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**INVOKING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS AN ANTIDOTE TO MODERN
CHALLENGES IN BESSIE HEAD'S *WHEN RAIN CLOUDS GATHER* AND CHITRA
DIVAKARUNI'S *THE MISTRESS OF SPICES***

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ABSTRACT :

Contemporary systems of knowledge have been on the rise from the modern and postmodern societies, characterising an era of battles between religions, science, political ideologies as well as cultures. Therefore, the society is exposed to a babble of diverse and contradictory cultures and customs leading to various challenges. This paper investigates indigenous and traditional knowledge systems which are no longer stagnant relics of the past. Instead, they are dynamic, life-sustaining toolkits invoked to navigate and solve modern challenges such as ecological collapse, migration, gender inequality, cultural alienation, psychological trauma and identity crisis. In Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress Of Spices*, by invoking the ideologies of indigenous knowledge systems doesn't

necessarily mean going back to prehistorical times or living within the context of a single coherent cultural package or the absence of cultural and digital wars. Rather, it offers a liberating ethnic cleansing and cultural preservation ethics. The hypothesis predicates that, when these traditional systems are flushed into the contemporary modern society, it serves as a productive force of authenticity of identity formations. By placing the indigenous knowledge and modern knowledge systems in the third space, there is a free play of movement from one knowledge system to the other while establishing a firm and positive hybrid system of knowledge. Hybridity will be used as the main theoretical framework to analyse this paper.

Keywords: indigenous knowledge, modern, postmodern, hybrid, culture and identity

INTRODUCTION

The subjugation of indigenous knowledge has led to reluctance among many indigenous people to allow their traditional knowledge to be accessible in the public domain (Fourmile 1989). There remains a range of problems in representing indigenous knowledge, particularly at the intersection of indigenous knowledge with modern knowledge systems of knowledge. Invoking, restoration and maintenance of indigenous knowledge is recognised as a vital ingredient for modern and postmodern societies in alleviating contemporary challenges in communities worldwide. This work is divided into three part. Part one discusses modern and postmodern challenges, part two invokes indigenous knowledge and the last part discusses hybrid systems of knowledge.

MODERN AND POSTMODERN CHALLENGES

Modern and postmodern challenges are enormous in both novels under study. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the novel is set in the modern era after colonialism in Botswana while in *The Mistress of Spices*, the novel reveals a postmodern California in America. The challenges of both modern and postmodern periods are very similar and can be grouped under similar notions of culture, identity, and gender inequality in the course of analysis.

The question of culture can be profoundly troubling and very threatening in the modern and postmodern societies. Both mark an era where people ask fundamental questions of who exactly they are. Notions of identity are always in the process of belonging. It is a civilization which continually changes its form, with unstable boundaries. Characters see borders of all kinds as social constructions of reality and feel free to cross them, erase them and reconstruct them. The plurality of perspectives in the postmodernism leads to a fragmentation of identities. One major modern challenge is the influx of different cultures in the society through postcolonialism which has served as a threat of war by the death of indigenous cultures. In most postcolonial countries character who use only indigenous knowledge make up only a small percentage of the total population because most cultures have been diluted. Their strong sense of community, spirituality, and territory are easily muted in the face of colonialism. Indigenous systems cannot survive easily when addressing the landscape of global political and economic and digital competition.

Although set in the 1960s Botswana, Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* tackles conflicts that remain strikingly contemporary. The novel serves as a blueprint for understanding

modern systemic crises, particularly in the Global South. The notion of cultural conflicts as a major modern challenge is highlighted in the course of the novel. The central operational conflict in Golema Mmidi is the struggle between age-old pastoral practices and modern agricultural innovation. The local Batswana villagers rely heavily on traditional cattle-rearing and subsistence agriculture, which are ill-suited for the harsh, drought-ridden climate. Wealth and social standing are tied strictly to the ownership of vast cattle herds, leading to severe overgrazing and land degradation. The British agriculturalist Gilbert Balfour and the South African political refugee Makhaya Maseko introduce cooperative farming, crop rotation, cash-crop cultivation (like millet and tobacco), and communal irrigation. The villagers initially resist these changes, viewing the new techniques as alien, suspicious, or impractical. The conflict highlights the psychological difficulty of abandoning deeply rooted ancestral survival strategies—even when those strategies are failing—in favour of unfamiliar technical knowledge.

