CHAPTER-II

MAGIC REALISM IN DIVAKARUNI’S

THE MISTRESS OF SPICES

I. Introduction:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning author, poet and teacher. Her work has been published in over 50 magazines, including the Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker, and her writing has been included in over 50 anthologies. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew and Japanese.

Much of Divakaruni’s works deal with the immigrant experience, an important theme in the mosaic of American society. Her book Arranged Marriage, winner of an American Book Award, is a collection of short stories about women from India caught between two worlds.

In The Mistress of Spices, named one of the best books of the 20th Century by the San Francisco Chronicle, the heroine Tilo provides spices, not only for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop experience. In Sister of My Heart, two cousins—one in America, the other in India, share details of their lives with each other and help each other solve problems that threaten their marriages. In One Amazing Thing, a group of strangers of varied backgrounds, trapped by an earthquake in an Indian visa office, discover
what they have in common as they struggle to save themselves. Divakaruni writes to unite people. Her aims are to destroy myths and stereotypes. She hopes through her writing to dissolve boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities and ages.

II. Plot :

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents multiple consciousnesses as an identity that is in between such oppositional states, characterized by being neither rather than both. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the process of self-perception is the foundation of identity formation for the central character Tilotamma (Tilo). As Tilo strives to define herself as South Asian and American, she develops multiple consciousnesses that manifest themselves in both her experiences and her subsequent relationships with her racial and sexual identities. While Tilo is living in America, she is incapable of pure self-perception, and can only see herself through the eyes of those around her, leaving her own self-seeing as a secondary and almost marginal perspective. Tilo views herself through the lens of her surrounding society, thereby leading to various and often conflicting simultaneous visions of her identity.

III. Magic Realism in *The Mistress of Spices*:

*The Mistress of Spices* is the story of Tilo, a young woman born in another time, in a faraway place, who is trained in the ancient art of
spices and ordained as a mistress charged with special powers. Once fully initiated in a rite of fire, the now immortal Tilo—in the gnarled and arthritic body of an old woman—travels through time to Oakland, California, where she opens a shop from which she administers spices as curatives to her customers. An unexpected romance with a handsome stranger eventually forces her to choose between the supernatural life of an immortal and the vicissitudes of modern life. Spellbinding and hypnotizing, The Mistress of Spices is a tale of joy and sorrow and one special woman's magical powers.

*Mistress of Spices* is a story of a girl who is born to poor parents and regarded as a one who will again put her parents in misery as they will have to pay dowry. Little did they know at the time of her birth that she is born with supernatural powers of foreseeing future. As her fame spread, pirates hear about her and abducts her one day! However, she was powerful enough to overthrow the chief and became the queen of pirates. She was not satisfied and when in search of peace, she comes to an island where she is to become the Mistress of Spices under the rigorous training of First Mother.

The First Mother teaches her along with other girls all about the Spices. These spices are later to be used to cure other peoples’ misery when given to them with the magical chants. Once she manages to learn all those Special Powers, she is to run a Spice Store in Oakland. She is
given the name ‘Tilo’. Tilo should never leave the store, she should never use the powers for herself but for others to help and last but not the least she should not make any physical contact with any human being. As the story progresses, readers find smaller stories intertwined where Tilo uses her powers to help others. While helping others, she is so taken into it that one after another she starts breaking the forbidden rules laid for Mistresses. Not only she breaks rules but she also allows herself to fall in love with a lonely American.

D. B Gavani Commented: “For the second generation Indian like Geeta, the question about identity is differently poised. She challenges continuous identification with patriarchal traditions which she associates her grandfather. Tilo empathizes with Geeta, tries to assenge their pain and the novel tells us that she succeeds in restoring within the family” (Gavani, 79)

At first, Tilo allows these perceptions of herself as created by others to dominate her thinking, yet as she assimilates herself to American culture throughout the course of the text, Tilo comes to claim her own self-perception. The result of this knowledge is Tilo's recognition of her multiple consciousnesses, and although this tiplicity is replete with contradictions, Divakaruni nevertheless presents it as a possible solution for Tilo's dilemma of cross-cultural identity formation.
An older woman born with supernatural shaman-like abilities in a small village in India, Tilo's gift is her ability to elicit specific powers inherent in spices and use them to cure the maladies of those around her. In Tilo's preteen years, pirates storm into her home, murder her entire family and abduct Tilo, taking her on board their ship as a prisoner. Eventually, Tilo overthrows the pirate captain to become the pirate “queen, leading [her] pirates to fame and glory, so that bards sang their fearless exploits.”(TMOS, 20)

