalances hegemonic forces of natural power and politicized dogma in the name of traditions and culture. Muhammad Manzur Alam examines the development of the senses creating an unequal space of power relations and advocated the "segregationist intents" of human beings, especially to cite the difference between masculinity and femininity to preserve "relations of dominance and subordination" (Alam 2). The masculinist version of the sublime does define a key aesthetic experience of terror and exhilaration that characterizes our material predicament and the socio-political idea of gendered dominance over women, prioritizing the masculinist project of segregation and domination of the 18th century aesthetical studies. But the idea of the masculinist traditions of the sublime may be seen as the form of fear and repression obstructing the concept of reason and freedom over instinctual, desires, and natural. Tilo is expected to be the 'mistress of spices', live in a life of servitude, prioritize the spices that

represent the authoritative voice, the parental discipline he craved for all her life. She always won fear from her parents and not adoration or restrictions, hence having no sense of belonging. The spice and the first mother represent the masculinist boundaries, the "sealed boundary" made of the worlds of reality and magic "contributes to the feminist consciousness" (Mann 160). Mann reflects—

It seems that an act of (symbolic? political?) violence is needed to tear open the boundary of an entire world, of an entire ontology, lived and (re)constructed with the masculine "I" at the center. Decentering the masculine I, opening this sealed world to difference in any genuine sense, requires the radical unraveling of its epistemes, but also a moment of shocking, awe-inspiring epiphany—an epiphany that shifts the center so completely as to bring the whole edifice down (Mann 160).

According to Bonnie Mann, the sublime, in the context of feminist politics, is the experience that pushes one to the limit of a closed. "I-centered" world, an assault on the boundary that seals it, or a glimpse (from the inside) over that boundary to exteriority that will not be reduced to the same. Most importantly, it retains the sublime moment when we know ourselves to be at the mercy of the natural world as Kant described sublime experience as a confrontation with nature at its most wild and formless, its most terrifying (Mann 161). His descriptions of hurricanes and volcanoes, wild oceans and thundering waterfalls, towering rocks, and thunderstorms evoke a nature that seemed to defy our human capacity to domesticate and control. Yet for Kant, amid an age that did indeed bring the natural world under technical control in multiple ways, the sublime was the experience of the rupture in this relationship of dependence, the undoing of this terror, and the triumph of reason.

This is a kind of sublime experience that does not reveal human's "infinite superiority" over nature but also focuses on humans capacity or "destiny" to be free of nature and its overpowering dominance as the Kantian sublime did. Tilo's magical power might give us an indication that she has the power to overcome her subjugated identity. However, the bestowing of the same power on her can also be seen as the continuation of the tendency to be free from the natural dominion and the superiority of the first mother and the spices exerted upon her. Even though the identity of a witch gives Tilo certain powers, it, nevertheless, is a patriarchal mechanism represented through the magical realm to indicate segregation. Tilo's tactile prohibition from her spatial boundaries, or even her "witchlike" representation in the novel, evidently reflects the imposition of patriarchal expectations on women and their exclusion from mainstream life. Therefore, the paradoxical juxtaposition of Tilo's apparent spiritual transcendence and her physical confinement resonates with women's monastic enclosure. Her engagement with the spices also reflects the sensorial, religious rituals women perform in the confines of monasteries and households. However, Tilo's spiritual ascent provides her with the strength to renegotiate her confined, othered identity. Divakaruni seems to be figuratively stating that the subjugation of a woman or anyone marginalized might not just ensue from their lack of strength; the subjugation may also result from their lack of effort to break free from the psychological shackles created by oppressive forces. *Mistress of Spices* manifests two essential conditions of human existence amid uncontrollable forces

of the world, which hints at the Kantian foundation of the sublime— "mercy of the land, and the air, and the water and what we've made of them" (Mann 168). But here, in the postcolonial reality of the novel, the natural elements, in the form of fourteen spices— Turmeric, Cinnamon, Fenugreek, Asafoetida, Fennel, Ginger, Peppercorn, Kalo Jire, Neem, Red Chilli, Makaradwaj, Lotus Root, and Sesame. In terms of these spices, then what kind of sublime experience is manifested through the contemporary understanding of fear and reason? Is it then only about the freedom one experiences through rational decisions? Bonnie Mann reflects that "this sublime experience does not unravel our dependence on the planet but weaves it tighter until we choke on our own mistakes" (Mann 167). In *Mistress of spices*, the sublime experience is an experience of just terror or the superseding control of the natural elements or her subjugation as a woman of the suspense over but a reasoned response to what is to become of Tilottyoma. The sublime here orients the fear, the guilt, the grief, and the responsibility —an admixture of the feelings that unknots the boundaries of the self to achieve the sovereign state.

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