The challenges of postmodernism are far reaching in Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. It is set in the postmodern American society with many Indian natives living there in the diaspora. It presents characters who experience coming into contact with other people with entirely different, cultures, values and beliefs. If the cultural shock or cultural war is not well negotiated, it can be very regressive and produce characters who are traumatised, fragmented or depressed. It has different consequences in different characters and that is why postmodern mutations are not always progressive but sometimes regressive. Postmodern cultures with decentred characters can be the space where ties are severed or it can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of identity. Therefore, identities are highly complex, tension filled, contradictory, and inconsistent entities.

Migration is one of the biggest modern and postmodern challenge plaguing many postcolonial nations. In the twentieth century, the advent of globalisation in the postcolonial era, gave rise to a wave of large-scale immigration of skilled and unskilled labour to the West, leading to formation of various diasporas. When analysed together, Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* present a profound comparative study of migration and identity crisis as defining modern and postmodern challenges. While the novels are set in vastly different geographic and generic landscapes—the harsh, realistic rural terrain of Botswana versus the magical realist, urban sprawl of Oakland, California—both texts diagnose how the physical act of crossing borders shatters an individual's sense of self,

forcing them into a volatile process of reconstruction. In both novels, migration is not a peaceful pursuit of opportunity, but a desperate flight triggered by trauma, which immediately destabilises the protagonists' identities.

In the case of *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Makhaya flees from Apartheid dystopia to search for greener pastures in Botswana. Usually, immigrants in diasporas too deal with racist attitudes of the dominant host society as they strive to negotiate the combinations of their traditional cultural roots with modern western realities while retaining their individual identities as seen in the case of the *Mistress of Spices*. Edward Said in *Reflections on Exile* says:

The greatest single fact of the past three decades has been... the vast human migration attendant upon war, colonialism, and decolonization, economic and political revolution... Exiles, emigres, refugees and expatriates uprooted from their lands must make do in new surroundings and the creativity as well as sadness that can be seen in what they do is an experience that is still to find its chroniclers....
(620)

In Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, migration is far more than a simple change of geographical location; it is a complex, transformative force that drives both the narrative and the socio-economic evolution of Golema Mmidi. Set against the backdrop of postcolonial Southern Africa, the novel frames migration as both a symptom of systemic trauma and a catalyst for profound challenge and reform. Head presents migration not as a smooth transition, but as an experience that forces individuals and communities to constantly negotiate displacement, xenophobia, cultural alienation, and the challenge of integration.

Makhaya encapsulates the traumatic necessity of political migration. Fleeing Apartheid: Makhaya is a political refugee fleeing the brutal, institutionalized racial oppression of apartheid South Africa. His migration is an act of survival, born from desperation and a deep-seated hatred for tyranny. Crossing the border into Botswana does not automatically erase Makhaya's internal wounds. He carries intense anger, cynicism, and alienation. His challenge as a migrant is psychological: learning to trust humanity again in a foreign land and transforming his destructive anger into constructive action. Although Golema Mmidi is known as a haven for misfits and displaced people, the migrant experience is fraught with social suspicion and hostility. Traditional villagers initially view newcomers with scepticism. Makhaya's arrival is met with suspicion by Sub-Chief Matenge, who views outsiders as

dangerous agitators threatening his feudal authority. Migration challenges are not limited to international refugees. Paulina Sebeso, an internal migrant from the northern region of Botswana, faces social marginalization as a single, widowed woman in a new village. Her “outsider” status makes her an easy target for local gossip and prejudice. Migration forces characters to navigate the delicate balance between adapting to a new community and retaining their personal identity.

In Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*, migration functions as both a physical journey across geography and a profound, psychological metamorphosis. Set primarily in Oakland, California, the novel explores the South Asian diaspora experience, framing migration not merely as a movement from East to West, but as a continuous condition of negotiating displacement, memory, trauma, and identity.

