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**Myth and Magical Realism in Cheetra Banarjee Divakaruni's**  
**The Mistress of Spices**

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to all the people who assisted me

A special feeling of gratitude to my loving **parents**, whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears... may God protect them

I also dedicate this dissertation to my beloved husband **Oussama** who have supported and encouraged me...and to all his **family members**

To the light in my life ... my angels ... my sons **Wassim** and **Jad**...

To my Brothers : **Abdelmouain, Siradj Eddine, Ahmed** and my little sister  
**Aridj**

To my best friend and sister **Selma** who helped me to realise this work..

To my **grandparents** and all my **family members**

To my **teachers** whom I met during all my educational life

Thank you for being in my life...thank you for believing in me.

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**Abstract:**

This study attempts to analyze themes of myth and magical realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *the Mistress of Spices*. It elaborates on how these two are related to one another. While exploring the main themes of the novel, the study also explores the problem of immigrants and Diaspora in postcolonial literature since Diaspora is a very prominent theme in postcolonial studies and literature. The study provides a practical analysis of how setting, language and style, characters, land and home, social status and cultural traditions are presented in the novel to construct the identity of people in *the Mistress of Spices*. As cultural offshoots, the author accumulates her novel with rituals, customs and practices pertaining to food, dress, and her mother tongue. Divakaruni's award winning novel entitled *The Mistress of Spices* has been studied as an epitome of several global issues which Divakaruni attempts to remove through the depiction of her fictional character, Tilo, .the Indian spices illumined with the power of healing and the Old One who seems to be an adherent of Buddhism. Divakaruni described the lifeless spices as living beings. The Indian Spices have been metaphorically interpreted by the Indo-American Woman author Divakaruni to draw on knowledge beyond science.

**Keywords:** Myths, Magic Realism, Diaspora, Postcolonialism, Literature, Indian writing

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# General Introduction



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### General Introduction

#### Background of the Study

Lately, studies on concepts such as Myths and Magical Realism have been the privilege of educationalists, psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers. Myths as well as Magic Realism could be seen as one of the common concepts which could be studied in many fields, including Literature and Most notably, Postcolonial literature. For instance, in South Asia, the study of literature is considered to be one of the most important disciplines, and the importance of literature lies in educating people on problems that their homeland has been through for a long period of time and that have been part of their identity after independence.

Such issues of immigration, colonialism, gender, racism, slavery, segregation, post-colonial experiences, and in most of these, 'Diaspora', which is the basic element that expresses the society existence with a remarkable attention in the field of postcolonial literature and Indian literature specifically. It is in the light of what has been said earlier that the study focuses on the issues of diasporic life in one of the writings of the fabulous and creative writer, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress Of Spices*. The Indian writer Divakaruni works are considered to be greatly full with issues of immigrants and diasporic life since the Indian diaspora is unique and diverse in terms of religion, region, caste, language etc...

Divakaruni aims to improve the living conditions of the Indians in the American society through her writings in which she attempts to illustrate the immigrants situation of misery, problems, depression and also examine how her protagonist could change the conditions of the indian's lives through the use of magical spices . Divakaruni is one of the prominent Indo-Anglian novelists and her novel *The Mistress of Spices* is represented for both Indians and the other audiences. Indeed, the problem of immigrants in *The Mistress of Spices* is at first the conflict between different cultures. Her own experience in the American society

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included violence, conflicts, racist oppressions and nostalgia. Most of the characters inspired from her life to express that experience. Therefore, she used Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*. Most of her writings were taken from Indian mythology and culture, and she also proudly linked Indian diasporic life with her own life story.

### Aims of the Study

The data for this study will focus on Divakaruni's *The mistress of spices*. The selection of the topic was guided by three reasons: first, the fact that *The Mistress of Spices* deals with issues of immigrants in America, and therefore, represents Divakaruni's insights of the Indians in the American diasporic society during the 90s. The other reason is that it is a story of hope, sorrow, love and the struggle between duty and desire. Therefore, the study will focus on how did Chitra Banerjee explore issues of identity, hybridity, immigration in her work *The mistress of spices* by using Mythology and Magical Realism. The love of Indian literature as never has been before is another reason to carry the study. In studying Indo-Anglian literature, we discovered the beauty, the deepness of meanings, and the moralities embodied in the Indian novels that are sources of inspiration. In fact, a novelist as Chitra Banerjee cannot be regarded less than a source of motivation that led to treat the current topic. We want, therefore, to bring new analysis discussing two major concepts in the field of postcolonial literature in a work written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

### Statement of the Problem

Divakaruni is considered as one of the legendary postcolonial diasporic writers in addition to other Indian writers. Her works, including *The Mistress of Spices* have been given a great attention and literary gratitude for their different themes in immigration, religion, love, culture, education, racism, oppression, tradition, independence and postcolonialism. The demonstration of the impact of colonialism on India and the fighting of Indians for their existence, their tradition and their identities are crucial topics in the novel.

### Research Questions

The followings are the research questions on which the work was based:

1. How does Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni characterize the lifeless spices as living characters in her novel?
2. How does Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depict the representation of different myths, magic and history related to spices?

### Significance of the Study

The study of post-colonial literature can become a learning module at the university and vocational courses in order to improve students' knowledge and skills. This is just a small effort that aims to help learners, intellectuals and those with an interest in post-colonial literature, and issues such as magical realism, mythology and diaspora, to improve and develop understanding of writers' styles and use of language to express their thoughts and beliefs in a high level and portray.

### Methodology

In order to conduct a literary research, various approaches, methods and theories have been employed. This is a corpus-based study follows a descriptive analytical method aiming at investigating Myths and Magical realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress Of Spices*. This implies that the study focuses on a different way of collecting data which is quite different from interviews, observations, surveys and so on. As a source of collecting data for the study, we adopted some literary texts, books, articles, documents and some trusted websites. For an in-depth investigation, the data for the practical analysis were derived mainly from the primary sources: *The Mistress Of Spices* (1997) and some other textual analysis guided by the tenets of the postcolonial theory. More precisely, we relied on a close study and

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a deep analysis to examine the representation of inidan culture / society through myth and magical realism, in addition to the issues of diaspora and how they were presented in the novel.

### Structure of the Dissertation

This work is divided into three chapters: Two theoretical and one practical. The first chapter will be a general overview about the Indo-Anglian Literature in order to facilitate the comprehension of the subject. Then it discusses the historical background of this literature. Afterwards, it shifts from historical background to a literary one in order to demonstrate the major themes and the popular writers of this literature.

It also sheds light on Myth and Magical realism as the most important components in this research, and the section of Magical Realism is divided into three parts : definitions, characteristics, and then Magical realism in the Indo-Anglian literature.

The end of This Chapter tackles Postcolonial literary theory and specifically the postcolonial diasporic literature, that will be used in the analysis of the chosen novel *The Mistress Of Spices*.

In the second chapter, we will try to present the writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as well as the novel *The Mistress of Spices*. This humble chapter aims at shedding some light on the themes of the novel as they are conceived a very important section to deal with the chosen theory too. This chapter is divided into Four main sections. The first will be about the writer her personal and professional life, and her major works. Then, we will see the plot summary of the novel and the characters to better understand the story. Next, we will introduce the dominant themes in the novel. The last part is also very important it will be devoted to critics that have been said about the Novel as well as the writer.

In the third chapter, the current study will seek to analyze the use of Myths and Magical Realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress Of Spices*. This chapter is devoted to a

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practical analysis of the novel. As the postcolonial diasporic writer Divakaruni tries to depict and portray her identity, culture and belonging, she defends her national identity through her ideas by using both the language of the colonizer and her cultural heritage and mythology. We will also show how she constructs along her novel the notions of diaspora through setting, language, myths, characters, land and home, and cultural traditions, on the one hand. On the other, we will try to present how she portrays her society as hybrid. Thus, we are going to discuss how Divakaruni uses Magical realism and mythology together to prove all what have been said above.

### The Literary Review

The literature review implies the previous literary works which deal with same subject. Several critics criticized the work of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and especially the *Mistress of Spices*. As the book of A Padmaja "Migration to Heaven or Hell: An Emigrant Perspective of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni". "White Feet in Black Sandals: A Study of Magic Realism as the Narrative Mode in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*" by Batra, Jagdish, in addition to the article journal of Chakravarti, Devashri and G. A. Ghanashyam (2012): "Shifting Identities: Reinvention of the Self in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*".



# Chapter One

Myth, Magical Realism and Historical Background  
on the Indo-Anglian Literature

# Content

Introduction

1.1 Indo-Anglian Literature

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### Introduction

The first chapter gives a general overview about the Indo-Anglian Literature in order to facilitate the comprehension of the subject. Afterwards, it states the historical background of this literature. Then, it moves from historical background to a literary background in order to show the main themes and the dominant writers of this literature.

Also, it sheds light on Myth as an important element in this research, in addition to Magical realism the most important section of this research, which is divided into three parts : definitions, characteristics, and then Magical realism in the Indo-Anglian literature.

The end of This Chapter deals with Postcolonial literary theory and specifically the postcolonial diasporic literature.

### 1-1- Indo-Anglian Literature

As early as 300 B.C., India had already produced a considerable body of literature written in several Indian tongues derived from a common ancestral language-*Sanskrit*. India was the center of an ancient civilization which spread east and south. This civilization affected the language, culture and literature in both Europe and Asia. India also founded colonies in ancient Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as in Spain, England, and France. As a Result, its the earliest known literature of India is a collection of tradition handed down by word of mouth (story-telling and oral tradition). These traditions are known as the Vedas, which contain hymns addressed to the Indian gods, who are very numerous. They also contain stories about these gods. The literature of India is often called *Sanskrit-literature*, and this word *Sanskrit* means cultivated,thus so much Indian literature is re-working of the *Sanskrit* epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the mythological writings known as *Puranas*. Hindu literature reveals the inner and outer life of a remarkable people; it extends from a remote past to the present. (Carpio)

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The mid nineteenth century is considered to be the time of the Indian renaissance for it was a periode of great literary and social revolutions. At that time legendary thinkers like Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Kesub Chunder Sen, and Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj have contributed for social reform, educational reform and religious reform which has given scope for renaissance in India, and this marked the beginning of the indo-anglian literature. (RAJKUMAR)

Indo-Anglian literature contributed to the common pool of world writing in English, which is different from the Anglo-Indian Literature. For The first one refers to the writings and creations of the Indians through the English Language; while the latter is all what is written by the English writers on themes, topics and subjects related to India. The Indo-Anglian literature, hence, is more associated with Indian English, The developement of a distinct standard the body of which is correct English usage, but Indian soul , thought, colour and imagery, in the present and in the future, even in the evolution of an idiom, which is expressive of English usage. It is also related to the works of members of the Indian Diaspora. It is extremely referred to as IndoAnglian literature. It comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature-the production from the colonized countries such as India. Indo anglian literature is dated back to one and a half century.

In its early periods, the narration was influenced by the Western genre "The novel"and early Indian writers made a full utilization of pure English by Indian words to impart a trial and understanding which was fundamentally and in a common sense, Indian. Its beginning had gotten their motivations from three sources -the British government's education reforms, the endeavor of missionaries and, the response and acceptance of English language and

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literature by upper—class Indians.

