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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni As A Creator Of Magical Realism In The Mistress Of Spices

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Abstract

India is a country with pool of myths which are not merely stories but teach the people the daily chores of life, the way of living and the cultural and traditional values. Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal and social reasons, as they are not forced to live in other countries. *The Mistress of Spices* deals with the problems of expatriates, torn between the values of their own society and by those of the west Tilo the protagonist in this novel owns a spice shop in Oakland and through her supernatural powers heals people of their problems. The title of the novel *The Mistress of Spices* is related to the spices and each chapter has been named after each spice. Each spice has the power of healing and its own mythological story in it they are used to solve the problems of immigrants.

Keywords: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Power, Spices, myths, magical realism.

1. Introduction

Magical realism, the narrative mode, employed by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* places her in big league of celebrated authors like Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Columbia, Gunter Grass of Germany, Salman Rushdie of India.

Ironically, the fictional tool of magic realism has gained popularity even as it deviates from the foundational premise of the genre of novel. Not long ago in the 18th Century to be precise when the genre of novel developed in Europe, it was meant to be different from the foregoing epics, fables and romances which thrived on fantasy. It is believed that the German art critic Franz Roh first used the term 'magic realism' in 1925, to refer to a painting style. However, the term caught attention of the literary world in 1955 through an essay. "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" penned by the critic Angel Flores. Latin America has been home to the early growth of this kind of fiction.

M. Nakade gives a comment about the magical realism Chitra's *The Mistress of Spices* in the universal Research Analysis Research Diary that she utilizes distinctive strategies in writing, for example, first individual account third individual story interchange account epistle and journal writing,

continuous flow myth and magic realism particularly to pass on shocking and tumultuous state of Indian immigrants while at the same time building up themselves to the new culture.

It may be noted here that the art of magic realism is nearer to the Indian art of storytelling. The magic realist text is told in the form of a modern fable and serves as a means to synthesize divergent conceptions of the world. In this kind of contradictory narrative, the realistic story takes magical turns at times. Divakaruni's use of magic realism, arguably an import, sits comfortably with Indian myths and legends.

The Mistress of Spices is the story of Tilo, born Nayan Tara in a poor family in India, where she is regarded a liability. As the child grows up, her parents realize that she is blessed with some special powers whereby she can find lost things as also forecast calamities. The word of her oracular faculty spreads far and wide and people from different villages come to her to know their future. Some bandits also come to know of her special gift, and wanting to make use of her rare gift to hit jackpots abduct her. Life with the bandits is indeed very difficult, but a brave person that she is, Nayan Tara overthrows the pirate captain and becomes the pirate queen Bhagyavati.

Tilo, the magical young woman, runs a grocery store in Oakland and uses spice to help the customers in order to cure their sufferings. Tilo does not use the spices for her own self. Tilo's sacrifice is compare to Swami Vivekananda's sacrifice. The only true duty is to be unattached and to work as free beings, to give up all work unto god. All our duties are His". Anywork any action, any thought that produces an effect is called a Karma (My India).

In the novel *The Mistress of Spices* all the chapters are named after spices like cinnamon, turmeric and fenugreek, quite common in Indian kitchens. Whenever an Indian is found, a spice is found. Kerala is famous for species. As India is blessed with a varied climate, each of its states produces some spices or the other. No wonder why spices are used so extensively for cooking in India. Not only in India but also in some other countries, spices are considered to be of great use.

Some benefits of using spices are: Bay leaf oil possesses antifungal and bacterial elements. Cardamom helps to control bad breath and digestive disorder. Star antise is also used for bad breath. Moreover, it is good for diabetes. Saffron is also used for asthma; Mustard oil is good for body massage and even for getting good hair. Tilo who is the heroine of the novel uses varieties of spices that possess magical power to cure her customers.

Spices are not only for cooking, they are also used for homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in Tilo's shop experience. Tilo is always there to help her customers and so they visit Tilo with the hope of solving their problems. Also, Tilo meets their needs and demands without disappointing them.

Tilottama has rare power to use spices to cure the physical and mental problems of her clients. Spices occupy the centre state in the novel in the form of chapter headings like fenugreek, fennel, kaojire, etc. Serving the diasporic Indians as also others becomes Tilo's life-long ambition. She helps a number of people.

The words of Turmeric are, "I am the Turmeric who rose out of the ocean of milk when the devas and asuras churned for the treasures of the universe. I am turmeric who came after the poison and before the nectar and thus lie in between (TMS13) Turmeric benefits acts as anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, and digestive ais. It is also said to help with arthritis pain, and recently it is found that turmeric fight against cancer".

Turmeric is also named Balud, meaning yellow colour of day break and conch shell sound. It is a preserver which keeps foods safe in a land of heat and hunger. It is an auspicious spice placed on the heads of new born baby for luck, sprinkled over coconuts at pujas and wedding saris.

Fennel is the spice for Wednesdays, it is brown as mud. Fennel, I call when she is gone, fennel that is shaped like a half-closed eye accented with surma, work for me. I reach into the bin and lift up a fistful. Fennel which the sage vashistha ate after he swallowed the demon Illwal so he would not come back to life again (TMS106)

Tilo uses cinnamon for her customer Jagit, a ten year old boy. He comes to her store with his mother always clinging to his mother's sari. He has some trouble in school, because he knows only Punjabi. He is sitting in the last row next to the drooling boy with milk blue eyes. He has learned his English word: "Idiot, Asshole", Tilo gives some burfi to the boy. She also tucks a "cinnamon" unseen in his turban. It works out so well that Jagit once seen as a limid boy after taking. Tilo's medicine for some months, changes into a self confident school goer.

When she meets the handsome American architect Doug (Raven), Tilo feels attracted towards him, much against the first rule. He is also a victim of circumstances. She seeks advice from the spices but they, for once, are silent : "Then : so be it for now. We are patient. We know you will come to us soon. Once you have heard our song, have paced the rhythms of desire whose seat is deep in the body's core, you cannot resist"

The all knowing magical spices know Tilo inside out. Soon, she calls upon spices to beautify her for just one meeting with him and the spices willingly oblige: "Use as for love, for beauty, for your joy, because that is why we were made," the spices say. It was the magical shampatti's fire which had aged her and the magical spices would bring back her youth.

When Raven hugs her, she feels the woman in her. He suggests to her to run away with him to a remote place an earthly paradise away from the urban jungle, that is, America. But then an earthquake changes Tilo's mind, Even though she has lost her magical powers as she had violated the First Mother's code for the mistresses of spices, yet she feels that she should not give up helping the American people in their hour of need

2. Conclusion

In *The Mistress of Spices*, we find several roles that women play. They appear as daughter, sister, wife and mother. Tilo's character, however is singular in that she is a brave heart from the very start. She charts her own course of life. She dedicates her life to empowering women so that they do not suffer injustice. Of course, she has magical powers to support her lone existence in the US.

Tilo is also for a fluid identity: she changes her own name from Nayantara to Bhagyavati to Tilottama, and Finally to Maya. In fact, she represents "the journey of a woman not only from innocence to maturity but a voyage that crisscrosses the realm of reality and magic and transcends the confines of geographical borders and cultural specifications.

It would not be inappropriate to conclude that by mixing the real with the fantastic, *The Mistress of Spices* has assumed form to a cross cultural experience of the Indian community in the United States. Divakaruni presents the image of a woman which goes against the stereotypical docile and subservient type generally found in diasporic literature. Of course, she employs the tool of magic realism to achieve it.

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