Through Tilo—a magical healer bound to her shop—and the diverse community of Indian immigrants who seek her help, Divakaruni portrays migration as a deeply contradictory process: a quest for economic opportunity and freedom that simultaneously exacts a heavy toll of cultural loss, racial violence, and emotional isolation. For many first-generation immigrants in the novel, migration creates a painful rift between their current physical environment and their mental world. The immigrants who visit Spices Bazaar—such as taxi drivers, construction workers, and elderly grandfathers—are physically in urban California, but mentally rooted in an idealized vision of India. Tilo uses spices as sensory portals to help immigrants cope with homesickness. A whiff of lotus root evokes memories of home, offering temporary emotional solace. However, this reliance on nostalgia also highlights the sadness of migration: home becomes a static memory rather than a tangible reality.

The novel dismantles the myth of migration as an unspotted path to prosperity and freedom, highlighting the harsh socioeconomic realities facing immigrants in 1990s America. Haroun, a hardworking Kashmiri cab driver who migrated to escape violence and build an honest life, faces anti-immigrant prejudice, verbal abuse, and violent assaults on the streets of Oakland. Many characters find that their skills, dignity, or qualifications are negated upon arrival. They take low-wage, high-risk, or gruelling jobs, enduring precarious living conditions to send remittances home or support their families.

Migration radically alters family structures and cultural continuity across generations, exposing a divide between foreign-born parents and American-raised children. First-generation immigrants often cling tightly to traditional values, caste norms, and patriarchy as a defense

mechanism against cultural erasure. Children of immigrants, like Geeta, experience migration as a generational inheritance. Growing up between two worlds, Geeta seeks individual freedom and integration into American life, leading to painful clashes with her family, who view her assimilation as a betrayal of her roots.

Tilo's own migration trajectory is unique, moving through multiple mystical transformations—from a gifted girl named Nayanantara in an Indian village, to a pirate queen, to an apprentice on the island of the First Mother, and finally to an old woman running a shop in Oakland. Unlike other immigrants who move seeking a better life, Tilo migrates under strict spiritual mandate. She is forbidden to leave her shop, touch another human for pleasure, or integrate into the surrounding city. Tilo experiences a double layer of exile: she is an Indian in America, but she is also an immortal "Mistress" trapped in a mortal world, watching human life pass by her storefront windows without fully participating in it. Both authors argue that an identity crisis caused by migration cannot be resolved by clinging to a romanticized past or by completely succumbing to the new environment. The only path to healing is the creation of a hybrid, localized identity.

Gender inequality is one of the biggest challenges that have plagued the world for a very long time and it is very evident as a major challenge in the novels under study. In Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, gender inequality is a foundational structural obstacle that the characters must confront to achieve social and economic progress. Set in the traditional village of Golema Mmidi, the novel provides a incisive critique of patriarchal Batswana society, demonstrating how rigid gender roles not only oppress women but also cripple the community's overall development.

However, Head does not present women merely as passive victims. Instead, the narrative uses the agrarian revolution led by Gilbert Balfour and Makhaya Maseko to highlight women as the true, untapped engine of economic and social transformation. Traditional governance in Golema Mmidi is strictly patriarchal, leaving women with no formal voice in community leadership. Power is concentrated entirely in the hands of male elites like Sub-Chief Matenge and Chief Sekoto. The kgotla (traditional village assembly) and decision-making councils are male-dominated spaces where women are excluded from policy decisions. Decisions regarding land distribution, communal labor, and resource management are made by men, despite women performing the majority of the actual agricultural and domestic labor. The traditional economy creates a gendered division of wealth that systematically disenfranchises women. In Batswana

culture, cattle ownership represents prestige, social standing, and real wealth. Cattle management is strictly reserved for men.

Women are relegated to backbreaking, unrewarded agricultural labour, plowing, planting, weeding, and bird-scaring in distant lands, without owning the land or controlling the profits of their labour. When severe droughts hit, women and children suffer disproportionately because they lack capital assets like cattle to fall back on. Women in the village are expected to be submissive, quiet, and dependent on male authority figures, whether fathers, husbands, or tribal elders. A character like Paulina Sebeso who is a widow from Northern Botswana faces social suspicion and economic vulnerability. Without a male protector, a single or widowed woman in traditional society occupies a precarious, marginal space. Women are socialised from a young age to accept male dominance as natural, often internalizing their own subjugation until exposed to alternative possibilities.