The early pioneering works of Indo-Anglian fiction were socials, historical, detective and romantic. They lacked depth and style and technique to leave any permanent imprint. Indo-Anglian fiction was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Mulk Raj Anand brought to Indian the new technique of the stream-of-consciousness. Raja Rammohan Rao who was known as the “father of the Indian Renaissance” adopted the autobiographical form of narration. But the credit of bringing a name and reputation to Indo-Anglian fiction goes to a few contemporary writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Nirad Chaudhuri. They are the four wheels of contemporary Indo-Anglian fiction. Other luminaries who have enriched the Indo-Anglian fiction are Khwaja Ahmed, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Mrs. R. Praver Jahabavala, Lumber Mascarenhas, Mrs. Vila Raina, Khushwant Singh and others.  
(RAJKUMAR)

For the most part, The Indo-Anglian poets and fiction writers were with an eye and hope on the western readers, which influenced their choice of themes and subject matters. The women writers, for instance, especially Kamala Markandaya, Santha Rama Rao and Anita Desai have a flair for the urban scene. Bhabhani Bhattacharya and Khushwant Singh, in very different ways, give us valuable insights into the pathos of economic impoverishment, misdistribution of wealth and human degradation caused by political upheavals.

### 1-2- Themes of the Indo-Anglian Literature

As a nation, India has the unique distinction of embracing international influences, not only integrating them into their daily lives, but also developing them and making them theirs. The best example that shows this phenomenon is their adoption of English, a foreign language and making it theirs. Indian English Literature has evolved in leaps and bounds. The Indian English Writers have written on a variety of issues that can cater to the endless areas of interest of the reading public. In the global literary scenario, Indian English novels have

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shown the way in which the writers have captured the reader's interest and imagination through poignant portrayals of different themes. This includes East - West conflict, multiculturalism, social realism, gender issues, comic aspect of human nature, ecological concerns, magic realism, and diasporic writings. The following are some of the prevailing themes that captured the readers' imagination and managed to create an enduring niche for themselves : Historical, Political and Nationalist themes, Social realism, Indian diaspora and Immigration, Individual Experiences, Feminism and Women's Empowerment and Modern themes. The new English texts demonstrate confidence in treating new topics, themes and experiments with new methods and strategies for dealing with these themes.

Today's Indian English writers are rapidly expanding the literary horizons of India in novels and short stories, and have accomplished producing a phenomenal amount of work, with a wide variety of themes. They reflect Indian culture, tradition, social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life in India and Indians living elsewhere. Some of the most dominant themes in the Indo-anglian literature are as follow :

### **1-2-1 Historical, Political and Nationalist Themes :**

It's been almost 200 years since Raja Ram Mohan Roy's 'Sati' was published in 1818. During this tumultuous period, they have witnessed the laborious and problematic transition from colonial oppression and slavery to political independence. English literature has been a means for Indians to give form and expression to hopes and despair, to enthusiasm and apathy, to the excitement of joy and to the throes of pain, in the history of the nation as it moved from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence, and from independence to the ardent tasks of reconstruction. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, R.K.Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy*, K.A.Abbas's *Inquilaab*, etc are a few examples of Indian writings in English revolving

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around the theme of the independence struggle and the aftermath of the freedom movement in post-independent India.

### 1-2-2 Social Realism :

One of the main themes in Indian writings during that period in English was to represent social problems for the purpose of social reform. Many of the prominent works that played a significant role in the social reform were, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*; R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friend*, *The Dark Room*; Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cow of the Barricades*; G. V. Desai's *All About Hatter*; Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* and Kamla Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Silence of Desire* and *Possession*.

These works depicted the Indian society, especially the common man rather than the elite and the sophisticated, preferring the familiar to the fancied, explored by lanes of the outcasts and peasants and the working people. The writings of this period extensively deal with several aspects of social reform such as exploitation of the untouchables, the landless peasants, tea garden workers and the problems of industrial labour. (Banerjee 3)

### I-2-3 Indian Diaspora and Immigration :

Another important aspect of social themes of this period of time is about immigrants who left their countries to reach the new horizons. Most writers and scholars wrote to explain their problems and experiences in English. The main theme of their works is the dilemma of Indian immigrants torn between the two worlds. They elicit ideas of homeland, their personal feelings towards rootlessness, their problems of adjustments, suppression, frustration, anger, identity crisis, resistance, humiliation and moral dilemmas. Bharti Mukherjee's *The Tiger's*

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*Daughter, Wife, Desirable Daughters, The Tree Bride, Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies, The Name sake* and *Unaccustomed Earth* all belong to this category. This band of Indian English writers reveals that the immigrants who seek to settle in the alien country have had an inner turmoil. Banerjee remarks that:

Contemporary writing from South Asian Diaspora bears the marks of a cultural encounter that combines the rewriting of history with nuanced responses to dislocation and marginalization by hegemonic structures. The raw energy of first generation politics is substituted by a more complex response to issues of race and unbelonging. The new writers retort to their attempted marginalization, not by dissolving into mainstream but by rendering their distinctive voices.

The Indian writers who wrote in English about their first-hand experience in foreign lands, delved upon the theme of East- West encounter and highlighted the interaction between the Oriental and Occidental people and cultures and is best portayed in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man, Some Inner Fury*. (Banerjee)

### 1-2-4 Individual Issues :

Some of the Indian English writers built their niches extensively and intensively by dealing with individual issues and problems such as : The quest for identity, alienation, rootlessness, meaninglessness and human predicament. From these writers there is Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *Apprentice*, Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* and *Fire on the Mountain*, Shastri Brata's *Confessions of an Indian Woman, Easter* and *She and He*, Saros Cowsjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* and Shiv K Kumar's *The Bone's Prayer*. Therefore the second generation of Indian English writers projected the themes of, social reform, the Indian Diaspora, the east-west encounter, degeneration of Values, existential issues.

### 1-2-5 Feminism and Women's Empowerment :

A significant development in modern Indian English literature is the growth of a feminist or woman-centered approach, which tries from a feminine consciousness and sensibility to project and interpret experience. The portrayal of the predicament of middle class educated Indian women, their quest for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and sex, and their exploitation are the distinctive feature of modern Indian writings. Such writings reflect the struggle of contemporary modern women to identify and maintain self-confidence. English writers have played an important role in making this theme famous. In post-independent India, the social and cultural shift has made women realize that it is important to define themselves and their role in society and the environment. Within these works, the female characters are very hard to avoid sticky, conventional constraints. For many Indian English authors, women's search for identity was a pet topic. In developing countries like India the feminist thought and political movements in the West had an influence on the movement of women. Some of the popular writers in the Indian English literature who changed the definition of feminism are : Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kamala Das, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Nayantara Sahgal and ManjuKapur, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. (Narayan)

### 1-2-6 Modern Themes :

The most useful themes of the modern Indian English writers include: Industrialisation, urbanization, globalization, modernization and feminism and women's empowerment and the changing social dynamics. For instance : Salman Rushdie's *The Midnight Children*, ShashiTharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, AmitavGhosh's *The Circle of Reason*, TabishKher's *An Angel in Pyjamas*, Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth*, AravindAdiga's *The White Tiger*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*.The last

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generation writers have concentrated their themes around sociological, diasporic elements, feminine subjects, science and technologies, explorative writings and much more.

### 1-3- Myth in the Indo-Anglian Literature

Joseph Strelka from the New York State University, Albany, in his paper *Mythe/Myth* says ;

Many literary works serve as excellent examples of the revitalization of myth. No less worthy of note, it is often myth that gives power and vitality to some of the greatest works of literature.”(Strelka, *Mythe/Myth*)

A lot of successful writers of The postcolonial Indian English fiction and prose used the Indian mythology and legends in their works for instance, Raja Rao in *The Serpent and the Rope*, is an example of the writers who have brought out the emotional, metaphorical, historical and symbolical appeal of myth. In fact, the resurgence of Indian mythology in popular literature and prose of recent times is very clear and observable. Indian English prose and fiction became popular in today's India. Many Indian writers and diasporic ones of Indian origin have written prose and fiction that has created a sense of interest and been exceptionally popular with the Indian readers of nowadays, especially young adults. In such literature, a completely new genre of writings about Indian mythology and legends has set the book market on fire, such as Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, and Devdutt Pattanaik etc who have gained a lot of fame because of their books and works involving Indian myth. Indian mythology is one of the enriching elements of Indian culture and that made it unique in the world.

Myth plays a fundamental role in the society, which often consists of narratives of gods. Myth is a folklore genre, a traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. The study of myth is Mythology. The roots of mythology gave a new scope for literature all over the world. Mythological literature derives from literary works like epic, lyric poetry, drama, history and



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other narratives. The most direct and a simple way to approach mythology is through its subject. In a broader sense we can define myth to be traditional stories of gods, kings, and creation of the world, true essence of human life and much more. Mythology depicts the relationship of god and human and provides a moral code by which we live. Myth are the popular tales which embody a collective knowledge and are passed on for generations as grandmother tales. While some may have originated with shamans, priests, or poets, myth belong to a primitive or pre-scientific people as their cultural heritage. (Rathi)

As much as The Indian Mythology is vast, it influenced many people in the whole world. This is probably because mythology and the Indian religion are like two sides of a coin which cannot be separated.

By the 19th century, a lot of German and American Romantic writers showed a great interest in Indian poetry, and literature. Furthermore, by the 20th century, some Westerns were interested in Indian thoughts and literature such as, T. S. Eliot who studied Sanskrit at Harvard, and dedicated a whole part of his epic poem *The Waste Land* highlighting Indian aspects and philosophy.

Buddhism brought Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder to India. Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz developed a strong, lasting interest in Indian poetry after living in the country as part of the Mexican diplomatic mission (and as ambassador in the 1960s). He translated Sanskrit kavyas, and wrote extensively about India. The Australian poet Colin Dean as listed in the Australian Literature Resource database shows interested in Indian thought and literature and as such has written many poems on Indian themes: Indian mythology; classical Sanskrit plays; Indian philosophy; Indian folktales and translated Sanskrit poetry. (Iyengar)

The Indian mythology influenced many western thinkers too and reflected in their works. Since a long time ago, mythology in Indian writings has been the most influencing element which kept the readers for generations under its impact, as it may be the most appreciated and used genre in the Indian writing.

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Mythology in Indian literature is all-encompassing and all-inclusive subject with conventional and standard point of view which influenced Indian writers, starting from the Vedic Age. As such, Mythological themes and topics in Indian literature are another common aspect, overseeing one's daily life and passion for reading, in particular *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics that have derived a lot of mythological themes.

Since the Vedic period, Sanskrit literature has poured out mythological characters through many writers such as Kalidasa, bhasa, etc. The Vedic Puranas or the Upanishads supported Indian literature by depicting mythological themes in every single line and rhythm. The Puran with its almost epic-like plot and the depiction of the different strata of society that exist, as well as the side-by-side dwelling of humans, gods and demons, always make the present age wonder about the prowess of people during this supposed imaginary period. Many famous works represent the predominance of the Hindu mythology over Indian literature. Less known mythological stories have been re-enacted in innovative ways to reach the reader. From a modern point of view, the writers discussed the unexplored meanings from episodes of epics and myth. The myth and conventional narrative forms and styles played a significant role in reviving culture and serving as a unifying force in society.

