

A Psychoanalytical Study of Female Characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Fiction

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The study focuses on the psychoanalytical aspects of the female characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's selected novels, exploring the intricate inner lives of Tilo, Draupadi, and Sita, who endure suffering throughout their lives. This study will explore the themes of identity, trauma, and empowerment by analysing novels such as *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Palace of Illusions*, and *The Forest of Enchantments*. It examines the studies of Freudian and Jungian theories. The study highlights the interplay between the unconscious desires and conscious realities of the protagonists of the novels, revealing how they deal with issues of displacement familial obligations and the search of self-identity by delving into the psychological motivations behind their actions. The author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni aims to illuminate a nuanced portrayals of female strength and psychological aspects which shows that women narratives are part and parcel of modern literature, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of women's role in contemporary literature.

Keywords: Psychoanalytical, empowerment, protagonist, Self –identity, contemporary.

1. Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, born in July 29, 1956, in Calcutta, is well-known Indian-American author and poet. She began her writing career as a poet with the publication of *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990). Being an Indian she has extremely influenced by the Mythology particularly Indian Epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Her first short story collection *Arranged Marriage* won American book award PEN Josephine Miles Award and Bay Area Book Reviewer Award and paved way for her to become prominent writer in English Literature. Her major novels are *The Mistress of Spices* (1995), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *The Palace of Illusion* (2008),

One Amazing Thing(2010), Oleander Girl (2013), Before we visit the Goddess(2016). The Mistress of Spices, one of the bestselling novels of Divakaruni has been adapted into the movie.

In contemporary literature, the portrayal of female characters has developed significantly, reflecting broader societal changes and a growing recognition of women's problems. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands out as a significant voice in this literary transformation, crafting narratives that seek deep into the psychological and emotional landscapes of her female protagonists. This paper focuses on three of her compelling characters—Tilo from *The Mistress of Spices*, Draupadi from *The Palace of Illusions*, and Sita from *The Forest of Enchantments*. Each character incorporate the struggles, strengths, and aspirations of women navigating a world fraught with cultural expectations, personal trauma, and the pursuit of self-identity.

Psychoanalytical theory emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. He is considered as the founder of psychoanalytical theory around 1960s .The theory is recognize as the theory of personality development which enables to understand the psyche and behaviour of human being. Human psyche is divided into three functions and introduced the concept of Id, Ego and Super ego to study the conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious mind and personality of a human being. The Id is very essential for child because all his bodily need are fulfilled by this. The desire is unconscious and refer to selfish and primitive pleasure. Ego refers to individual identity and a balance between Id and Super ego, and Super ego is moral conscience and parental standards of right and wrong behaviour. Freud introduced the theory of unconscious with the respect of dream interpretation through his work 'The Interpretation of Dreams'. Freud's theory of dream interpretation is applicable in the character of Sita for she encounters many dreams in the novel.

The Mistress of Spices by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a psychoanalytical perspective explores the inner world of the protagonist, Tilo, searches her subconscious desires, conflicts, and identity crisis. Tilo struggles with her dual identity—one as a mystical Mistress of Spices with a duty to help others, and the other as a woman with distinctive desires, particularly her longing for love and connection with Raven, a man who represents freedom from her mystical obligations. This duality reflects Freud's idea of the conflict between the id (desires) and the superego (sense of duty and moral restraint).

"I am not this body that you see, more shadow than substance, I am the Mistress of Spices."(Tilo's struggle with her identity, *The Mistress of Spices*)

Tilo's supernatural role requires her to suppress her own emotions and desires, repressing her personal happiness to fulfil the needs of others. This situation creates tension and emotional turbulence within her, leading to a psychological conflict that develops the novel.

Tilo's attraction to the Raven is seen as a manifestation of her unconscious desires to break the rigid roles which imposed upon her and become free.

"I must not love him, I have told myself. I must remember my vow, my sacred calling."(Desire and Repression, *The Mistress of Spices*)

The longing for freedom and individuality might be interpreted through the psychoanalytical lens as the subconscious breaking through the rigid control of the ego.

In the novel the use of spices can be seen as a symbolic representation of Tilo's emotions and psychoanalytical states. She has the desire to escape from the constraint of her magical role. Each spice plays a significant role and power, mirroring the complexity, often hidden emotions she navigates within her inner world. She has the yearning of autonomy, to live a free from the dictate of the spices, which symbolize her obligations. It reflects the psychoanalytical struggle of the ego trying to keep balance in societal expectations and personal desires.