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, gender inequality is framed as a major barrier to human freedom and communal survival. Bessie Head demonstrates that true liberation from poverty, drought, and political oppression cannot occur while half the population remains subjugated. By taking charge of the agricultural cooperative, the women of Golema Mmidi do not just adopt new farming techniques, they dismantle patriarchal dominance and rebuild their society on a foundation of gender equity and shared labour.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, gender inequality is rendered not as a static, single system of oppression, but as a multi-layered force operating across geography, culture, and generations. The novel reviews patriarchy in both its traditional Indian manifestations and its insidious Western forms, demonstrating how women's bodies, desires, and voices are systematically regulated. At the same time, Divakaruni uses magical realism and female solidarity to chart pathways toward autonomy, agency, and self-reclamation. Within the diaspora community in Oakland, domestic spaces—often assumed to be safe havens for immigrants—frequently become sites of physical and emotional subjugation for women. Lalita, an Indian woman brought to America through an arranged marriage, represents the ultimate vulnerability of isolated immigrant women. Her husband, Haroun's friend Ahuja, subjects her to physical abuse and isolation, treating her as domestic property. Lalita's abuse is compounded by her geographic and linguistic isolation. Deprived of a support network, financial independence, or knowledge of American law, she is bound by the cultural imperative to remain silent and preserve family honour.

Patriarchal standards within the South Asian diaspora strictly dictate women's life trajectories, body autonomy, and marital choices. Geeta, a second-generation Indian-American woman, faces severe emotional exile from her family when she rejects traditional expectations by pursuing a corporate career, living independently, and dating a non-Indian man. Her family views her desire for personal agency not as self-determination, but as dishonour and rebellion against tradition. In both flashback sequences to traditional village life and in the diaspora context, young women are routinely evaluated based on marriageability, dowry, and subservience, reducing their worth to their utility to men.

The *Mistresses of Spices* are taught that their power depends on total self-denial. Tilo must suppress her sexual desires, her physical body, and her personal identity to serve others. Tilo's spiritual imprisonment reflects the broader cultural expectation that women must be selfless nurturers who exist purely to heal, comfort, and sacrifice for their communities, denying their own humanity in the process.

Divakaruni highlights how gender inequality intersects with racial and economic vulnerability in 1990s America. Immigrant women face a double burden: they must navigate systemic racism and economic precarity in the American public sphere while simultaneously enduring patriarchal control in the private sphere. For women like Lalita, neither the dominant American culture (which treats them as exotic or invisible) nor their home culture (which demands submissiveness) offers a safe space for self-expression. Despite these pervasive structures,

In *The Mistress of Spices*, gender inequality is depicted as a pervasive construct that limits women by confining them to rigid roles—whether as submissive wives, dutiful daughters, or selfless spiritual healers. Through Tilo's transformation and the liberation of the women who enter her shop, Divakaruni demonstrates that true freedom requires women to reject enforced self-sacrifice, reclaim their bodies and desires, and forge solidarity across cultural and physical divides.

INVOKING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Although increasing numbers of Indigenous people live less traditional lives, many still seek to maintain meaningful connections to their traditional knowledge, heritage, and land (Edwards and Heinrich 2006). Such priorities for the continuance of their traditions and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge to future generations hold a

special place in postcolonial studies. In Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, both authors frame traditional knowledge as an essential antidote to modern crises.

Over time, diasporas became more and more prosperous and confident, and asserted their identity emphatically in the form of cuisines, cultures, festivals and dressing. Characters in traditional societies were exposed to other cultures. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the main character who is the Mistress of Spices is born in India and migrates to the United States, where she invokes indigenous knowledge through the use of native spices to capture the hearts of great men and women, who have no resistance but to bow to the powers of indigenous spices from India. She asserts herself as such:

I am a Mistress of spices...I know their origins, and what their colours signify, and their smells...Their heat runs in my blood. From Amchur to Zafran, they bow to my command. At a whisper they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magic powers (p.3)

She integrates indigenous knowledge, power and practices in the white community where the supremacy of digital western and postmodern knowledge dominated the society. Tilo, invokes the mysterious powers of spices to restore the poignant and intuitive griefs of her customers. For Tilo self-perception is the basis of identity construction. She develops different levels of consciousness that are noticeable in both her ensuing relationships and experiences with her ethnic and sexual identities. Divakaruni's characters are generally diasporic people who have an inherited origin in India. Tilo's innate endowment is to extract the accurate powers inbuilt in the spices and employ them as antidote to solve contemporary challenges.