But Tilo abandons this exalted position when mystical sea serpents tell her about the existence of an island upon which she, and other women like her, can develop their supernatural talents to use them for a greater good. This isolated island is a haven for these women, who call themselves the “Mistresses of Spices” and are under the care of the First Mother, the eldest and wisest teacher of all the women. The women are trained in the art of listening and controlling the spices, and are then sent forth into the greater world to aid humanity. After Tilo learns all that she can, she is sent to Oakland, California, to a tiny Indian spice shop where she must begin her duties of healing the masses. Thus, she is thrust into the chaos of American life and the newness of a culture to which she must adapt. Although Tilo has already begun her diasporic journey, she does not feel the loss of a home, but rather a finding of many. Tilo sails
upon a ship to the island of the Mistresses, a reference to the kalipani, or dark water, the term used in order to describe the journey made by indentured laborers and immigrants from the motherland of India to other foreign lands, creating what we today refer to as the “diaspora.”

Already, Divakaruni presents Tilo as inextricably mired in the workings of the diaspora, and the entire notion of home becomes displaced, transformed into an intangible condition that is not based on a singular location but rather a movement among many places. When Tilo arrives on the Island, she and the other young girls like her are given new identities, indicating that the past is being relegated to memory and new personas are being forged. Tilo meets the First Mother, a figure who foreshadows the paradoxical identity that Tilo will soon find herself grappling with.

The First Mother is elderly and maternal, representing the traditionalist notion of the South Asian woman in the domestic sphere. Yet at the same time, she is outside the boundaries of conventional culture, for she lives on an isolated island, possesses magical powers and urges the young girls toward progression and change rather than the maintenance of the status quo. She is at once the old world and the new, a juxtaposition of differing geographical spaces, times and cultures. Upon their arrival, the First Mother tells the girls, “Daughters it is time for me to give you your new names. For when you came to this island you left your old names behind, and have remained nameless since.” (TMOS, 42)
D B Gavani commented: “Divakaruni is writing the script of women’s rebellion against the pressure to suppress their desire and their bodies. The order of Mistresses clearly replicates patriarchal struggle and Tilo must be made to break free of them. She struggles with her own passions as she builds emotional relationship with Native American man, whom she calls, Raven. She transforms herself into a woman, feeling guilty about her self indulge, but decides to brave the retribution that she would have to face” (Gavani, 80)

Tilo, the mistress of spices takes her name from Tilottam, the divine danseuse in Indra’s court. But she also brings another meaning to the name. She associates herself with till, the sesame seed. In this sense the divine and the earthly are united into Tilo. When she decides to give up the divine and restrict herself only to the human, she takes another name Maya, a name with profound mythological and philosophical associations. Maya, in Hindu philosophy is feminine and is the principle behind the entire material universe. The material universe is considered an allusion. When Tilo assumes the name Maya, she once again reasserts her earthly and feminine character.

Tilo receives her new name and identity, leaving her childhood in a village in India behind her, and assuming a temporary persona that is of the uncertain present rather than the definitive and historical past. Tilo
spends decades learning the delicate art of the spices, but the moment arrives when she must leave the island and continue the diasporic journey she has begun. Before Tilo is sent to Oakland, the First Mother gives her a knife as a gift, the purpose of which Tilo believes is “...to cut my moorings from the past, the future. To keep me always rocking at sea” (TMOS, 53)

Tilo has entered a state of liminality, a space between the past and the future and without a precise knowledge of where the present. She is unmoored and treading the dark waters between the lands of her past and the lands of her future, a theme that will reappear throughout in the text's representations of the relationship between time and space.

The Island is the first diasporic space that we encounter, and while it exhibits the same liminality and ambiguity as America does, Divakaruni clearly genders the island differently than she later will America. The Island exudes femininity - specifically, Divakaruni constructs it as a maternal space with the figure of the First Mother and the presence of only females on the island. The Island nurtures Tilo, educating and preparing her for the next stage of life she will encounter when she leaves, and also imbuing Tilo with a sense of singularity of identity. While its women learn and grow, the Island itself never changes—the daily routines of the Mistresses remain the same and an ambiance of
group unity amongst all females is fostered. Such community cohesion and support will later contrast sharply with the multiplicity and solitude that Divakaruni presents as indicative of the diasporic experience of America.

