

Chitra Banerjee's *The Mistress of Spices* and Concept of Magic Realism

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Abstract:

*Literature expresses life most effectively. It is the ideal combination of beauty and morality. As a result of the potential of literature to maintain ideas through time and place, every innovative thinker and doer uses their craft to depict both contemporary and timeless concerns. The novel expresses the ethos of a nation more precisely, eloquently, and effectively than any other literary medium. It is the best, most versatile, and most popular method of sharing a creative moment with the world. It provokes profound reflection on the significance of human existence. It expresses the collective worldview and moral compass of the authors. The English language and western education were vital to India's progress. The rise of liberalism in India is attributable to the West's propagation of liberal principles. Indian authors who wrote in English have contributed significantly to the development of the English-language novel in India. This paper presents a succinct overview of Magic Realism and the concept of Magic Realism in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. It displays how Divakaruni incorporated magical realism into her narrative.*

Keywords: Magic realism, liberalism, postcolonial, postfeminism

Significant is the rise of female English writers in India. It inaugurates a new era of optimism for Indian women. Nonetheless, social subordination continues. According to *The Birth of the Indian Novel in English* by K.S. Ramamurti, "escape from dependency remained out of reach for the bulk of women." Hence, the fight for emancipation was taken up by a handful of educated women who turned to writing to transmit to the public their own traumatic experiences as women and their views on social reform."

In the last decades of the twentieth century, as problems such as unemployment and corruption grew gradually worse, the identity and moral standards of the common man were undermined. No longer did novelists worry about social and political issues. To ensure a person's and his family's safety, they would reveal his or her troubles and emotional anguish. In the later decades of the 20th century, Indian English fiction moved its focus from the outside

world to domestic affairs. The pessimistic view of educated women was a key topic in these stories. The effect of Western feminism can be seen on women's issues in period Indian literature. Today's women are actively investigating their identities. The modern woman's mental pain, identity dilemma, marital turmoil, and quest for self-fulfillment take centre stage. The world is viewed and discussed from a female perspective, and throughout the text, feminine terminology is used.

Postfeminism is based on the idea that feminism provides women the option to attain equality, such that women no longer require feminism. In postfeminist literature, women were portrayed not as passive victims, inferior, weaker, or subordinate to men, but as more assertive, self-confident, and equal to men in status. Postfeminism emphasises the concept of metaphysics over that of history. Metaphysics involves mental and physical liberty. Uma Chakravarty, a prominent feminist, agrees that the argument on contemporary feminism must be based on the reasons for women's unequal situation. She asserts that women have been subservient the majority of the time. This is a universal reality, with the degree and kind of subordination depending on the social, economic, and cultural setting in which women are situated. (Chakravarty 25)

In the past, "equality" and "feminist" were frequently used interchangeably. Clearly, fostering gender equality was an early objective of the feminist movement. But, the historical context of feminism has changed, and the relative weights of its demands have also moved. Despite decades of feminism's fight for equality, there are still evidence of discontent, repressed revolt, open rebellion, and unhappiness among women in today's society. The fight for equality was unquestionably vital to the early stages of the feminist movement, but the movement has not fared well in subsequent decades. Gradually, women realised that equality based on sexual diversity was not what they required. Women must break generations of institutionalised quiet and speak out about their experiences. For women to advance, they must learn to assert themselves. The origin of contemporary feminism talks can be traced back to Virginia Woolf.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the most prominent voices of contemporary Indian writing in English, portrays the "New Woman" in its genuine light, as it is one of the challenges she faces in this demanding culture. She illustrates the never-ending struggle of an Indian lady against patriarchy, society, and her own family. Her female protagonists are powerful and courageous. Wealthy or poor, educated or uneducated, married or unmarried, all the female

protagonists in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels fight against those who would stifle their individuality.

Status of Women in Indian society

Throughout history, Indian women have fought hard for their country's independence. Now, the fight is to liberate her from the terrible, suffocating chains of superstitions, rituals, and traditions. The modern woman craves psychological autonomy. The enslavement of women has religious roots. If one religion confines women to the home, another faith confines them to the purdah or veil. Unbelievably, another female victimises another female. The transition of a mother into a mother-in-law indicates a great deal about the incidence of domestic violence in our transitioning culture. Domestic conflict between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law escalates into a full-scale war, resulting in the terrible destruction of the family. The feminine mind will never consider that the mother-in-law was once a daughter-in-law or that the current daughter-in-law will become the future mother-in-law. Whenever two birds quarrel over the same piece of bread, the cat will serve as a mediator. This is precisely the situation in question. When a struggle for dominance arises between two women in a home, the male takes no side and instead benefits from the attention of both women. This is one side of the question; no characteristic can be generalised, and no one person can be held solely responsible for any disaster, just as it takes both hands to make a sound.