In the novel, characters are strenuously defending ethnicities. Conservatives and fundamentalists around the world are fretting about the dilution of their ancient ethnic cultures- and expressing their concerns in white supremacist movements, anti-immigration policies, neo-fascist political parties, ethnic cleansing warfare. At the same time, earnest liberals rally to the support of indigenous peoples, enlist in cultural preservation efforts to maintain other ethnic groups in their original state. All of these are biased in favour of an idea of the naturalness and timelessness of those cultures.

In the novel, ethnic spices and myths from India are typically imagined as if they were natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units. They seem to be always already in existence. As

a subject of study, each spice that the Mistress Tilo uses yields an essential continuum of certain myths and traits, or of human capital handed to her by other women in different generations who had the power to heal and change the world. The novel focuses on the ancestral preservation and survival, which may have appeared threatened in the era of postmodernism. Indigenous knowledge is stored in characters memories and invoked through the use of traditional medicines, songs, dances, folklore, myths cultural values and beliefs.

Considering, the fact that the relationship between indigenous peoples and their environment was eroded because of dispossession or forced removal from traditional lands and sacred sites through migration to the United States, Tilo, realises that environmental damage has been substantial. Flora and fauna species have become extinct or endangered but the relics of the indigenous knowledge system were transported from India and dominantly used in the postmodern American society to fight against the challenges of the postmodern world.

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the invocation of indigenous knowledge is central to the novel's vision of post-colonial renewal, ecological survival, and social transformation. Rather than presenting indigenous wisdom as an obsolete artifact of the past or romanticizing it uncritically, Head portrays it as a dynamic, living force that must engage with new ideas to foster true self-reliance.

In the drought-prone environment of Golema Mmidi, knowledge of nature is intimately tied to moral character, survival, and spiritual renewal. Rain is not merely meteorological; it is the ultimate symbol of life, goodness, and human warmth. The traditional worldview perceives a direct connection between human kindness and ecological abundance. As Mma-Millipede explains the local philosophy of rain:

You may see no rivers on the ground but we keep the rivers inside us. That is why all good things and all good people are called rain. Sometimes we see the rain clouds gather even though not a cloud appears in the sky. It is all in our heart. (p.88)

The above quotation shows that; the traditional knowledge system recognizes the fragility of the soil and climate. While local cattle-herding traditions face environmental limits during severe droughts, the villagers' survival stems from their collective resilience and deep familiarity with the terrain.

Head highlights how the traditional agricultural knowledge base is overwhelmingly maintained by women, whose labour forms the economic backbone of rural society. While men historically focused on cattle herding, women held the practical knowledge of food production, soil cultivation, and harvesting:

No one worked harder than Botswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for big families rested on them. It was their sticks that thrashed the corn at harvesting time and their winnowing baskets that filled the air for miles and miles around with the dust of husks. (p.103)

When Gilbert Balfour introduces cash crops (such as tobacco) and new farming techniques, it is the women—led by Paulina Sebeso—who adopt these methods. They do not discard their traditional habits of collective labour; instead, they synthesise their traditional communal work ethic with scientific agriculture to achieve economic autonomy.