Indian writers like Bankim Chandra, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand R K Narayan concentrated on Hindu mythology allusions as a literary instrument for voicing people's social, political, medical, and contemporary conflicts and dilemmas. Every Indian writing genre in English has its own representation of the Indian myth. Poets such as Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Kamala Das and author such as Ambedkar, Narayan and Girish Karnard have symbolized Hindu mythology in an ingenious way through their writings.

Mythological themes in Indian literature are well manifested in Vedic literature. All the Hindu Gods, like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Agni, Vayu, Surya, Varuna or Indrahad

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actually come into existence from the Vedic Period. The four Vedas themselves: RigVeda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda, are also known to contain umpteen tales of heroism, bravery, bloodshed, invasions and valorous deeds, that surely only are possible in mythical books, lending additional finery to mythological themes in Indian literature. Contemporary modern Indian literature uses the mythological themes in an extensive sense. This particular genre kept the generations mesmerized with its gigantic source of tales and values; and constantly inspiring them to write mythology as a context. Modern authors like Arundathi Roy, Sashi Tharoor, Amitav Gosh, Salman Rushdie, etc have come out with totally different view of mythology. (Iyengar)

### 1-3- Magical Realism in the Indo-Anglian Literature

The term "magic realism" has been used somewhat arbitrarily in the literary world since its introduction into the world of surreal art and subsequent use by the Latin American author Jorge Luis Borges. This is derived from a mixture of terms and is generally applied to mystical or imaginary literature that comes from Latin America's embattled nations. College professors use the term to describe literary works, critics apply it to many works and young fiction writers often classify their own works under the umbrella of "magic realism," but what is magic realism? Is it a genre? A style?

The term Magic Realism was originated by Franz Roh, a painter and an art critic in Germany during 1920s. Later this term was used by Central American writers such as Alejo, Carpentier in their works during 1940s and after that in 1955 the term was employed by Latin American writers Angel Flores and Gabriel Garcia Marquez and eventually gained worldwide attention. Although the expression later took root in Europe it revolutionized Latin America. Therefore, all times are interlinked with the style of literary art. ( A Study in Comparison and

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Contrast of the Protagonists in Vikram Chandra's Red Earth in Pouring Rain and Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Ritu Sharma)

### 1-3-1 Definitions of Magical Realism

Magic realism is an esthetic style or genre of literature, which combines magic elements in a realistic setting to obtain a deeper knowledge of reality. These magical elements are explained as normal occurrences which are presented in a straight forward way that allows acceptance of the 'real' and the 'fantastic' in the same stream of thought. It would be beneficial to examine a few definitions of Magic Realism in order to understand the present concept precisely. Mathew Strecher has defined magic realism as: "*What happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something "too strange to believe"*". (Strecher)

Erwin Dale Carter gives a very simple and comprehensive definition of magic realism in the following words :

First it is the combination of reality and fantasy and second, it is the transformation of the real into the awesome and unreal, thirdly an art of surprises, one which creates a distorted concept of time and space, fourth a literature directed to an intellectual minority; characterized by a cold cerebral aloofness it does not cater to popular tastes, but rather to that of those sophisticated individuals instructed in aesthetic subtleties. (Flores)

While the American Heritage Dictionary has clarified, "*magic realism is a chiefly style of genre originating in Latin America that combines the fantastic or dreamlike elements with reality*", The Oxford Companion has defined it elaborately in the following words;

Magic Realist novels and stories have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unaccepted and the inexplicable, and in

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which elements of dream, fairy-story, or mythology combined with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrences.

Angel Flores also shares a concept similar to that aesthetic literary genre;

In magical realism we find the transformation of the common and the everyday in to the awesome and the unreal. It is predominantly an art of surprises. Time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality. Once the reader accepts the *fait accompli*, the rest follows with logical precision (Flores)

Magic Realism in fact is a literary movement that is associated with a writing style or technique that integrates mystical or supernatural phenomena into realistic storytelling without challenging the impossibility of events. This fusion of fact and fantasy is supposed to question the nature of reality and to draw attention to the act of creation.

The most remarkable quality of a magic realistic text is its ability to create a literary atmosphere which must be filled of : the local folklore, cultural beliefs, geography, history and political events. Therefore, the setting of the text look quite real, but the events that take place seem to be impossible or simply unimaginable. Slaves are helped by the dead, Human beings change into animals, and time reverses and moves backward, While other events are occurring continuously. Therefore, a magic realistic work provides the readers with a view of the world where nothing is taken for granted.

Magic Realism also incorporates outer and internal elements of human life, mixing empirical and emotional physical reality. It includes aspects of human existence, such as thoughts, emotions, dreams and imaginations. This amalgamation allows a more accurate portrayal of human nature through magical realism.

### 1-3-2 Characteristics of Magic Realism:

There are certain particular features of magic realist works provided below. These features may differ in the works of various writers. One may not find all of them in one text, but some of them can be easily traced. In addition, the features mentioned can be helpful in evaluating literary works as magic realist. These features are as below;

**1- Hybridity :** Hybridity is one of the most common characteristics of magical realism. The main use of this technique is to help the writer set the stage for a continuous blurring of time limits. It also helps the writer insert a narrative voice into the text. Its primary function is to use multiple levels of reality that take place in dissonant arenas of opposites such as urban and rural, western and indigenous. The plots of magical realistic works include issues of borders, mixing and change. Such plots are designed to reveal a crucial aim of magical realism: a deeper and truer reality than conventional realistic techniques would illustrate.

**2- Fantastical Elements:** Magic realism is regarded as a modern fictional style that contains fantastic narrative elements. Although fantastic, it maintains the consistent tone of objective, realistic reporting. It directly shows the modern novel's tendency, "To move beyond realism's boundaries". Technics and strategies like fable, folk-tale, and myth are used to preserve contemporary social significance. The fantastic characteristics such as – levitation, flight, telepathy and telekinesis; given to characters are among the means that magic realism adopts.

**3- Metafiction :** This feature involves the reader's role in literature. In addition to its multiple realities and its special relation to the imagination of the reader, it explores the effect of fiction on fact, fact on fiction and reader's role in between; as such, it is quite important to draw attention to social and political criticism.

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**4-Authorial Reticence:** It refers to the lack of clear opinions about the efficiency of events and the credibility of the world views expressed by the characters in the text. In the words of Chandy: *Authorial reticence is the deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world.* (Chandy). No clarification on the accuracy or reliability of the events or views presented in the text shall be given by the narrator. In fact, the narrator remains dismissive, a characteristic enhanced by his lack of fantastic explanations; the story proceeds with 'logical precision' as if nothing unexpected happened. This technique promotes acceptance in magic realism. In magic realism, the simple act of explaining the supernatural would eliminate its position of equality regarding a reader's conventional view of reality because it would then be less valid, and the supernatural world would be discarded as false testimony.

**5- Sense of Mystery:** One of the strongest characteristics of magic realism. Almost every critic admits that a magical realistic text does not fit the traditional narrative form, plot advancement and linear time structure. Instead, it moves forward and backward in time along with the narration that is full of diversions. The narrator moves straight on to another event before finishing the first event and leave the readers in the mystery about the earlier events. This is the sense of the mystery that a reader feels throughout the text.

**6- Political Critique:** Generally, texts in magic realism have a specific historical, political and cultural setting. Magic realism includes implicit criticism of society and, in particular, of the elite. This is a mode primarily about and for – 'eccentrics': the geographically, socially and economically marginalized. Thus, magic realist writings work to correct the reality of established viewpoints (like realism, naturalism, modernism). Magic realist writings, under this logic, are subversive text, revolutionary against socially dominant forces.

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**7- The Supernatural and Natural:** In Magic Realism, the super- natural is not presented as questionable. While the reader recognizes that rational and irrational polarities are opposite and conflicting, they are not confused because the surnatural is incorporated into narrator's perceptual norms and characters in the fictional universe.

**8- Role of Inexplicable:** The most noticeable feature of magical realism is the inexplicable: coincidences, serendipity, consequentialism and poetic justice or divine justice; supernatural or wondrous powers, abilities, beings or events; prophecies, omens and premonitions. The character's reactions to the inexplicable are key to the definition of magic realism: inexplicable phenomena occur in extremely mundane circumstances and the characters tend not to respond adequately or at all to the supernatural or magical nature of the event. On the contrary, they often treat the magical event as an annoyance, a setback, or an unwanted obligation. Indeed, this type of response to the supernatural distinguishes Magic Realism from other more traditional representations of magical phenomena in narrative fiction. It is also what gives Magic Realism a characteristically ironic and humorous quality. (Flores)

### **I-3-3 Magical Realism in Indo-anglian literature :**

In Indo-anglian literature Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Kiran Desai popularized the expression « Magical realism » through their fiction. Indian culture is rich of various languages, where more than a hundred languages are being used as a means of communication within the country. The dominance of English language in Indian writing is a result of the British presence in India. The hegemonic governance of British company over India for almost two-hundred years brought English language as most dominating language amongst all the vernacular languages.

The past few years have brought attention to the global landscape for India and Indian Novelists. Salman Rushdie is a pioneer in resetting the domain of themes, techniques and



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trends of Indian writing in English. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*(1981) has become an epitome for the successor writers. The oldest art of story-telling was surprisingly carried as best storytelling device in the novel. This novel featured different themes in it such as – religion, myth, political issue and most specifically magical realism (allegorical, symbolic and ironic as well); combination of perfect language that is vivid and alive and the text is treated as classical text (in its adequacy, strength). It holds the level of seriousness that can compel intellectuals' attention and also maintain interest. This novel is an example of a combo of entertainment, carrying all the basic elements within it. This novel is a recorder of human beauty, strength and universality-eternal.

Rushdie has been writing in the area of Magical Realism the term associated with Gabriel Garcia Marquez. During the ten years in India i.e. from 1980s to 1990s and in fact past two decades those writers who were residing in India as well as the Diaspora Indian writers started exploring their creative writings by giving different treatment in the sector of past history, contemporary life, raising issues with the problems of ethics and politics using appropriate language form and techniques. With regard to language, the majority of contemporary writers in countries such as America or England are either immigrants or born and raised. But language does not stand in the way of their imagination. English is a valuable weapon for contemporary writers; they can be competent in their mother tongue also. This combination is beneficiary for Indian writers writing in English to make acquaintance worldwide about the variety which Indian culture possesses and also some of the Indian slang. After Rushdie a lot of contemporary novelists have employed their writing with the term. The contemporary writers are qualified in narrative techniques provided through Magical realism. As Iyenger says that *the Indo-Anglian novel which in many ways merges with the totality— is rich enough variegated enough phenomenon*. Moreover there were several changes vibrating on social and political ground at International level, which influenced Indian (residential and

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non-residential) creative thinkers as well. Theo L. D'Haen in his essay on Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers talks about the impact of Postmodernism in the art of writing. This era received recognition during the 1980s. Through the use of the term on national and international level, the following contemporary Indian authors have gained remarkable achievement. Nina Sibal's debut novel *Yatra* (1987) replicates the character of *Midnight's children*. Saleem Sinai's body begins to crack as India shows signs of breaking up with a mysterious telepathy. Similarly, Krishna Chahal the protagonist born with fair complexion endowed with magical skin grows darker and darker. Both the characters have some events and similar features.

