

Portrayal of Myths in the Writings of Chitra Divakaruni

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Abstract: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a celebrated diasporic writer of India-American fiction. She frequently incorporates Indian myths and folklore in her writings. Her myths in novels are not static retellings but dynamic reimagining which serve many purposes. It preserves cultural background, challenges patriarchal traditions, and provides new meanings in diasporic contexts. This paper explores her selected works such as *Arranged Marriage* (1995), *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), for the research. Divakaruni adopted a different reinterpretation of epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, through feministic point of view. Divakaruni through her subtle infusion of Indian-mythological elements into immigrant narratives, establishes myths as effective tools for empowerment and cultural negotiation in the alien land. This study advocates that her fictions demonstrate how myths transcend temporal and spatial boundaries, when reinterpreted to remain relevant in the present diasporic literature.

Keywords- Myths, diaspora, narrative, displacement, immigrants.

Introduction

Myths have always been centered in Indian cultural and literary traditions. Myths are timeless narratives that offer moral, philosophical, and cultural insights by nature. For diasporic writers especially, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, myth functions as a bridge between native-land and the alien land. Divakaruni focuses her concerns of immigrant identity, displacement, and hybridity in the United States while simultaneously drawing on the mythical imagination of Indian tradition.

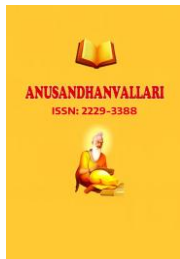
She has written in many forms of literature; her novels and stories reflect a unique blend of myth and modern thoughts. In *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), Divakaruni reinterprets the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective, raising voice to a character who was traditionally silence. In *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), she reimagines the *Ramayana* through Sita, transforming a narrative of obedience into one of the strong agencies. Even in works like *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), myth represents in a symbolic way, where magical spices possess mythical qualities that shape immigrant lives.

This paper is an effort to explore Divakaruni's strategic use of myth, focusing mainly on three key aspects of her narratives:

- A. Myth as a traditional and cultural memory that preserve forever.
- B. Myth as a tool for feministic representation.
- C. Myth as a source in diasporic negotiation.

Myth as a traditional and cultural memory, preserve forever

The one and foremost functions of myth in Divakaruni's narratives is the preservation of traditional and cultural memory. For the people who are navigating life in the United States, myths provide continuous relief with their rich Indian heritage.



In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the central character is trained by an immortal mistress who incorporates mythical wisdom. The spices in this novel function themselves as mythological characters — turmeric has power of a purifier, cinnamon as a reminder of love, neem as a representation of sacrifice. These spices perform as sources of cultural continuity, reminding immigrant people about their rituals, traditions, culture and values.

In the same way, in *Arranged Marriage*, her collection of short stories, characters usually recall Indian mythic figures or cultural archetypes when they struggle with their difficulties. For example, women compare themselves with the difficulties of Sita or Savitri, depicting the deep-seated motivation of myths in shaping their identity.

Thus, Divakaruni explores myth not only as nostalgia alone but also as a living presence in the diaspora, ensuring that the cultural roots of the people are not severed despite geographical dislocation.

Myth as a tool for feministic representation

Divakaruni's most striking contribution lies in her feminist reinterpretation of Indian epics. She challenges patriarchal society's philosophy of myths by giving voice to women who were historically silence in canonical texts.

Portrayal of Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions*

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni retells the *Mahabharata* through Draupadi's perspectives. Draupadi was traditionally seen as a pawn in the epic's political drama, Divakaruni reimagines Draupadi as the narrator, reclaiming her rights and powers. Through her interior monologues, we come to know about her desires, frustrations, and ambitions in her life. By creating a central place for her in the narrative, Divakaruni not only humanizes Draupadi but also criticizes patriarchal structure of society that defined her role in the epic.

