

**STUDY OF MAGIC REALISM IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF CHITRA BANERJEE  
DIVAKARUNI**

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**Abstract:**

The recent research paper desires to provide the center of attraction to the concept of magic realism in the select novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Her novels consist of various themes like, magic realism, myth, immigration, multiculturalism, human instinct and art. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's expertise is revealed through her style and she is bestowed with an innate sense of mingling reality and imagination, fantasy and beliefs, the past and the present. Magic realism is a genre of narrative fiction which consists of literature, film, painting and art. It is a fiction where supernatural things and magical elements will be existed in the real world. The novel, *The Mistress of Spices* which tingles the appetite with its skillful use of various spices. Divakaruni has used the character of Tilo to intermix fantasy, imagination, reality and myth. The novel, *The Conch Bearer* is completely an adventurous journey of three persons, Anand, Nisha and Abhayadatta. Their mysterious journey is completely filled with many shocking surprises, danger, magical elements, supernatural things. The novel, *Queen of Dreams* is fully deals with an Indian American experience through the concept of magical realism. Dream is a common and natural thing in everyone's life, but dreaming about other's life is a peculiar thing. But this kind of situations and scenes takes place frequently in Divakaruni's novels. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni skillfully handled both magic reality by her extraordinary perspective and talent. Even many renowned critics and writers also analyzed the thematic elements and different approached which are interrelated with magic realism.

**Key Words:** Magic, Reality, fantasy, Imagination, Spices, Conch, Dream, supernatural

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a renowned Indian women writer and also an award-winning author in Diasporic Literature. Especially her novels consist of various themes like, magic realism, myth, immigration, multiculturalism, human instinct and art. The novel, *The Mistress of Spices* was her first novel published in 1997 and it shortlisted for the Orange Prize and also recognized as one of the best books in that time. She has used magic realism and magical elements in most of her novels, specifically, *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Conch Bearer* and *The Queen of Dreams*. She has utilized magic realism as a mechanism to change the fantastic elements into reality. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's expertise is revealed through her style and she is bestowed with an innate sense of mingling reality and imagination, fantasy and beliefs, the past and the present. Magic realism is a genre of narrative fiction which consists of literature, film, painting and art. It is a fiction where supernatural things and magical elements will be existed in the real world. Blending of reality and imagination is recognized as magic realism. Wendy Faris comments on magic realism:

Magic realism often gives voice in the thematic domain to indigenous or ancient myth, legends and cultural practice and the domain of narrative techniques to the literary tradition that express them with the use of non-realistic events and images; it can be seen as a kind of narrative primitivism (103).

Here, the novel, *The Mistress of Spices* which tingles the appetite with its skillful use of various spices. So, the spices are not only utilized to create the fragrance and flavors to give taste but also the spices are the significant element for the development of the novel. Through the character, Tilottama, Divakaruni effectively portrayed magic realism along with the spices. Tilo is the mistress of spices in the novel, who is possessed with many supernatural qualities and even she has the ability to speak with the spices.

Divakaruni has used the character of Tilo to intermix fantasy, imagination, reality and myth. The magical quality which she has imbibed with her is that she foresees the future of other people. So, she

could prophets the future and the sufferings of people and even she transforms the miseries and sorrow into happiness. Through this novel, Divakaruni reveals the authentic knowledge of Ayurveda and the uses of spices and its benefits and advantages. She has the power to resolve the problems and can give solution for the problem according to their feelings of homesickness and disillusionment. The spices and herbs which are all used from the ancient times till it had its power to cure simple issues like, fever, cold and sometimes even it solves complex problems also.

Actually, Tilo has learnt the skill of foreseeing the future through spices, from the old man. The calling thought is another skill, which she has learnt from the old man:

The calling thought can draw to you whoever you desire- a lover to your side, an enemy to your feet, which can lift a soul out of a human body and place it raw and pulsing in your palm which used imperfectly and without control can bring destruction beyond imagining (MS, 18).

Tilo has a small spice shop, named 'Spice Bazar' and as a mistress she has started the task of recovering the people from their sufferings through the magical spices. As a mistress, if she wants to handle those magical spices, the first condition is that she should not fall in love with anyone and she should be very sincere and virtuous. If she fails to follow the norms for a mistress, then she will lose the power over all of her spices. Here, Divakaruni explores the unique quality of interacting with the spices,

I am a Mistress of Spices. I learned them all on the island. I know their origins, and what their colors signify, and their smells. I can call each by the true-name it was given at the first, when earth split like skin and offered it up to the sky... At a whisper they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magic powers (MS, 3).

