

**Intersectionality Reading of Marginalization and Class  
Degradation in Indian Diaspora Women Narrative: Bharti  
Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The  
Mistress of Spices*  
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**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to focus on the issue of intersectional marginalization and class-conscious exclusion of South Asians in the United States as portrayed in two novels written by writers of Indian origin: Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. The study investigates how intersectional mantra is the reason for the marginalization and exclusion of South Asian immigrants in the United States. To describe the *intersectional class-conscious exclusion* and marginality of Indian and Indo-Americans, the study conjoins Crenshaw's *structural intersectionality* and Yuval-Davis' *situated intersectionality* to formulate a new concept, *translocational intersecting marginality*. As an analytical tool, the novel intersectionality form enables an analysis which explores how Indian marginality and exclusion are constructed within specific historical and socio-political realities and how myriad reasons such as colonization and their repercussions; the stereotypical Indo-American representations of Indians; Muslims and finally inter-ethnic encounters which dominated American discourses incorporate all intersectional aspects would result in marginality and intersectional exclusion of in-transit characters in the West. The study has reached the conclusion that the central characters of both narratives are exposed to new in-transit-intersectional-identities and displaced fragmentation, transformation, and fluidity. In comparing the two complementary narratives, it emerges that both Indo-American diasporic identities are constructed through overlapping systems of oppression, which construct social inequality and exclusion. Moreover, displaced, fragmented intersectional identities are forced to resort to mimicry of Western traits, which reduces their presence in America to partial *outsiders within*.

**Keywords:** Class-Conscious Exclusion; Intersectionality; Structural Intersectionality; Situated Intersectionality; Translocational Intersecting Marginality

**1. Introduction**

The contemporary Indian women writers reinforced modern Indian English literature. They have highlighted various chronicle issues facing

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women for ages. Women who have come forward to prove their efficiency in various spheres are subverted by patriarchal society. Some of the women like Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, among countless other Indian South Asian writers who migrated to foreign lands, have penned their voices on diaspora. As recent postcolonial diaspora writing is principally concerned with themes such as marginalization, resistance, racism, ethnicity, adaptability, and self-independence, this section attempts to focus on the issue of marginalization and class-conscious exclusion of South Asians in the United States as portrayed in two novels written by writers of Indian origin: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*.

To describe the *intersectional class-conscious exclusion* and marginality of South-Asian and Indians, the study conjoins Crenshaw's *structural intersectionality* and Yuval-Davis' *situated intersectionality* to formulate a new concept, *translocational intersecting marginality*, to incorporate all intersectional aspects which result in marginality and intersectional exclusion of in-transit characters in the West. The study contends that *Jasmine* and *The Mistress of Spices*' central migrating subjects are grappling with the formation of identity within new sets of marginalization, ultimately hindered in their quest and forced to resort to mimicry of Western traits, which consequently reduces their presence in America to partial outsiders within. The main questions raised regarding *translocational intersecting marginality* and *class-conscious exclusion* are: How does migration to the West affect Mukherjee's and Divakaruni's characters? Does it make them capable of embracing the foreign other? Does it complicate their Indian identity? Does class-conscious racial hierarchy tend to complicate migrant characters' state, exclude, and marginalize them?

In fact, the primary claim for these two counterpart migration novels is that migration and exile, although they pose migration intersectional consequences on the two migrants' lives and identities, present a sense of otherness. Since both central characters, Jasmine and Tilo, benefit from the privilege of being a moneyed class and having the ability to travel overseas, they are not blind to class, cultural hierarchies, and social exclusion, which are defined not by exclusion or opposition but through the others or relation. Accordingly, the marginalization and exclusion of middle-class, Western-educated Indians are new forms of marginalization. In other words, moving from a third-world country to a first-world country means leaving one set of marginalization and moving into another, in the way that migrants need to redefine their identity in accordance with the new social landscape as well as the geographical one.

Migration is one of the luring concepts during pre-independence among Indians who generally sought to migrate to America. South Asian American fiction, similarly to other literatures of diaspora created by ethnic minorities, explores the problems of marginalization and exclusion based on the *translocational intersecting mantras*, including skin color, beauty, race, ethnicity, gender, and class. In this section, it is discussed how two novels by American writers of Indian origin present *translocational intersecting marginality* of South Asians in the United States. Both novels depict immigrants from India, and Indians will be the focus of the intersectionality investigation. These immigrants are to be represented through their intersectional experiences in the hosting country. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (2023) and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. The former presents the problem as emerging on American soil; in other words, it explores American prejudice towards people of a different race and frequent confusion about the exact classification of Asian Indians. The latter extends the perspective and shows the problem of marginalization based on intersectional mantras, which begin already in the homeland, that is, in India, before it encounters the racial and ethnic diversity of the United States.

The presumption is that the novel carries the consciousness of inferiority as well as the patterns of marginalization and dominance which can be transferred to the hosting country from the country of origin and may characterize both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations. The intersectional identity of Indian protagonists is conveyed differently in the novels; while *Jasmine* focuses on the negative reactions and emotions evoked by the main character's exclusion and foreignness, *The Mistress of Spices* uses the trope of white physicality to imply the sense of *translocational intersecting marginalization* of dark-skinned Indians.

