

# Art of Invisibility in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Mistress of Species

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**Abstract-** Nature is God's precious gift to man. The Life of the human beings is highly interlinked with their environment. Literature which deals with nature is called as green literature. Ecocriticism brings connectivity to nature, literature and human life. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the renowned diasporic writers. Her debut novel *The Mistress of Spices* is filled with environmental imageries. Spices in the novel are also personified to display its inevitable role in the novel. It is about the magical properties of spices and the relationship between spices and human beings. The writer has employed a lot of natural elements in the novel gives vivid descriptions. This paper studies the effects of spices, the role of nature and environment in the novel *The Mistress of Spices* from an ecocritical perspective.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has characterized the lifeless spices as living characters in her novel. *The Mistress of spices* the Indo American Woman writer Divakaruni has given metaphorical representation to the Indian spices in order to touch upon the knowledge beyond science. It also depicts the representation of different myths, magic and history, related to spices. It also evaluates the importance of spices in Socio-Cultural perspective in the life of protagonist. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has been able to produce the better meaning of the text and context by characterizing the spices as non-human beings.

**Index Terms-** Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, myth, Woman and Nature and Spices.

## INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one among the most talented women writers of Indian Diaspora. She herself is an immigrant settled in America. She has written eleven novels, three anthologies, four poetry collections, and five adult children books. Her works mostly deal with the themes of diaspora, gender discriminations, and ecofeminism, etc. She is well known for her unique style of narrating the plot. *The Mistress of Spices* is the debut novel of Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni which is shortlisted for Orange Prize in 2000. It portrays the day-to-day life of immigrants living in California. In the novel, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has employed a lot of natural elements to make the descriptions more vivid. For example, spices play a key role in the novel next to the protagonist of the novel. The whole novel revolves around the protagonist and her relationship with spices. Tilo, the heroine of the novel upholds the power of sensing spices. Spices were also personified to display their inevitable role in the novel.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the heroine of the novel is a trained expert in perceiving the secret powers of spices, dedicates her life to spices. Her knowledge helps her in sensing the problems of people. Tilo Nayan Tara was born in India. Nayan Tara means the star of eye. She is enabled to sense the problems of people. As she was a girl child she was neglected by the family members. Once in her childhood when her mother was not able to feed due to fever nature becomes Tilo's mother and feeds her. Nature has the quality of supporting people during the critical situation. The author brings the heroine closer to nature and entangles her entire life with different elements of nature from her birth. She was considered a special child as she had an inborn magical power of predicting the future which she uses for solving the problems of the villagers. She becomes luxurious and brings wealth to her family.

*The Mistress of Spices* narrates the quest of the protagonist Tilo. She is born in a lower class family as a third girl child and is felt burden by her parents as another dowry debt. As the cows run dry at the time of her birth she is fed with the milk of ass which helps her in getting the sight and words sooner than others. Being neglected by her parents she leads a very careless life. When born she is named Nayan Tara - The star of the eye, star seer, and also the flower that grows by the dust road. However, when

she realizes her unknown powers and helps the villagers in solving their problems and finding their lost things she is given luxurious presents as a matter of gratitude and her household wins recognition. A girl who is once neglected is now chosen to be the best. Once she was last for anything but now she is the first for everything. Even the family members enjoy the luxury life brings by the fame of her exotic powers. She too has grown proud. Her fame spreads far and wide. By her powers she can draw to her whoever she wishes - a lover to her side or an enemy to her feet. But when used imperfectly and without control can bring destruction beyond imagination.

The pirates' chief names her Bhagyavati, Bringer of luck. She becomes Bhagyavati Sorceress; pirate queen, bringer of luck and death. Later on, her days on the deck are painful and harrowing. As a pirate queen she reviews her life and wants to know her longing and sends a calling thought over the water again. As a result a typhoon comes in the water she is released and saved by the serpents of under water. Serpents are the oldest creatures and the dearest to the Earth Mother. They have perfected the art of invisibility, if they do not wish, one can never see them. Serpents tell her about the Island of spices, the place where if she reaches would lose everything, sight, voice, name and perhaps self. Though they could see the spice glow under her skin - the sign of her destiny, they offer her to become sarpa kanya. Serpents warn her not to go to the island of spices. The Hero is now ready to act upon his call to adventure and truly begin her quest, whether it is physical, spiritual or emotional. She may go willingly or he may be pushed, but either way he finally crosses the threshold between the world he is familiar with and that which she is not. Tilo crosses first threshold by entering Shampati's fire and chooses Oak Land as her destination. Tilo spends decades learning the delicacies of the spices and after the training when she and other girls are about to leave, they are given new identities; indicating that the past is being relegated and new persona are being forged. The Old one teaches Tilo to look into the heart of others but she doesn't teach her to read the future as it kept her away from hoping and trusting the spices fully. After leaving India, she steps into the unknown world.

The First Mother transforms Tilo into an old woman so that she can serve as a healer of her community – a

woman who will be free from male gaze and being an elderly woman anyone can confide her. Tilo loves spices, knows their origins, what their colors signify, their smells and even their true names. In some ways, the return to society, the final phase of the hero's journey, is just as difficult if not more so than deciding to start the search, for society does not often embrace those who return and are now self-aware and comfortable with who they are.

The store Tilo collects all the left overs in the store and made a pyre in the centre of the room and sprinkles sesame all over to protect her through journey and invokes words but nothing happens. She fears if she has been doomed to live as old woman without power and livelihood and plans to end herself from climbing the red gold girdens of the bridge, but finally decides to accept the decree of spices. She willingly accepts it and firmly believes that she had not sinned but acted out of love. She recollects the story of Shiva - halahal - Tor one to be happy another must take upon the suffering'. She is ready to take whatever burden they lay but needs one hour of sleep saying so she lies down.

## CONCLUSION

The Mistress of Spices is an aesthetically sophisticated, metaphysically profound novel as well as adventurous masterpiece, among other reasons, not because it merely borrows the monomyth's superficial plot structure, but because it likewise incorporates the monomyth's theme of transcendence. It develops this theme by fantastically elaborating the central death-and-rebirth motif that reinforces this theme in the monomyth itself while similarly replicating the monomyth's fractal pattern-within-pattern internal structure—which is also the structure of that matrix of thought, proceeding through transcendence, that leads to enlightenment and that the monomyth symbolizes—in its own internal structures of disguises-within-disguises, agendas-within-agendas, and reasons-within-reason.

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