At the beginning of her childhood days, she was neglected by her own parents and soon she gets back the attention and appreciation of everyone. Only because of her magical powers, she could even bring wealth to her family. After that, she was kidnapped by the sea pirates and they named her as Bhagyavati and become the queen of pirates. At one instance, she was protected by the sea serpents and they asked her to become one with them by the name, Sarpakanya. Then she moved to an island and there she has learnt many magical powers from the old woman by entering into Shampati's fire. Angel Flores opines that,

In magic realism we find the transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal. It is predominantly an art of surprises. Time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happiness as part of reality. Once the reader accepts the fait accompli, the rest follows with logical precision (187-192).

Another magical element happened when Tilo play behind her house in the heat cracked fields, suddenly the land snakes saved her from the sunlight. Here, the snakes and its conversation with Tilo is very normal in this novel, even she replied to the snakes without any fear and hesitation. Tilo solved the problem of many people, who comes to meet her with problems and distress. Actually, she has attended training to learn the powers and among the mistresses. Some of them were asked to return to Island and they were labor again by the spices. So Tilo remembered everything how other mistresses entering into the Shampathi's fire and when they reached the center of the fire, they suddenly disappeared from that place. She could understand that, those mistresses never show any kind of pain and agony in their faces while they are entering into the fire. Now it is Tilo's turn to enter into the fire, and as her wishes she did not hurt by the fire.

When Tilo met a handsome man named, Raven, her life totally has changed. She developed a romantic attraction and feelings towards Raven. When both of them started to love each other, then things become worse in her shop and also with her customers. Because as a mistress she is not supposed to fall in love with anyone. So, the magical spices started to show the negative impacts on her shop as well as her customers. Soon, she realized that her actions would be the major reasons for all the misfortunes. She got fear that Raven might be the sufferer so she determines to leave him after the passionate night. She also begs the magical spices that they should not hurt Raven. But fortunately,

the magical spices did not give any punishment for Tilo's action and for crossing the terms and conditions. So, it ends with a positive note that she has started a new life with a new name, Maya.

The novel, *The Conch Bearer* is completely an adventurous journey of three persons, Anand, Nisha and Abhayadatta. Anand is a small boy and Nisha is street girls and Abhayadatta is a mysterious old man. The whole novel revolves around the three persons and the old man is on the mission. So, he is in need of Anand and Nisha's help to safeguard the Conch and his motive is to replace the conch in the brotherhood of valley. Anand, Nisha and Abhayadatta are ready to face the problems, obstacles and sufferings to place the conch in its original place. Brenda Cooper states that,

Magical Realism attempts to capture reality by way of a depiction of life's many dimensions, seen or unseen, visible or invisible. Rational and mysterious. In the process, such writers walk a political tight – rope between capturing this reality and providing precisely the exotic escape from reality desired by some of their western readership.

Their mysterious journey is completely filled with many shocking surprises, danger, magical elements, supernatural things. But at the end, they will get success and placed the magical conch at the right place. Anand is a twelve years old boy, who is working in a teashop. He always thinks about magical things and he loves magic. The main reason is that he wants to get benefits by using magic, because he wishes to take care of his family. His motive is that, he should learn some magical skill and he wants to teach a perfect lesson for his tea shop owner. Because he is a man who is very cruel and violent towards others. He told his mother that, "Then I could make Meera better, and would see where father was, and if he was all right... he believed that magic could happen" (CB, 4-5)

After that Anand is supposed to meet the old man. When Anand looks at the eyes of the old man, he could understand that he is possessed some magical powers within him. The old man determines that Anand would be the perfect person for the mission. Even the old man confesses to Anand about his secret wishes and desires to learn magical skills. The old man comments that,

... the magic and magical powers are real, even now a days people hold and practice magical things. The old man gives a explanation to him... I was called to you because of your belief in magic and your desire to enter its secret domain (CB, 32).

The first magical incident occurs when Anand was walking towards his home. Suddenly he could sense that something is wrong and felt that he should leave the place immediately without any delay. He was shocked on seeing the fog, "Where had the fog come from, anyway? How could it be windy and foggy at the same time... He looked around wildly not recognizing anything (CB, 18). The old man confesses to Anand that he only makes the place both foggy and windy through his magical powers. To make Anand to believe magic, he cured his sitters problem. Then Anand agrees to participate in the mission and the old man told everything about the Brotherhood of silver valley and the healers and their magical powers. On hearing the words of the old man, Anand was surprised and he wants to know about the nature of healers. Then he replied to Anand,

Some can look into the future and advice men and women of what to avoid. Some can cure sickness of the body and mind. Some transport themselves to places thousands of miles away. Some travel through time to bygone ages. Some know special chants to create rain or storm or wind and fog... (CB, 25).