HYBRID KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

The concept of the third space is most associated with Homi Bhabha, a leading and contemporary figure in postcolonial studies. His idea of cultural difference in *The Location of Culture* has provided us with the term's hybridity and third space. Bhabha (1994) asserts:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integral open expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical culture as a homogenizing unifying force, authenticated by the original Past kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (37)

What stands out in the above quotation is the idea of the past which is not being lost but expanded. He further notes:

It is that Third Space though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (37)

The above passage connotes a deconstructive vision as the third space reads anew histories. What is worth noting here are the signs and tenets that make up a culture but in the third space, this culture can be extended and given new meanings. Following the above analysis, the concept of the third space is a metaphor for the space in which cultures meet and interact. It is a space in which colonial hegemony and authority is challenged and hybrid identities are created. In the "Third Space of Enunciation," Bhabha argues that the coloniser and the

colonised have an interdependent relationship with one another. This concept challenges the view that cultures are singular entities that cannot be influenced by others. The third space that Bhabha refers to offers the possibility of creating a cultural hybridity that transcends preconceived notions of political and social order. In this light, there is room for negotiation and change, freedom from idealised or long-held political, linguistic, and cultural paradigms that have had a stronghold on societies.

In the third hybrid space, Bhabha postulates that pure cultures no longer exist. Rather, they are in a constant process of redefinition and hybridity. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha says that “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather, hybridity...is the “Third Space,” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority” (211). Thus, we can recognise a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself which may demand that you translate principles, rethink them and extend them. Hybridity thus provides for a third space of resistance, negotiation, and articulation of new meanings in the face of ambivalence. By placing the indigenous knowledge and modern knowledge systems in the third space, there is a free play of movement from one knowledge system to the other while establishing selfhood.

Set against the backdrop of a modernising, drought-stricken Botswana, Head’s novel positions indigenous agricultural awareness and communal ethics as the keys to overcoming environmental and political adversity. The immediate threat to Golema Mmidi is environmental degradation, worsened by rigid, traditional overgrazing and a lack of modern infrastructure. The colonial administration views the dry landscape of Botswana as a wasteland incapable of development, offering little to no agricultural innovation. The success of Golema Mmidi’s hybrid farming methods exposes the limitations and outright failure of the colonial imagination. The modern political landscape features corrupt local chiefs (like Chief Matenge) and rigid colonial frameworks that alienate people from their land.

Rather than choosing blindly between indigenous tradition and destructive modernity, the novel advocates for a synthesis of the two, driven by the community’s deep-rooted connection to the land. Makhaya and Gilbert, a British agriculturalist succeed because they build upon the indigenous concept of communal labour. Gilbert’s modern agricultural techniques like dam-building and millet cultivation fail until they are filtered through the local women’s traditional role as the true cultivators of the soil. the women, possess an intimate,

generational understanding of the land, weather patterns, and local crop resilience. They know the soil's temperament and how to survive the brutal droughts. Gilbert then brings Western scientific advancements, such as cooperative farming, crop rotation, dams for water conservation, and artificial insemination for cattle.

Set against the harsh, drought-prone landscape of Botswana, the novel positions knowledge not as a static cultural artifact, but as a dynamic, evolving tool for survival and liberation. The Hybrid system of knowledge shows that instead of imposing a top-down colonial model of farming, Gilbert and Makhaya create a synthesis by establishing the women's millet cooperative and utilise traditional communal labour structures but infuses them with modern cash-crop marketing and sub-surface irrigation techniques. As Head says, Gilbert

Wanted Golema Mmidi to be cooperative in everything as that was the only way of defeating the land tenure system in the tribal reserves and the only way of defeating subsistent agriculture which was geared towards keeping the poor more poor until eternity. (156)

By adopting hybrid knowledge, the villagers dismantle the false dichotomy between being “traditionally African” (which Matenge equates with blind obedience) and “modern” (which was previously equated with colonial submission). However, Head explicitly shows that Western science in isolation is ineffective; it requires local integration to succeed. The fictional village of Golema Mmidi becomes a living laboratory for hybrid knowledge. This hybridisation is primarily driven by this partnership between Gilbert Balfour, and Makhaya. Wealth was traditionally measured solely by herd size, leading to overgrazing. By integrating ecological science with the traditional reverence for cattle, the villagers learn to ranch cooperatively, solving an environmental crisis using an adapted version of their existing lifestyle. Head suggests that modern technology is useless without the indigenous spirit of community and an innate, respectful understanding of the local ecosystem.