Shashi Tharoor has contributed in the treasure of Indian writing in English. One of his novels *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) is reset from *Mahabharata* (Indian epic). The title is complex and therefore it is difficult to define; The novel recreates certain characters that reflect Indian history – Ganga Dutta (fictional representative of Mahatma Gandhi) refigures Bhishma of the great epic *Mahabharata*. Another character of *Mahabharta*, Karan who represents Muhammad Ali in the novel is parallel to Jinnah of modern political history. This work is an allegorical satire to the recent political scenario which has passed. Tharoor's fiction is rich in expressing itself through language; throughout his works he has made an attempt to mock satirically at the evils of 'high society' hypocrisy and gender stereotype. He has enriched his work with the skills of language. Show business, based on the interplay between fiction and reality, includes satirical theme on Bollywood. Short stories *The Five-Dollar Smile: Fourteen Early Stories* and a *Farce in two Acts* (1993) deal with the issue of identity. He explores history, myth and politics through his novels and also creates pun (figure of speech). Arundhati Roy is the first productive Indian woman writer to win prestigious Booker Prize. She sets best example to represent contemporary Indian writing in English. She made everyone to pay attention to her blasting entry with *God of Small Things* (1997) that provoked

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many criticisms. The tragic love story is narrated through twin children taking up the issues of caste, religion and Indian politics. Kiran Desai born in 1971 in New Delhi; marked her presence with her debut *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* she depicts character named Sampath Chawla whose life swings between the harsh reality and world of magical realism. Her writing deals with the effects of colonization and also refers to culture and society. She portrays dream and aspirations of an Indian middle class family. Kiran Desai has attempted certain daring successful experiments with Diaspora writing. She has acclaimed fame worldwide. Her novels deal on the impact of post-colonialism. Her realistic portrayal of human life makes a deeper understanding of human behavior. (Naik)

### **I-4 Theoretical Background:**

#### **I-4-1 Definitions of Postcolonialism :**

The term post-colonial and post-colonialism appeared first by the mid-1980s in scholarly journals in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2002). By the mid-1990s, both terms were familiar in a wider range in academic and non-academic discourses. However, the term post-colonial seemed to have traces back to the late of 1970s in some texts such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* which led to the development of colonialist discourse theory in the work of critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, the term was not really used by them. Spivak, for instance, first used the term 'post-colonial' in the collection of interviews and recollections published in 1990 called *The Post-Colonial Critic*. (Ashcroft)

The prefix 'post' in the term post-colonialism means 'after' carrying a chronological meaning indicating, on the one hand, the time of succession that comes after colonization,

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post-independence. On the other hand, 'post-colonial' may refer to the state of a land that is no longer colonized and has regained its political independence. The latter concept post-colonialism seems to be about investigating the processes and effects of European colonialism from the sixteenth until the present day and their reactions to them. Thus, even with the debates around the use of the problematic prefix ' post', or the equally problematic hyphen, it remains necessary to consider the impact of the colonial encounters on the political, cultural, economic and social status of the former colonies in the meanwhile.

Geographically, “postcolonial” is a global term. It refers to nations of the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa, the South Pacific islands, and Malaysia, and It applies equally to India, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the Philippines. The colonizing powers that these countries have undergone and have continued to fight for their independence, are Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, and the United States.

On the whole, post-colonialism or post-colonialism is a cycle of continuous resistance and rebuilding that discusses post-independence colonizing effects on cultures and communities. It focuses on the challenges and implications that former colonies struggled with, faced and perhaps still facing till present. In literature, it is an academic discipline or study that aims at analyzing and explaining the impacts of colonialism and imperialism. It comprises the study of theory and literature as it relates to the colonizer-colonized experiences in different fields. One of the leading theorists in this field is Edward Said, with Chinua Achebe being one of its leading authors.

### **I-4-2 Postcolonial Literature**

The postcolonial literature has developed in the colonized societies. Suppression, resistance, race, identity, migration and gender were and are still starting points, themes, and reasons that led to the appearance of postcolonial literature in addition to many others. It's also, a reaction to the imperial European discourse of history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics, and its representational experiences of writing and speaking. The theories and critical approaches began to emerge after independence, and the fact that most of these elites were well educated and capable of challenging European writings that spread their voices aloud paved the way to post-colonial literature to prosper. Post-colonial literature consequently existed as a reactive item, taking its energy from the radical colonial literature to reveal the injustices experienced by post-colonial societies.

### **I-4-3 Postcolonial Diaspora literature**

Etymologically the term 'Diaspora' is derived from the Greek term "diasperien", from "dia-across" and "sperien-to sow or scatter seeds" It is based on Hebrew word of diaspora - 'galut', meaning 'exile' (that is from the Holy Land). (Britanica the new encyclopedia)

The term 'diaspora' refers to any ethnic population that is forced, induced or forced to abandon its traditional ethnic background; had been spread across other areas of the world; and the resulting developments in its dispersal and culture. 'Diaspora' was previously derived from the present meaning. This refers to a range of ethnic groups and categories of individuals like – politicians, war refugees, migrants, ethnic and racial groups, immigrants, expatriated individuals and transnational communities.. According to Steven Vertovec (1999) "Diaspora" is the term often used today to describe practically any population which is considered 'deterritorialized' or 'transnational' - that is, which has originated in a land other than which it

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currently resides, and whose social, economic, and political networks cross the borders of the nation-states or, indeed span the globe. (Vretovec)

In brief, the term 'diaspora' represents the individuals and the communities that are detached from their native lands through migration, immigration, or exile as a result of colonial expansion / imperialism / trade / business / better opportunities / hunger for better prospects / and Globalization.

Some Scholars like William Safran, and Robin Cohen, have listed the defining characteristics of the diaspora. William Safran in his "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return" defines 'Diaspora' as expatriate community that shares several qualities. The chief among them are :

- 1) Their own or their ancestors' dispersion from a specific homeland to another country or place.
- 2) Retention of a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland.
- 3) Experience of a feeling of alienation and antagonism from the host society, and the feeling that they can never fit in.
- 4) Regarding the ancestral homeland as their true home and their sojourn as temporary, with the hope that they or their descendants would some day return.
- 5) Treasuring the collective past;
- 6) Commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland. (Safran)

Robin Cohen's defining common characteristics of diaspora are as follows :

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- 1) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
- 2) The expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
- 3) A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
- 4) An idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity;
- 5) The frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
- 6) A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
- 7) A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
- 8) A sense of empathy and co- responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
- 9) A possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Global Diaspora 17).

### **Conclusion**

Indo-Anglian literature is well-known all over the world now. It is discussed by many Writers in different literary books. These literary writings helped in showing the most useful themes, techniques, strategies and genres, for improving their existence they created many figures as; Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Dessai, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Chitra Banerjee Divacaruni, and others. As it's mentioned in this chapter, Myth and Magical realism were both a distinctive tools or strategies that differentiate Indo-anglian literature.

For it the next chapters will discuss one of the famous novels of Indo-Anglian literature, and highlight the myth and magical realism features in it.



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# Chapter Two

## Critical Overview

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### Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American novelist who collects a wide audience from all sides of the world. This popularity was gathered by the production of her first novel *The Mistress of Spices* and also *The sister of my heart* and Lately *The Palace of Illusion*. Thus, she is considered as one of the famous Indian diasporic writers.

The novel is the most important and popular literary medium in the modern times. It is the only literary form which can compete for popularity with the film and the radio, as in *The Mistress of Spices* which was released as a film under the same name in 2005. The novel examines several themes. It addresses issues of Culture, Identity, the immigrant and diasporic experience and is an evocative account of the protagonist Tilo's journey from awareness to self-discovery. Tilo takes the spice route to self-discovery; the spices speak and lead her throughout the narrative.

### 2-1 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Biography

#### 2-1-1 Chitra Banerjee's Life

The Indian-American novelist and poet Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in 1956 in Calcutta, India. Her father Rajendra Kumar Banerjee was an accountant and her mother Tatini Banerjee was a school teacher. Divakaruni's childhood name was Chitra Lekha Banerjee. She had three brothers namely- Partha, Dhurva, and Surya. Chitra being the only daughter was over-protected and prevented from pursuing any self-seeking pursuits. Her late grandfather made a profound impression upon her life. He loved Chitra so much and told her many stories especially from Indian epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

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The memories of the old rustic village of her grandparents without light and natural beauty, reflects Chitra's works in pictorial surroundings. Her mythical narratives are imprinted with the eternally well-known Indian Epic stories.

Divakaruni learned the art of storytelling from her grandfather. In her series of books, she launched that art as the mistress of magical realism. She studied in a convent school- 'Loreto House' run by Irish nuns, till 1971. She was totally inspired by Mother Teresa and her works for the poor, ill, orphan and deprived. She graduated from Kolkatta University in English Literature in 1976. She was from a Bengali middle-class background. Her understanding of Indian culture and traditions developed her traits suitable to traditional Indian families.

She decided to go to The United States for further studies after completing her graduation. Her traditional Bengali family initially refused to fulfill Chitra's desire, but realizing that since childhood Chitra was very smart in her studies, they allowed her to go to the U.S. but only with her elder brother, who used to live in Ohio. She moved to the United States in 1976 when she was only 19 years old. She pursued her master's degree in English Literature from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio in 1978.

She had to make money for the expenses of her studies. She worked on the instrument washing in a research laboratory, then in a bakery shop, after that she worked as a seller of merchandise. She even tried her hand at babysitting. Furthermore, in order to continue her Ph.D. studies at University of California at Berkeley, she lived in the international house of Berkeley and worked in its dining hall for cleaning dishes. Chitra had been married to S. Murthy Divakaruni from Andhra Pradesh, India, since 1979. She lived in Sunnyvale, California, with her family for a long time, including her husband, and two sons, Anand and Abhay. Divakaruni completed her doctorate at the University of California in 1985. She felt

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deeply rootless, nostalgic and deprived as an immigrant in the United States. The quest for her own identity was born and the creation of her personality took place continuously, the cultural differences were gradually recognized to her. The United States as her host country inspired her to evaluate what was good to adopt and what was not. She shared these experiences with the voice of immigrant women in the context of cultural conflicts. (Agarwal), Divakaruni said in an interview that:

*"—Immigration in my case makes me into a writer. It gives me a subject to write about. It gives me a whole different focus for looking back at my home culture, but also for looking at this new world in which I find myself, everything is so different!"* (Basu)

Chitra took writing more seriously; she joined a creative writing program and accompanied a Berkeley literary group. Since her childhood Divakaruni writes for her own pleasure and solace, and as an immigrant, she also wrote protesting American behavior towards immigrants. Her nostalgia for India is well projected in creative writings. The first volume of poetry *Dark like the River* was published in 1987, with the help of a group of writers that she joined in Berkeley, she even taught creative writing and English Literature at Diablo Valley College. After that, she published *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990) another anthology of her poems. After the publication of her second anthology, she became a professor in Foothill College, Los Altos, California. Her passion of writing started as a poet, but later she wrote essays and novels.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was also inspired by many novelists of different communities as Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, and many Indian-American writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee etc. She was influenced by their

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themes of immigration, changing the role of women, myth, identity crisis, lives of second-generation immigrants etc. (Chakravarti)

### 2-1-1 Chitra Banerjee's Major works

#### A) Fiction and poetry

Divakaruni's works have been published in more than 50 magazines and her writings have been included in more than 50 anthologies, such as the *Best American Short stories*, *the O*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Henry Tales Prize Stories* and *The Pushcart Award anthology*. Her works have been translated also into 29 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew, Indonesian, Bengali, Turkish and Japanese.

