

Narrative Techniques in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Novels

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Narrative techniques in her select novels that are *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams*. Magic Realism is used as a narrative technique in her *The Mistress of Spices*. The term magic realism is defined in The Oxford Dictionary as a style of writing that mixes realistic events with fantasy. Magic Realism is an amalgamation of the fantastic or fantasy with realism.

Narratology is a study of narrative structure. It is a branch of structuralism. It is not the reading and interpretation of individual stories, but the attempt to study the nature of story itself. The story is the actual sequence of events as they happen, whereas the plot is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented. The distinction between story and plot is basic to narratology. According to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, Good plots should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. A writer selects how to present that the story in language. When the writers put a story or sequence of events, into language it is called narrative. In other words, a narrative is a story. There are many types of literature that are considered narratives, including novels, dramas, fables, folk tales, short stories, and poetry. There are common techniques relevant to narrative perspective or who is telling the story include first person, second person, and third person flash back story, flash forward, and fore shading. "The plot, on the other hand, may well begin somewhere in the middle of a chain of events, and may then backtrack providing us with a flashback which fills us in on things that happened earlier. The plot may also have elements which flash forward, hinting at events which will happen later. "(BG 215)

Salman Rushdie, and Chitra Banerjee employ an innovative narrative technique in their novels. The narrative technique is magical Realism in their novels such as *Midnight's Children*, and *The Mistress of Spices*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956-) an Indo- American author, works as a professor of English in the University of Houston. She belongs to middle class family and has worked as a baby sitter, a store clerk, a bread slicer, a dining hall attendant, and an attendant in laboratories. She left from Calcutta and migrated to California in 1976. She at present lives in San Francisco with her husband and her two children. She is also a co-founder and former president of a helpline for South Asian Women. Maitri, the organization, was begun by her with the help of group of friends. She has written *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Queen of Dreams*, *The Vine of Desire*, *The Conch Bearer*, *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, *The Palace of Illusions*, *One Amazing Thing*, *Shadow Land*, *Oleander Girl* and *Grandma Great Gourd*.

The present paper analyzes Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Narrative techniques in her select novels that are *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams*. Magic Realism is used as a narrative technique in her *The Mistress of Spices*. The term magic realism is defined in The Oxford Dictionary as a style of writing that mixes realistic events with fantasy. Magic Realism is an amalgamation of the fantastic or fantasy with realism. The related terms Magic realism, Magical realism and Marvellous Realism are arduous to explain.

“The terms originated from the German Magischer Realismus which travelled and was translated into Dutch Magisch realism, the English magic realism and eventually the Spanish Realism Magico. Later the Spanish term Realsim Magico was translated to Magical Realism and occasionally Magic Realism.” (Bowers 3)

The term ‘Magic Realism’ is clarified in the Magical Realism, “it fuses the two opposing aspects of the oxymoron (the magical and the realist) together to form one new perspective. Magical realism is often considered to be a disruptive narrative mode. “(Bowers 3-4) The term ‘Magical realism was first introduced by Franz Rob, a German art critic. The following elements are found in many magical realist novels:

It should be a magical element.

The element may be intuitive but it is never explained.

It exhibits a richness of sensory details.

It presents events from multiple perspectives, such as that of belief and disbelief or the colonizer's and the colonized's.

It may be set in arise from an area of cultural mixing.

Woman with magical power plays as a counsellor in her life. This power allows the mistress as well as the healer to work magic only for the good of her own people. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni uses the magical spices such as Turmeric, Cinnamon, Fenugreek, Asafoetida, Fennel, Ginger, Pepper, Kalojire, Neem, Red Chilli, Makaradwaj, Lotus Root and Sesame. Sometimes the spices will speak to the young heroine Tilo. For instance, the turmeric speaks to Tilo in the novel as a living character. Like the fable, it tell her,

“I am turmeric who rose out of the ocean of milk when the Devas and auras churned for the treasure of the Universe. I am turmeric who came after the poison before the nectar and thus lies in between” (MS 13)

The cinnamon spice has a special power as friend- maker and destroyer of the enemies and it gives him strength and courage. Tilo uses this spice cinnamon to solve immigrant Jagjit's problem. The lotus-root helps Haroun to unite with his lover Hameeda. The spice fennel solves Lalita's predicament and the spice Kantakari is used by Tilo to change Geeta's stubborn behaviour in selecting her life partner and she changes in her life.

Sigmund Freud considers dreams as the main outlet for repressed desires. Therefore, dream analysis is important in the Freudian model. “Dream analysis studies how real events are transformed into dream images.” (Swamy 50) There is a difference between Reality and Illusion. Reality is an honorific word that means what is there. Illusion is a prejorative word that means a response to what is not there. Dreams are not hallucinations and imagination may help the perception of reality. Dream power is to read other's mind, ideas, thoughts feelings and problems. Divakaruni's subconscious craving for her homeland, thus her novel *Queen of Dreams* may have conjured up the dreams of Mrs. Gupta unravelling the complicated knots in her relationships.” (Vinoda 178) Divakaruni explores this idea of dream power of woman and her achievements in the society to reveal her love for her homeland.

Women regard her as the embodiment of spiritual power of light and love or pure bliss. Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* is entirely different from her other novels. She reveals the connection between wakefulness and sub consciousness in her *Queen of Dreams*. The

novelist presents her character Mrs.Gupta with dream power to solve and serve others in the society. Hence there is a part “‘The Dream Journals’ in *Queen of Dreams* and it expresses suspense, mystery and past life of Mrs.Gupta. The title *Queen of Dreams* represents Mrs.Gupta. Dreams are related to real incidents. Mrs. Gupta’s motto in this novel is “My life is nothing but a dream” (QD 21) The novel begins with this line “ Last night the snake came to me...(QD 1) It symbolizes death and the snake is her messenger in her dream, but in her point of view, it is optimism. The novelist records the Dream Journals as an important evidence and displays a person’s joys and sorrows in her past life. Mrs. Gupta recollects some cantos from Brihat Swapna Sarita,

“The dream comes heralding joy

I welcome the dream.

... My life is nothing but a dream

From which I will wake into death.” (QD 21)

Divakaruni particularly depicts about what will happen if the dream comes in eleventh chapter that titled as ‘From The Dream Journals.’ For instance, “If you dream of closed door, you will ultimately be successful in gaining what you desire, but it will take much effort. A dream of milk means you are about to fall ill...” (QD 85)

Divakaruni has used epistolary method in her another novel *The Vine of Desire*. This novel is a sequel novel of *Sister of My Heart*. It tells a story of two sisters and their sufferings in their married life in this novel. There is a chapter named as ‘Letters’ in her novel *The Vine of Desire*. Anju’s mother Gouri writes letter to her daughter Anju “My dear Anju, Blessings of the goddess Kali on all of you. I miss you more than a letter can convey...” (VD 70).

Therefore, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has used Magical Realism as a narrative technique in her *The Mistress of Spices*, and in her *Queen of Dreams* and epistolary technique in her *The Vine of Desire*.

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