In Golema Mmidi, women are the traditional producers of food, yet they are structurally excluded from cattle ownership and political discourse. When Gilbert and Makhaya introduce the cultivation of Turkish tobacco as a cash crop specifically for the women, it sparks a radical shift. The women readily adapt their traditional agricultural stamina to master the strict, meticulous scientific steps required to cure tobacco leaves. Led by figures like Paulina Sebeso, the women become the primary custodians of this new, hybrid economic system. Their

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financial independence directly undermines the patriarchal tribal structure, proving that hybrid knowledge is a vehicle for social emancipation.

Gender inequality is framed as a major barrier to human freedom and communal survival. Bessie Head demonstrates that true liberation from poverty, drought, and political oppression cannot occur while half the population remains subjugated. By taking charge of the agricultural cooperative, the women of Golema Mmidi do not just adopt new farming techniques—they dismantle patriarchal dominance and rebuild their society on a foundation of gender equity and shared labour. Recognising that the men of Golema Mmidi are often preoccupied with distant cattle posts or entrenched in traditional rivalries, Gilbert and Makhaya turn to the village women to launch their agricultural cooperative. The women are taught to build tobacco-curing sheds, cultivate cash crops, and manage small-scale farming infrastructure. By growing and processing tobacco, women gain direct access to cash income for the first time, breaking their total financial dependence on men. Paulina Sebeso stands out as the novel's primary symbol of female strength, resilience, and leadership. Paulina uses her fierce independence and strong personality to rally the other village women into joining the cooperative. She challenges both the political corruption of Chief Matenge and the passive, submissive stereotype expected of women. Her leadership proves that women possess the organizational intelligence required to modernise the community. While Paulina represents active, practical leadership, Mma-Millipede represents intellectual and spiritual authority. Mma-Millipede combines traditional Batswana wisdom with compassionate Christian ethics. She acts as an adviser to Makhaya, Gilbert, and Paulina Challenging Male Ego: Her deep insight and calm dignity dismantle the notion that wisdom belongs exclusively to male elders or chiefs.

Bessie Head, herself a South African exile living in Botswana does not depict migration purely as a tragedy of displacement. While it poses immense challenges regarding identity, belonging, and survival, migration is ultimately presented as a precondition for rebirth. It is precisely because Makhaya, Gilbert, and Paulina are outsiders—unburdened by Golema Mmidi's local feudal politics that they are able to envision a new social order. Through shared labour and mutual respect, the challenges of migration are overcome, turning a village of displaced outcasts into a thriving symbol of communal resilience. Head argues that for postcolonial Africa to thrive, it must reject both the uncritical romance of a static past and the violent imposition of Western modernity. *When Rain Clouds Gather* champions a pragmatic

Third Space where local insight and global science co-exist to cultivate both the land and human dignity.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, hybrid knowledge is explored through a magical realist lens, blending ancient, mythic indigenous wisdom with the stark, pragmatic realities of modern diasporic life. The novel follows Tilo, an immortal “Mistress of Spices” trained on a secret island, who runs a spice shop in Oakland, California. To heal and sustain her immigrant community, Tilo cannot rely solely on the ancient dogmas of her training; she must forge a hybrid system of knowledge that bridges the sacred traditions of the East with the secular, fractured realities of the West. Tilo’s central challenge is that pure tradition fails in the diaspora if it refuses to adapt. To be effective, her ancient knowledge must evolve into a hybrid practice. Tilo’s healing methodology becomes a hybrid of physical alchemy and psychological therapy. She uses the spices not just for their traditional culinary or supernatural properties, but to address specific, modern psychological traumas born of displacement.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, migration is presented not as a single historical event, but as an ongoing process of re-creation. Tilo’s decision at the climax of the novel—to defy her ancient vows, step out of her shop, and embrace a life with Raven, symbolises the transformation of the migrant identity. Migration ceases to be a sentence of perpetual nostalgia or isolation; instead, it becomes a space where one can honour ancestral heritage while courageously building a new, hybrid sense of belonging in the present world. When dealing with Jagjit, a young Punjabi boy struggling to fit into a hostile American school, she uses turmeric—not just to heal a physical ailment, but to weave a protective aura that gives him psychological resilience against systemic racism.

