



Neurofeministic Consciousness: Themes of Transformation of Woman in Modern Times in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Selected Novels

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* is a modern adaptation of an ancient story written from a woman's perspective. *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) is a retelling of the epic Mahabharata, either because of the author's writing style or simply from the point of view of a woman trapped in the middle of a man's world. Traversing the life of Panchaali, King Draupad's daughter and wife to five husbands seeking to reclaim her birthright, bestselling novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni lends her voice to a bold and meaningful retelling of the stories of the Mahabharata. Revenge was the only emotion that drove Draupadi during her years of exile. Draupadi is indeed a powerful woman who holds an extraordinary place in history. Women are not really inferior to men, they are just "different" in a way that fits biblical teachings and gender roles. Thus, the female brain is said to be wired for empathy and sensitivity as of Draupadi. Divakaruni's plot features a woman of Indian descent torn between old and new world values. She uses her imagination and masterful narrative, plot, and lyrical expression to give readers a multi-layered look at her characters and their respective worlds, filled with fear, hope, and discovery. *The Mistress of Spices* reveals the importance of spices in human life found and cultivated only in the rich soil of India. Tilottama inherited this special trait from her mother. Tilottama is a woman in a small community runs a grocery store and uses her magical abilities to help customers through her creativity. She gives some turmeric tied in newspaper with some words of healing whispered in it and tries to cure the people physically as well as mentally. She uses fennel to treat Ahuja's wife when her life becomes miserable after marriage. Then the spice ginger is used to treat Geetha's grandfather. The special feature of this character Tilo is that she can communicate with the spice, which is very peculiar. Her novels and short stories portray educated, determined, mentally strong and stubborn female characters who are not afraid to break free from male chauvinism. Many scholars, critics, writers, newspapers and magazines recognized Divakaruni's female protagonist as the most interesting part of her work. In this article, the various issues faced by women and Divakaruni's neurofeministic perspective as a post-colonial feminist writer is analysed.

Keywords

Feminism, The Palace of Illusions, The Mistress of Spices, neurofeminism, Draupadi

Introduction

"Expectations are like hidden rocks in your path- all they do is trip you up."

---The Palace of Illusions

Feminist neuroliterarists typically seek to engage with the materiality of the brain and society, women faces in addition to biological definitions of the relationship between gender and the culture. The goal is greater differentiation of categories and societal designs, and greater clarity in the constructive process of presenting and interpreting results. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* is a modern adaptation of an ancient story written from a woman's perspective. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a writer who has written many essays, poems, short stories and novels. She gave voice to immigrant Indian women in her work. In this article, the various issues faced by women and Divakaruni's neurofeministic perspective as a post-colonial feminist writer is analysed. Her novels and short stories portray educated, determined, mentally strong and stubborn female characters who are not afraid to break free from male chauvinism. She has played many strong neurofeministic roles in the series of *Mistress of Spices* Tilo (1997) and Rebel Anju and Sudha, *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and Beautiful Draupadi in the *Palace of Illusion* (2008). All arranged marriage stories are presented in a subtle way, with believable characters. Many scholars, critics, writers, newspapers and magazines recognized Divakaruni's female protagonist as the most interesting part of her work. *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) is a retelling of the epic Mahabharata, either because of the author's writing style or simply from the point of view of a woman trapped in the middle of a man's world.



Fig 1. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

The Palace of Illusions (2008)