## 2. Literature Review

Since Yuval-Davis (2006) has proposed the concept of situated intersectionality, several studies have been conducted to determine the geographical, social, and temporal locations of particular individual or collective social actors. Lesley McCall (2005) has taken situated intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological approach to make comparisons between the social phenomena in different locations and introduced the translocality, transcalarity, and transtemporality to avoid the vernacularity of many social studies. Moreover, Floya Anthias (2008) uses this version of the intersectional approach to study racial and ethnic differences in class analysis. Her work underlined how different social locations are important in class differences and vice versa. Moreover,

Eisenstein (2019), working on Thomas Piketty's well-known recent work on class analysis *Capital* (2014), highlighted the primary role of intersectionality, the role of race and gender in situated positionality, theorizing class and inequality worldwide. The study by Dhamoon (2011) applies this approach to survey processes and systems, shifting the gaze from the Othered identity and category of Otherness to a critique of social production and organization of relations of Othering and normalization. An epochal earthshaking study has been conducted by Owen (2019) on class positionality of Iranian migrant women in the UK, with an emphasis on the significance of the role of class subjectivities and performativities. This study demonstrated understandings of social location and social hierarchy and contributed to the burgeoning area of applying a gendered and intersectional lens within research in migration and ethnic studies. Owen represented the complexity of othering processes and how they are dealt with by subjects and particularly how racialization, class, and gender can operate in multiple and contradictory ways. She further displayed how class is formed in and through power relations, which form a set of imaginations, perceptions, performances, and validations in discourses available to an individual. Owen underlined the situatedness and locality of class, reminding the contradictory positionings constructed in and through power relations in society. Accordingly, Owen's study offered inspiring insights on the understanding class in the lives of migrant women, which she claims are rooted in the matrix of transnational and intersectional positionings that place women differently from heterosexuals and migrants differently to non-migrants. She concluded that situated intersectionality and translocational positionality need to be seriously considered in any research on social identities with migrant groups with marginal positions to analyze their marginalization. Moreover, in a study entitled "representation of Marginalization and Class Degradation in Arab Diaspora Women Fiction: Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* and Laila Halaby's *West of Jordan*", Pourali and Eslamieh (2022) compared two complementary-narratives of Arab-America and deduced that both the Arab-American diasporic identities are constructed at the interaction of social, familial, economic and gendered hierarchies to endure of alienation, marginality and inequality. Thereupon, to proceed partly similar studies conducted on situated positionality of in-transit women and add new insights, the current study builds on the theories of intersectionality taking Yuval-Davis and Anthias (2005) situated positionality and Kimberle' Williams Crenshaw's structural intersectionality to study the position of a migrant women in relation class in Idiaspora.

### 3. Methodology

The current study is both descriptive and analytical in nature, thus the research method has been a qualitative content analysis. The research will develop an interdisciplinary epistemological methodology using the Intersectionality Theory to study diaspora identity and complex subjectivity that inhabits the globalized West world in the second/third generation Asian diasporic women writers' works. In addition, the pivotal Intersectionality related critical concepts which enables the analysis of interconnected factors that shape social localities, social status and social inequalities of migrant women in the America are to be distinctly represented, analyzed and discussed. Then the descriptive qualitative method is to compare the analytical result of testing theory between two groups of Asian women writers' works to identify which diasporic women are mostly disempowered and marginalized and considered the most minority group in the West.

The research adopts the coined concept of *translocational intersecting marginality* in an intersectionality theoretical framework to conceive, analyze, interpret, and unravel social realities, conditions of marginalization and class degradation in South Asian diaspora women under intertwined factors in America. The primary purpose of coining the concept of *translocational intersecting marginality* lies in its potential capacity to unequivocally assert the complexity of intertwined factors in dis/em-powering in-transit women's social class, class positioning, and classed experiences. Adopting this line of thought as an approach, and in particular applying this concept as an analytical tool, the research attempts to address class in the study of inequality which does not happen in a vacuum but in intersection with other locations that in themselves create, adhere and leading to other states such as *translocational intersecting marginality* and *class-conscious exclusion*. It will thus extend the perception of how complicated the interplay of a host of factors crucially affect the nuanced experiences of hierarchical and relational class in the lives of migrants and how class has turned into a priori which seriously limits migrants' chances of integration, citizenship and belonging.

### 4. Findings

South Asians, apart from exploring inequalities and tensions resulting from the white-black polarity between the Indian immigrants and in their confrontation with members of other ethnic groups in America, Mukhrejee and Divakaruni's novels work towards building the consciousness of the Indian diaspora racial uniqueness. It attempts to locate Indians within the American racial and ethnic diversity somewhere

between the black-white racial polarity. Therefore, brownness which establishes the distinctive status of *ambiguous-nonwhites* for South Asian Indians in host land is also the prevailing dimension among other intersectional mantras to define marginalization. Thus, ambiguity is an important component of the position of South Asian Americans, while the analysis of their situation influences the debates about their race and status as minorities. The unstable classification of South Asians exposes the incoherence of racial categories and the ad hoc nature of their construction over time, showing race as a social construct rather than a biological given.

