Myth, Dreams, and Magical Realism in The Fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: A Study of Cultural Memory and Feminine Identity

Shaestha Siddiqua [1]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

Dr. Soumya Tiwari [2]

[2] Supervisor, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

In this article, we will look at some of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works and how they deal with magical realism, mythology, and dreams. The narrative realm where truth and imagination coexist is constructed by Divakaruni via the use of dream narratives, mythical themes, and supernatural aspects. She gives Indian folktales and cultural traditions new life in her novels by reimagining them as feminist anthems and cultural relics. The research emphasises the role of dreams as symbolic and prophetic tools that muddy the lines between reality and the mystical, and how myth provides a structure for rethinking women's identities. As they navigate the tension between tradition and modernity, the protagonists in Divakaruni's stories mirror the diasporic experience of trying to find their own identity. The article goes on to say that her magical realism approach both explains and dispels patriarchal conventions and cultural traditions. To empower women in a globalised society via solidarity, self-discovery, and cultural reinterpretation, her literature ultimately constructs a feminine mythological cosmos.

Keywords: *Myth, Magical Realism, Dreams, Identity, Culture.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Divakaruni has mostly expanded the mystical aspects in her works via the use of dreams. The heroes' everyday lives mirror the fantastical occurrences in their dreams. Amazing snakes, tastes, and conch, among other extinct animals, may talk to the protagonists in her stories just like any other person. The author writes to them as if they were living, breathing, and knowledgeable. Rather of avoiding or evading them, the characters just recognise, joke about them, and reply to them. This led her to merge authenticity with magic. With a blend of everything in enthralling authenticity, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni revives the long-lost Indian story, conviction, tradition, culture, and aspirations that are essential to presence. The dream aspect, however, takes a back seat to the more realistic aspects as the story develops. Ancient Indian legend is given new life by Divakaruni. Bengalifolklore, Indian mythology, eastern magic, and being an outsider were her primary areas of study. In terms of her social status as an Indian immigrant, the heroine doesn't acculturate or acclimatise; instead, she adapts her life to her new environment without really changing who she is.

A feminine universe is partially born from the mythical framework of her works. Fantasy, in stark contrast to the masculine, tends to be more feminine. She writes in an effort to either inspire new ideas or clarify existing ones. She claims that the new dream symbolises the female reality, where women support each other without seeking assistance from men. She assessed Indian women based on their yielding behaviour and used folklore as a way to connect with India. The issue of demystification is significant in the realm of otherworldly authenticity. Divakaruni uses the myths

and prejudices about Indian women that she investigates after leaving her home and vows to dismantle. Divakaruni examines a variety of fantasies, including the idea of becoming a widow. Widows are treated poorly in male-dominated cultures. Regardless of their age, they are relegated to the role of a sick-predicting agamic creature.

India is a culturally diverse nation that places a premium on superstition. Whenever possible, it is more important to safeguard the culture than any other consideration. Chitra Banerjee's writings bear witness to this. She writes on the potential benefits of cultivating a bicultural identity in her books. It is surprising how Divakaruni handles ethnic individualism given her perspective on South Asian Diaspora, which holds that it is necessary to combine Indian culture with its American experience. Chitra Divakaruni is deeply connected to her Indian roots. The dream interpreter would beg her mother for a collection of Bengali literature on the subject. It brought back memories of how her society's members saw things. An increasing number of people are listening to her recollections. As social branches, the designer's books include local rituals and customs, as well as her efforts to establish connections to the area's cuisine, clothing, and language.

Central to the purpose and aim of fantasy in her works are the dual concerns of demystifying and demystifying. The conclusion gives the idea that the writer is challenging long-held assumptions on topics like cultural significance, women's continued role in the house, traditional widows' attire, and more. The term "demystification" is used in Chitra's works to describe the novel approaches that women find when they reject conventional gender norms. The magical realist notion of demystification has not eliminated the positive evaluation of legend, and essayists continue to harp on folklores as a means of passing them on to younger generations. This is how the author transports readers all around the globe to India via the usage of mythical references in her work.