Told in the first person, Divakaruni's tale takes us through the epic in Panchali's voice. Panchali goes through several stages in her life. Through her simple narration, we understand that she is not a typical girl of her time, who obeys everything the elders tell her, but rather an explorer. Not just the exploratory kind, but the resilient and brave. Its nature is to challenge the limits society has set for women. The main plot revolves around the prophecy that she will change the course of history. After studying divination and growing up alone in a palace where outsiders were restricted, she always wondered how these quarantined people would change history to get out. Her only companion in childhood was his beloved brother Krishna. In a twist of fate, five siblings got married at the same time. This completely changed her life. She inspires us not to be defeated by her fate. She is comfortable with reality and helps her husband build her kingdom. However, no one is perfect, and she gambles away her home, her freedom, and her reputation, planting the seeds of revenge, and a horrible life of hiding, slavery, and running away makes her seriously flawed attack and in the end harsh justice that killed many innocent people and ultimately lead to lonely death. Traversing the life of Panchaali, King Draupad's daughter and wife to five husbands seeking to reclaim her birthright, bestselling novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni lends her voice to a bold and meaningful retelling of the stories of the Mahabharata. Draupadi-born fire believed in the prophecy of her life, then history changed forever. She spent her early years in Panchaal, hearing the story of her birth from Dhai Ma. Draupadi's only companion is Dhristadyumna, her brother born of fire. Since women

were forbidden to take lessons, she learned what she could from herself. Draupadi was a strong willed girl and wanted to leave a mark in history. Krishna visited them often and Draupadi loved them very much. He earned Panchaali in the name of the ancient sage Vyasa. Sage asks and warns him about three conditions. King Drupad wanted a strong ally like Arjuna. Draupadi's swayamvar is just a political setup for Arjun to defeat Draupadi. Because he is the only person who can compete with Arjuna and win. Although Draupadi is secretly attracted to Karna, she speaks bitterly about his caste and status. This is the only way to prevent him from defeating himself, to heed the advice of well-meaning people. Due to certain conditions and circumstances, Draupadi married five Pandavas and faced the real situation instead of escaping. She considered this a punishment for treating Karna cruelly. Karna's unspeakable love welled up inside her. She wanted to meet Karna's sad eyes. The Pandavas were given half of Hastinapur where they built a magical palace. Palace of Illusions. The palace was built so beautifully and gave Draupadi a sense of belonging and home. Krishna spoke his words of wisdom on the journey of the Pandavas. All the kings of Bharat participated in the Rajasuya ceremony in their palaces. Despite being threatened by the Pandavas, they welcomed Duryodhana and the other Kauravas. Sisupal brings death to Rajasuya with his words and the ceremony does not go as planned. Draupadi learns about Duryodhana's vision of why Pandavas has a beautiful palace. Duryodhana sent an invitation to the Pandavas to visit his palace and play dice. Yudhisthir brother of the Pandavas offered to accept the invitation. Yudhisthir lost his kingdom and Draupadi in a game of dice. The Kauravas insulted Draupadi. The game has lost its reputation. She called for help, but no one came forward. She cursed the Kauravas. The Kauravas promised to restore their kingdom when they returned from twelve years of exile. Revenge was the only emotion that drove Draupadi during her years of exile. The Kauravas did not fulfill their promise. Draupadi is one of the main reasons behind the great war between Pandavas and Kauravas. She also learns the truth about Karna, the biggest enemy of the Pandavas.

Mix of myth and magic:- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Palace of Illusions is beautifully written with a mix of myth and magic. Draupadi's character development is amazing. We find lots of elements of feminism in her character development. From her dream of making a place in history to being the main cause of the Great War, she made her dream a reality. Author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni incorporated the idea of a modern woman into the character of Draupadi. The humiliation faced by men by Draupadi which is completely away from our thoughts and imagination and this character created by Chitra Banerjee symbolises that women since centuries struggling in the patriarchal society. The character of Draupadi in this novel is a best example of neurofeministic thoughts going into a woman's mind which made her to open a council to women during her reign. Therefore, not only for her but all the women of Hastinapur get justice. Draupadi is indeed a powerful woman who holds an extraordinary place in history. Her unspoken love for Karna is depicted. Karna has been emotional since birth, but he never complains about the hardships of his life. Reliability is excellent. He stood by his friend, even if it was the wrong way. This shows his gratitude. Yudhisthir's luck with Dharma put the Pandavas and Panchali in trouble. He blindly trusted the Kauravas and lost his kingdom. Although his honesty causes difficulties, it helps him achieve his ultimate goal. Draupadi is also carved with all the flaws and strengths, her desires, her aversions and her positive and negative thoughts, thus allowing the readers to know and recognize Draupadi in her raw form. . Draupadi is depicted beautifully in the story and brought back to life by the author with great power. Women are not really inferior to men, they are just "different" in a way that fits biblical teachings and gender roles. Thus, the female brain is said to be wired for empathy and sensitivity as of Draupadi while the male brain is optimized for intelligence and action as depicted for Yudhisthir. Readers will experience Draupadi's childhood, family life, her role as a pawn in the biggest war game in the history of our country, and how she fought against her brother for the price of blood. In short, the rest of the supporting characters have no role or depth to them, and from Draupadi's mind, readers can draw a brief sketch of the characters. In short, this is a beautifully written fan fiction based on Indian mythology that will enlighten the mind and soul of the reader as well as make the book interesting.