In addition, it draws attention to the fact that political realities change, and the minority identities should be reconceptualized. South Asian Americans complicated histories create a need for attention to their racial identification and avoidance of racial generalizations and constructions of South Asian American identity tend to simplify the complex hierarchies of color, class and caste immigrants bring with them from their homeland by collapsing them with the historical patterns of race in their host country. This need is enhanced by a great diversity of the group and its disjunct history of immigration to the United States. As a result, racism on the basis of appearance, and especially the negative reactions to Mukhrejee and Divakaruni characters', Jasmine and Tilo, in darkish skin, with which they are confronted in the United States are quite startling factors for marginality and exclusion. Such bizarre interplay united with classism, beautism, migrancy, Orientis and ethnocentrism to underline structurally intersectional marginality and exclusion.

Divakaruni (2005) shows that, especially for the first generation of Indian immigrants, color matters also in relations to other minorities. The first-generation immigrants transfer to the country of arrival a deep sense of hierarchies ingrained in the structure of Indian society and hence in Indian consciousness. This is what *structural intersectionality* deems. The class-conscious home and host land excludes the lower intersected identities in the same way. Thereupon, *the intersecting marginality/exclusion* and *translocational intersecting marginality/exclusion* occur in the same state. Thus, for Indians, the resulting inequalities are from the same caste system plus British colonialism. Holding the minority status in the United States, Indian immigrants that are portrayed in the novel sometimes respond by the marginalization of other minorities, especially those whose skin color is similar or darker, and whose status is perceived as lower in American society.

## 5. Discussion

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* may be read as, to some extent, an illustration of American confusion about racial difference and their problems which is not limited to race with classification of Indian immigrants. The novel portrays *translocational intersecting marginality* of an immigrant whose foreignness is still quite untypical in the United States, and therefore difficult to embrace and comprehend. As Christina Dascalu (2007) states "throughout her new life in America, the narrator, Jasmine, is constantly perceived as 'the Other,' as the incarnation of the colonial stereotype of the female native" (*Imaginary Homelands of Writers in Exile* 67). The in-transit-protagonist-narrator is a young girl who attempts to maintain tension between the wish to be an American and instances of her intersectional marginalization and exclusion. In the process of adaptation to American reality and access inclusion, Jasmine attempts to look and behave like an American, and quickly internalizes the American set of values. Yet, her unfamiliar appearance with exotic beauty, Black original hair, brown skin color, broken English and Indian descent is the basis for making her feel not only as a complete foreigner, outsider, excluded from the mainstream, but as an inferior marginalized individual as well. Thereupon, part of structural intersectional mantra which capture and cripple her relates to her physical features and suffice to mark her perceptively different and subject to social inequality and exclusion.

Such point gradually reveals repeatedly in events which Jasmine encounters and mostly produces a crisis of national belonging. There is an event when a beggar on a New York Street assaults her verbally, after it turns out that Jasmine is not going to give him any money, his target is the woman's foreign appearance: "You fucking bitch. ... you fucking foreign bitch!" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 139). In another confrontation which her racialized immigrant subject is questioned, two men in a bar insult her and her partner Bud implying that she might be a foreign prostitute. They throw some "foreign" words at her, which sound like Asian and speak more of the men's adventurous past rather than their aim of finding out where Jasmine is really from: "His next words were in something foreign, but probably in Japanese or Thai or Filipino, something bar girls responded to in places where he'd spent his rifle toting youth (201). For the two men Jasmine is Asian or Oriental, an exotic creature from a distant, backward continent, characterized by sensuality and submissiveness. Her ethnic and national origin added to her gender and race mark her potential intersectional exclusion.

Also, the racist Americans' reaction resembles that of Half Face, the carrier of illegal immigrants, a cargo-ship captain who smuggles "refugees and mercenaries and guest workers" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 100). He violently raped Jasmine upon her arrival in America. Her feeble attempts to explain some details of her past bear no interest for Half Face, for him Jasmine is just from Asia, which he sees as an uncivilized and barbaric land: "I been to Asia and it's the armpit of the universe" (112). Her national and racial labor position are perceptively enough to incite a subjective crisis leading intersectional denigration. Half-Face's denigrating action suggests that, racial injury and her lack of power as an undocumented migrant appeal to the state of sexual violence. In fact, given the history of U.S. racialization into such events reveal many stories of light-skinned or mixed-race African Americans which have experienced such undesirable demeaning sexual violence.

Another *structural intersectionality* lying in racial-spatial composition is that Jasmine and other racialized ethnicities and nations' racialization occur within a collective in a way that not-so-benevolent racism does not know and specific contours of racial difference. For example, in an event, the high status of Bud, a local banker, among the farmers of the county, is probably the reason why they suppress any expressions of racism and rejection: "In Baden, the farmers are afraid to suggest I'm different. ... In a pinch, they'll admit that I might look a little different, that I'm a 'dark-haired girl' in a naturally blond country. I have a 'darkish complexion' (in India, I'm 'wheatish'), as though I might be Greek from one parent" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 33).