II. MYTH' IN DIVAKARUNI'S NOVEL "THE MISTRESS OF SPICES

By uniting all parts of the creative imagination, especially as seen in enchantment, religion, and fantasy, enchantment realism may further our comprehension of what is "real" in the world. The goal of supernatural realist literature is to uncover the extraordinary in everyday things, people, and events by presenting an unfiltered view of the real world. Women are the focal point of her work, which is grounded in reality via the usage of magic in her essays. Among the works selected for this inquiry are The Mistress of Spices (1995), Sister of My Heart (1999), The Vine of Desire (2002), The Conch Bearer (2003), Queen of Dreams (2004), and The Palace of Illusion (2004) (2008). The enchanted elements possess several of her works, including The Mistress of Spices, Queen of Dreams, and The Conch Bearer. Several references to myths and legends may be found in Sister of My Heart and The Palace of Illusion. Almost every work incorporates social features, particularly those that address issues impacting outsiders.

Divakaruni mostly writes about enchantment realism and the associated themes of culture and fantasy. In her writings, the fantastical elements that help us make sense of the mystical occurrences in our lives—like dreams, clairvoyance, and gut feelings about what's to come—emerge. Since they are associated with brain research, the otherworldly aspects of her work imply that they are indications of reality. By using their imaginations, the story's protagonists demonstrate that those who experience more physical force may be able to predict what's going to happen next.

There is an effort to demystify or create fresh myth in Chitra's books. Every one of her works incorporates myth, which she considers to be one of the most prevalent narrative methods used by most successful authors. Chitra Banerjee's myths serve a particular function. Eliminating myths would be an enormous challenge in India since they are so intrinsic to the human experience. Reading Chitra's works is a great way to pass on cultural values and traditions because of the mythical references. She is not trying to eradicate myth by demystifying ancient norms in her books; rather, she is fighting against the traditional ideas about women that stand in the way of their advancement.

We look at the skill with which Divakaruni uses myth to demonstrate how the authors have taken the ideas from their myths and fictionalised them to bolster the plot structure of their works; in other words, how myths have been utilised to depict the problems that modern man faces. The author seems to have the abilities necessary to construct situations that showcase their creative talent. Fiction is set against the background of myth.

Her works' mythical structures help build a female-centric cosmos. Unlike the masculine realm of the mind, the term myth has a more feminine connotation. She writes about myths, but she tries to make them up or at least reimagine old ones in her books. As Divakaruni sees it, the new myth represents a feminine universe. Here, women come to the aid of other women in need, rather than relying on males for assistance. She re-evaluates the myths surrounding the virtuous, selfless, and self-sacrificing Indian women more reflectively, and she utilises them as a hold to identify herself with India.

Adapted from its original use as a religious story in prehistoric times to its current use as a tool in the study of the unconscious mind, myth has maintained a prominent place in human psychology and culture. "The study of myths reveals about the mind and character of a people... and just as dreams reflects the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, myth are the symbolic projections of a people's hope, values, fears and aspirants," (Carl Gustav Jung, prominent mythologist) said Jung.

The mythology of India are more influential and evocative in Indian literature and daily life. Inspiring Hindu society and shaping international cultural standards, its fads are a source of pride for all nations. It is proven by Chitra Banerjee's books. Possibilities for forming a bicultural identity are depicted in her work.

Myth is something that Chitra Banerjee loves to use. Her works often allude to mythology. "I am turmeric who rose out of the ocean of milk when the devas and asuras churned for the treasures of the universe," the heroic spice explains to Tilo, who is one of several mythical figures featured in the "Mistress of Spices" book. I am turmeric, the intermediate being who sprung from the nectar and the poison.