Queen of Dreams

Featuring post-colonial and post-modern themes, the work displays hybrid cultural characteristics. Tilo, the heroine of the tale, is the mistress of magical spices. She exploits spices to heal her kingdom's citizens with magical powers. The novel incorporates fiction, myth, realism, imagination, faith, the past, and the present.

One of the most prominent literary styles of the 20th century is magical realism. The term "magic realism" was invented by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925. Throughout the last three decades of the 20th century, magic realism is both hugely popular and despised. This oxymoron suggests a contrast between reality and fancy. In order to gain a deeper understanding of reality, this artistic style incorporates mystical elements within a realistic setting. Utilizing folk tales, fairy tales, fables, mythologies, and epics from any culture in the globe, magic realism combines fantasy and reality. It is a narrative strategy that incorporates

topic dramatization, history, mythology, time, questionable reality, and the supernatural. It has both political and mythological material. It is both a literary and visual art form. In order to appreciate the relationship between magic realism and postmodernism, the paper aims to define the historical context.

According to Roh, "Magic Realism is not a blend of fact and fantasy, but rather a technique for discovering the underlying mystery of ordinary life."

Magic Realism is a 20th-century literary movement that originated in Europe after World War I. The term is linked to paintings by Franz Roh in Germany (1890-1965). He referred to Magic Realism as the New Objectivity of Post-Expressionist painting. South America is the cradle of the magical realism literary genre. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Fuentes, Gunter Grass, Ben Okri, Isabel Allende, and Salman Rushdie, among others, are among the most renowned Magic Realist authors in the world.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (born Chitralkha Banerjee on July 29, 1956) is an award-winning and best-selling Indian and Indian-American author, poet, short story writer, novelist, and essayist. She is one of the most outstanding authors. She was born in Calcutta, India. She is a Betty and Gene MC David Professor of Writing at the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program. She is also the co-founder and former president of Maitri, a 1991-formed hotline for South Asian women. Divakaruni's most prominent works include *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *The Unknown Mistakes of Our Lives* (2001), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), and *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), among others.

The world of magic and the protagonists' daily lives are explored in *The Mistress of Spices*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni merges the fictitious with the real. Divakaruni overcomes transdisciplinary boundaries and creates a whole new enchanted cosmos. Her works' fantastical qualities are communicated mostly through the use of dream. The magic realism in her novel reveals and explains supernatural happenings in one's life, such as foretelling dreams, telepathy, and intuition. The novel is an examination of the immigrant experience replete with myth and magical realism.

Tilo (Tilotamma) is a priestess of the mystical secrets of spices and a spice mistress. She is an immortal woman trained in the ancient art of spices and a great mistress.. She may conjure the distinct and particular energies embedded in spices and use them to treat the

maladies of immigrants or the local Indian expatriate population in the United States. She is an expert on spices. As she adds, "From amchur to zafran, all submit to my power. With the sound of a whisper, they reveal their secret characteristics, their magical powers. Tilo is born with the supernatural capacity to foresee the future. She is referred to as Nayan Tara, Star of the Eye, which translates as "star seer" and "dust road flower." She is lonely and neglected by her parents, but thanks to her second sight, she gains everyone's attention in the end. She utilises her talent to predict future occurrences to produce revenue for her family. Soon, her fame will become global, and pirates will capture her. She is given the name Bhagyavati (Bringer of Good Fortune), but she rapidly deposes the captain and becomes the pirate queen. She eventually produces a storm to flee the pirates, and sea serpents come to her aid. The sea serpents want her to become the Sarpakanya, and they notify her of the island's elderly female monarch. The elderly woman would lecture on the art of spices on the island known as The Isle of Spices.

She believes she has found a term to describe her desire to master the art of spices: spice love. To achieve her objective, Tilo travels to the island despite numerous impediments and declares her desire to become the elderly woman's mistress. To become a mistress, one must sacrifice their own desires. After agreeing to the stipulations, the mistresses are pushed into Shampathi's cleansing fire and converted into elderly women. The elder one hesitates when Tilo declares her desire to be named Tilo since there is an apsara in Lord Indra's court named Tilottama who is punished for her desire. Tilo assures the elder that she will never fall, and she enters the shampathi's fire.

The ancient one offers her a dagger to prevent her from succumbing to her passions before she enters Shampati's flames. In addition, he gives her a piece of ginger root to assist her in keeping her vows. She awakens as an aged Tilottama in Oakland after entering the core of Shampathi's fire. The spices appear to exert some influence over her, since they resist her whenever she appears to breach the mistress's law.