#### Fiction :

- *Arranged Marriage: Stories* (1995)
- *The Mistress of Spices* (1997)
- *Sister of My Heart* (1999)
- *The Vine of Desire* (2002)
- *Queen of Dreams* (2004)
- *The Lives of Strangers* (2007)
- *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel* (2008)
- *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019)

#### Poetry :

- *Mr. aryan yadav*, 1987

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- *The Reason for Nasturtiums*, Berkeley (Berkeley Poets Workshop) 1990. *Black Candle. Poems About Women from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, Corvallis (Calyx Books) 1991
- *Leaving Yuba City*, St. Louis (Turtleback Books) 1997. (Patel)

### B) Film, Television, Theater and Opera

"As films adaptations reveal the success of any literary work and its universality" (Hanafi), we will discuss Chitra's novel *The Mistress of Spices* as a film that was released in 2005. It was directed by Paul Mayeda Berges, with a script by Berges and his wife, Gurinder Chadha. The film's Protagonists are Aishwarya Rai and Dylan McDermott.

In addition, her novel *Sister of my Heart* which is made into a television series by Suhasini Maniratnam in Tamil and aired in India, as *Anbulla Snegithiye (Loving Friend)*.

In 2018, the producers NR Pachisia und Dipankar Jojo Chaki secured the rights to a film adaption of *The Palace of Illusions*.

Her story *Clothes* from the collection *Arranged Marriage* was adapted into play under the title *Arranged Marriage* by Peggy Shannon "at the Sacramento Theatre Company in 2004.

In 2013 Divakaruni wrote the libretto to a chamber opera for Houston Grand Opera, *River of Light*, about the life of an indian woman in Houston. It premiered in 2014 with original compositions by Jack Perla and was shown again in 2015 by the opera company Festival Opera, directed by Tanya Kane-Parry at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center.

*The Palace of Illusions* was adapted into a play named *Fire and Ice: Draupadi's Story* by Joe Disabatino and performed in India under his direction. A Bollywood movie with the title

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*Mahabharat*, starring Deepika Padukone as Draupadi, is currently prepared in India based on *The Palace of Illusions*. The premiere is scheduled for 2021. (Aishwarya)

### C) Anthologies

- *Multitude: Cross Cultural Readings for Writers* (1993)
- *We Too Sing America* (1997)
- *California Uncovered: Stories for the 21st Century* (2004) (Patel)

### 2-2 Plot Summary

The novel has fifteen chapters. The first chapter is called “Tilo.” In fact, Tilo is a major character in the narrative. The chapter begins with the title “I am a Mistress of Spices.

TILO, the protagonist, was born as a third girl child in a lower class family and was named NAYAN TARA. When she was a baby she was fed with the milk of ass which helped her in getting the sight and words sooner than others. Being neglected by her parents she led a very careless life. When she realized her unknown powers and helped the villagers in solving their problems and finding their lost things she was given luxurious presents as a matter of gratitude. She has grown proud and willful, even the family members enjoyed the luxury life brought by her. But this does not last long, her fame spreads far and wide. Once when she was a child the pirates kidnapped her, killed her parents and destroyed the village with fire, so as to gain more and more riches with her exotic powers, then she became the Queen of Pirates. One day the Serpents told her about the Island of spices, the place where if she reaches would lose everything, sight, voice, name and perhaps self. So she jumped into the ocean hoping to reach the Island of Spices. In the morning she opened her eyes she found First Mother and her novices. She did not remember her past. Here under the guidance of First Mother she renames



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herself as TILOTTAMA. Tilo passed the ceremony of purification i.e., entering the Shampati's fire.

The first time you enter the shampati's fire - you will not burn, you will not feel pain and you will wake in your new body as though it has been yours forever - a body that has lost its youth and took on age and ugliness and unending service.  
(Divakaruni)

The life of mistresses would be full of exotic, mystery, drama and danger. Once in a great while if a mistress grows rebellious and self indulgent, fails her duty she must be recalled. Warning is sent to her and she would have only three days to settle her affairs. Tilo chooses to go to Oakland she loves spices, knows their origins, what their colors signify, their smells and even their true names. Every Indian spice was found in her store and when placed in her hand they speak to her and even direct her at necessary times. SPICE BAZAAR was the name of her shop fitted at the corner.

She considered by some as witch woman but when they face problems they come to her for solutions. As a Mistress it is her duty to understand their longings for the ways they chose to leave behind when they chose America without their revealing.

Each chapter of this novel is named after a spice which reveals their powers and their origins and thus making the novel very interesting to the reader to continue without postponing. In the chapters she deals with different problems faced by women and even found a solution for them, healing them with the help of spices. People who are disturbed in the society, suffers from alienation and isolation or who suffers with the internal struggle ensures to come to terms with this lady. For them she is human goddess to resolve their problems. Even, Tilo who runs the grocery shop runs after the problems in spite of her limitations and bounded promises, She is the care taker of human problems and their ups and downs. For instance Turmeric, also named Halud meaning yellow, color of day break, corals and shell

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sound is used as a shield for heart's sorrow, an ointment for death and hope for rebirth. It is placed on the heads of new born for luck, sprinkled over coconuts at puja, rubbed into the borders of new and even wedding saris. Black pepper is boiled and drunk to loosen the throat and learn to say 'No -and hear me no' which is so hard for Indian women. Powder of almond and kesar to boil in milk, to drink at bed time to sweeten your words and thoughts to remember the love buried under the anger... and so on.

Though many comes to her shop Tilo tempts to speak only to a few of them. Some of them were Lalitha, Haroun, Jagjit, Kwesi, Geeta and her grandfather, Lateefa and the last but not the least is the lonely American. He usually comes on Friday evenings. The time when she first saw him the real nature of her womanhood is revealed. She is very much attracted by him. Though she was warned by the spices she likes to have him, losing control over herself and even the spices. When the American touches her hand she cannot describe it in words. Though she snatches her hand as obedient to mistress' the sensation stays. When asked by Tilo, the American recollects his childhood, how his mother used to maintain everything clean and neat, how she loved him and so on. But he hates her like anything. Till that time he believed himself to be a true American but now he realizes that he is not a true American and his name is RAVEN, he always feels hurting, confused and angry. He met Tilo-the old woman in the spice *bazaar* on some one's advice. He invites her to accompany him to find out earthly paradise. As a Mistress one should not touch others but Tilo has crossed this rule many times. As a Mistress of spices she must feel other's pain and leave her own passions behind, but from the time she was attracted by the American, spices start working against her as well as the persons to which they were used.

First mother appears that night and warns her saying "*if you try to help outside the protected walls turns on itself*". (Divakaruni) Tilo then decides not to see outside even out of window.

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One day The Raven meets her and offers her a white dress which settles on her like the petals of lotus. And in his company she tastes a bit of wine too. when she returned back to the store she had a message revealing that "*Shampathis fire is calling back and she has been left only three days for decision*" (Divakaruni). In the second last night she asks the spices to give her such a beauty for one night in such a way that after spending with her he would never be with another woman without remembrance and regret. On the last day of sale she got plenty of money as nothing could be given free. Tilo then makes love to the American and their desire has been satisfied. She is ready to take whatever burden they lay but needs one hour of sleep saying so she lies down.

After a while, when she heard Raven, she was in a confusion whether she was dead or alive but spices speak to her saying that as she accepted the punishment in mind without battling that was enough for her and no need to undergo any physical punishment. Now she was neither like the old mistress nor like the young lady of the last day. But a moderate woman-just as Raven imagined her to be. In search of earthly paradise when they crossed a tollbooth she heard about the destruction of the earthquake caused in Oakland. Looking into the water she recollects the destruction caused by her in the village during her childhood. She feels the responsibility and decides to go back to Oakland instead of with Raven. For in the end some things are most important than one's own joy. The novel ends with Tilo finding a new life and new name to give meaning to her existence. She gives herself the name Maya. The name has a number of connotations like illusion, spell and enchantment. She tells that this naming is very different *The Mistress of Spices* depicts the paradox and incongruity of life. Divakaruni's characters reflect the predicament of being caught between two conflicting cultures, the Indian and the American, two different approaches to life, the internal and the external. (Divakaruni)

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### 2-3 Characters

The novel contains many characters :

**Tilo :** Tilo the protagonist is a 'round character' because she has several qualities and develops herself in the story. Tilo is the owner of a 'Spice Store' in Oakland, California. She does not only sells Indian Spices but helps her customers in solving their problems through her magical power of reading their mind and heart.

**The old one :** Like Tilo's mother, and teacher, she's the one who teaches everything about spices and the land of spices to Tilo and the other mistresses.

#### **Customers:**

**The Lonely American:** His real name is Raven, the man who falls in love with Tilo.

**Geeta:** her family comes from India but she was born in America, she falls in love with a Mexican boy, which is not allowed by her family.

**Rau and Sheela:** Geeta's parents, who felt disappointed with the behavior of their daughter.

**Geeta's Grandfather:** he was first against his granddaughter, but then realizes that she is happy and tries to help her and her parents to get together.

**Kwesi:** He is a karate teacher, who usually goes to the bazaar to buy few things, he is American.

**Jagit:** is a little boy that first is bullied by his classmates, Tilo gives him a potion to make him brave, he is Indian.

**Haroun:** He is a Taxi driver, that feels affection for Tilo, because she connects him with his country India.

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**Hameeda:** Haroun's neighbor who is in love with him.

**Lalitha:** An Indian woman abuse by her husband. (Roca)

**The spices :** are treated as characters in the novel . They are 'flat characters' because they remain unchanged and stable in the novel.

### 2.4 The Major Themes

The themes in *The Mistress of Spices* are numerous, all fascinating, and better help us to understand who Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is. Many of her themes are not so much for the issues themselves but for the spiritual and universal manner in which she has developed them, render them extremely up to date and particularly useful, even today.

#### 2.4.1 Nostalgia

As it is noticed, the theme of Nostalgia covered the whole novel from the first chapters till last ones, such as in the scene when Tilo becomes nostalgic about her past and wonders about her existence. As she looks into her past she finds it conflicting. She herself says ;

Sometimes I wonder if there is such a thing a reality, an objective and untouched nature of being or if all we encounter has already been changed by what we imagined it to be. If we have dreamed it into being. (Divakaruni)

It is shaped again in Tilo's speech about the Islan of mistresses, when she was about to go to Oakland :

We had glorious it'd be exhausting to depart this island of girls wherever on our skin the nice and cozy rain fell like pomegranate seeds, where we woke to birdcall and slept to the primary Mother's singing, where we swam naked without shame

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in lakes of blue lotus. To exchange it for the human world whose harshness we have a tendency to remember. But this? (Divakaruni 156)

### 2.4.2 The Conflict between Love and Duty :

Tilo as a mistress is not allowed to fall in love. She is stuck between her duty as a mistress and her personal desire and needs as a human being. The deep emotion of love motivates her to move against her duties at different levels. Tilo has broken all expectations, rules, other people's wishes and has, at last, through her resolution, discovered the freedom to express her own needs and to create a new life in her own identity formation, as if she is born into a new identity. Making love with Raven brings Tilo, a symbolic change making her more human rather than supernatural and it gives a sense of harmony with the outside world. As a result, her life is full of disasters. She realizes that her act of offending the rules of falling in love with the American is responsible for all her sadness.