Anand is very excited to see the conch. When the old man shows the conch in the dark room, the brightness of the conch was fabulous. Anand suddenly forgot everything on looking at the conch. The old man wrapped it in a bag and confesses to Anand that, the conch was so powerful and also alerts that, the conch was so powerful and also it alerts the cunning man Surabhanu's existence. Surabhanu is person, one who came to the brotherhood of valley to learn magical powers. He is selfish person, instead of using the powers to heal others, he wants to use those powers for her personal growth. So, the old man told him that even from the long distance, Surabhanu could sense the conch. Actually, Surabhanu took the conch from its place to corrupt the Brotherhood. So, to safeguard the conch from him, they are struggling against him.

The old man always keeps a magical bag along with him. And he kept many things in the bag which are required for them throughout their journey. He advises both Anand and Nisha to continue their journey towards brotherhood instead of waiting for him. Immediately, the old man made a magical map in the floor by using his magical powers. The old man often insists them to be careful because, Surabhanu is following them to steal the conch. So, they struggled a lot in the hands of Surabhanu and his magical powers. The old man said,

I will throw some herbs from the valley into the flames, and their fumes will protect us from all who indeed to harm us... the name of this herbs is, indeed ocean weed and although it grows in the snow, it carries many of the ocean's powers. It cleanses your thoughts, blowing away old, stagnant impressions. And just as an ocean protects a country's boundaries, ocean weed does the same with your mind (CB, 122-124).

Meanwhile, Anand felt excited because his desire to move away from the real world and enters into the magical world with the help of the old man's magical powers. At first, they faced the obstacle in the cave and they escape from that danger, but they lose the old man in the fire. Finally, after faced the hard times and struggling they reached the Brotherhood of Valley and placed the conch in its place. The old man and the healers in the valley asked Anand and Nisha to stay with them. Nisha did not have parents, so she agrees to stay and Anand think about his family. But he comes to know that his family members forget about Anand and they started a new life. On seeing those things, he got surprised that, through the power of magical powers his family completely forget about him. So, he decided to stay in the valley to work as a healer in the Brotherhood of Valley.

The novel, *Queen of Dreams* is fully deals with an Indian American experience through the concept of magical realism. In this novel also, the major character Mrs. Gupta foreseeing the future of others through her dream. She has the ability to dream about others dream. In the beginning of the novel itself, the snake appears in front of Mrs. Gupta and remains her duty of dreaming others. For that, she sacrificed her sleep and sometimes even she will contact those particular persons to safeguard themselves from the upcoming danger. To read the dreams of other people, they have to learn the skill along with novices. At first, they learn to read the dreams of Kings, Saints and Queens. Mrs. Gupta always sleep alone to read the dreams. Her daughter, Rakhi asked her mother that why she did not sleep with her family members. She replied, "I don't sleep with you or your father because my work is to dream. I can't do it if someone is in bed with me... I dream the dreams of other people, she said. So, I can help them live their lives (QD, 7).

Rakhi's main aim is to get her mother's skill of dream about others. And she feels that it was difficult for her. At once, Mrs. Gupta dream about Mr. Raghavendra. Immediately she asked Rakhi to bring a Tupperware box along with little rows of glass bottles. Then she asked her to get the phone number of Mr. Raghavendra from the phone book. It is understood that she is going to give some precaution and tries to safeguard him from the danger. She knows, the danger is waiting for him,

Mr. Raghavendra, 'my mother said', I'm calling to inform you that your life is in danger. One of the people living in your house is planning to kill you... you have to believe me. It's probably your cousin, whom you sponsored from Indian six months ago. He's been living in your house since then, right? Does his name start with the letter H? (QD, 40).

In this way, Mrs. Gupta sacrifice her sleep for the welfare of others. Actually, dream is a common and natural thing in everyone's life, but dreaming about other's life is a peculiar thing. But this kind of situations and scenes takes place frequently in Divakaruni's novels. But unfortunately, she could not safe her daughter from the danger. Rakhi desires to inherit the skill of dreaming others from her mother. But accidently, Rakhi's daughter, Jona inherits the skill form her grandmother. Mrs. Gupta has written a Dream Journal. By reading that journal, Rakhi completely understands the feelings and affection of her mother. In this way, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni skillfully handled both magic reality by her extraordinary perspective and talent. Even many renowned critics and writers also analyzed the thematic elements and different approached which are interrelated with magic realism.

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