There, Tilo locates and provides the perfect spices to those who seek her out depending on their particular concerns. Each spice has its own day, and every so often they would sing in her palms. She is torn between her master's discipline of detachment and her compassion for those who seek her help. In the novel, the battle between love and duty serves as a driving force. The wife of Ahuja is a young woman who frequented her shop weekly. She got married

against her will to Ahuja. Her security guard husband bans her from working on the grounds that it is a man's occupation. Tilo offers her optimistic optimism. After a lengthy absence, Ahuja's wife returns to her shop and declares she can no longer accept her husband. Tilo urges her to take Fennel and instructs others to consume it as well, as it will give them the fortitude to withstand life's trials. Tilo assisted Haroun, a cab driver who is unhappy with his employment. Tilo chooses to aid Haroun prior to the realisation of the vision.

She opts for the seasoning Kalojire. "Kalojire, the spice of the dark planet Ketu, is a protection against the evil eye."

A young Indian child named Jagjit struggles to gain acceptance in the United States. His friends tease and bully him because of his statements. Tilo conceals cinnamon in Jaggi's turban to aid him. The spice destroys opponents and gives the body and mouth vitality. He finds the strength to speak out against the crimes his fellow Americans have done. Afterwards, spices began to work against Jagjit to punish Tilo for violating the forbidden rule of the mistresses. Tilo tries to recover him by feeding him "manjistha" to purify and cool his blood.

Geeta is an Indian girl from a Bengali household. After everyone in Geeta's family disagrees with her proclamation of love for a man, Tilo reunites the family. For him to boil in milk, she grinds almonds and kesar into a powder. "To soften your words and thoughts, and to remember the love that lies underlying your fury." As Tilo chooses to see Geeta in her workplace, the spices turn against her. She provides a combination of "methi for healing breaks" and "ada for deeper bravery." On the same night, Tilo has a dream conversation with the First Mother across the vastness of space and time. She senses the Old One in her business dealings. She is invisible and transparent. "Do not permit America to degrade you to incomprehensible tragedies. Thinking of love, do not stir up the anger of the spices."

Tilo is unable to read Raven's thoughts as he enters the store. She is unable to find a condiment for him. Mahamul, the root spice, is used to increase luck, encourage success and happiness, and fend off bad luck when a specific spice cannot be located. Tilo adores Raven, a solitary American. Raven is charmed by her beauty at the same time. Raven possesses a peculiar mystic quality and can see beyond Tilo's superficial appearance. Tilo gives him peppercorn, which causes him to reveal his secrets through perspiration. Later, Raven shares his own story with Tilo. He believes Tilo can help him unlock the secret ability he was unable

to obtain from his great-grandfather. Tilo presents Geeta's grandfather "kantak, the thorn herb with its hair-like, venomous black needles" in an effort to unite Geeta's family. She directs him to mix kantak with his supper rice and drink it slowly, which will provide him with a golden tongue for one hour.

In the inner chamber sits Marakadwaj, the king of spices, and it is this spice that will change Tilo into a beautiful woman. Tilo violates the most important rule in the end. The spice must be handled with extreme caution, as improper handling might result in insanity or death. It is consumed in one sitting by Tilo. She senses physical changes in her body. Tilo returns to the shop after spending time with Raven. She brings spices, lentils, atta, rice, and bajra and makes a fire in the room's centre. Tilo is preparing to enter Shampati's hell. Woman sits in lotus asana on a pile of spices while immersing her hands in turmeric. She withdraws her thoughts from everyone she has ever loved and finds an unanticipated sense of peace. I perform the incantations while holding the last remaining chilli in the jar. Nevertheless, nothing occurs. She cries with words and tries several chants. Tilo apologises for all of her acts to the spices. Before she can consider, the ground trembles and shakes violently.

Raven guards Tilo. The answer is only apparent to her. "It was sufficient, mistress, when you passively accepted our punishment in your heart. Having prepared your mind for adversity, you did not have to physically suffer it as well." (305) Tilo gives her the name Maya. "In the Ancient language, it may have several meanings. Illusion, magic, enchantment, the force that daily maintains our imperfect reality." (317)

The novel depicts numerous kingdoms filled with magic, mystery, and the history of spices. It evaluates the sociocultural value of spices to the protagonist. In *The Mistress of Spices*, magic realism author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni redefines reality by merging the supernatural and the scientific. Magic realism expands the definition of reality to encompass myth, magic, and other extraordinary natural or experiential occurrences. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni offers to her readers a culturally and psychologically recognisable universe. She used the literary style of Magic Realism to illustrate the tensions between various civilizations. The novel is a magical realist story that combines supernatural and ordinary situations. Employing magical realism, the author reconstructs the long-lost past. Mythological, historical, political, and social considerations play a larger role in this instance.

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