O exhilaration, I thought. To be upraised up through the attention of chaos, to balance breath-stopped on the edge of nothing. And the plunge that will follow, the shattering of my matchstick body to smithereens, the bones flying free as foam, the heart finally released. (Divakaruni 232)

### 2.4.3 Identity Crisis

When a person is going through a period of identity crisis, that person begins to create a number of self-satisfying illusions, rationalizes his/her failures, creates a new self, or is ultimately eliminated from the face of the earth. Identity is also closely related to the term self. Tilo has been addressed by nearly four different names representing four conflicting and confusing identities in a single life-time. (Tomlinson) Tilo was born in a village and she was named Nayan Tara. Then the pirates carry her away and then she was called 'Bhagyavati'. When She decides to reach the island, the snakes named her 'Sarpakanya'. For becoming

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mistress of Spices, She changed her name into Tilo meaning ‘a life giver and a restorer of health and hope’. She has to change her identities many times in order to arrive at a final definition of her selfhood.

### 2.4.4 Time and Space

Time does some strange things in Magic Realist literature. It moves back sometimes rather than going forward. It can be difficult to know where you stand when you dig into some Magic Realism, time doesn't behave in the way we'd expect it to behave in the real world. For Magic Realists, time isn't this predictable, reliable thing that progresses from one second to the next; it isn't linear. (Magic Realism Characteristics)

Tilo has entered a state of liminality, a space between the past and the future and without knowing where the present is. She is completely detached and runs over the dark waters between her previous lands and her future lands, a theme that is clear throughout in the novel's representations of the relationship between time and space.

### II.4.5 Racism

when Tilo observes a different class of South Asians, she sees the other side of South Asian racial identity. As opposed to the lowerclass patrons described earlier, the rich Indians are protected from racism and disassociate themselves from the black community, identifying almost completely with the white-upper class.

The rich Indians descend from hills that twinkle brighter than stars... The car stops, the uniformed chauffeur jumps ut to hold open the gold-handled door, and a foot in a gold sandal steps down. Soft and arched and almost white... the rich Indians rarely speak... Inside the store which they have entered only because friends said, “it's so quaint, you must go and see it at least once”... The rich Indians crane their necks and lift their chins high because they have to be more always than other people, taller, handsomer, better dressed... [They] heave their bodies like moneybags out the door and into their satincars... Other rich people send lists instead, because being a rich person is a busy job. Golf cruises charity luncheons in the Cornelian Room shopping for new Lamborghinis and cigar cases

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inlaid with lapis lazuli. Still others have forgotten to be Indian and eat caviar (Divakaruni 78/9)

### 2-5 Critics

The huge amount of criticism that *The Mistress of Spices* gathered and the popularity over more than twenty years employed that Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni had a big famous and success. *The Mistress of Spices* criticized in different periods which reflected different critical points. It is criticized by many which contain, African, Asian, American critics, and historians.

A Padmaja writes, 'Kurma House,' the coffee house run by Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams* and Tilo's Indian spice store in *The Mistress of Spices* which are the places of meeting for the ethnic people, especially from the Asian community mirror the aspirations, disappointments, pains and pleasure felt by them. In America, Indian grocery stores often become the flag mast of cultural identity keepers. Most of these stores stock all general grocery items used in Indian cooking like dals, spices, rice, flours, canned and pickled items, frozen Indian dishes, Indian sweets, utensils, etc. some even sell a few fresh vegetables and video cassettes of the latest Hindi and regional movies not available at the regular supermarket. In fact, Divakaruni makes all the action happen in these places. (Padmaja)

Not long back, Simon de Beauvoir had faulted western literature for dishing out stereotypical images of woman as either a goddess or a vamp. Critical surveys have pointed out that writers have depicted Indian woman as exotic though oppressed; as demure, delicate and docile. 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 (Batra).



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C. Bharathi thinks Divakaruni's novel depicts women entangled in the mesh of their own psyche born out of the pressures of a society which is both patriarchal and cloistered but at the end, all of them break strongholds of their society and explore new avenues. In a remarkable terse and evocative language, Divakaruni tells the story of a pronouncedly individual woman who emerges as representative figure with her brave attempt to find an identity of her own. (Bharati)

Another critic Jagdish Batra thinks magic or magical realism, the narrative mode, employed by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *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 and Salman Rushdie of India. (Batra)

Commenting on the narrative art of Chitra Banerjee, Jeff Zaleski says: Divakaruni combines a gift for absorbing narrative with the artistry of a painter. Her lyrical descriptions of the characters inner and outer worlds bring a rich emotional chiaroscuro to an uplifting story about two women who learn to make peace with the difficult choices circumstances have forced upon them. (Zaleski)

## Conclusion

To conclude Divakaruni's novel demonstrates that the Indians in the United States have made great efforts to preserve their cultural traditions. Her approach to ethnic identity is dependent on the view of the South Asian Diaspora that believes in the need to integrate the Indian heritage with its American experience. Divakaruni pointed out that every person or character has a unique experience. Acculturation strategies like generation, culture, food, assimilation, racism, identity crisis, self-esteem, depression are all portrayed through different characters in *The Mistress of Spices*.



# Chapter Three

Myth and Magical Realism  
in *The Mistress of Spices*

# Content

Introduction

3.1 Myths in the Mistress of spices

3.2 Elements of Magical realism in the Mistress of spices

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Conclusion

## Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

### Introduction

Divakaruni has incorporated a number of contemporary issues into *The Mistress of Spices*. Interracial conflict, ethnic identity, immigrant assimilation, adolescent anxiety, domestic violence, abusive and destroyed marriages, and prohibited interracial romances, along with Hindu myth, fables, and magical realism as she also asserts that, “*It’s actually a kind of magical-realist genre heavily influenced by the folk traditions of India especially of Bengal*” (Divakaruni, “Dissolving Boundaries”). Herein, she clearly depicts the issues of immigrants and attempts to resolve them by portraying the magical properties of spices, for Divakaruni realizes that, “*It’s quite mysterious the way art is created. We talk about it a lot, but it’s mysterious and intuitive*” (Mangla). The present chapter explores some of these mysterious levels and discover the elements of the ancient Indian medicinal science, as well as analyzes the novel from a postcolonial diasporic point of view.

### 3-1 Myth in *The Mistress Of Spices*

In her novels, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni uses the myth to show the world the importance of culture, tradition and ecology in human lives. Myth are tales based on culture, tradition and religion. They’re not just simple stories, but it provides a deeper purpose in both modern and ancient cultures. In the *Mistress of Spices* Divakaruni presents How myth illustrates the importance of culture and tradition of a particular population and how it encourages individuals to improve internal and external problems of life.

India is a synonym of the rich culture and traditional heritage, it’s people take their culture and tradition wherever they go to survive in any circumstance. Trees, Snakes, Monkeys, Crows, Rats, Plants, more than gods and goddess, and nature has the mythological values in Hindu Mythology. Nature is the true seen god of the people all over India, it is one of the most unique qualities of Hindu Mythology and Hinduism, and this is what is going to be illustrated in the following section.

### Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

Starting with her name : Tilo, is the short form for Tilottama who was considered as The most graceful dancer in the court of Lord Indra. Indra is known as the king of the Gods in the mythos of the Hindus. Tilottama was warned by Lord Brahma, who is the creator of the universe according to Hindu mythology, that she would be condemned to seven lives of illness, disfigurement and leprosy if she falls in love with human being. Tilottama neglected Brahma's words of warning and fell to the earth for her sins and had to suffer badly for it. The Old One advises and warned Tilo to think about the destiny of Tilottama if ever she is led by her arrogance and ignorance to go against the rules framed for the Mistresses of Spices. But as the mythical Tilottama broke the promise made to Lord Indra, Tilo breaks the promise made to the Old One. When Tilo was leaving the island, The Old one gifted her a knife in order to remind her of the dangerous path she had to walk for being a Mistress of spices.

Tilo's name has got also another mythical significance. It refers to the sesame seed which under the sway of planet Venus turns, gold-brown when touched by flame. Mothers pray for their daughters to have a small, straight and pointed noses shaped like the flower of sesame.

The novel is mainly all about describing the healing power of the spices with regard to magic. The protagonist uses spices like turmeric, fenugreek, cinnamon and other spices. For instance Peppercorn is able to reveal the secrets of people. In the beginning of the story Tilo describes silky yellow powder turmeric. In Ayurveda (*is one of the world's oldest holistic ("whole-body") healing systems. It was developed more than 3,000 years ago in India, It's based on the belief that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, and spirit. Its main goal is to promote good health, not fight disease. But treatments may be geared toward specific health problems*) (WebMD), turmeric is the antibiotic It protects human beings from insect larva and bacterial infections. Turmeric is used in food to add some color but actually it has a big medicinal quality. Tilo said that the turmeric has the

### Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

efficiency of increasing our beauty which might remove imperfections and age spots. Every spice has its own special day based on Indian mythology. For turmeric it is Sunday. It is used to sprinkle on the head of newborns and on the coconuts of puja, rubbed into the borders of new cloths. When she holds the spices, Turmeric speaks to her :

I am turmeric who roses 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 (Divakaruni 14)

She believes that the turmeric, the armor of sorrows, brings hope for rebirth. So, she gave the turmeric to Ahuja 's wife for her couple struggles.

Cinnamon is a spice known as a friend maker. It is filled with Acids and defeat heart disease. In earlier civilizations, they believe cinnamon gives strength to demolish enemies. That's why Tilo decides to give cinnamon to the small boy Jagit, who is the only Punjabi in his school, he was afraid of the school and his classmates.

Fenugreek is Tuesday's spice. In Ayurveda, fenugreek is a medicine that is used to take care of asthma, hormonal disorder and to maintain a healthy metabolism. It was first shown by Shabari, the oldest women in the world "*She is an elderly woman ascetic in the Hindu epic Ramayana. She is described as an ardently devoted woman who received Rama's darshan and blessing due to her Bhakti to him*". (Vijayan) Tilo described fenugreeks taste as:

Put in water and it willbloom free. Bite the swollen kernels between teeth and taste its bitter sweetness. Taste of water weeds in a wild place, the cry of grey geese (Divakaruni 47)

Tilo asked the favor of the fenugreeks to help Ratna. She feels disrespected by her husband, so that Tilo gave the spice to make them feel happy.

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After that we come to the example when Tilo meets the lonely American who frequently visits the shop on every Friday. She felt very close to him, so she decides to give him some spice, remembering that the old one told them that there is just one special spice for each person there. Tilo searches and finds Asafoetida, a remedy to love as the ancient myth declared.