The work alludes to the legendary figure Agni, deity of fire, as well as the location "Lanka," which has its own etymological weight. As it circled sun-bleached slopes devoid of vegetation, Chilli sang and talked like a hawk:

God of fire Agni gave birth to the island of Lanka. I oozed out of my fingers to provide flavour to this tasteless dirt. That is why I cling to you, Lanka, the name that the ten-headed Ravenna bestowed upon his magical realm. At the very end, the city that had a million diamonds crumbled to dust. Still, the thought has crossed my mind more than once.

Tilottama claimed to know the significance of her name when the first mother enquired about it. She went on to say that a paste made from mashed sesame seeds and sandalwood may treat liver and cardiac conditions. She promised to be Tiloma, the embodiment of the word "life," a healer, a source of optimism, and a source of restoration.

"Takes on the name of the most beautiful apsara of rain of god Indra's court," Tilo, the first mother, stated with reference to her name. Tilottama is the most graceful dancer, the crown gem of women—were you unaware?"

III. CULTURE IN CHITRA'S THE MISTRESS OF SPICES

The ways in which a people express themselves creatively, ordinarily, and religiously. It refers to the habits and procedures that people in a certain group or organization adhere to every day. As a whole, it includes the arts and philosophy, which are considered essential to human flourishing and intellectual development. A person's culture includes all the aspects of his developed potential that he has learnt from his community, whether via intentional study or unintentional indoctrination.

The foundations of ancient Indian civilisation were love and brotherhood, tolerance and compassion, honesty, faith in religion and selfless duty (as Krishna teaches in the Gita), and reverence for parents, Guru, and elders. Indian writers have researched and emphasised the relevance of the enduring ideals espoused by our ancient Indian culture.

The protagonists of Chitra Banerjee's works represent Bengali culture via their food, language, and clothing. Rural Bengali art is distinctive because it captures the essence of the people's everyday existence in all its forms: their social and seasonal festivities, their work and play. Creativity and the creative process are intrinsic to rural and daily Hindu life, which includes worshipping the numerous gods of the Hindu pantheon, some of whom date back to the Vedic era and others who have evolved over time according to popular belief.

Even while the particular rituals, prayers, and sacrifices may vary from deity to deity, there are some common elements to these worship activities. They showcase a creative wellspring that stems from the religion's tropical foliage. Three days of nonstop festivities begin as early as seven days prior to the wedding in Bengali Hindu weddings. Since the Bengali people reside in a delta region with an abundance of rivers, it is not surprising that they include fish as a symbol of plenty into their wedding rituals.

One of the best female writers of the modern era is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The use of myth and legend is a characteristic storytelling technique used by Banerjee. These allusions, myths, and legends provide Divakaruni's literary works the necessary intensity in their plots.

Divakaruni takes great pleasure in her quirks, which preserve a treasured representation of love and life via a synthesis of myth and tradition. She is the source of all myths. She hopes that her ideas may unite mythology, magic, and ancient concepts with contemporary life. In her pursuit of harmony, she holds both traditional values and contemporary lifestyles in high regard.

IV. CONCLUSION

By analysing Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's use of myth, dreams, and magical realism, we may see how her literature might reshape our understanding of cultural memory and the role of women in society. Dreams serve as symbolic visions in her stories, and mythical aspects carry tradition,

knowledge, and resistance. She expertly blends the real with the otherworldly. Divakaruni retains and reimagines Indian cultural history in a modern diasporic environment via this synthesis. The author's use of magical realism blurs the lines between truth and fantasy by letting readers encounter both the mundane and the miraculous as interrelated aspects of human existence. By creating new environments where women may help one other out, heal from past hurts, and gain strength, her efforts challenge patriarchal systems and conventional gender norms, as discussed in the article. Simultaneously, myth is not dismissed but rather rethought, which opens the door to a demystification process that fosters change while fortifying cultural identity. In the end, Divakaruni's work offers fresh viewpoints on how one's identity is formed in a world that is more interconnected via mythology, culture, and feminist awareness. Her writings about identity, belonging, and empowerment have lasting impact on modern readers.

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