Tilo is transported to America by means of “Shampati’s Fire,” a giant bonfire into which she steps and disappears. The symbolism of fire is obvious in its action: the destruction of present physical form, and a reduction to ashes that are then scattered to the far corners of the globe. Divakaruni is again foreshadowing the process of Tilo's identity formation, using the fire as a metaphor for the recreation of the self and presenting identity as erratic rather than permanent. The actual word “Shampati” is a reference to the “bird of myth and memory who dived into conflagration and rose new from ash,” or what can be considered an Eastern version of the phoenix. (TMOS, 58)

Tilo's journey to America is a form rebirth; it is a literal recreation of the self. She emerges from the fire on a bed of ash, in a small spice store in Oakland that she will make her own. The presence of this ash serves as an ambiguous omen, for Tilo enters into her new life upon the remnants of her old, with life and death inextricably linked together just as they are for the phoenix. Once in America, Tilo is immediately placed in yet another interstitial space, unable to forget her history but still
wanting to move forward with life. She lives in between, for the island of the past is no longer her home, while America is still too unfamiliar to describe as such. While Divakaruni had gendered the Island as female, America is now portrayed as an almost hermaphroditic space, as ambiguous and uncertain in its many identities as Tilo is in hers. When in America, Tilo interacts with all genders, identifying with both her male and female customers and friends alike.

She experiences the sadness and anger of the young and confused adolescent Indian boy who is tormented at school while at the same time sympathizing with the pain of the newly-wed Indian bride who suffers from the terror of domestic abuse. Tilo's consciousness, like America, is in between genders, possessing the characteristics of both so she never has to choose one or the other. Even though she now lives in California, Tilo finds that she cannot let go of her time on the Island with the First Mother and the other Mistresses.

The memories are with her night and day, reminders and warnings of the past stream into her thoughts, creating conflict in her present life. As her relationship with her lover Raven progresses, Tilo finds the past inescapable, for the possible admonitions of the First Mother constantly plague her present consciousness. “The spice's silence is like a stone in my heart, like ash on my tongue. Through it I can hear back to long ago, the Old One laughing bitter as bile. I know what she would say were she here.” (TMOS, 136)
“Tilo often dreams of the island, and even engages in a silent mental dialogue with the First Mother across the expanses of space Time” (Divakarun, 121-22). There is a sense of simultaneous universes, or different spheres that exist at the same time and in the same place. As Tilo ponders one day, “First Mother, are you at this very moment singing the song of welcome, the song to help my soul through the layers, bone and steel and forbidding word, that separate the two worlds.” (TMOS, 316)

The phrase at this very moment suggests a synchrony between the Island and America, rather than a divide between them that would relegate the Island to the past and America to the present. Tilo's past does not simply haunt her, but instead it is part of her current sphere, making it impossible for her to live simply in the present because the present does not exist by itself. This new sense of time is also expressed in the very structure of the text itself, for Mukherjee jumps from one temporal location to another with almost every chapter.

By oscillating between Tilo's childhood, her time spent on the Island, and the various stages of her life in America, Mukherjee elicits a somatic reaction within readers, causing us to experience the same senses of temporal liminality and dislocation as Tilo herself feels. Tilo also feels unmoored spatially, for America is only a temporary place for her; it is
her home only insofar as she is fulfilling her duty as a *Mistress of Spices*. The first time that Tilo exits the comfort of her store, she experiences an intense wave of longing for a place to call home:

“I run my hand over the door, which looks so alien in outdoor light, and I am struck by the sudden vertigo of homelessness” (TMOS, 137). It does not have a home in the traditional and permanent sense, and America is simply one point in between her geographical migrations. Tilo has left the Island but knows that she will someday return to it, to that place that is still “in between” worlds, yet remains the only location in which she feels the comfort of belongingness. Tilo's emotions are an extreme version of the diasporic experience of space in which continents are separated not by miles but by universes, where home does not exist except in the space of idealizing memory.