"I want to be free, free of all these spices, their voices that fill my head." (The Mistress of Spices)

These dialogues represent Tilo's inner psychological conflict, her repressed emotions, and her struggle between duty and personal fulfilment. They can be analysed psychoanalytically as manifestations of deeper subconscious desires and tension. The Journey of Tilo can be seen as one of self-discovery and emotional integration where she oscillated in between duty, desire, and self-realization.

In the Palace of Illusion, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni focuses on the inner psychological experiences of the protagonist, Draupadi (Panchali), exploring her desires, conflicts, and identity struggles. The novel depicts the Mahabharata from Draupadi's perspective, revealing her subconscious drives and emotions.

Draupadi struggles with her self - identity as a woman in a patriarchal society, and this inner conflict is key in her quest for power, recognition, and control. She plays her roles as a daughter, wife, and queen, often questioning her value beyond these roles, she is divided between in these roles. This can be called the Freudian concept of the "ego" grappling with societal expectations. The novel examines Draupadi's inner mind, where she often explores the limitations imposed on her as a woman. Through Jungian lens her desire for agency and power can be viewed.

Her quest for autonomy symbolizes the search for feminine consciousness in patriarchy society. The novel reflects the psychological journey of Draupadi, her unfulfilled desires, specially her longing for independence and respect, her attraction to Karna, despite being married to the pandavas, the conflict between duty and personal desire. When Draupadi was publically humiliated in the court of the Kauravas, the event had a profound impact on her actions and psyche. This trauma led her to harbor a deep desire for vengeance, which aligns with the psychoanalytic concept of restrained emotions surfacing as motivation for future actions.

Overall Divakaruni narrates psyche as a lens to search deeper issues of gender, identity, power and trauma in mythological context.

The Forest of Enchantment by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a psychoanalytical reading can explore the inner workings of Sita's mind, her identity, and her complex emotional landscape. The novel presents her perspective on events in The Ramayana, focusing on her thoughts, feelings, and psychological responses to the trials she faces.

In the novel psychoanalysis explores Sita's sense of duty versus personal desires. As she plays her roles as a wife, mother, and queen. She confronts inner turmoil, especially in relation to her relationship with Rama and her sense of self. Her struggle can be perceive through the lens

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of Freud's theory of the id, ego and superego, as she balances personal needs and societal expectations.

"I am more than the woman who waits for her husband to return from war. I am more than the wife who stands by, even when she is abandoned. But what am I, truly?"

(The Forest of Enchantment)

This dialogue depicts her internal struggle between her societal roles and her desire for self-definition. From a psychoanalytical viewpoint, this might represent her attempt to reconcile the demands of the superego (societal expectations) with the needs of the ego (her personal identity). Sita encounters significant hardship, including her kidnapping by Ravana and her trials by fire. These events can be analysed as a psychological trauma. The novel explores how Sita maintains balance in between her composure and role in society.

Sita's role as a mother is the central part of her identity. A psychoanalytical approach expands how motherhood influences her psyche, reflecting Jungian archetypes, such as caring mother and warrior woman, as she fights for her children and for her own existence. The relationship of Sita with other characters specially Ram and Ravana can be seen as unconscious desires or fears. Her relationship with Rama is tinged with both love and deep desire for equality, which can reflect unconscious dynamics of power, dependency and longing the novel explores Sita's emotions, feelings and mental states, offering a rich landscape for psychoanalytic interpretation. Beyond her mythological role, it reveals deeper layers of her psyche.

2. Conclusion

This study emphasises the significant psychoanalytic perspectives through Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's selected novels by delineating the complex inner lives of the female protagonists. The research highlights the themes like identity, trauma and empowerment and how women carry the tensions between unconscious desires and conscious realities. By applying Freudian and Jungian theories, the analysis throws light on psychoanalytical motivations behind their actions, familial obligations and search for self –identity. Divakaruni explores through the novels the resilience and strength of female characters, putting a broader recognition of women's narrative in contemporary literature. Ultimately the study states the crucial role of these narratives in offering deeper insights into women's experiences and their significant contribution in contemporary literary discourse.

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