Fennel, is the spice of Wednesday. Tilo consoles Lalita Ahuja's wife when she lost the turmeric and gives her Fennel instead. It gives the fresh smell and refreshment. She advised her to take a pinch of Fennel after every meal, she insisted also to give fennel to her husband too because Fennel cools the temper. There is myth about Fennel, when sage Vashistha

Sage Vashistha was Ram's guru and the Rajpurohit of Ikshwaku dynasty. He was a peace-loving, selfless, intelligent and great Rishi. He had established Gurukula (residential college) on the banks of the river beas, where he and his wife Arundhati were taking care of thousands of students. (Familypedia)

Swallows the demon Illwal he ate Fennel to he would not come back. Ancient people believe that Fennel is an equalizer; it can take the power from one and give it to another when two people eat at the same time. So Tilo thought Lalita got strength to protect her.

Tilo was disguised, and to get her original appearance she used ginger. That is used for digestion problem in Ayurvedic and considered as one of the important spices in Indian curries. Tilo breaks the rule of the mistress and used the spice for her own benefit, She ate it, and it makes her look younger.

When she falls in love with Raven she was no more aware of the consequences. She used the spices another time for herself and this time requests the king of spices Makaradwaj to make her the most beautiful women in the world. But the spice remains silent because she ignored

### Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

and humiliate the island rules. Then it laughs and warns her as :

Do you desire it more than you desired us on the island, that day when you would have thrown yourself off the granite cliffs had the First Mother said no.  
(Divakaruni 261)

The medicinal power and quality of the spices in the novel are real and true they help in the practical life. But the magical side of the spices like solving the family problems, giving courage, and rebirth are themythological references.

Some other spices are lotus root for lifetime passionate love and sesame, the protector of long journey. These spices play a significant role in the novel, but they have to be used carefully, as their misuse could be dangerous. All these myth, folk tales and secret of spices contribute to the Indianness of the novel.

Unfortunately the most important law of the spice island is when the mistress committes any forbidden act the spices act against the beneficial persons. As a result all the visitors of the spice store get into trouble. Jagit the school boy, Lalitha typical Indian women and Geetha and other people facing the problem because of Tilo's magic failure. When Lalita wrote a letter to Tilo about her problems, Tilo requests all the spices to help her. She said,

will pound almond and chyavanprash for mental strength and physical and set it outside the door for the wind to carry to the women-house where you wait.  
(Divakaruni 273)

Finally, after consoling the spices and First mother, she got a new life and named herself as Maya. *“In the old language it can mean many things. Illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day”* (Divakaruni 317)

'Maya' is a word with Sanskrit origins, expatiated upon in great length by Lord Krishna in the Gita. Briefly, It's the force of illusion. Illusion is one of the chimeric, ephemeral concept of perfection that any human being seeks as he or she flies through life in a never-ending quest for the unattainable... No human being is ever satisfied and always tries to achieve the mirage



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of perfection that goes further and further. Tilo 's transformation into Maya indicates her realization that the perfect harmony is unattainable and pain and sorrow always have to coexist with peace, happiness and prosperity.

People think that spices are used only for cooking, but in this novel Divakaruni gave awareness to the people about spices and its medicinal qualities as well as their magical power. She used myth to enlarge the benefit of the spices.

Hence myth plays an extremely important role in this novel. Ancient people create a myth about every spice that can easily demonstrate the medicinal qualities of the spices. Since no one assigns importance to plain theory, it quickly reaches people's mind when they add other myth and mystical elements in that matter. Divakaruni cleverly handles the myth as a tool to explore the qualities of the spices.

#### III-2 Elements of Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

Magic realism leads to improving the thoughts about what is real through imagination reflected in magic, myth and religion. Divakaruni has the capacity to confront and detach the reality and to find what is mysterious in things, in human existence and in human behaviour.

The novel starts with a sentence that, strikes the readers' comments "*I am a Mistress of Spices. I can work with the others too. Mineral, metal, earth and sand and ston...but the spices are my love*" (Divakaruni 3)

By introducing herself as Tilo, who is named after the spice of nourishment 'Til'-sesame seed-, it's obvious that the writer is trying to fly with the reader to another world. It is important to keep in mind here that the content of the novel is divided into 15 chapters and each one of these chapters is named after a spice. "Turmeric", "Cinnamon", "Fenugreek", "Asafoetida", "Fennel", "Ginger", "Peppercorn", "Kalo Jire", "Neem", "Red Chilli",

### Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

“Makaradwaj”, “Lotus Root”, and “Sesame”, are all popular spices that the Indians used to cook with in their daily life.

Both The first and the last chapter are named after the protagonist’s name ; The first chapter “Tilo” and the last chapter “Maya”. The whole novel is based on the transformation of Nayan Tara to Bhagyavati to Tilo to Maya ... .with the spices acting as the motivators.

At the first glance, the reader may see the novel on the superficial front as a cook book being divided into names of spices, but the magic is in their use. All the spices are under the control of (Tilo) The mistress of spices, she talks to them, manipulates them for healing, for protecting, and for nourishing. Divakaruni, brings home the point that the spices have some magical power to speak to Tilo.

‘The calling thought’ is one of the magic realism elements that is used successfully whenever Tilo is in a difficult situation, she would talk to the Old one from whom she learnt the power of spices. The old one told about the calling thought too :

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 (Divakaruni 18).

Snakes were Tilo’s friends. She was saved by the them from the pirates. Divakaruni makes use of the folk tales which she has remembered from her childhood, such as the sleeping city under the ocean and the speaking serpents. But she has changed them almost completely in the novel of the spices. Here the magical thinking is presented by snakes talking to Tilo. This point ie. "the talking of snakes " was accepted as something normal and Tilo replied to them too. This is one of the features in magical realism which we call « fantasy ». She refers to the speaking serpent as a fantastic serpent. A creature that regularly makes myth in the novels. The speaking serpent has a different kind of magic, and it symbolizes the beauty of the natural world, and is not governed by logic, but comes to the mortal as a blessing.

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She endures a purification process in the "Island of Spices" under the guiding hand of a strict "First Mother" who teaches her and makes her experience severe austerity and a life of misery without basic comforts. She is made to take the vow of celibacy, to sacrifice body pleasures and to give a haggard, old lady 's body. Magical Realism is revealed when Tilo, speaks about her physique as an oxymoron of young lady in old woman's form. No one knows about her youth and her ability of having supernatural power even her own customers ;

They do not know, of course. That I am not old, that this seeming body I took on in Shampathi's fire when I vowed to become a Mistress is not mine... The eyes Which alone are my own (Divakaruni 5).

Actually she really takes the readers to a different world after completing her purification process and jumping into the "Shampati fire". Another myth is shampati, People who are interested in indian mythical tales would know that "Shampati" is the "bird of myth and memory", that bird which although divided into conflagration comes alive from ashes which coincide with Tilo and Raven. And this is a symbolic reference from mythology to add realism to the magical conversion, and here the incorporation of myth is one of the important component of magical realism.

Tilo is moved to a Spice Store in Oakland, California selling Indian Spices. she gets glimpse into the experiences of people With her supernatural abilities, especially the minority group in her motherland, who are threatened with the problems of homelessness, the important lives she transforms with the power of her spices are in the form of characters, such as Haroun (the taxi driver), because she has a power of foreseeing the future. She had foreseen an accident to him in her vision. Hence foreseeing the future through vision and that incident really happening in the future is another special feature in magic realism. As she foreseen the accident she decided to help him, by taking the spice that is blue and black

### Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices*

*“Kalojire, a spice shaped like a teardrop, smelling raw and wild like tigers, to cover over what fate has written for Haroun”* (Divakaruni 32).

Jaggi the young boy (Jagjit-conqueror of the world) who is totally unlike his name, unfortunately is unable to find acceptance in his Dream land America. He 's considered as an unfit who is failing to find a position. Cinnamon is known as – “Friend Maker”, “Destroyer of enemies”, “to give strength” – strength not only to the body, but to the mouth, so Tilo put the cinnamon stick in Jaggi’s turban (which is mandatory for a Punjabi). As a result Jagjit gains the power needed to make his voice heard in the face of evil act and violence against his American fellow friends. After this magical created feeling, of course people around the world would want to use Cinnamon!

A female character who is also in a trouble in the novel « Lalita », Ahuja’s wife. She is the representative of the majority of those who are defenceless in violent relationships and unhappy marriages. To resolve the problem of Lalita Tilo uses “Fennel”, and as a consequence she escapes a life of marital violence and abuse. When Tilo receives a letter of gratitude from her at the end of the novel, she says :

Meanwhile, I will pound almond and chyavanprash for mental strength and physical and set it outside the door for the wind to carry to the woman-house where you wait. (Divakaruni 273)

In this example, magic realism is again highlighted by the use of one of the five elements of the Earth – Wind energy.

The key moment of the novel is when Tilo immediately takes a liking to Raven, whom she calls "My American". Raven is also attracted by her beauty instantly, He can see beyond her physical appearance and seems to grasp her supernatural abilities. He entrusts Tilo with his own story and feels that she can help him to reveal the secret power he was supposed to acquire but failed to do so. This fact also adds mythological quality to the character of Raven.

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Now Tilo, is confused between her desire and her responsibility and duty as a mistress, who should live only for others and never engage in any personal pleasure. The fact that she's attracted to the raven makes her overpowered, thus she uses "Makaradwaj", a spice which is known as "The King of Spices", or "The Conquer of Time", to transform her body and makes her beautiful, in order to discover her hidden eagerness and desire that is surely the sexual union of two loving souls. In this example Divakaruni uses magic realism in a wonderful way like in fairytales, specifically in the story of Cinderella, when Tilo transforms herself for just one night from an old body into a sensual, mystic, and spiritual Aspara in a white dress ( that Raven had gifted her), elegantly flowing her waistline emitting a floral perfume, *By tomorrow night Tilo, you will be at beauty's summit. Enjoy well. For by next morning it will be gone*" (Divakaruni 263). Raven was amazed, and couldn't say anything but, *"I had not dared to dream such beauty. I do not dare to touch it."* (Divakaruni 280).

The effect of the transformation here was Magical ! And the first component of magical realism is Magic.

Another important key moment or dramatic turn of event is already mentioned, when Tilo tries to jump into the Shampati's Fire after defiling her body (similar to the idea of Sita in Ramayana, who undergoes purification through "Agni Pariksha") she finds herself in Raven's hands. It's seems like The Spices have forgiven her and let her live the life of her own.

By the end of the novel Raven suggested her new name "Maya", the Hindu term defining the everyday world of desire, pain and joy the world of illusion, a place of inevitable sorrow from which man is trying to escape. Maya is magic and magic realism here personified!

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### 3.3 The Exploration Of Postcolonialism in *The Mistress of Spices*

"While reading Divakaruni`s texts, it is not difficult to locate the post colonial politics which is to be understood in relation to the `dynamics between post colonial writing and American literature". (Jahan)

In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni adopts a more complex strategy to portray diasporic identity. She uses the elements of mythology to examine the different type of issues faced by immigrants who come to holy land with silver pavements and golden roofs. The protagonist Tilo is an Indian immigrant. She is sent to modern day Oakland to help the immigrants with her powers, to solve a variety of problems of her immigrant customers.

The mistress feels that the Indians come to her store in quest of happiness. One can see many faces there and each face tells a story. The most vivid among them are the faces of some whose fates are inextricably linked with that of Tilo, the spice and spell maker such as Geeta and Jaggit.