Authors writing style:- The author's writing style is elegant and eloquent, connecting the storyline with deep emotions, which will move the readers to the challenges of the characters. The story is quite intellectual, wise and very real and is told from the first person perspective of Draupadi, thus allowing the audience to think in an honest voice. The pace of the book is very slow and while reading, readers may get a little tired due to the author's use of heavy words and many philosophical phrases. Whether in India or America, Divakaruni's plot features a woman of Indian descent torn between old and new world values. She uses her imagination and masterful narrative, plot, and lyrical expression to give readers a multi-layered look at her characters and their respective worlds, filled with fear, hope, and discovery. Whether in California, Chicago or Calcutta, women learn to adapt and eventually discover their own feelings in times of joy and heartache. The message taken from *The Palace of Illusions* is at the end of our lives, neither our wealth nor our fame accompany us on the path of peace. This is considered our good and bad deeds. We need to protect our property and focus on good work.

The Mistress of Spices (1997)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *The Mistress of Spices* reveals the importance of spices in human life found and cultivated only in the rich soil of India. Tilottama inherited this special trait from her mother. Tilottama is a woman in a small community runs a grocery store and uses her magical abilities to help customers through her creativity. However, in *The Mistress of Spices*, magic becomes more overt and deliberate, and the heroine is placed in the same place by the mystical grocer. Once fully committed to herbalism, the immortal Tilo in the crimson and arthritic body of an old woman—occasionally travelled to Oakland, California, where she opened a shop offering spices to the local Indian community. . Although it is her duty to remain emotionally detached, Tilo breaks the perfume rules and becomes drawn into the lives of her shop customers, facing challenges: abusive husbands, racism, generational conflict, drug addiction. When an unexpected romance blossoms with a handsome stranger. Tilo is forced to choose between eternal life and the changes of the present. Enchanting and hypnotizing, *The Mistress of Spices* is a tale of joy and sorrow and the magical power of a special woman. A special woman character created by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as a mistress of spices with abundant knowledge of spices and magical powers. The novelist opens a new avenue and reveals the importance of spices, in the life of people which is found and cultivated exclusively in a rich land, India. Tilottama acquires this special nature from her mother. She gives some turmeric tied in newspaper with some words of healing whispered in it and tries to cure the people physically as well as mentally. She uses fennel to treat Ahuja's wife when her life becomes miserable after marriage. Then the spice ginger is used to treat Geetha's grandfather. The special feature of this character Tilo is that she can communicate with the spice, which is very peculiar. Tilo should make use of the special power only with other persons and not for her own good, if she uses the power then it will turn against her. But unfortunately there comes a time when she uses it and she disobeys the rule, the power of the spices move away from her.