In public, the farmers tone down their statements about Jasmine's different appearance, out of caution, probably motivated by their dependence on the banker's decision about the loans. Therefore, the farmers pretend not to see the woman's exoticism, her "difference" and seemingly evade her exclusion. Instead, they opt for familiar terms and suggest her European origin implying a link with their European roots and in this way provide the consent for her inclusion. However, Jasmine eventually learns that she and Bud are called "the Odd Couple" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 218). The structural intersectionality also appears in hidden racism of farmers. For example, White Iowans' racism is not in the open but concealed under their polite appreciation and consumption of Indian food, which Jasmine prepares for them.

Comparing Jasmine's exotism and foreignness to Bud's disability, she seems more unacceptable in many aspects of skin color, exotic beauty, long original black hair, gender, enchanting sexual physique, her Asian nationality, Indian ethnicity, and labor class. Then, she is considered odd



for her foreign looks, even for Bud who despite his disability (he is in a wheelchair after a murder attempt) is accepted by Jasmine as a partner. And it is her exoticism, which makes him divorce his wife and accept the new lover under his roof. In order to imply exclusion and *translocational intersecting marginality* based on racial features, Mukherjee resorts to the description of reactions and emotions rather than emphasizing the details of the protagonist's physical appearance.

Americans perceive Jasmine as different in a position of the other, but she does not underline any element of her looks as overwhelmingly different and other. It is the stereotypes her foreignness releases that are most important from her perspective. Such stereotypes are attached to Eastern femininity of sexuality, fertility, and submissiveness. Actually, it is the Orientalizing gaze of Americans which constantly locates Jasmine in an inferior position under intersection because of the perception of her racial, gender, sexual, cultural and class difference. The young woman has experienced marginalization before, in her homeland, but on different grounds: specially her sex and gender were the main source of oppression.

Jasmine's mother tried to strangle her right after her birth, devastated on seeing another daughter, who for the family would mean financial burden, loans, or simply another "unhappy life" if there were no financial means to support her. Jasmine understands her mother's motives; she knows the woman wanted only to "spare her the pain of a dowry less bride" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 40). Yet, skin color was never a problem for her in India, in fact, as the protagonist admits, she was perceived as "wheatish", in other words, she possessed a lighter, privileged shade of skin. As a result, racism on the basis of appearance, and especially the negative reactions to her "darkish" skin, with which she is confronted in the United States are new for her and quite startling. Such bizarre interplay united with classism, beautism, migrancy, Orientis and ethnocentrism to underline structurally intersectional marginality and exclusion.

*Jasmine* charts its heroine's migrations across India and the U.S. and the multiple identities—Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Jassy, and Jane—that she acquires within each of these migrations, from young adulthood to her mid-twenties. From her childhood days in Hasnapur, when Jasmine is named as the most beautiful of nine daughters. Her movie-star looks in Jullundhar, to her "jazzy" femininity in Florida and New York, Jasmine's beauty marks her as somehow exceptional or special. In one sense, her exceptional beauty within both India and the U.S. attests to the transnational formation of the model-minority stereotype, in which the U.S. state heralds Asian immigrant subjects as ethnic minority exemplars of "Asian values" of hard work and capitalist achievement.

Jasmine's racialization as an illegal and working-class South Asian immigrant subject within various U.S. metropolitan spaces, even as any viable form of belonging remains elusive as part of this self. In other words, Jasmine's class status and stratification is directly determined by her race, ethnicity, nationality and migrancy. Situated in the town's racial economies, such interactions repeatedly produce the community's willingness to further query the migrants like Jasmine and cripple them within class-conscious society which strictly stratifies through intersectional differences. Then, the racial hegemony of whiteness, and an emerging racialization of Asians— allows for a provisional and contingent form of belonging which could be interpreted as stranger sociality.

Jasmine becomes a racially strange. For example, Jasmine's sense of belonging in Baden is tied to her racialized strangeness. While working as an au pair for the Hayes family in Manhattan, for example, Jasmine observes that "Taylor's friends in New York used to look at me and say, 'You're Iranian, right?' If I said no, then, 'Pakistani, Afghan, or Punjabi?' They were strikingly accurate about most things, and always out to improve themselves" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 33). Jasmine mocks the ways in which the policing of her racially class identity is motivated by white critiques of racism that express sensitivity to ethnic difference. Such reactions reveal the racially denigrating thoughts which label and justify class and ethnicity-based exclusion of Asian immigrants in America. For Jasmine, still the case is somehow different.

In *Jasmine*, the major female character, Jasmine challenges her illegal migrancy and working-class labor with her beauty. As a privileged factor, Jasmine's beauty invariably conditions and secures her will-to-assimilation, it also, paradoxically, impels complex and even violent confrontations with her status as an illegal immigrant and, concomitantly, with her embodiment as racialized immigrant labor. First in her training to be a "domestic" and a "picker" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 134) under the supervision of a white Quaker woman, and then in her job as an au pair for a wealthy white Manhattan couple, Jasmine negotiates her illegality and working-class labor through her beauty. Such negotiations, rather than allowing her to lay claim to the U.S. as a legal, upwardly mobile subject, ultimately mark her as unassimilable to the nation.

Jasmine's beauty does allow her to manage her undocumented status later in the novel, when Professorji invites her to sell her hair in exchange for a green card. The social and material value of Jasmine's beauty, the racialized beauty becomes a sign of the exploitation of her labor as a migrant subject. How Jasmine's race is a way of bypassing state

surveillance is questioning issue and this fact complicates her position as socially excluded subject. Since South Asians such as Jasmine have occupied a racially ambiguous position within a longer history of U.S. racial formations. Eluding definitive racial categorization as Black, white, or Asian over the course of the twentieth century, South Asians have been understood to possess a kind of racial indeterminacy.