In a diasporic context, clash between generations often leads to conflicts. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the second generation of Geeta 's feelings comes from the fact that she is part of a paradigmatic diasporic family, where a clash between the first generation and the second generation of Indians is unavoidable.

The first generation parents are more concerned about the traditional values of their home country and ignore the feelings of their daughter. In fact, they 're shocked when she decides to be with a Chicano man and to cut her off entirely. Geeta, the second generation Indian, is not ready for this volt face; she is surprised by the elements of racism she sees in the reaction of her parents to Juan. When discussing the conflict between generations in the American diaspora, Suniana Maira and Rajni Srikanth write:

The relationship between the generation is complex and nuanced second generation Indian`s, having come of age in a postcolonial era, often refuse to be treated as other by mainstream culture; at the same time many question the

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uncritical acceptance of the need for assimilation. The resulting political involvement of the second generation, in its building of alliances with other people of colour, often conflicts with the first generation's political agenda, which is typically more rooted in home country interests. (Sunaina Maira 25)

Aside from her parents, Geeta had a clash of values; particularly with her grandfather, who was trying to set in her some of the "Sterling Values" he had learned in India that are hopelessly expired in this new land. The questions of identity are different for the second generation of Indians like Geeta. She challenges the ongoing identification of her Grandfather's patriarchal traditions. Geeta's parents are very different with regard to American way of life, they generally have their origins in their home traditions. It seems uncultured to them, and against their stereotypical Indian lifestyle. It is therefore difficult for them to assimilate American culture. But Geeta, who was born in America, has another outlook towards American culture. She fails to find out any difficulty in assimilating things. Still in the multi-cultural land, her values are really more traditional than her family members imagine.

Another example is the young boy Jagjit who had a lot of troubles in the adopted nation, and found it hard to explain things to his mother. Because she couldn't understand her son's real issue he becomes a drug trafficker and eventually an armed gangster. Jagjit's failure is due to lack of communication between the younger and the older generation. Since Jagjit and his mother are not truly connected, it changes the little innocent boy into a drug trafficker and makes his life meaningless ;"*Jaggi what you meaning you don't want to go to school, what for your father he is killig himself working working at the factory, two slaps will make you go...*" (Divakaruni, *The mistress of Spices* 39)

Therefore, although most immigrants economically assimilate and succeed, there are others who lose their jobs or even worse, lose their children. In their introduction to *An Anthology of Writings by South Asians in North America*, Sunaina Maira and Rajni Srikanth write :

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For the first-generation Indians issues of belonging become increasingly complicated-the longer they stay in America and even more profoundly complex as they bring up children here, children who are socialized in the American context as they bring up children here, its schools, its movie theatres, its bars, its malls, its streets, etc. The boundaries between ethnicities, class, gender and religion dissolve and re-emerge, as second generation South Asians move from home to school and college, to work place and to peer groups. In the fissures of these topographies of consciousness arise the ingredients of contested identities and contested forms of belonging (or not belonging) in America. (Sunaina Maira)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni aims at bringing diverse confluences together, diaspora discourses such as racism, the condition of immigrant women, the problems faced by children at school, and the question of preferences between Indian and Western cultures in her work. This is especially seen in *The Mistress of Spices*. A prominent contemporary diaspora theorist, Stanley Tambiah attempts to examine the different aspects of societies in the diaspora as they become interactive parts of the host society and become effective voting bases in local and national politics. He says:

For any Diasporic community, the host society in question is not a single homogeneous entity but is itself segmented and stratified according to social class and other criteria; it also contains other immigrant communities that are involved in the politics of finding and negotiating their niches.... Consisting of resistance and rejections as well as cooperation and incorporation, fights against discrimination and eagerness to take advantage of opportunities. (Tambiah)

These elements, in particular negotiations with other immigrant communities, are the target of *The Mistress of Spices*, which varies from other works because it also deals with other margins of American society, as well as the Indian diaspora. These include Kwesi, an African immigrant, Juan a Hispanic, and Raven, a Native American. Their experiences gave the novel



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complexities due to the perspectives of racism involving other non-white societies in America, and develop multiple levels of relevance in the novel.

The touching instance of racism in *The Mistress of Spices* is shown in the story of a young school boy, Jagjit, who is newly arrived to America from Jullundhur, Punjab, and faces assimilation problems due to his lack of English. This is further compounded by his rustic turban physical appearance as a religious Sikh. The first English word he learns is "idiot" along with other racist abuse: "Talk English sonofabitch. Speak up nigger wetback asshole." (Divakaruni 39)

As a child, he would be unable to quietly ignore all of this like the aged people, and he responds by getting his hair shorn and joining a gang in order to find acceptance and protection. The trauma faced by Jagjit is typical of the kind faced by newly arrived immigrant children who are dealing with language problems and racism due to the color of their skin as they struggle to find a foothold in a strange environment. According to M.A. Gibson, in his book on Sikh immigrant students :

Sikh students newly arrived from rural Punjab to California faced a very difficult process of assimilation in schools because of the extreme hostility towards immigrants who looked so different and spoke a different language. He says: "Punjabi teenagers are told they stink... told to go back to India... physically abused by a majority of students who spit at them, refuse to sit by them in class or in buses, throw food at them or worse. (GIPSON)

This explains Jagjit 's abuse and his choice to join a gang to protect himself. Whereas Jagjit 's racist abuse is due to his physical appearance and his foreign accent, another cause of racism is due to the belief that immigrants take off harder jobs which, legally, belong to the white majority, and are considered superior and legitimate job seekers because of their skins. This theme of racist resentment surfaces in different ways in *The Mistress of Spices*.

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In the chapter "Fenugreek", immigrants articulate their frustration, which is :

bitter like the bitterness of fehugreek: No one told us it would be so hard here in Amreekah, all day scrubbing greasy floors, lying under engines that drip black oil, driving the belching monster trucks that coat our lungs with tar. Standing behind counters of dim motels where we must smile as we hand keys to whores. Yes, always smile, even when people say 'Bastard foreigner taking over the country, stealing our jobs.' Even when cops pull us over because we're in the wrong part, the rich part of town. (Divakaruni 62)

Yet now, like the taste of the fenugreek, there is always the promise of sweetness under bitterness, the lure of success underpinning the daily struggle for survival, the lure of the dreams which might come true. The novel highlights the growing anger against immigrants due to the fact that they are taking up 'white' jobs in an already burdened economy, resulting in racist violence.

Divakaruni, through her novel, has argued that both immigrant and native societies in the United States need to correct themselves and, at the same time , help change society in order to make racial hostility less likely. Not only must immigrants be more willing to assimilate into american society, but the opposite must also be ensured, creating more acceptance of immigrants who are trying to assimilate.

### Conclusion

This study shades light on postcolonial diaspora of the twentieth century in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. Love, nostalgia, search of identity, magic, are all expressed by Divakaruni's protagonist, Tilo. The novel structured the American society in which both Indians and Americans suffer.

The Postcolonial theory tackled diaspora in which it looks for the interest of immigrants. This leads to see how it analyzes a literary work, according to history, ideology,

### **Chapter Three : Myth and Magical Realism in *The Mistress Of Spices***

and its formand content. Through the content of the novel, one may see that diaspora is concerned of both Americans and immigrants, and it influenced both of them.



# General Conclusion

### General Conclusion

The core of Banerjee's novels derives from ancient legendary culture and tradition, fairy tales, myths, superstitions, mysterious events that establish the universe of her mystical existence. Much of the magic originates from the description of a special atmosphere and from a particular approach to the concept of time. Her magic is often taken as its natural element. The way of combining the real and the fantastic in particular qualities prove Chitra Banerjee as a magic realist author.

From Chitra's novels it is clear that the world of myth and magic associated with magical realism neutralizes any possibility of opposition or criticism in the narrative. In fact, the use of myth in magic realism is not different from its use in traditional legends, nor is it the only way by which magic occurs in it. The point in resisting a strict use of realism even in addressing social, political and historical issues is that it presents the reader as well as the writer with an alternative mode to express an alternative perception of a "reality" which has always existed. According to Wendy Faris, magic realism often gives voice in the thematic domain to indigenous or ancient myth, legends and cultural practice and the domain of narrative technique to the literary traditions that express them with the use of non-realistic events and images; it can be seen as a kind of narrative primitivism.

As far as postcolonial literature is concerned, this study focused on the practical analysis of Chitra's *The Mistress of Spices*, by presenting a postcolonial approach to the novel which is not difficult to locate while reading Chitra's text. It also dealt with the issues of immigrants and their diasporic life in America. They suffered a lot and experienced many abuses, such as discrimination, racism, nostalgia, and many other issues.

Literature helped in presenting the voice of the Indian immigrants, whereas writers and intellectuals from the postcolonial period had faced these harsh conditions.

## General Conclusion

Divakaruni's *The Mistress of spices*, shows deeply this meaning. It tackled Tilo's life in America. Divakaruni tried to show her culture, tradition and mythology for both Indians and white people. Postcolonialism investigated the literary works, especially those which talked about the immigrants and Diaspora. Both postcolonialism and Divakaruni fight the bad treatment and issues.

This study therefore, aimed to argue mainly on three important issues:

- The power of magical spices.
- The great mythology of Indians.
- The issues of immigrants and their diasporic life in America.

The novel is a beautiful piece of art, a reflector insight into the lives of immigrants in America, and it sets a good example of the term magical realism. By blending myth, fantasy, and realism, Divakaruni was able to break stereotype of defining one's identity only from the social and political level.



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## ملخص الدراسة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أسلوب **الأسطورة والواقعية السحرية** في رواية ، " **سيدة البهارات** " للكاتبة **شيترا بانيرجي ديفاكروني** كما توضح كيف أن هذين الأسلوبين مرتبطين ببعضهما البعض. وفي إطار استكشاف المواضيع الرئيسية للرواية، تستكشف الدراسة أيضًا مشكلة المهاجرين و المغتربين في أدب ما بعد الاستعمار حيث أن الشتات موضوع بارز جدا في دراسات وأدب ما بعد الاستعمار. تقدم الدراسة تحليلاً عملياً لكيفية عرض اللغة والأسلوب والشخصيات والأرض والوضع الاجتماعي والتقاليد الثقافية في الرواية لبناء هوية الأشخاص في رواية **سيدة البهارات**. وكفروع ثقافية، تجمع الكاتبة روايتها بطقوس وعادات وممارسات تتعلق بالطعام، اللباس، ولغتها الأم. دُرست رواية ديفاكروني الحائزة على جائزة أدبية، كمثال لعدة قضايا عالمية تحاول ديفاكروني إزالتها من خلال تجسيد شخصيتها الخيالية تيلو، البهارات الهندية المزروعة بالبراعة وقوة الشفاء، و العجوز الأم التي تبدو ملتصقة بالبوذية. وصفت ديفاكروني التوابل التي لا حياة لها بأنها كائنات حية. ولقد جسدت الكاتبة الهندية الأميركية ديفاكروني مجازاً هذه التوابل الهندية بهدف الاستفادة من المعرفة التي تتجاوز حدود العلم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** الأساطير ، الواقعية السحرية ، الشتات ، ما بعد الاستعمار ، الأدب ، الكتابة الهندية