Frantz Fanon explores the impact of altered space upon one's consciousness in the colonial context, describing the experience of existing in such a luminal space as follows: “Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. A slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world - definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.”( Frantz Fanon, 110-111).
Tilo's understanding of time and space results in the creation of a schema in which her existence relates to these constructions through a dialectic of mentality and physicality, that is to say, time and space are no longer solely corporeal locations (past or present, continents or nations) but rather states of being that are intertwined with her consciousnesses, spanning numerous locations and incorporating the presence of various spheres simultaneously. Tilo's fluidity of identity also translates into a fluidity of identification, for Tilo's gift is her ability to read into the lives of all those who enter her store, seeing all of the problems they endure as they assimilate, feeling their daily sufferings and understanding even their most private thoughts and wishes.

Ironically, she has the deepest vision for the innermost selves of all others, yet is still incapable of actually perceiving herself. In fact, Tilo is expressly forbidden to look in a mirror while she lives in Oakland and fulfills her duties as a Mistress of Spices, for “Once a Mistress has taken on her magic Mistress-body, she is never to look on her reflection again.” (TMOS, p. 61)

This strict prohibition of mirrors is a metaphor for Tilo's inability to perceive herself through her own eyes; instead, she formulates her identity upon the vision of others, based upon the differing perceptions of herself as seen by friends, patrons and lovers. Tilo first confronts conflicting perceptions of herself through her experiences with race and
class, both of which are inextricably linked together in South Asian formations of identity. She consistently sees the damaging effects of racism on the lower-class patrons of her store, the emergence of an Indian elite upper-middle class community, and the general displacement of South Asians in traditional American categorizations of race and class.

As Vijay Prashad observes, South Asians have been “confusedly named and renamed both as 'whites' and as 'minorities' throughout the twentieth century,” for “white Americans have been unable to decide how to identify Asian Indians in terms of Race” (Vijay Prashad, p. 109). Rather than a singular approach to South Asian racial identity, there has only been an abundance of contradictions and paradoxes. As Tilo observes the manner in which South Asians are treated in America, she begins to formulate a conception of her place in the overall structure of American race relations. Tilo first encounters the brutality of racism when one of her working class patrons, Mohan, is brutally assaulted by two young white men one evening. As the men viciously beat Mohan, they scream, “Sonofabitch Indian, shoulda stayed in your own goddam country.” (TMOS, 180)

The young men classify Mohan who has lived in the United States for over a decade in the same category as all immigrants in the United States, just another minority amongst many. In contrast, Mohan and his wife Veena see themselves as separate from other minority communities and wonder why they are the targets of racism. Tilo experiences Mohan's
pain and Veena's suffering as if it were her own, crying out after her vision of the beating, “My limbs ache as after a long illness, my sari is damp with shiver-sweat, and in my heart I cannot tell where your pain ends and mine begins. For your story is the story of all those I have learned to love in this country, and to fear for.” (TMOS, 182)

Another young South Asian patron of Tilo's is assaulted at school, taunted by white classmates who scream, “Talk English son of a bitch. Speak up nigger wetback asshole.” (TMOS, 41). Tilo's patron sobs and tries to understand why the jeering must occur, wondering what it means to be called nigger, when he is not black but rather South Asian. “The experience of being discriminated against is one common to many South Asians living in America, and acts of violence against South Asian immigrants have only increased over the years”( Prashad, p. 87)

Prashad examines this rise in racist attacks in the United States and the impact that such attacks have upon the racial consciousness of desis: “Immigrants can work, but if they choose to enact their cultural resources, they may face anti-immigrant wrath. Since 1994 the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium's annual audit of violence has shown a gradual increase in the number of racist attacks...Though desis have faced the tyranny of white supremacy since the nineteenth century...the incident of the 'Dotbusters' reminded us of the threat to our
existence... Some white youths in New Jersey fastened upon that 'dot'... dubbed themselves 'Dotbusters,' and issued a manifesto to the local press: 'We will go to any extreme to get Indians to move out of Jersey City,' they wrote.”(Vijay Prashad, 87)

Regardless of the manner in which South Asians perceive themselves, they are still subject to the prejudices of racism that plague society, and when Tilo observes such discrimination, it influences her perception of her race in relation to greater American society. She now identifies with the experiences of other minority groups in the United States, groups that are constantly fighting for recognition and respect from the majority.