As literary critic Anne Anlin Cheng (2000) has argued, *me'lange* allows a woman of color to pass as beautiful within predominantly white spaces or under the constraints of white ideals of feminine beauty by "denouncing yet revealing [racialized] difference" ("Wounded Beauty" 207). *Me'lange* promises to dispel the threat of recognizable and undesirable brownness, such as that of undocumented migrant laborers like the Kanjobal Indians whom Lillian also trains to be pickers and domestics. As Lillian reminds Jasmine: "if you walk and talk American, they'll think you were born here. Most Americans can't imagine anything else" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 134–35). Lillian understands that Jasmine's exotic difference must produce its own juridical referent: through beauty, brown bodies read and pass as naturally legal American bodies. In the performance that makes Jasmine look like a natural-born citizen in an insider within position, Jasmine makeover allows her to circumvent the labor of naturalization by rendering her, essentially, too beautiful to be an immigrant.

After Jasmine performs her tasks at a shopping mall, Lillian confidently asserts, "you don't strike me as a picker or a domestic" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 134). Despite possessing a measure of natural beauty that, presumably, inspires Lillian to make her over, Jasmine admits to having "worked hard on the walk and deportment" (133). Here, the labor of racialized beauty—of becoming Jazzy—impedes Lillian's ability to see Jasmine as an embodiment of racialized labor. Such racialized indeterminacy defined her position in the U.S as socially stranger. Stranger sociality is, ultimately, an untenable mode of belonging for Jasmine. Definitely such racialized strangeness allows her to bypass the labor of racial self-management within the various economies of beauty that have thus far governed her migrations.

Accordingly, the demands of Jasmine's intersectional position make her disavow or withhold the revelation of any kind of racial specificity. Whereas racialized intersectional dimensions produce a set of crises around Jasmine's national, class and racial position as rural, migrant, woman, illegal, and migrant laborer in Hasnapur, Flushing, and New York City, racialized strangeness produces Jasmine's racial self-denial as part of her crisis of belonging in Baden. A key scene in the novel, in which

Jasmine and Bud have sex, forces Jasmine to confront this crisis. Bud exclaims, "Oh god... I have never seen anyone so beautiful" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 36), and Jasmine later reflects that this declaration leaves her feeling "torn open like the hot dry soil, parched" (38).

In fact, Jasmine's intersectional inclusion was over-laden for her. Given Bud's earlier stated fear of India and Jasmine's Indianness, she experiences a form of double consciousness—a way of being seen and not seen, being excluded or included—around Bud's interpellation of her as beautiful. She recognizes that in calling her "beautiful," Bud xenophobically both sees her racial difference and yet disavows the material histories that constitute that difference. Bud's response to Jasmine's only privileged dimension, beauty, is representative of her strange experiences of being a South Asian female migrant in a way that part of her intersectional experiences was erased and manipulated at the expense of her physical and sexual abuse. However, Jasmine's sense of belonging in Baden requires precisely this kind of racial designation and obfuscation. Evoking images of rape, Jasmine's references to feeling "torn open" and "parched" here index the way that her beauty incites a crisis of racial self-denial.

Therefore, in appealing to plainness as a racialized subject, Jasmine reveals more broadly that the very dialectic of beauty/ plainness structurally challenges with racial logic. Jasmine must constantly negotiate such racial logic across her intersectional identities as a rural, postcolonial, illegal, immigrant, and working-class subject. Thus, Mukherjee certainly concerns with transnational belonging, and Jasmine is not simply an ethicized version of the canonical female subject who is set to experience both *translocational intersecting marginality* and citizenship, while remaining as unrealized form of cultural citizenship.

Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* gives a different perspective on the question of racially intersectional marginalization of Indian in the United States, because it embraces the beliefs and practices of the native country. The presentation of India, in a very similar vein as in *Jasmine*, brings up the issue of gender as a source of oppression (Mannur, *Culinary Fictions* 89101; Daphne, "Relocating Consciousness" 15); yet, at the same time skin color remains a powerful factor. Consequently, it is already the moment of the protagonist's birth that is important. The first viewing of a newborn is an attempt to assess the prospects for a comfortable and successful life of the child. For Tilo's parents this brings disappointment. The girl is another daughter in the family and, what is even worse, dark-skinned: "my parents' faces were heavy with fallen hope at another girlchild, and this one colored like mud" (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 7). The fortuneteller's reaction on seeing the baby is equally

disheartening, he "shook his head sorrowfully at [the girl's] father" (7). As in *Jasmine*, the shadow of death is hanging over the protagonist: "Wrap her in old cloth, lay her face down on the floor. What does she bring to the family except a dowry debt" (7).

Dark skin has a significant influence on the girl's life. She describes herself as a "dark girl left to wander the village unattended" (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 8), which means that Tilo is conscious of the darker shade of her skin even in a village among her own people. She also feels a certain lack of proper care, attention, and concern that signifies her worthlessness in the eyes of others, and which results in her sense of estrangement from the family and the rest of the village inhabitants. Thus, the consciousness of her dark skin is inseparably linked to the feeling of gender inferiority, and this legacy of India is eventually transferred to the United States, when the protagonist settles down in Oakland, California.