Role of Sita in *The Forest of Enchantments*

Similarly, *The Forest of Enchantments* reimagines the *Ramayana* from Sita's perspective. Divakaruni rather than depicting Sita merely as a symbol of chastity and devotion, represents her as a woman full of strength, independence, and emotional depth. Her different exams like exile, trial by fire, and ultimately rejection of Rama are exposed as the acts of self-respect and dignity. This feminist reimagining highlights how myths can be reincorporated to empower women in both traditional and modern societies.

Myth as a source in diasporic negotiation

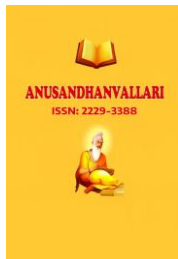
For diasporic communities, myths play a crucial role in negotiating identity. Divakaruni's fiction illustrates how myths are adapted and reinterpreted in the immigrant context.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, mythic motifs merge with immigrant struggles. Tilo's role as a healer resonates with the archetype of a shaman or goddess figure. Yet, she lives in Oakland, navigating the pain of cultural displacement. The fusion of myth and immigrant reality enables Divakaruni to articulate the hybridity of diasporic identity.

Moreover, myths in her works are not rigid; they evolve with changing contexts. Immigrants use myths to make sense of new realities, whether by invoking them for comfort or by reinterpreting them for empowerment. In this way, myths become tools of adaptation, allowing cultural heritage to coexist with modern challenges.

Myth and the challenge of Identity

Identity is one of the prominent themes in Divakaruni's fiction, and myths play a vital role in its construction. Especially for women, myth offers both responsibility and freedom. The people struggle not only with their traditional expectations laid in mythic ideals but also find strength in reinterpreting various myths.



For instance, Draupadi and Sita in Divakaruni are not merely passive victims; they are the characters who demand recognition of their word. Immigrant Indian women, in *Arranged Marriage* similarly challenge patriarchal expectations idealized by myth. The acknowledgement of myth in such contexts permits Divakaruni to expose how identity is negotiated at the different stages of tradition and modernity.

Myth and Narrative Techniques

Divakaruni does not simply include myths into her narratives; she intertwines them structurally. Her narrative technique itself reflects mythical qualities. Recurring cycle, magical elements, and figurative patterns evoke the ambience of myth. In *The Palace of Illusions*, episodes of the *Mahabharata* are retold in lyrical forms, almost as in oral-traditional style, echoing how myths are historically transmitted from oral to written. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the anthropomorphizing of different spices recollects mythical folktales, in which different objects and elements of nature possessed their voices and agency.

Thus, myths configure not only themes of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni but also the form of her fiction.

Critical Analyses of Myth in Divakaruni's Fiction

Many Scholars have quoted Divakaruni's innovative incorporation of myths in her narratives. Meenakshi Mukherjee argues that her feminist reimagining provides: - "New entry points into old narratives." Anjali Gera Roy perceives that her mythical reconstructions provide as tools of "Cultural survival in diaspora." Some critics have also mentioned that her engagement with Indian myths stands her alongside other renowned global personalities like Margaret Atwood, who also reinterprets myths for feministic purposes.

However, some critics observed that her mythical reimagining occasionally oversimplify the great epics for her Western readership. Yet, the overwhelming concurrence is that, her writings revitalize myths for modern contexts, especially in raising women's voices and identities of immigrants.

Amplified Conclusion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's narratives demonstrates that myths are not the artefacts of the tradition but living narratives are capable of transformation in modern time. Divakaruni, by reinterpreting Draupadi and Sita, empowers silenced voices. By embedding myths in immigrant fictions, she sustains cultural tradition while authorizing new hybrid identities. She, by blending myth with narrative innovation, Divakaruni ensures that narratives vibrate across boundaries of time, land, and culture.

Ultimately, we can conclude that myths in her fiction become favorable tools of negotiation — between traditional and modernity, native land and immigrant, patriarchy and feminism. In reshaping myths new context, Divakaruni not only preserves her traditional cultural heritage but also transforms it to face the needs of contemporary women as well as diasporic communities.

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