Divakaruni constructs female characters who actively resist and dismantle patriarchal subjugation. Tilo uses her magical knowledge of spices not just for general healing, but specifically to empower suffering women. She provides cinnamon and turmeric to Lalita to grant her physical protection, inner strength, and the courage to break free from her abusive marriage. On her second visit of Lalita, Tilo hurriedly provided her with some *Jeera* or fennel seeds to “strengthen her mind” (p.34) and Jagjit was given *Manjistha* or Indian madder “to make him calm and take away his anger” (p.39) She offers support to Geeta, helping her bridge the gap between her ancestral heritage and her right to independent choice. Through her, Tilo witnesses the painful but necessary birth of hybrid knowledge in the diaspora. Geeta’s Grandfather represents a rigid adherence to “the old ways,” trying to

enforce strict Indian matrimonial standards on his American-born granddaughter. His knowledge is stagnant because it refuses to recognise the reality of their new geography. With him and his family brought into limelight spices like *Kesar* or saffron. When mixed with *Badaam* or almond and added to boiling milk, Tilo believed that drinking that milk will, “sweeten your words and thoughts. It will make you remember love, not anger” (p.32). Geeta represents the synthesis. She does not want to abandon her Indian heritage, but she demands the agency and independence afforded to women in Western society. Tilo uses her spices to soften the grandfather’s stubbornness, facilitating a compromise. In doing so, Tilo acts as a cultural translator, helping her community develop a hybrid knowledge system where Indian values and American realities can coexist without destroying one another. Divakaruni believes that one should never lose ties with his/her cultural roots as these are the basis of our whole being and they act as guiding lights for an individual whether, he stays in a homeland or host land.

Tilo’s eventual defiance of the First Mother’s rules, by leaving her shop, pursuing a romantic relationship with Raven, and embracing her physical desires is a radical act of feminist reclamation. She rejects the notion that a woman must choose between spiritual power and bodily joy, proving that true wholeness includes hybridity and self-love. Tilo learns the pure, unadulterated essence of the spices from the First Mother. This knowledge demands complete detachment from the human world, ascetic self-denial, and absolute obedience to strict, timeless laws. The inner-city streets of Oakland present a chaotic landscape of racial violence, domestic abuse, economic exploitation, and generational culture clashes. The rigid, isolated knowledge of the island provides no ready-made answers for a teenager being bullied at an American school or a woman trapped in an abusive marriage.

The shop itself is a physical manifestation of hybrid knowledge. It becomes a venue where third spaces are negotiated on the surface, it is a mundane American grocery retail store. Beneath the surface, it functions as a sacred temple, a community centre, and a psychological clinic where Eastern holistic healing meets Western urban survival. The fundamental rules of the Mistresses dictate that they must remain passive observers, never touching another human or using the spices for their own desires. However, Tilo realizes that strict adherence to these ancient boundaries paralyzes her ability to help her patrons. When she falls in love with Raven, an Native American man, her knowledge system undergoes a radical hybridization. Raven brings his own marginalized indigenous heritage to the narrative; his search for “The Earthly

Paradise.” Tilo’s interaction with him forces her to synthesize her Indian cosmic worldview with his Native American ecological and spiritual understandings of displacement. By choosing to touch, love, and experience desire, Tilo breaks the “pure” tradition of the Mistresses. She internalises Western individualism and emotional vulnerability, blending it with her Eastern spiritual discipline. Tilo’s power comes not from remaining a pure, untouched vessel of ancient tradition, but from becoming a hybrid subject: part immortal guardian, part vulnerable immigrant woman.

CONCLUSION

Head’s vision in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is ultimately one of grassroots agency and utopian possibility. It demonstrates that overcoming systemic challenges requires moving past rigid power structures to build collaborative, community-driven solutions. Divakaruni argues that keeping ancient cultural knowledge trapped in amber renders it useless in a changing world. True power and healing lie in hybridisation. By allowing her ancient craft to be altered by the pain, love, and realities of postmodern America, Tilo transforms from a rigid custodian of the past into a living bridge for her community's survival. Both authors argue against the colonial myth that progress requires the erasure of indigenous heritage. Instead, they demonstrate that indigenous knowledge is a flexible, living entity, uniquely equipped to humanise and heal the fractures of the modern world.

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