The appreciation of whiteness in India is a complex phenomenon and has been interpreted mainly as a result of two events in the history of the Indian subcontinent: Aryan and British invasion. The Aryan invasion introduced a division between Aryan and Non Aryan races in the form of the caste system. In this way, the social hierarchy is established between fair-skinned and dark-skinned stratifications. Fair-skinned people were separated from the dark-skinned, and the caste system became a mechanism to enforce Aryan superiority over the conquered nation. Aryans tried to prevent intermixing of castes and possibly races; thus, they advocated marriages within one caste (Bhattacharya, the "Desire for Whiteness" 126), consequently maintaining the hierarchy between castes or classes of society.

Sucheta Mazumdar (1989) regards the Aryan origin myth as the basis of racist attitudes: "South Asians, regardless of national origin on the subcontinent, cling to a mythography which holds that the elite (upper caste/class) are "Aryan" and by extension "Caucasian" (*Frontiers of Asian American Studies* 47), while "Caucasian" means, by extension, "white". She attributes South Asian racist attitudes to "the class fear of being overwhelmed by the dark-skinned working people that haunts upper caste Hindus. They have long sought to use notions of "purity of blood" and "Caucasian features" to exercise dominance over the majority of the population whom they have dubbed the "Non Aryan Untouchables" (51). Such hierarchy stratification which marginalizes various ethnicities in home land is ostensibly representative of multiethnic India.

The British colonization strengthened the value of whiteness even further. White skin color was inseparably linked to the superiority of the colonizer, the privileges the native inhabitants of India did not have in the

colonial times (Bhattacharya, "The Desire for Whiteness" 120). As a result, whiteness was a respected and desired commodity. Moreover, lighter skin among South Asians is associated with better prospects and opportunities, and this is understood as colorism, i.e., a phenomenon distinct from racism (1234). Remnants of this kind of thinking have endured and can be found, for example, in the preference for the lighter colored females when arranging marriages (127). The attitudes to Indians from the North, who have different physical features are often marked by prejudice; moreover, the awareness of color and the notion of superiority derived from the fact of possessing skin of a lighter-shade are widespread.

Divakaruni's novel uses the trope of white physicality to underline the hierarchy between colors, in other words, to suggest the Indian belief in the superiority of light-skinned people and show the experience of marginalization of individuals whose skin is of a darker shade. Exploring the intra-ethnic relations, *The Mistress of Spices* indicate the importance of the difference in color tones between the Indian immigrants. This difference is represented as a significant factor structuring their relations, which in the consequence are hierarchical. Furthermore, the lighter skin color is often accompanied by a higher position in society or a better financial status: these two qualities are shown as complementary. In this vein, the intersectional interplay of color, class and gender is strictly dominant in Tilo's life in home land where she is almost marginalized in her own community. Such positionality is pervasive in America as well. For instance, the visit of rich Indians in Tilo's store reveals the hierarchies that exist among people of one nation even though they are outside their homeland, in completely new circumstances.

The rich Indians' fair skin is accompanied by wealth and the air of dominance. Only a brief, though important comment about the rich Indians' physical appearance is made: their feet are "almost white" (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 75). The main focus is on their wealth: they "descend from hills that twinkle brighter than stars" (75), which means that they live in privileged areas; chauffeurs drive their cars with "gold-handled" doors; their feet are in gold sandals, and their attitude towards her is condescending: "The rich Indians look at me with heavy eyes that are almost no color at all" (76). There is a sharp contrast not only between the wealth of rich Indians and the modest living of Tilo, a spice store keeper, but also between their skin colors: Tilo's dark skin is set against the "almost white" skin of rich Indians, who feel exceptional and do not hide their disdain towards dark-skinned people from a lower class.

Divakaruni shows that, especially for the first generation of Indian immigrants, color matters also in relations to the other minorities. The

first-generation immigrants transfer to the country of arrival a deep sense of hierarchies ingrained in the structure of Indian society and hence in Indian consciousness. This is what structural intersectionality deems. The class-conscious home and host land excludes the lower intersected identities in the same way. Thereupon the *intersecting marginality/exclusion* and *translocational intersecting marginality/exclusion* occur in the same state. Thus, for Indians, the resulting inequalities are from the same caste system plus British colonialism. Holding the minority status in the United States, Indian immigrants that are portrayed in the novel sometimes respond by the marginalization of other minorities, especially those whose skin color is similar or darker, and whose status is perceived as lower in American society. Also, Divakaruni makes a point about the lasting importance of caste for immigrants; despite their dislocation and attempts to build a new life in the United States, lighter-skinned higher classes continue to cherish beliefs and values from their homeland. Hence, they hold to the idea that the purity of the caste should be maintained.

Furthermore, deep reservations about Hispanics reveal the first generation's disregard of nonwhite ethnicities and acceptance of negative stereotypes about other minorities, especially if these minorities are of similar skin color. Avrind Rajagopal (2001) argues that South Asians wish to "distance themselves from blacks and Hispanics" (*Politics After Television* 65), in other words, they strive to distance themselves from people who are similar in color, but whose status is seen as much lower than that of the Indian minority.

