

# MYTH AND CULTURE IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *THE MISTRESS OF SPICES*

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## INTRODUCTION:

The word '**Myth**' is defined as a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. A myth is a well known story which was up in the past to explain natural events or to justify religious belief or social customs. It is a story from ancient times mainly one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of the people. It is culturally significant story or explanation of how things came to be; for example, of how God made a world or how a hero undertook a quest.

Oxford English Dictionary defines Myth as a traditional story, typically involving supernatural being or forces, which embodies and explanation, a etiology or justification for something such as the early history of society, a religious belief or ritual or a natural phenomenon.

Whereas 'The Encyclopedia Britannica defines that the word "myth" derives from the Greek Mythos, which has a range of meanings from 'word, through saying and

“story to fiction”, the unquestioned validity of Mythos can be contrasted with logos, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated.

**Culture** is part of the external influences that impact the consumers, i.e. culture represents influences that are imposed on the consumer by other individual. The definition of culture offered in Williams, is “That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, moral, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man person as a number of society”. (23)

According to the definition of culture in *Concise Encyclopedia Britannica*, Culture is an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour, culture is both a result of an integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

Culture thus consists of language, ideas, belief, customs, codes, tools, techniques and work of art, rituals, ceremonies and symbols. Every human society have its own particular culture or socio cultural system.

Among cultures is attributable to such factors as differing physical habitats and resources, the range of possibilities inherent in areas such as languages, rituals with other cultures. Culture changes takes place as a result of ecological, socioeconomic, political religious or other fundamental factors affecting a society.

### **‘MYTH’ IN DIVAKARUNI’S NOVEL “THE MISTRESS OF SPICES”**

In Chitra’s novels there is an attempt to create new myth or demystification. According to her view, Myth is also one of the most prominent narrative techniques adopted by most novelists of merit and so does in all her novels. Myth

for Chitra Banerjee have a specific purpose. Myth are so much part and parcel of human self that doing away with them is almost impossible in India.

The mythological reference in Chitra's works really help the reader to transmit the traditional and cultural values. The demystification of breaking the traditional rules which she applied in her novels do not mean to do away with myth but to crusade against the conventional concepts against women which hurdle their way against their progress.

The craftsmanship of Divakaruni's usage of myth is examined in order to drive home how the writers have drawn copiously these ideas this form their respective myths and conveniently fictionalize them to strengthen the plot structure in their writings, in other words, myth have been used as tools to portray the predicaments of the modern man. The writer seems to be potential craftsmanship to create situation that display their skilful artistic creation. Myth serve as the backdrop fictionalizing.

The Mythic framework of her novels contributes to the creation of a female universe. The word of Myth is essentially feminine in nature as opposed to the cerebral world which is masculine. In her novels there is an attempt to create fresh myths or at least give new interpretations to existing ones. The new myth symbolizes the feminine world that Divakaruni envisages. It is a world where women rescue other women and do not wait for the help of men. She uses myth not only as hold to associate herself with India but also to re-evaluate more reflectively on those surrounding the good, self-effacing and self-sacrificing Indian women.

Myth has always had a significant position in human psychology and society from its beginning as primitive religious narrative to its recent adaptation as an aid in the exploration of the unconscious mind. According to the eminent mythologist, Carl Gustav Jung,

“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” (183)

In Indian culture, myths are more powerful and play a suggestive role in the life and literature of the country. Its trends have inspired the Hindu society and have fashioned culture is the prestige of all countries. Chitra Banerjee’s novels are an evidence to prove it. Her novel portrays the possibilities for establishing a bicultural identity.

Chitra Banerjee is fond of using myth. There are many mythological references in her novels. In the ‘Mistress of Spices’, the turmeric is mentioned about the mythological characters such as the Davas and Asuars, its origin and the incident to Tilo:”I am 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 nectar and before the poison and thus lie in between” (MS13)

The mythological character, Agni, god of fire and the place ‘Lanka’ which had its own etymological significance are referred in the novel. Chilli spoke and sang in the voice of a hawk circling sun-bleached hills where nothing grows:

“I Lanka was born of Agni, god of fire. I dripped from the fingertip

to bring taste to this bland earth. This is why I hold on, Lanka,

whose name the ten headed Ravenna took for his enchanted

kingdom. City of a million jewels turned at the last to ash.

Though more than once I have been tempted”(MS 39)

When the first mother asked 'Tilo' the meaning of her name 'Tilottama' she said that she knew its meaning. She explained that 'Til' means the sesame seed which ground into paste with sandalwood cures the diseases of heart and liver. She said that she would be Tiloma, the essence of 'til' life-giver, restorer of health and hope.

Tilo, the first mother explained about her name in the following way: "Takes on the name of the most beautiful apsara of rain of god Indra's court. Tilottama is most elegant of dancers, crest jewel among women, or had you not known?" (MS44)

### **CULTURE IN CHITRA'S *THE MISTRESS OF SPICES*:**

The cultures in a particular society or civilization especially considered in relation to its belief, way of life or arts. It is the practice of a particular organization or group comprising of the habits of the people in it and the way they generally behave. It consists of activities such as the art and philosophy, which are considered to be important for the development of civilization and of people's minds. Cultures includes all the elements in man's mature endowment that he has acquired from his group by conscious learning or a conditioning process of belief and patterned modes of conduct.

Indian ancient culture was based upon certain principles as love and brotherhood, benevolence and tolerance, truth, faith in religion and selfless duty as taught by Krishna in the Gita, and reverence for the old, the Guru and the parents. The eternal values of our ancient Indian culture and their place in life have been analyzed and emphasized by the Indian novelists.

The protagonist in Chitra Banerjee's novels reflects the culture of Bengal such as usage of Bengali words, dress and food items. The most outstanding feature of the art of rural Bengali consists in its being synonymous with the life of the people - their seasonal and social festivities, their work and their play. The whole of life was conceived as an art and lived as an art; worshipping the numerous deities of the Hindu pantheon, those from ancient vedic times as well as those conjured up over time by the folk imagination, is part of the daily life or rural life.

Although the rituals, prayers and offerings can vary from one deity to the next, some elements are common to all such occasions of worship. They reveal a fertile artistic imagination springing from tropical lushness of the religion. Weddings among Bengali Hindus are elaborate affairs, stretching over three days, with the preparatory rituals beginning even a week in advance. In a delta region, where river are prolific part of life, it is not surprising that Bengali consider fish a symbol of plenty and use it in their wedding rituals.

#### SUMMING UP:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the finest woman writers of twenty first generation. The use of myth and legends is the most outstanding part of the techniques of Banerjee's narration in her novels. It is through these subtle

allusions, myths, legends that the narrative of Divakaruni's fiction acquires the desired intensity.

Divakaruni expresses her own idiosyncrasy, one that is composed of myth and culture where a vision of life and love is valued. She is the creator of myths. She strives to weave her observations with the elements of myth, magic and ancient culture alongside contemporary culture. She tries to bring those things together along with a sense of ancient culture and the daily realities of life.

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