Objectives

- * To analyse the various issues faced by women.
- * To examine the phenomena of neurofeminism using a literary approach.
- * To understand how several authors have included feministic aspects in their literary texts.
- * To analyse how authors have looked at the relationship between brain and feministic thoughts.
- * To Undermine the social conventions and asserting individual rights, read with a humorous prism.
- * To analyze how women learn to adapt and eventually discover their own feelings in times of joy and heartache

Literature Review

Socio-structural factors are a source of influence at all levels of society, including laws, policies and practices, economic characteristics, occupations, and familial organization. (Duchesne,A.,Trujillo,K.A.,2021). Feminist research cannot claim to speak for all women, but can provide new knowledge grounded in the realities of women's experiences and actively enact structural changes in the social world.(Brayton,J.,Ollivier,M.,Robbins,W.,2000). We delineate how neuroscientific studies purporting to show sex brain differences may be prone to bias at a number of methodological levels – including the choice of categories to be studied, and the choice of tools for data gathering, analysis, and presentation. Then, we show how interpretations of such studies may wrongly assume the notion of 'hard-wiring'. Furthermore, lack of attention to distinctions within philosophy of mind may result in a mistaken supposition that brain differences lead to mental and/or psychological and/or behavioral ones. It is not difficult to see how these forms of neurosexism, leading to claims of 'hard-wired' gender differences that map onto traditional and harmful gender stereotypes, raise ethical questions. (Hoffman,A.G.,Bluhm,R.2016). One field in which especially feminist scholars request more caution is the neuroscientific examination of sex or gender differences. Feminist scholars have described various ways in which sexist bias might be present in neuroscientific research on sex or gender differences. In this context, they coined the term "neurosexism" to describe the entanglement between neuroscientific work and sexist ideology, and "neurofeminism" as a response to that.(Kassandra,F.,Philipp,K.,2022). In day today life, spices are used for cooking. But in the hands of the writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni Spices get a different shape and sense. Tilo the main character of the novel uses the spices as a curative. By penning the novel *The Mistress of Spices*, the novelist, opens a new avenue and reveals the importance of spices in the life of people which is found and cultivated exclusively in a rich land, India. (Kanagamani,P,J.,.2019)

About the author

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (born July 29, 1956) is an Indian-American writer, poet, and the Betty and Gene McDavid Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her short story collection, *Arranged Marriage*, won the 1996 American Book Award, and two of her novels (*Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart*), as well as the short story *The Word of Love*, have been adapted into films. This book, *The Palace of Illusions*, has been made into a film or TV series. Divakaruni's work was created primarily in India and the United States, often focusing on the experiences of South Asian immigrants. She writes for both children and adults and has published novels in many genres including realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, myth and fantasy. Her notable works are *Arranged Marriage* (1995), *Mistress of Spices*(1997), *Sister of My Heart*(1999), *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019). She founded Maitri about 25 years ago. An organization that helps Indian and South Asian women affected by violence and domestic violence. In 25 years, it has grown into a large organization and has helped hundreds of women.

Conclusion

The basic principle of feminism is the pursuit of women's equality and justice in all areas of life and the creation of opportunities for women to enjoy the same resources freely available to men. Feminism includes various lines of research related to the history of women's oppression and how to deal with the "author's anxiety" by creating an independent literary canon. Feminism, in fact, is a serious attempt to analyze, understand, and clarify women because they have many psychosocial and cultural constructs. However, this paper is an attempt to explain some of the basic assumptions and principles of feminism and to trace its theoretical origins. Historical events have the power to attract, fascinate and entertain people as in *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. But when history is viewed through a feminist lens, it's sure to start a conversation.

“Women can be feisty, they can be flawed and at the same time they can be empathized with and admired.”

- -- Chitra Banerjee Devakaruni

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Suggested Reading

Sudha Shaw.Dr.S.Prasannasree.*Neurofeminism: A Neuroliterary Study of Social Gender Order that critiques the Virginia Woolf's Assumptions about Feminist Issues in her A Room of One's Own.IJRAR, Sept2022 Vol 9, Issue 3*

SudhaShaw.Dr.S.Prasannasree.*Neurofeminism: Atwood discusses neurofeminist issues of consumerism and cannibalism in The Edible Woman. IJRASET Oct2022 Vol 10,IssueX*