Sucheta Mazumdar (1989) argues that in the United States "[South Asians] find it necessary to distinguish themselves from all other ethnic groups. Since their skin color automatically sets them apart from the white majority, efforts are focused on differentiating themselves from other minorities" (*Frontiers of Asian American Studies* 51). All that can be read as a desire toward whiteness and the status connected with the white majority. This viewpoint, in the novel characteristic of the first-generation immigrants, is in sharp contrast to the attitude of those born in the US. Thus, Geeta, who represents the second generation, feels no longer obliged to follow the Indian customs, which she considers to be the traditions of her parents' homeland. Moreover, the divisions generated by the caste affiliation or skin color are no longer valid for her.

Finally, the Indian sense of inferiority and translocational marginalization based on skin color is evident from the protagonist's appreciative attitude towards whiteness. For a man outside of her culture and of different appearance (Raven, a "lonely American", looks white to

Tilo and other Indians), she decides to break the Mistress's rules of conduct, that is, never falling in love with a man and never helping a Non-Indian person. Thus, she consents to dire consequences, which will befall her because of the disobedience. Tilo immediately strikes a bond with Raven, the only man who is impervious to her magical powers of mind-reading (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 71). The inability to see his thoughts fascinates the woman and is one of the reasons of his attractiveness. Yet, a frequent Indian client, Haroun, points to another factor which raises the American's appeal, that is, his white skin. Haroun voices his concern as well as criticism, when he sees Tilo's visitor. He criticizes her carelessness in letting unknown visitors in after dark and deplores the way the Mistress is treating the white visitor and her unwillingness to listen to Haroun's warnings: "I'm only a kala admi after all, not a white like him" (112). Haroun immediately points to the difference in skin color. Calling himself "kala admi", which means "black man", he locates himself in an inferior position. Accordingly, he accuses Tilo of showing more respect for the white man than to a member of the Indian community.

It is an important motif in the novel, for even though Tilo prefers to emphasize the special bond she has with the "lonely American", which she attributes mainly to the fact that she cannot read his mind, the way she sees Raven does indeed suggest her appreciation for the white skin. Tilo pays attention to every detail of Raven's appearance. She scrutinizes him and on the basis of her observations evaluates his class and race belonging. His elegant clothes, the "expensiveness" of which she can tell (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 68), suggest his higher status and financial means. She also examines his posture and face, notices dark hair and eyes. Everything about the "lonely American" tells her that he is white.

The value of superficial judgment based only on the inspection of appearance is later defied: Raven turns out to be biracial, his mother was a Native American. Before Tilo learns about Raven's mixed origin, her fascination and infatuation are manifested in her imaginings of his "ivory" body (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 73). Tilo's descriptions of Raven's white skin are idealistic, she notices his beautiful feet with "the soles pale ivory" (151), and his arm with "skeins of lapis lazuli running under the skin" (110). When she tries to differentiate between different hues of white as she pictures them in her mind, her descriptions always employ very positive terms: "Under his shirt his skin must be golden as lamplight" (113), in another image she envisions his chest as "smooth as the sun warm whitewood we used on the island to carve amulets" (113).



Later, interestingly, when Tilo learns about Raven's mixed origin, she uses different terms to describe his skin. His skin reveals even more golden hues to Tilo: his hand is "gleaming gold brown" (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 164). Influenced by the information of Raven's roots, she pictures his skin as darker, but still with a noble, refined hue of gold. Tilo's attitude is full of admiration for Raven's physicality, especially for the whiteness of his skin. The appreciation of whiteness is not a product of her confrontation with American reality: it has already been instilled in her in India.

The novel seems to emphasize this fact by portraying Tilo as a Mistress who has a very limited contact with the external world. Being confined to her spice store and with an obligation to serve only the Indian community, she is not really exposed to the American lifestyle or set of values until she meets Raven. Apart from exploring inequalities and tensions resulting from the white-black polarity between the Indian immigrants and in their confrontation with members of other ethnic groups in America, Divakaruni's novel works towards building the consciousness of the Indian diaspora racial uniqueness. It attempts to locate Indians within the American racial and ethnic diversity somewhere between the black-white racial polarity. Therefore, even though it acknowledges the range of colors of Indian skin, portraying Tilo as very dark while rich Indians as almost white, it establishes Indian distinctiveness as "brownness". The protagonist frequently refers to the brown color when she describes Indians. She speaks of immigrants from the Indian continent as "a brown people who come from elsewhere, to whom real Americans might say Why?" (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 5).

In a vision that she has of Mohan, an Indian store keeper who is attacked and severely beaten, she notices the sharp contrast between the whiteness of bandages and Indian skin: "The white of his bandages blends with the white of the hospital pillow. Only his skin stands out in patches, brown like mine. Like mine, Indian skin" (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* 168). It is worth noting that although Tilo is aware of the darkness of her skin, she never refers to herself as black; it is always brownness that is emphasized. It is particularly conspicuous when the Mistress leaves the confines of her Spice Bazaar and visits a young woman in need, Geeta. She decides not to wear the traditional sari but chooses Western clothes, which are, significantly, all brown: "I pull on my nonsense pants and polyester top, button my nondescript brown coat all the way to my calves. I lace my sturdy brown shoes, heft my brown umbrella in readiness. This new clothed self, I and not I, is woven of strands of brownness" (131). Stripped of her traditional sari and, quite unlike in her store, wearing

shoes, she wants to look plain in the streets of Oakland, at the same time manifesting her distinctiveness as a member of the Indian diaspora.