Yet when Tilo observes a different class of South Asians, she sees the other side of South Asian racial identity. As opposed to the lower-class patrons described earlier, the rich Indians are protected from racism and disassociate themselves from the black community, identifying almost completely with the white-upper class.

“The rich Indians descend from hills that twinkle brighter than stars... The car stops, the uniformed chauffeur jumps out to hold open the gold-handled door, and a foot in a gold sandal steps down. Soft and arched and almost white... the rich Indians rarely speak... Inside the store
which they have entered only because friends said, “it's so quaint, you must go and see it at least once”... The rich Indians crane their necks and lift their chins high because they have to be more always than other people, taller, handsomer, better dressed... [They] heave their bodies like moneybags out the door and into their satin cars... Other rich people send lists instead, because being a rich person is a busy job. Golf cruises charity luncheons in the Cornelian Room shopping for new Lamborghiniis and cigar cases inlaid with lapis lazuli. Still others have forgotten to be Indian and eat caviar” (TMOS, 78-9)

The minority group described above differs greatly from the patrons who were terrorized by racism and prejudice, even though both groups are of South Asian descent. This difference serves to illustrate the fact that the marker of race changes in relation to South Asians- it is no longer skin colour only, but rather class, which possesses an immense influence over the creation of identity, resulting in distinctly different characterizations of the South Asian self. Because class is such a strong indicator of race, the very notion of race itself is transformed to the point where it is as changeable as one's job or financial security.
Tilo soon realizes that the South Asian in America is considered neither white nor black in American society, but rather a race in-between, depending on one's particular class. Tilo's racial identity can be characterized as entailing a self that is seen as non white but not black, lower-class but in certain instances upper-class, part of an immigrant minority and an assimilated elite community. But the moment that money and upper class status enter into the equation, the South Asians in this text are considered almost white by themselves, other South Asians and even Americans. Nevertheless, these upper-class South Asians are still perceived (and perceive themselves) as an “Other,” a mimicry of whiteness that lives on the border of almost passing. The knowledge of inescapable and indeterminate otherness causes the wealthy South Asians in this text to feel as though they must constantly prove themselves as legitimate, lifting their chins high “because they have to be more always than other people.” (TMOS, 78-79)

Prashad captures the paradox of South Asian racial identity in his chapter on the complex consciousnesses of desis, presenting an interesting argument for why South Asians do not perceive themselves as black, even though they suffer many of the same experiences as African-
Americans. Prashad claims that this disassociation is due to the desire for upward socio-economic mobility in a racist society: “Desis realize they are not 'white,' but there is certainly a strong sense among most desis that they are not 'black.' In a racist society, it is hard to expect people to opt for the most despised category. Desis came to the United States and denied their 'blackness' at least partly out of a desire for class mobility (something, in the main, denied to blacks)..” (Prashad, p. 94)

Again, the notion of race as being redefined as class is clear from the manner in which South Asians perceive both themselves and other minorities groups. Tilo has observed what it means to be a South Asian living in America in terms of race relations, and the moment arrives when she herself experiences what it is like to be an American. When Tilo dons her first American outfit and walks out into the street on which her store is located, she makes the striking transition between states of mind and possesses a consciousness that she believes is that of an American but at the same time it is a foreign and “other” consciousness for her.

...I pull on my no-nonsense pants and polyester top, button my nondescript brown coat all the way to my calves. I lace my sturdy brown shoes, heft my brown umbrella in readiness. This new-clothed self, I and not-I, is woven of strands of brownness with only her young eyes and her
bleached jute-hair for surprise. She tries a hesitant smile which resettles her wrinkles... Outside at a bus stop crowded with other strands of brown and white and black she will get into line, will marvel that no one even raises their eyes, suspicious at her moving through the air of America... She will finger in pleased wonder the collar of her coat, which is better even than a cloak of disappearing. And when the bus comes, she will surge at it with the others, her blending so successful that you standing across the street will no longer know who is who” (TMOS, 139-40)