There are tensions and contradictions when the critical framework investigates the multicultural inclusion and position within Mukhrejee's and Divakaruni's narratives as representative texts of late-twentieth century South Asian immigrant experience. Through various attachments to form national inclusion and exclusion, racialized beauty in *Jasmine* and skin color in *The Mistress of Beauty*, the standards of insider within complicates a dominant post-Enlightenment view of beauty. In *Jasmine*, beauty is regarded solely as a redemptive force which, for those deemed lucky enough to possess it, facilitates social advancement and ideals such as empowerment and freedom. In fact, such liberal ideals traffic in a fetishistic logic of beauty, since the conferral or possession of beauty historically has depended upon the erasure and denial of the realities of race, ethnicity, color and nationality, among other axes of social difference and deeming needed social inclusion. Situated within the contexts of these populations, assimilation in *Jasmine* is held out as a social reward for the immigrant woman's exceptional beauty. In the face of both denigrated (rural, terrorist, illegal, resident alien) and valorized (modern, jazzy, upwardly mobile, model minority) forms of South Asian immigrant difference that *Jasmine* confronts across her migrations, racialized plainness exceeds the logic of *translocational multicultural inclusion*.

The beauty contains within it the promise of national inclusion through its exchange value. But it also marks *Jasmine*'s potential exclusion from the nation as a racialized immigrant subject. Yet in another sense, *Jasmine*'s exceptional beauty also repeatedly fractures the coherence of model minority discourses and the liberal fantasies of national inclusion that support them by marking her confrontation with the social inequities which constitute on the basis of *translocational intersecting* of her rurality, femineity, race, migrancy, racialized labor, and illegality. Hence, *Jasmine*'s social mobility and agency as deracinated from their historical and material conditions of possibility and, consequently, as uncritically endorsing a narrative of liberal inclusion within the U.S. nation. *Jasmine*'s beauty allows her to manage her place as a national subject first within India and then within the U.S. From the other way, to address the inclusion/exclusion in displaced communities as a new social condition in the diaspora, La Barbera (2012) adopts the term *within out*. In her view, *Within out* is the particular locationality of those women whose subordination within their community and in the society at large is inexplicable if not conceiving gender as differently made up of several

interacting socio-phyco-political factors. Understanding Tilo and Jasmine's state as *within out*, it is manifested that locationality and positionality of migrant women in the displaced community is clearly considered *within out* which is thoroughly complicated state constructed by elaborately interrelated intersectional factors.

## 6. Conclusion

The process of marginality, social exclusion, class degradation and intersectional preservation of domination are discussed in Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. The two diasporic Indo-American novelists voiced the personally experienced concerns and challenges of Indian in-transit women in the West. Having presented the subtle changes that are taking place in the Indian American community, the study explored another bizarre *translocational intersecting mantras* within the ethnic diasporic group *translocational intersecting marginality* revealed the role, mode and shifting figuration of operation of power in forming social class and social location of migrant Indian females. Arguably, an in-depth discussion of the notion of class as a significant vector of power helped nuance the various social, political, and historical dimensions pertaining to Indian exile. The focal female character and other resistant Indian femininities of the two counterpart narratives, Jasmine and Tilo challenge the hegemonic ideologies of *intersecting marginality/exclusion* and *translocational intersecting marginality/exclusion* within the family scope and/or culture. The achieved realities underscore how difficult it is to define Indian femininities and masculinities' marginality in diaspora, and how hard and complicated it is to identify the ways in which power relations are enacted to exclude and marginalize them in American society. Both Mukherjee and Divakaruni's novels underline the fact that Indian world can create different basis for generally accepted political patterns. Such diversity and complexity, more significantly, challenges and even subverts stereotypical constructions of Indian positions in the United States. As opposed to Anglo-American constructions of Indian stereotypes, both narratives demonstrate specific historical, political, social and economic realities which not solely govern their complicated intersectional state but establish their marginality, exclusion and invisibility. Moreover, understanding the major female characters' state as *within out*, it is deduced that locationality and positionality of migrant women in the displaced community is clearly considered *within out* which is thoroughly complicated state constructed by elaborately interrelated intersectional factors.

Studying these two-counterpart diaspora works, it will be important that future research investigate other diaspora women writers works from migration-prone zones as Ireland, Iran, East Asia, West Asia, Latin America and also war-ridden regions such as Africa, the Caribbean, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and other underdeveloped countries. The current study dealt with Feminist Intersectionality; however, further work is certainly required to disentangle the complexities in the politics of Feminist Intersectionality. The study specifically devoted to female in-transit marginality, identity and class exclusion in South Asian diaspora narratives, which in fact provides a good starting point for discussion and further analysis in marginalized masculinity, and neglected intersectionalities of male diasporized individuals.

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