Tilo's shift in consciousnesses is further suggested by the change in pronouns- moving from a narrative “I” to a third-person “she” when describing herself through the lens of an American. It is as if Tilo is a different person, yet she is cognizant of the fact that this new woman is still “herself.” Tilo embraces the idea that she can blend in with America and be a part of it; as she waits at the bus stop, she relishes the fact that her difference is no longer the marker of her racial identity, for she can stand amongst a group of true Americans and exist as one herself, with no one being able to tell “who is who.” This sense of betweeness is also inherent in Tilo's perception of her sexuality. Tilo observes some of her
female patrons fulfilling the traditional submissive role of the South Asian housewife, with patriarchal dominance and instances of domestic abuse. Yet she also observes the young, sexualized and flirtatious patrons who come to her store, “all fizzy laughter and flutter lashes. In miniskirts their legs are long and tan, cocoabutter smooth. Their lips are dark and pouting. They toss back their crinkle-cut hair and glance around and laugh again... all sway and undulation” (TMOS, 270-271).

These are the two extremes of sexuality of South Asian women that Tilo encounters, and she herself begins to fall into these contrasting (and stereotypical) roles in perceiving her own sexuality. Tilo's female patrons view her as a traditional older South Asian woman, unattractive in her age, sexless in terms of her desires and submissive to the will of others. Tilo begins to see herself as she believes others do: “a bent woman with skin the colour of old sand, behind a glass counter that hold... sweets of their childhoods. Out of their mothers' kitchens.” (TMOS, 5)

Tilo describes herself as possessing an “old woman voice” and an “old woman body,” covered in “creases and gnarls,” and layers of wrinkles like “old snakeskin” (TMOS, 71, ll4,.5,5l)

“She is deferential to the elders who enter the store, referring to older men as “dada,” a term of endearing respect (TMOS, 87). She is not seductive but rather matronly, repressing any sexual desire; she is silent
in her opinions and offers advice only when asked. In her behavior in the store, Tilo typifies the traditional submissive Indian woman and she is perceived to be so by her various patrons. Yet Tilo's sense of passion and her ability to seduce are clearly evident in her relationship with Raven. Even in their initial encounters, Raven appeals to Tilo's sexual side, creating emotions in Tilo that she has never experienced before. During their first conversation, Tilo thinks to herself, “There is a lurching inside me, like something stitched up tearing lose. O danger.” (TMOS, 71)

Divakaruni uses to describe Tilo's sensations is replete with a sexual suggestiveness that grows more overt as the relationship between Raven and Tilo progresses. When they finally consummate their love, Tilo appears as a highly knowledgeable and sensual lover, and her sexuality is in stark contrast to the older asexual woman from the spice store. Strangely, there is a sense that this sexual knowledge was already there for Tilo, existing (though hidden) while she perceived herself as the asexual woman from the spice store. Divakaruni is subtly suggesting the possibility of simultaneous selves, as if Tilo had another younger and more sexualized identity that existed (albeit unexpressed) along with the asexual identity of the older woman.

The complexities of race in South Asian identity remerge in the formations of sexual identities, and racism and prejudice take the form of Orientalist fantasies and all that they imply. Tilo's American lover Raven sees her as a paradigmatic representation of Eastern beauty, an
“authentic...Real Indian,” and since Tilo is estranged from her own self-perceptions, she eventually comes to view herself as Raven's Orientalist fantasy, hyper-sexualized and representative of all that is seen as Indian in American culture. Suddenly, cultural categories such as Indian” (TMOS, 272-3)' and American, which may at first appear concrete, are subject to the biases and stereotypes of perception and self-perception, thereby changing the very meaning of what it means to even call oneself by those markers of nationality.

At first, Tilo is suspicious of her new sexualized perspective on herself (or rather, Raven's perspective on her which she adopts) and she muses, “My American Raven, how you have romanticized my land and my people. And most of all me... ...” (TMOS, 226)

But soon she cannot help but view herself from this exoticized standpoint, as Raven's “mysterious Indian beauty.” When Tilo perceives herself as Raven's idealized Indian fantasy, she becomes subject to a specific form of racism that gained much attention during the 20th century. “Orientalism,” Edward Said says,

... is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'... Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it...
Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist... makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.” (Edward W. Said, p. 21-22)

In his relationship with Tilo, Raven falls prey to describing and categorizing her based upon his knowledge of her race but without a true understanding of her actual identity. Raven thus becomes the quintessential orientalist described by cultural scholar and writer Anwar Abdel Malek: “According to the traditional orientalist, an essence should exist-sometimes even clearly described in metaphysical terms- which constitutes the inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered... ...” (Anwar Abdel Malek, 107-8).

Evidence of Raven's tendency toward an Orientalist perspective is evident in the conversation that ensues when a group of beautiful young Indian women, whom Tilo terms the “bougainvilla girls,” enter the spice store one day. He smiles, squeezes my hand. “Hey. You can do things these girls couldn't in a hundred years.” The pinpricks begin to fade. “You're authentic in a way they'll never be,” he adds, Authentic. A curious word to use. “What do you mean, authentic?” I ask. “You know, real, Real Indian.” I know he means it as a compliment. Still, it bothers me. Raven, despite their fizzy laughter, their lipstick and lace, the bougainvilla girls are in their way as Indian as I. And who is to say which of us is more real” (TMOS, 309)
Tilo bonds with the old one and the other women who were in the island training to be mistresses. There on the island she feels safe and secure. Once she lands in America in her spice store she is able to empathize with her woman customers better than with her male customers. Although she helps all who come to her store irrespective of their sex, she can feel the pain of women like Lalita, Ahuja and Geeta as her own. Her understanding of the women is expressed through the typically feminine metaphor of spices. Although she does reach out to male characters like raven, Haroun, Geeta’s grandfather and Jagjit, she cannot relate to them in the same way. When Tilo talks about the lessons she learnt on the island she says:

“Most of all we learned to feel without word the sorrow of our sister, and without words to console them. In this way our lives were not Different from those of the girls we left behind in our home villages” (TMOS, 52)

They learn this lesson of bonding with other women by doing ordinary everyday chores like sweeping and stitching. When she says that their life on the island of spices was no different from that of the village girls, the implication is that women for generations have learnt to bond with one another while learning household chores. Female bonding, therefore, has always been indirect and Tilo learns it the same indirect way as women all over the world.
D.B Gavani commented: “Tilo or Tilotama, The Mistress of Spices is really a young woman who is required by the dictates of the order to disguise herself as an old woman, thus accentuating her a sexuality and inducing anonymity and restraint. She cannot be aware of her own body” (Gavani, 80)

Raven believes that Tilo possesses an intangible essence that makes her an authentic Indian as compared to the other young Indian women in the store. Tilo questions Raven's conferring of authenticity, for even using the term authentic suggests that there is a certain fundamental nature that is a prerequisite for true Indian identity, an essence that Raven gives himself the ability and power to judge as legitimate. In thinking about Raven, Tilo says, “You have loved me for the colour of my skin, the accent of my speaking, and the quaintness of my customs which promised you the magic you no longer found in the women of your own land. In your yearning you have made me into that which I am not.” (TMOS, 309)

Just as her lower-class patrons suffered the taunts and jeers of racist slurs, Tilo suffers the feelings of objectification and exoticization that come from Raven's Orientalism. Yet Tilo herself falls prey to a sort of reverse Orientalism- she begins to view Raven as a representative of American culture. From the moment she meets him, she refers to him not
by name, but rather as ‘my American’ and ‘the American’. While Raven views her as his Eastern exotic fantasy, Tilo comes to see him as her token American lover. When Tilo realizes this, she thinks that the relationship must end because it was a love that “would never have lasted, for it was based upon fantasy of what it is to be Indian. To be American” (TMOS, 311)

As Tilo moves through the maze of American culture, she desires even more to see herself, to view her life through her own eyes rather than the perspectives of others. Tilo's moment of “self-perception” occurs after she questions the prohibition of mirrors for Mistresses. “Here is a question I never thought to ask on the island: First Mother, why is it not allowed, what can be wrong with seeing yourself?” (TMOS, 151). Before she looks at her reflection, Tilo decides to drink a special potion, a concoction whose power stems from the spice Makaradwaj, and is considered the “conqueror of time.” (TMOS, 277)

This potion will transform Tilo's body from that of the “old woman disguise” she has been wearing since she arrived in America, to a body of youthful beauty. Over the course of three days, Tilo's beauty increases as the layers of age peel away. “Now I am ready. I go to the back where [the mirror] hangs on the wall, remove the covering from it, I Tilo who have broken too many rules to count. How many lifetimes since I have looked
into one. Mirror what will you reveal of myself” (TMOS, 297). Tilo gazes into the mirror, but does not see some great truth about identity revealed to her. Instead, she sees “… a face that gives away nothing, a goddess-face free of mortal blemish... Only the eyes are human, frail.” (TMOS, p. 297).

Tilo’s physical transformation represents the illusion of the notion of a singular “true identity,” for in the process of trying to reveal a real self, Tilo finds that she has lost all that was human about her. In her desire to see a unified identity free of the “mortal blemish” of contradiction, Tilo is faced with a reflection that is blank, the only hint of life residing in the eyes that stare back at her. The frailty and humanity of Tilo’s eyes mirror her reading of this moment, for when Tilo looks for unity, all she sees is the reality of the human condition reflected in her eyes. The contradictions that Tilo believes make her frail are, paradoxically, the very foundations of her identity.

Thus, Tilo realizes that in place of a unified identity she possesses an identity of multiplicity and ambiguity; she is comprised of many different and contradictory perceptions of the self, or else she is a blank. At this pivotal point in the text, Tilo realizes that self-perception is a matter of acknowledging the multiple processes and factors that influence the formation of identity, of embracing each of the contradictory
characteristics and consciousnesses as legitimate identities. She describes this process of understanding in rather surreal terms: “I move as through deep water, I who have waited all my life- though I see it only now- for this brief moment blossoming like fireworks in a midnight sky. My whole body trembles, the desire and fear....” (TMOS, 298)

But Tilo's happiness is soon diminished, for she has a dream in which the First Mother tells her that she only has three more days in America, and on the third day she will have to enter once again into Shampati's Fire and return to the island. Yet when the moment arrives for the fire to consume her, Tilo is surprised to find that the flames do not envelop her as they did once long ago. Rather, she is transformed back into the body of the old woman, wrinkled with age and bereft of her youthful beauty.

The transformation back into the body of the old woman further reinforces the notion that identity is not a question of cohesion, for when Tilo returns to the body with which she experienced the different perceptions of race and sexuality, she is in essence accepting her fragmented selves in place of a unified identity. The novel closes with Tilo renaming herself Maya, which “can mean many things. The Illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day.” (TMOS, 338)
D. B Gavani commented:

“The novel validates women’s empowerment through articulation of their desire. As with her protagonists in the short stories, Divakaruni argues for recognition of women’s full control of their bodies. Once Tilo is in touch with her own sexuality, she can no longer assuage others pains or even see in to the future, but she can live the life of the young woman. The Mistress has to extinguish herself in order that the woman find her voice, fellow her desire and search for an identity outside of that of a ministering angel. She must live her domain, the beautiful, organized spices store, in order to fulfill desire” (Gavani, 81)

Tilo chooses a name that can mean many things, a name that embodies the multiplicity of her identities, the many consciousnesses that lie within her. Interestingly, ‘Maya’ is also an ancient Sanskrit name, and the juxtaposition of a name so representative of a cultural past with Tilo’s present power suggests that Tilo still lives in between spheres, with contradictory spaces and times comprising the rather ambiguous landscape of her existence. In naming herself, Tilo reveals that which she is made of: multiple consciousnesses that allow her to exist as not as South Asian or American only, but rather as everything in between, living a life that spans the endless boundaries of space and time and in which identity is filled with the promise of endless possibility and eternal evolution.
IV. Conclusion:

Magic realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* – A Study, *The Mistress of Spices* has been studied and the study has revealed several instances of magic realism. The old woman in the island who imparts knowledge about spices to Tilo is an example of magic realism. Tilo’s metamorphosis from one figure to another is an instance of magic realism. The qualities of the spice and their human form are also indications of magic realism.

At this junction she experiences love by his touch. Consequently many misfortunes takes place in her life. She realizes that her act of violating the rules in falling in love with American is responsible of all her miseries she is left with no option other than suicide. Thus she sits the spices and on herself on fire. The novels is filled with so many instances of magic realism firstly there are myths about various ancient spices. Secondly the spices are portrayed as to participate with in the dialogue with Tilo-Thirdly the spices and characters change from one form to another frequently lastly the spices behave like human beings feeling jealous when tilo fall in love with American. All this aspects of magic realism are traced and analysed in this chapter.
References:


