CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study on “Themes of Magic Realism, Myth and Culture in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s select novels” attempts to make a holistic analysis of three prominent themes usually encountered in the novels of Chitra Banerjee. While the themes of magic realism is a recently evolving contemporary theme explored by Chitra Banerjee to its fullest use, her myths and use of culture dates back to a traditional use of these in ancient classic and old texts. There are many mythological references in her novels to prove that she has a sound knowledge in myth. Supernatural events in her novels help to make the genre as a magical realism. Like a swindle, the narration goes back to the past and present. The novelist uses stream of conscious techniques, dreams and flash back techniques and other related techniques.

In recent times, the concept of magic realism has emerged as a sub-genre due to its prominent usage as a leitmotif in contemporary novels while themes of myth and culture are historically used from ancient times. The author has given it a varied structure from a new dimension. It elaborates how these are related to one another and gives novelty to her novels. Divakaruni has used mainly dream as a technique to project the magical elements in her novels. The magical happenings in dreams of the protagonists come true in life. In her novels, the inanimate things like special snakes, spices and conch have the ability to speak and they converse with the protagonists like a human. The novelist has treated them as if they have life and intelligence. The characters do not doubt or question but accept, converse and reply to them. She has thus blended magic with realism.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni resurrects the long forgotten Indian myth, belief, tradition, culture and even dreams which are so essential for existence, which in reality is only a mixture of all in magic realism. However, as the novel progresses, the fantasy element diminishes and the realistic element becomes prominent. Divakaruni modifies ancient Indian legends and reinvents the myth. Her research included Bengali folk tales,
Indian myths, oriental magic and also the immigrant experience. Socially and culturally positioning herself as an immigrant Indian, the protagonists either acculturates nor assimilates but just adapt or adjust with life around her, without changing or transforming herself.

The mythic framework of her novels contributes to the creation of a female universe. The world of myth is essentially feminine in nature as opposed to the masculine. In her novels there is an attempt to create new myths or demythification. According to her view, the new myth symbolizes the feminine world where women rescue other women without expecting support from the men. She uses myth not only as a hold to associate herself with India but also to re-evaluate sacrificing Indian women. Demythification is a main theme in magical realism. Divakaruni employs the myths and stereotypes surrounding the Indian women, which she consciously explores after her immigration and sets out to question and deconstruct. For instance, one of the myths that Divakaruni explores is the myth of widowhood. The society, which is defined by men, deplores women whose husband is dead: Young or old the widow becomes an asexual, marginalized being who portends ill omen.

India is a land of culture and strong belief in superstitions. Preserving the culture is the prestige of all countries. Chitra Banerjee’s novels are an evidence to prove it. Her novels portray the possibility for establishing a bicultural identity. Divakaruni’s approach to ethnic identity is contingent with the view of South Asian Diaspora that believes in the necessity of integrating the Indian heritage with its American experience. Chitra Divakaruni stays in touch with her Indian heritage. She would ask her mother to send a lot of Bengali books on the tradition of dream interpretation. It helped her to remember how people viewed things in her culture. She shares those memories with a growing audience. As cultural offshoots, the author heaps her novels with rituals, customs and practices pertaining to food, dress, and the language of her native place.

Magic realism has the capacity to enrich our idea of what is ‘real’ by incorporating all dimensions of the imagination, particularly as expressed in magic, myth and religion. In magical realism, the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to
discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. As a writer, she gives a sense of reality with the blending of magic and also her writings centers on women. The novels which have been chosen for research are The Mistress of Spices (1995), Sister of my Heart (1999), The Vine of Desire (2002), The Conch Bearer (2003), Queen of Dreams (2004) and The Palace of Illusion (2008). The magical elements abound in her novels like The Mistress of Spices, Queen of Dreams and The Conch Bearer. There are many mythological references in Sister of my Heart and The Palace of Illusion. Cultural values are highlighted in almost all novels especially the novels which deal with immigrants’ problems.

The main themes of Divakaruni’s novels are magic realism and its allied themes of myth and culture. The magical realism in her work unfolds to understand the magical occurrence in one’s life such as dreams, telepathy, and intuition portends the future events. The magical elements in her novel prove that they portent reality as it has a link with psychology as well. The dreams of the characters in the novel are realistic as they prove that those who have extra sensory power can have intuition of the future events.

The aim and objective of myth in her novels focus on the twin themes of remythification and demystification. The latter gives the sense of the writer’s deconstruction of the traditional concepts like widow’s in white dress, women’s endurance to the domestic and societal pressure and so on. Remystification in Chitra’s novels highlights the new ways that the women find by breaking the conservative practices. Though the concept of magical realism is demystification, the remystification, the positive value of myth has not been given up and the writer dwells on their mythologies to pass them on to the posterity. This proves that the writer’s usages of mythological references in her work in order to propagate Indian culture and tradition to the readers abroad.

The Chitra’s use of culture and multifarious manifestations reveal through food, dress, customs, rituals along with the practices evokes the sensibility of Indian readers, a feeling of intense nostalgia, for things past, etched in their memory as they assimilate themselves to a new immigrant culture. The technique employed in her writing proves
Divakaruni’s talent as a novelist. Like the various flower tied into a beautiful garland, the various techniques such as stream of consciousness, epistolary, dreams help to give variety of flavours to the reader avoiding monotonous tone in her writing. Divakaruni’s female characters search for identity and strive to create an identity of their own. Their education and career prospects help them to be independent without depending on men and to face the world boldly by freeing themselves from the male domination, suppression and humiliation at home and society. The mutual help among the women makes them feel liberated and autonomous enough to control their life. In three novels, this view is strongly expressed by the metaphorical statement of protagonists “I’ve learnt to fly.” (VD 245)

The thesis begins with the definition of magic realism, myth and culture and describes how Divakaruni has depicted them in her novels. It follows with the introduction of the author and the review of literature which help to understand how her works differ from other writers. It also explores the manner of their interrelation of innovative themes along with different techniques that she employed in her novels which chiefly focus on the women’s problem and to define strategies to overcome difficulties. Chitra Divakaruni, in constructing narratives of magical realism, creates a truly cross-cultural literature, one which opens the history and language of America to discordant voices. As a female author, Divakaruni is able to offer an authentic perspective on the social constraints placed on immigrant women. In assuming the charge of revealing the plight of such persons, she places them at the centre of the recent emergence of post colonial and feminist texts to tackle the subject of female oppression both in society, inclusive of minority subgroups, and within the home.

‘Magic Realism’ is a term coined by Franz Roz (1925), to describe tendencies in the works of certain German artists of the neue sachlichkeit (new objectivity) characterized by clear, static, thinly painted, sharp focus, images, frequently portraying the imaginary, the improbable are the fantastic in a realistic rational manner. That term was adapted in the United States with 1943 exhibition (containing work by Charles Sheeler, 1883-1965 and Edward Hopper, 1882 – 1967) at the New York museum of modern art, entitled
American Realistic and magic realist. The term has subsequently been used to describe the works of such Latin American authors as Borges, Garcia marquez, Alenjo Carpentrer (1904-1980) and the elements of it have been noted in Grass, Calvino Fowles and other Europian writers. In 1970s and 1980s it was adapted in Britain by several of the most original younger fiction writers, including, notably, Emma Tennant, Angla Cartar and Salmon Rushdie. Magic realist novels and stories have, typically a strong narrative drive in which recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and the inexplicable incidents in which elements of dream, fairy story and mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kalaidascopic pattern of refraction and recurrence, English magic realism also has some affinity with the neo-Gothic (Drabbles 56).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines ‘Magic realism’ as “a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the 'reliable' tone of objective realistic report. Designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach beyond the confines of realism and draw upon the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a strong contemporary social relevance. The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels- -levitation, flight, telepathy, and telekinesis--are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often phantasmagoric political realities of the 20th century”(19). Magic realism (or magical realism) is an artistic genre in which magical elements appear in an otherwise realistic setting. As used today the term is broadly descriptive rather than critically rigorous. M.H. Abrams inA Glossary of Literary Terms describes in term magical realism thus:

The writers (magical realists) interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales. [...] These novels violate, in various ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic--and sometimes highly effective--experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the
mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic. (43)

According to Erwin Dale Carter, first magic realism is the combination of reality and fantasy and second, it is the transformation of the real into the awesome and unreal, thirdly an art of surprises, one which creates a distorted concept of time and space, fourth a literature directed to an intellectual minority; characterized by a cold cerebral aloofness it does not cater to popular tastes, but rather to that of those sophisticated individuals instructed in aesthetic subtleties. (3-4) David talks of it as a 'poetics of excess' that typifies magical realist texts, extends within a broadly delineated typology, from the fantastic to the hyperbolic and from the improbable to the possible (65) 'Possible' is instantly transformed into probable as we are transported from the domain of the real to the magically real by the similarly uncharted stratagems of the artistic imagination. Carpentier in “Marvelous Real in America” has of the opinion that the marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state. To begin with, the phenomenon of the marvelous presupposes faith (85-86).

In magical realism we find the transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal. It is predominantly an art of surprises. Angel Flores in Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction opines that time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality (113-116).

The various definitions of Magical realism is more than anything else. It is an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles in closed or open structures. In magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. The principle thing is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of
the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. Luis Leal says, “In magical realism key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality or to wound it but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things.” (119). Scott Simpkins searches the root of magic realism:

Garcia Marquez maintains that realism is a kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive a vision of reality. However good or bad they may be, they are books which finish on the last page. Disproportion is part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself all out of proportion. In other words, Garcia Marquez suggests that the magic text is, paradoxically, more realistic than the realist text. (148)

Magical realism is not a realism to be transfigured by the supplement of a magical perspective, but a reality which is already in and of itself magical or fantastic. P. Gabrielle Foreman says, “Magical realism, unlike the fantastic or the surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and the faith of the community, that s/he is historically constructed and connected.”(286). Patricia Merivale points out:

Rushdie sees 'El realismo magical, magic realism, at least as practiced by [Garcia] Marquez, [as] a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely Third World consciousness. [Magical realism] is a way of showing reality more truly with the marvelous aid of metaphor. (331)

The magical realist narrative provides a perfect vehicle to present to the reader the contrast between the psychopath’s and the average reader’s view of what is ordinary behaviour. Geoff Hancock describes magic realism as constituting the ‘conjunction of two worlds’- the magical and realist(7). Likewise, Amaryll Chanady states that magical realism is an ‘amalgamation of a rational and irrational world view’ (21). Lois Zamora and Wendy Faris observe that the conjunction or amalgamation of these two worlds creates a mixture of these opposing cultures (6). Morrison claims that magical realism provides ‘another way of knowing things’ (342). Zamora and Faris point out that:
Text labeled magical realist draw upon cultural systems that are no less ‘real’ than those upon which traditional literary realism draws –often non-western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation. Their primary narrative investment may be in myths, legends, ritual- that is in collective (sometimes oral and performative, as well as written) practices that bind communities together. (3)

Magic realism is thus characterized by the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, bizarre and skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable. It is characterized by paradoxical events which are never fully explained by the author, and these events are often accepted as perfectly normal and in fact usual by the characters or figures in the world of the artwork. For example, a ghost may manifest in a novel about magical realism, and while the presence of the ghost might seem difficult for readers to accept, the characters seem to have no difficulty with the ghost's existence and actions.

It is observed from the magical realist writers that the magical realism is subject to a certain control, that is, the common aspects of magical realist novels: The following elements are generally found in many magical realists’ novels: contains a magical element, the magical element may be intuitive but is never explained, Characters accept rather than question the logic of the magical element and exhibits a richness of sensory details, distorts time so that it is cyclical or so that it appears absent. Another technique is to collapse time in order to create a setting in which the present repeats or resembles the past, inverts cause and effect, (for instance a character may suffer before a tragedy occurs), incorporates legend or folklore, presents events from multiple perspectives, such as that of belief and disbelief or the colonizers and the colonized. It may be an overt rebellion against a totalitarian government or colonialism, may be set in or arise from an
area of cultural mixing. Uses a mirroring of either past and present, astral and physical planes, or of characters.

Some people mistakenly think that magical realism as a genre with fantasy, but in fact this genre is distinctly separate from fantasy. The focal point of magical realism is not the dreamlike, fantastic, or supernatural elements which appear, but rather the very real world that serves as the framework for the piece. Magical realism seems to be often extremely serious, and it contains embedded commentary about art, culture, and human nature. People may deeply enjoy works of magical realism, drawn into an interesting world and the fascinating characters, but it is far from escapist, forcing people to confront very real issues and situations.

Magic realist novels and stories have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic merges with the unexpected and the inexplicable and in which elements of dreams, fairy story, or mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence. (Oxford Companion to English Literature 19) Magic realism has the capacity to enrich our idea of what is 'real' by incorporating all dimensions of the imagination, particularly as expressed in magic, myth and religion.

Gabrielle Foreman in his article on “Past on Stories: History and Magically Real” defines that the word myth derives from the Greek mythos, which has a range of meanings from “word,” through “saying” and “story,” to “fiction”; the unquestioned validity of mythos can be contrasted with logos, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated (42) Because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception. In the study of religion, however, it is important to distinguish between myths and stories that are merely untrue.

Gabrielle, further explains that a myth is a well-known story which was made up in the past to explain natural events or to justify religious beliefs or social customs. It is a
story from ancient times especially one that was told to explain natural events or to
describe the early history of the people: this type of story: ancient Greek myths (that
explains how the world began), the heroes of myth and legend. It is culturally significant
story or explanation of how things came to be for example, of how a god made a world or
how a hero undertook a quest. As such, myth is opposed to history, in that it is usually
fabulous in content even when loosely based on historical events. The term ‘mythology’
refers both to the study of myth and a system of myths, such as Greek mythology. It is a
fictitious or dubious story, person or thing; that’s a myth; it never happened.

It is believed that Myth is a traditional story of ostensibly historical events serves to
unfold part of the worldview of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural
phenomenon. Myths relate the events, conditions, and deeds of gods or superhuman
beings that are outside ordinary human life and yet basic to it. These events are set in a
time altogether different from historical time, often at the beginning of creation or at an
early stage of prehistory. A culture’s myths are usually closely related to its religious
beliefs and rituals. The Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary Encyclopedia defines
myth:

1. A traditional story presented as historical often purporting to explain
some natural phenomenon, as the creation of life, and expressive of the
character of the people, their gods, culture, heros, religious beliefs, etc.,
2. Any real or imaginary story, theme or character that excites the
interest and imaginery of a people.

Myth is a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly
traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with
religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic
places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman
beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but
which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term
mythology denotes both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a
particular religious tradition. (The Encyclopedia Britannica: 125)
It is obvious that myth has existed in every society. Indeed, it would seem to be a basic constituent of human culture. Because the variety is so great, it is difficult to generalize about the nature of myths. But it is clear that in their general characteristics and in their details a people’s myths reflect, express, and explore the people’s self-image. The study of myth is thus of central importance in the study both of individual societies and of human culture as a whole. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2009) states about myth that in Western cultures, there are a number of literary or narrative genres those scholars have related in different ways to myths. Examples are fables, fairy tales, folktales, sagas, epics, legends, and etiologic tales. Another form of tale, the parable, differs from myth in its purpose and character. Even in the West, however, there is no agreed definition of any of these genres. Non-Western cultures apply classifications that are different both from the Western categories and from one another. Most, however, make a basic distinction between “true” and “fictitious” narratives, with “true” ones corresponding to what in the West would be called myths. (78)

One of the most celebrated writers about myth from a psychological standpoint was Sigmund Freud. In his Die Traumdeutung (1899; The Interpretation of Dreams) Sigmund Freud viewed myth as an expression of repressed ideas, a view later expanded by Carl Gustav Jung in his theory of the “collective unconscious” and the mythical archetypes that arise out of it. Bronislaw Malinowski emphasized how myth fulfills common social functions, providing a model or “charter” for human behaviour. Claude Lévi-Strauss discerned underlying structures in the formal relations and patterns of myths throughout the world. Mircea Eliade and Rudolf Otto held that myth is to be understood solely as a religious phenomenon. Features of myth are shared by other kinds of literature. Origin tales explain the source or causes of various aspects of nature or human society and life. Fairy tales deal with extraordinary beings and events but lack the authority of myth. Sagas and epics claim authority and truth but reflect specific historical settings.

The study of The Ramayana and The Mahabharatha reveals the four Vedas, notably the hymns of the Rigveda, contained allusions to many themes. In the period of
Classical Sanskrit, much material is preserved in the Sanskrit epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Besides theology proper, the voluminous epics also provide a plethora of information about ancient Indian society, philosophy, culture, religion and ways of life. The Puranas deal with stories that are older than the epics (Purana is Sanskrit for "ancient"). The date of the Puranic texts as preserved however mostly post-dates the epics, dating to the Early Middle Ages. The epics themselves are set in different Yugas (epochs) or periods of time. The Ramayana, written by the poet Valmiki, describes the life and times of Lord Rama (the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu) and occurs in the treta yuga, while the Mahabharatha that describes the life and times of the Pandavas, occurs in the Dwapara yuga, a period associated with Lord Krishna (the eighth avatar of Lord Vishnu). In total, there are four Yugas. These are the Satya Yuga (or Krita Yuga), the Treta Yuga, the Dvapara Yuga and finally the Kali Yuga.

The Bhagavata Purana is probably the most read and popular of the puranas. It chronicles the story of the god Vishnu and his incarnations (avataars) on earth. Hindu Epics: The two great Hindu Epics, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata tell the story of two specific incarnations of Vishnu (Rama and Krishna). These two works are known as Itihasa. The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana serve as both religious scriptures and a rich source of philosophy and morality for a Hindu. The epics are divided into chapters and contain various short stories and moral situations, where the character takes a certain course of action in accordance with Hindu laws and codes of righteousness. The most famous of them is The Bhagavad Gita (Sanskrit: The Lord's Song) in the Mahabharata, in which Lord Krishna explains the concepts of duty and righteousness to the hero Arjuna before the climactic battle. These stories are deeply embedded in Hindu philosophy and serve as parables and sources of devotion for Hindus. The Mahabharata is the world's longest epic in verse, running to more than 30,000 lines.

There are many deities in Hinduism. At the top are the Trimurti: Shiva (the destroyer), Vishnu (the protector), and Brahma (the creator), and their wives (goddesses in their own right): Shakti (also known as Paarvathi, Ambika) the goddess of courage and power, Lakshmi the goddess of all forms of wealth, and Saraswati the goddess of
learning. The children of the Trimurti are also devas, such as Ganesha and Skanda or Kartikaya. Brahma is considered the ruler of the highest of the heavens (the world called Sathya), so in one sense, Brahma is not beyond the fourteen worlds as Shiva and Vishnu are.

Some gods are associated with specific elements or functions: Indra (the god of thunder and lightning; he also rules the world of Swarga), Varuna (the god of the oceans), Agni (the god of fire), Kubera (the treasurer of the gods), Surya (the sun god), Vayu (the god of wind), and Soma (the moon god). Swarga also has a set of famous heavenly dancers: Urvasi, Menaka, Rambha, and Tilottama (all female), whose job is to entertain the heavenly court, and upon orders from the heavenly kings, to distract people on the earth from accumulating too much good deeds so as to become a threat to the heavenly kings.

One aspect of magical realism is that the “magic” or mythological part of this genre comes from the author’s background and culture. It is a very unique genre that introduces elements of the mythologic. It draws upon the energies of fables, folk tale and myth, the term has also been extended to works from very different cultures. This technique (magical realism) explores how different cultures perceive. It is a style of writing or reality painting which sometimes describes dreams as though they were real and real events as though they were dreams. In her novels, Divakaruni strives to weave her observations with the element of myth, magic and ancient culture alongside contemporary culture. She tries to bring those things together- a sense of ancient culture and the daily realities of immigrant life. It is important to her to maintain a sense of cultural identity. The main thing she would like to preserve is its importance of family Indian culture promotes.

Culture is a particular society or civilization especially considered in relation to its beliefs, way of life or art. It is a particular organization or group consists of the habits of the people in it and the way they generally behave. It consists of activities such as the arts and philosophy, which are considered to be important for the development of civilization and of people’s minds.
The ideal of the traditional, oppressed woman persisted in a culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands, the Hindu goddesses Sita and Savitri serving as powerful cultural ideals of women. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying wife, Sita, supported by other figures such as Savitri, Draupadi and Gandhari. When looking at these narratives silence or speech can be a useful guide to interpreting women’s responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation.

One major and dominant trend visible in post-independence is that Indian English fiction is the presentation of the vast and enduring culture of India. If culture can be defined as the sum total of all that is reflected in the mode of life of a people, their thought processes and outlook of life and their needs, aims and aspirations, then this is best expressed through the arts and letters of a country. The pluralistic heritage of Indian culture helped the Indian society to get exposed to a variety of cultural influences, and endowed the Indian cultural mosaic with its richness. Indian society has managed to absorb and assimilate the divergent traditions, customs and bodies of knowledge and art forms from its invaders and these in turn have coalesced into a cosmopolitan Indian culture of many religious practices, and a multitude of customs, beliefs, languages, art and architecture forms, etc., that we know and very easily identify with.

Culture includes all the elements in man’s mature endowment that has acquired from his group by conscious learning or by a conditioning process-beliefs and patterned modes of conduct. Resources presented by the natural world are shaped to meet existing needs; while inborn traits are so moulded as to drive out of inherent endowment the reflexes that are preponderant in the overt manifestation of behaviour. Indian ancient culture was based upon certain principles as love and brotherhood, benevolence and tolerance, truth, faith in religion and selfless duty as taught by Krishna in the Gita, and reverence for the old, the Guru and the parents. The eternal values of our ancient Indian culture and their place in life have been analyzed and emphasized by the Indian novelists.
The changes and clashes caused by the impact of the Western culture have also been recorded by these novelists, in their thought-provoking novels.

Dorothy M. Spencer, In Indian Fiction in English therefore, rightly regards Indian fiction in English as a major source for a systematic study of culture-contact and cultural change, with Indian world-view as the focus for the Westerners to increase their knowledge of acculturation processes. From it it is known that Swami Vivekananda’s attitude to culture influenced the Mahatma’s thoughts concerning the arts and literature. He said that he wanted art and literature that can speak to millions. And he did not want his house to be walled in on all sides and his windows to be stuffed. He wanted the culture of all lands to be flown about his house as freely as possible. The thoughts of both Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi had been activated simultaneously.

The Protagonists in Chitra Banerjee’s novels reflect the culture of Bengal such as usage of Bengali words, dress, and food items. The most outstanding feature of the art of rural Bengal consists in its being synonymous with the life of the people-their seasonal and social festivities, their work and their play. The whole of life was conceived as an art and lived as an art; worshipping the numerous deities of the Hindu pantheon, those from ancient Vedic times as well as those conjured up over time by the folk imagination, is part of the daily life of rural Bengal. Although the rituals, prayers, and offerings can vary from one deity to the next, some elements are common to all such occasions of worship. They reveal a fertile artistic imagination, springing from the tropical lushness of the region. Food serves as both an artistic and a ceremonial medium.

Weddings among Bengali Hindus are elaborate affairs, stretching over three days, with the preparatory rituals beginning even a week in advance. In a delta region whose rivers are prolific in fish, it is not surprising that Bengalis consider fish a symbol of plenty and use it in their wedding rituals. In the Sister of my heart, Chitra has described about it in the wedding ceremonies of Anju and Sudha. Traditionally, every village had a resident Padua, whose depiction of divine figures or scenes from myths, epics, and narrative poems often adorned the walls of huts, or substituted for images in the
household niche reserved for worship. The illustrations were remarkable for their bold line drawings and vivid use of pure unmixed colours.

Parallel aesthetic visions are called up by the conjunction of food and art. There are direct depictions of food in art, in painting, literature; conversely, there is the artistry of preparing and presenting food. But all such convergence of food and art, however sublime, is about food as an object of consumption and sustenance, either in the immediate present, or savored as a memory, or anticipated as a future pleasure. But there is a third dimension, where food is the medium for depicting the emotional, ceremonial, and ritual universe of a people.

Food, in that cultural mindset, was not only something to be consumed for survival, but also an artistic medium. It provided the raw material for painting and making offerings to the gods; it enhanced personal experience when its shape, colour, and life became metaphors for human existence; it acquired symbolic meaning and enriched social customs with ceremonial value. And the creative force that was behind such transformations was a rurally derived folk imagination, and the cultivated, educated, sophisticated mindset of intellectuals.

It is a realm where, having already experienced the pleasures of preparing, presenting, and partaking, one has subsequently made it into a versatile medium for both spiritual and artistic creativity, a metaphor for diverse human experiences. As in the simple and complex conjunctions of food and art among the Hindus of Bengal, the traditional life of Bengal as portrayed in the novels of Chitra Banerjee is rich in form, ritual, and aestheticism. In sacred and secular ceremonies, Bengalis have invested food with intricate symbolic significance. An extraordinarily active folk imagination draws on food images to create verse, paintings, and craft objects. Chitra Banerjee says in one of her interviews:

“I want the culture to be presented without dilution. I have a lot of trust in my audience- people understand through context a lot of things that are not explained,” she says, likely referring to the instances when she
mentions a Bengali word without translation or an Indian cultural reference without explanation.”

The experience of being caught between two cultures has remained a prominent theme in writing by Indian woman writers: there are many Indian women writers based in the USA, Canada, Britain and other parts of the world. Some are recent immigrants, while others, such as Jhumpa Lahiri, are the second generation immigrants; these authors write about their situation in cross cultural contexts states of in - betweens.

Expatriate representation has been in question on several counts. Most expatriate writers have a weak grasp of actual conditions in contemporary India, and tend to recreate it through the feeling of nostalgia, writing about imaginary home lands. Distancing lends objectivity. But it can also lead to the oscillation of cultural constructs and even if, memory is sharp and clear, the expatriate is not directly in contact with the reality of India. The East and West confrontation or the clash between tradition and modernity is the impulse behind the works of acclaimed migrant writers such as Meera Syal, Anita Rau Badami, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Uma Parameswaran, Chitra Banerjee, Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana and Kiran Desai.

East-West encounters which is explained in terms of hybridity in relationship by postmodern Indian English fiction. When the world has become ‘a global village,’ no culture, or society is pure or insular today. That is why Indian English fiction now takes characters, situations both from inside the country and abroad into its orbit and develops them. Chitra Banerjee combines the unfamiliar, the female, Indian immigrant experience, with the familiar, urban life in America, blending the two into a magical narrative that relates a woman’s plight as an outsider in Southern California.

Divakauni is a Bengali whose work is firmly rooted in Bengali soil. Not only are most of her characters Bengali. Women’s community and sisterhood emerge as important motifs even when they have been told by male novelists like Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya. Chitra Banerjee made an indelible impression on the literary world as she does good job working current
issues into the novel. She shows the experiences and struggles involved in women trying to find their own identities. Thus, whether set in California or India, the problems of the women are same everywhere. The expressions and the struggles of women for their victory are powerfully and inextricably portrayed in her novel. Instead of searching for identity the protagonist creates a self-identity.

Chitra Banerjee was born in Calcutta and spent the first nineteen years of her life in India. At the age of nineteen, she moved to the United States to continue her studies, getting a Master’s degree and a Ph.D, both in English. She did not begin to write fiction until after she graduated from Berkeley. She came to realize that she loved teaching but did not want to do academic writing, Married to Murthy Divakaruni in 1979, she now lives in Sunnyvale, California. As she began living in the United States, Chitra became more and more aware of the differences in culture and it was then that she wanted to write as a means of exploring these differences.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author and poet. She has been published in over fifty magazines, including the Atlantic monthly and the new Yorkers, and her writing has been included in over fifty anthologies. Her books have been translated into 16 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew, Russian, Japanese, she was born in India and lived there until 1976 at which point she left Calcutta and came to in the nationally ranked creative writing serves on the board of MAITRI in the San Francisco Bay Area and or the Advisory Board of Daya in Houston she has received several prestigious awards, such as the National Book Award and the PEN Faulkner Award.

Much of Divakaruni’s works deal with the immigrant experience as important theme in the mosaic of American society. Her book *Arranged Marriage* is a collection of short stories about women from India caught between two worlds. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the character, Tilo provides spices not only for cooking but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop experience. She hopes through the writing, to dissolve boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages and even different worlds.

In many ways, Chitra Banerjee’s novels such as *The Mistress of Spices, Queen of Dreams* and *The Vine of Desire* fall into two halves. The first part of the novel concentrates on the immigrant women, their lives, problems of identity and their search for identity and the second half presents the way to solve their problems and attainment of self identity by magical realism. Her novel is also divided between India and US, a land of dreams represents the mystical, and the continuity of life of women is a major feature of the novels. The worlds of understanding of men and women are firmly separated, and the men play mostly peripheral roles, only sometimes, impinging on the horizon of the women’s lives. In the novel *Queen of Dreams*, the concept of knowledge that is handed down from mother to daughter is significant and the female solidarity seems the only way to survive the conscious and unconscious bonds between mother and daughter are also notable. The novelist has done a good job by working current issues into the novel.

As a writer, Banerjee gives reality with the blending of magic. So most of her writings are magical realism and also her writings centre on women. In one of her interviews, she said that women in particular responded to her work for she wrote about them – women in love, women in difficulties and women in relationship. She is an incomparable story teller of immigrant experiences and especially the struggles of women in the strange place who must face the contradictions between the world they left behind and the one which the immigrants must call home.

Divakaruni is the recipient of many awards: The American Book Award for *Arranged Marriage: Stories* (1995), The Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize and the Pushcart

Before Banerjee began her career in writing fiction, Divakaruni was an acclaimed poet. She writes poems encompassing a wide variety of themes and she once again directs much focus to the immigrant experience and to south Asian women. She shows the experience and struggles involved in women trying to find their own identities. It was agreeably surprised to say that she has made such a name for herself and her story proves that she is one immigrant under the combination of auspicious starts. Her first volume of short stories, *Arranged Marriage* (1997), explores the cross-cultural experiences of womanhood through a feminist perspective, a theme that continued to inform her work. How the changing times are affecting the cherished Indian institution of arranged marriage is the theme of all the eleven stories in this anthology. Most of the stories are about Indian immigrants to the United States from the author’s native region of Bengal and are told by female narrators in the first person singular point of view, often in the present tense, imparting a voice of intimacy and cinematic credibility.

Two of her books, *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of my Heart*, have been made into movies by filmmakers Gurinder Chandhe and Paul Berger (an English Film) and Suhasini Mani Ratnam (a Tamil T.V. serial) respectively. The novel *The Mistress of Spices* stands alone as an exploration of the immigrant experience heavier on myth and magical realism than Divakaruni’s other books. Banerjee writes to unite people and she
breaks down these barriers, she dissolves boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages and even different worlds. Much of Divakaruni’s writing centers around the lives of immigrant women. She wrote in a spirit of play, collapsing the division between the realist world of the twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth and magic.

Chitra Divakaruni, in her works, creates a truly cross-cultural literature, one which opens the history and language of America to discordant voices. As female authors, Divakaruni is able to offer an authentic perspective on the social constraints placed on immigrant women. In assuming the charge of revealing the plight of such persons, she places themselves at the forefront of the recent emergence of post colonial and feminist texts to tackle the subject of female oppression both in society, inclusive of minority subgroups, and within the home. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes about what she knows and feels. And she is at her best exploring the themes of love, friendship, assimilation, self-analysis, and discovery. Divakaruni has carved out a very a special place in Indian literature – that of being a storyteller of immigrants, especially women, who must face the contradictions between the country they left behind and the one that they must call home.

Divakaruni’s first novel, The Mistress of Spices (1997) is unique in that it is written with a blend of prose and poetry, successfully employing Magic Realism. Chitra drew on the folk tales which she had remembered from her childhood days in Bengal, such as the sleeping city under the ocean and the speaking serpents, but she changed them almost completely in The Mistress of Spices. In this novel, Tilo develops dilemmas of her own when she falls in love with a non-Indian. This creates great conflicts, as she has to choose whether to serve her people or to follow the path leading to her own happiness. Tilo has to decide which parts of her heritage she will keep and which parts she will chose to abandon.

Magical, tantalizing, and sensual, The Mistress of Spices is the story of Tilo, a young woman born and ordained as a mistress charged with special powers. Once fully initiated in a rite of fire, Tilo became immortal with the gnarled and arthritic body of an
old woman who 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.

The island which is portrayed in *The Mistress of Spices* itself is a world where men are excluded and where, as a result, there is neither hate nor fear. It is explicitly stated that it is an ‘island of women.’ Divakaruni’s second novel, *Sister of My Heart* is a realistic treatment of the relationship between two cousins, Sudha and Anju, who narrate alternating chapter of this modern drama that develops over decades. Divakaruni returns to the lives of Sudha and Anju in *The Vine of Desire*. In this sequel, Sudha comes to live with Anju after leaving her husband. The author’s lyrical descriptions of the characters’ inner and outer worlds being a rich emotional chiaroscuro to an uplifting story about two women who learn to make peace with the difficult choices circumstances which have forced upon them.

Unlike the magic realism of her first novel, *Sister of My Heart* (1999) is written in the realist mode and describes the complicated relationships of a family in Bengal. Born in the big old Calcutta house on the same tragic night that both their fathers were mysteriously lost, Sudha and Anju are distant cousins, and are brought up together. Closer even than sisters, they share clothes, worries, dreams. The Chatterjee family fortunes are at low ebb, as there are only widows at home – the girls’ mothers, and their aunt. The chapters themselves are alternately titled, Anju and Sudha, and contain within their folds, techniques that are epistolary and explanatory, topography that is transcultural, tone that is adjectival and highly lyrical, and style that is italicized and romantic.

The male world only creates trouble for the protagonists. Marriage tears them apart and Anju moves to America while Sudha to rural Bengal. Men separate them effectively in terms of geography. Their lives are shattered when they attempt to conform to the rules of the masculine society. It is only when they decide to migrate to a female universe quite removed from male geographic definitions, albeit symbolic, that
they begin to find solutions to their problems. When Anju is upset by her miscarriage, Sudha calls her over the telephone and consoles her.

The novel *Queen of Dreams* combines the elements that Divakaruni is known for, the Indian American experience and magical realism, in a fresh mix it all succeeds in two levels: 1. She effectively takes the reader into an immigrant culture and experience. 2. She shows the common ground that lies in a world that some would find foreign. *Queen of Dreams* is a novel that belongs to the genre of magical realism. It juxtaposes Mrs. Gupta’s numinous world of dreams with the everyday concerns of her daughter’s life. Her search for identity and a sense of emotional completion is not confined into small corners of the world as it explores the connection between wakefulness and subconscious in the mind of Rakhi in her attempt to disconnect from her parents and to take steps to reconcile with them when a family member dies and the horror 9/11 creates another opportunity for resolving longstanding issues of alienation.

*The Vine of Desire* (2002) is a story of extraordinary depth and sensitivity and is also considered as a sequel to her earlier novel, *Sister of My Heart*. With sequels one can trace the growth of that character. This one is the story of Anju and Sudha, two young women far from Calcutta, the city of their childhood, who after a year of living separate lives are rekindling their friendship in America. The deep-seated love they feel for each other provides the support they need makes Divakaruni deal with a new facet of immigrant experience in the sense that the movement is not necessarily a physical one or from east to west. By making Sudha decide that she is not interested in America any more and would like to go back to her home in Bengal, the author wants to tread new ground. Through the eyes of people caught in the clash of cultures, and by constantly juxtaposing Calcutta with a Californian city.

*The Mahabharata* was an epic that had significant lessons of life, traced out in the most subtle manner, through many incidents; some mythical and some, brutally real. *The palace of Illusion* was an important part of *The Mahabharata*, which had an underlying meaning in it – what one sees, may not be real; it just could be an illusion. To identify the real, one need to look beyond just perception. Banerjee’s novel *The palace of
Illusion is based on the Indian epic The Mahabarata. All along, we get to see what kind of conflicts she goes through with her own self like trying to take over the household from the mother-in-law, maintaining a complex friendship with Krishna, her guilty attraction to her husbands most dangerous enemy, etc., In a world that is ruled by myths, warriors, Gods and uncontrollable fate, we see the strength and viewpoint of a woman.

The palace of Illusion gives an insight into what happened through the eyes of a strong feminist, the woman who was the wife of the five Pandava brothers. The story begins with the birth of Panchaali a magical birth in five in a rich kingdom. It then goes on to explore her life as the single wife of five brothers. Chitra supports them throughout their quest to reclaim the kingdom they had been cheated of. The palace of illusions is full of magic and imagery as only Chitra Banerjee can create. Her style of magical realism rivals those of the Latin American writers, establishing a new genre of Indian mysticism. The novel is a retelling of an ancient Indian text but all of the elements of modern tale invest them with fresh layers of meaning and interpretation.

The Mistress of spices revolves around an Indian girl with magical powers. Shashi Tharoor in “The Los Angeles Time” Observed that “Divakaruni has written an unusual clever and often exquisite first novel that stirs magical realism into the new conventions of culinary fiction and the still-simmering caldron of Indian immigrant life in America” (41) There is a lot of variety within the genre that is broadly labeled “magical realism.” The following is a list of the most popular and famous books in this style of literature, and offer a buffet style variety of what genre has to offer: Midnight’s Children by Salman Rushdie (Indian-British), Illywhacker by Peter Carey (Australia), One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, (Colombia), Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka (Gzech), Nights at the Ciraus by Angela Carter, Immortality by Milan Kundera, La Casa de los Espiritus (The House of Spirits) by Isabel Allende, Chronicle of a Death-Foretold by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, The Sugar Queen by Sarah Addison Allen, Electric Jesus Corpse by Carlton Mellick III, Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World by Haruki Murakami.
Cooper claims that magical realism attempts to capture reality by way of a depiction of life’s many dimensions, seen and unseen, visible and invisible, rational and mysterious. In the process, such writers walk a political tightrope between capturing this reality and providing precisely the exotic escape from reality desired by some of their western readership. (32) Magic realism can be seen as a device binding Indian culture of the past to the contemporary multicultural interface. Rushdie’s principle use of magic realism in the text involves the telepathic abilities of Saleem and the other thousand and one children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15th 1947 (the date of Indian Independence), abilities that enable them to communicate with each other. The best-known magic realist novel in mainland Europe is Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum) written by the German novelist and Noble Prize winner Gunter Grass in 1959. Although Grass himself admits to having been influenced by fairy tales, his magical realism can be seen to have arisen from the same source as Garcia Marquez’s; that is, the distortion of truth through the effects of extremely horrific violence, which Grass had witnessed during and immediately after second world war (75).

The writing of Gabriel Marquez is seen to move towards a new direction for Latin American literature. His most famous magical realist novel, cian anos de soledad (One hundred years of solitude) is considered to be turning point of the new novel. His writing has an overwhelming atmosphere of nostalgia, and magical happening such as the birth of the child with a tail occur as a matter of everyday reality. In Le Guins’s story, the most prominent magical element is the sets of wings on the cats. Because of the magical element of the wings, “Catwings Return” is similar to “A very Old Man with Enormous Wings”, Written by the Magical Realist Gabriel Garica Marquez. Both stories give a creature wings when ordinarily the creature would not have any. Along with the wings, a second possible magical element in Catwings Return could be the conversations held between the animals.

In order to have some characteristics similar to those in magical realism, a text must contain both realistic elements and magical (Flores 112). In Catwings Return, one of the realistic elements could be the setting. Rather than taking place in some other
fantastical world or realm, the main part of *Catwings Return* takes place in a city near the little country town called Overhill. The Czech writer Franz Kafka was the first magic realist. At the beginning of Kafka’s most famous short story, “*Die Verwadlung* (the metamorphosis), Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning and finds himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. In Kafka’s short story ‘*Metamorphosis*’, a character Georg Samsa wakes up and finds himself to be an insect and he does not seek an explanation for what has happened to him. What this illustrates is that it is possible to have magical realist elements in a text that is not consistently magical realist in its approach. So, the magical aspects are accepted as part of everyday reality throughout the text, otherwise the text cannot be called magical realist.

Many magical happenings in children’s fiction occur in ordinary settings for limited periods of time while maintaining a close connection with reality. Magical realist children’s fiction offers the opportunity for children to explore disruptions in their ordinary world secure in the knowledge that such magic and extraordinariness can be contained. Two of Nesbit’s earlier novels, ‘*Five Children and It*’ and ‘*The Phoenix and the Carpet*’ provide good examples of how her writing approaches the model of magical realism. The children in the stories discovered a sand fairy called ‘It’ on their holiday beach. Although the magical figures ‘It’ and the phoenix are extraordinary characters, both treated as ordinary figures who communicate easily with the children.

It is an undeniable fact that the origin of literature has a very close link with religion. Poetry in most part of the world was born of myth and legend, both having close links with some kind of belief or another. Two Indian epics, *The Ramayana* of Valmiki and *The Mahabharata* of Vyasa are as much parts of the Hindu belief as *The Bhagarad Gita*, a venerated religious book like *The Bible* of the Christians and *The Quran* of the muslims. Similar instances of sublime poetry, in when gods figure as characters and Participate in the affairs of men, are *The Iliad & The odyssey* of Homer in Greek, and the *Aeneid* of virgil in Latin.

Rushdie has an uncanny gift of fantasy and myth-making, rarely encountered in contemporary English fiction. *Midnight’s Children* presents a nation India – in its
infancy, which, like Saleem, enjoys a fantastic tale and sees the magical as omnipresent. **The satanic verses** of Salman Rustie and ‘**The great Indian novel**’ of Shashi Tharoor were published in 1988, which is just a coincidence, but highlights the myth as inspiration and theme for creative writing even at the end of twentieth century. This novel is also an epic novel.

In contemporary Indian drama, we find the transformation of ethic ideal or good women portrayed in them into reality in the plays of three major dramatists; they are Mohan Rakes’s play **Great Swans of the Waves**, Grish Karnad’s Hayavadana Vijay Tendulkar’s **Sakharam Binder**. Mohan Rakes had written the play **Great Swans of the Waves**, taking the story from Asvaghosa’s **Saundarananda**. The main plot of the play is based on Thomas Mann’s **Novella Transposed Heads**. Mann himself has borrowed it from the Sanskrit Vetala Panchavimsatika, Vijay Tendulkar’s play **Sakharam Binder**.

Raja Rao has used myths in **Kanthapura** to his advantage is apparent in the emergence of creation out of devastation, of hope out of despair. Besides the central myth, other myths are inextricably blended with the theme of **kanthapura**, which raises a socio-political theme to epical dimensions. The dominant myth of Kanthapura is of Ram-Sita - Ravan which is used to illustrate the fight between the Mahatma and the British. The Mahatma is Ram and Jawaharlal Nehru is Bharatha.

Numerous writers have revealed and almost obsessive preference for the myths. R.K.Narayan’s **The Man Eater of Malgudi** (1961) is based on the well known mythological episode, the story of Mohini and Bhasmasura. Anita Desai’s **Where Shall We Go This Summer** (1982), employs the major myth of Ram and Sita. Shashi Deshpande’s **A Matter of Time** (1996) reflects myths from **Brhadaranyaka Upanished** and **Katha Upanished**. Shashi Tharoor’s **The Great Indian Novel** (1989) frames a mythic network from **TheMahabharata** in order to provide depth to a contemporary story. Vikaram Chandra’s **Red Earth and Pouring Rain** (1995) is a parody of **Mahabharata** and **Arabian nights**. Anjana Appachana’s **Listening Now** (1998) is an interesting rewriting of the Shakuntala tale. The legend of Shakuntala has enduring significance. Myths afford contemporary writers for exploring about them.
In fact the consciousness of myth has very slowly evolved in Indian English fiction. It is not until the fifties that we find any significant use of myth in the Indian English novel. The Cradle of the Clouds by Sudhin Ghose, The Man-Eater of Malgudi by Narayan, or Anand’s The Old Woman and the Cow, The Dark Dancer by B.Rajan in addition to Raja Rao’s The serpent and the Rope are remarkable in this respect. Myths return with as insistence in history in the world of Maheswatha Devi in a dynamic and with one perspective undercutting another, and with the stories embodying myths and grant them their status as creative forces underlying Indian history. Irawati Karve’s Yuganta, is a collection of essays on the Mahabharata and its characters Karve’s approach is a historical one, based on the belief that the seed of the story was an actual event that took place around 1000 Bc. ‘Yuganta’ offers a refreshingly new outlook on Mahabharat.

Raja Rao’s The Cradle of the Clouds refers the ancient myth of ploughing ceremony performed by Balram and Krishna along with the women of the village. The material, the author works with, is also rich in myths and legends. These mythical tales are scattered all over the novel. ‘The serpent and the rope’, another novel of Raja Rao, is an attempt at blending and interfusing myths of different civilizations. While on the one hand, it contains the legends of satyakanm and the Budumekaye or the retelling of Rama’s story, it also contains the Chinese fable of Wang-Chu and Chang-Yi (127-28) and the tale of Tristan and Isoult. The Man-eater of Malgudi by R.K.Narayan also has a definite sustained mythical structure. The novel follows the classical pattern of Sanskrit literature. The characters, in the novel, behave as if their actions are pre-ordained by celestial powers. The novel thus has a clear mythical design, reiterated by references to the Puranic conflict between gods and demons.

R.K. Narayan’s The Guide also proves the relevance of the classical myths to modern life. The entire structure of the novel is on a mythical level. Another aspect of myth, observed in the novel, is faith in the rituals of rain. In the novel rains do come as a result of fasting, though Swami, a protagonist does not have faith in it. Mulk Raj Anand’s novel The Old Woman and the Cow reveals the influence of Hindu mythology and,
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scriptures on the novelist. Another novelist, Balchandra Rajan, incidentally employs
mythical parallels to illuminate certain situations or characters in The Dark Dancer. The
references to Karna or to the son of Kunti serve to give the novel a mythical appearance.

The myths have been explored and re-interpreted by the anthropologists, the
sociologists, the psychologists, the philosophers and the students of comparative religion.
The discussion on the use of myths in the novels of post independence Indian English
literature includes not only the stories from The Ramayana and The Mahabharata
and The Puranas but also local legends, folk-lore as well as primitive rituals like the
ritual for rain, for harvest, or the fertility, ritual for land or for a woman. Christian, pagan
hand classical myths have always provided a rich material of reference to English poets
and writers. Achilles and Hector, Diana and Apollo, Job and Judas, have frequently
appeared in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as allusions and
decorations. But the structural use of myth is clearly a 20th century phenomenon.

Thus the myths have been used by many of the novelists of this period to enrich
their novels and to enlarge their circumference. References to mythology and scriptures,
use of certain rituals and symbols reveal a great deal about their attitude to life, their
aspirations in art and their a genius in perceiving links between the present situation and
its parallel ancient situation. Through her stories such as ‘The Day of the Golden Deer,
Mirror, The Inner Rooms, And What has been decided?Hear Me Sanjana, Shashi
Deshpande gives new voices to her mythical women characters such as Sita, Indra’s wife
Sachidevi, Amba, Draupadi and Kunti to break the silence and pour their emotions. The
above stories bring new dimensions to the existing myths.

Deshpande’s ‘The Day of the Golden Deer’ reveals the inner trauma of Sita as
she pours them out to Lakshmana. Draupadi is considered to be the sole reason for the
Kurukshekratra war. But she was only a pawn in reality. But Deshpande’s ‘And what
has been Decided?’ depicts how Draupadi was made the victim of situations. The
feelings of Draupadi when she was made as a wife of five husbands, her psychological
turmoil on the day, her humiliation in the open court, and her agony on Arjuna marrying
Subhadra are subtly portrayed in the above story.
Cultural transactions happen in literature that crosses geographical, political and cultural boundaries and it has been a major topic of debate in post colonial era. The people who migrate from India belong to the professional middle class from urban area and for them life abroad means making money, understanding code and cultural norms of the new country and creating a footing there. Bharati Mukherjee extends her focus beyond the nation’s borders and studies cultural transactions which act as catalysts for new cultural developments.

Uma Parameswaran, herself being an immigrant in Canada portrays the life of Indian immigrants in Canada and highlights the Indian values in her literary products. Her “Sita’s Promise”, a dance drama connects epic of India with modern Canada through myth and dance. The author introduces various typical Indian philosophical concept and mythical characters of her audience. Thus she kindles the spirit of her audience to know further about it. Her technique sows the seed for spiritual inspiration and she has done it perfectly and comprehensibly by introducing various other characters such as Muruga, Valli, Nataraja, Gopis, Krishna, Brindhavan. By introducing them, she brings into the knowledge of Indo-Canadian audience the various cults of Indian religious custom.

A close examination of R.K.Narayan’s novels reveals that his combination of setting and character in novels promotes the Indian flavour, and that his comedy derives from deeply-ingrained patterns of Indian thought and culture. The action of the novel The Guide proceeds in two distant streams, presenting two different aspects of Indian culture. In The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao has presented the historical and cultural image of India. The beautiful pious city of Benaras, the holy Ganga River and other historical places are described in detail in the novel. The reader is taken on a guided tour of North India and Raja Rao not only shows historical and religious places but also narrates the myths and legends associated with them. The Ganges, Benaras, the Thames, London, Oxford and Paris come alive under the keen observant and scrutinizing eyes of the hero.
Kamala Markandaya’s novels portray the cultural conflict or East West confrontation. Her fiction reflects the East-West encounter she values Indian traditions and culture. Culture is the foundation unit in any society upholds its beliefs, customs and traditions. Through her novel ‘Possession’ we come across a sort of overgrowing conflict between Indian spiritualism and western culturalism, the former winning over the later. In ‘A Handful of Rice’, the East-West encounter has been portrayed in the form of difference in the cultural values. Certain traditions and the ways of the East are disliked by the West and vice versa. The barriers of arrogance, colour and cultural difference keep the East and the West apart. The Theme of East-West encounter is presented in the rural India in her Nectar in a Sieve. She brings to light the various points of weakness and strength of both the culture.

A number of Indian women novelists made their debut in the 1990s, producing novels which revealed the state of Indian society and its treatment of women, their work is marked by an impressive feel for the language, and an authentic presentation of contemporary India, with all its regional variation. They generally write about the urban middle class, the stratum of society they know best. In the field of regional fiction, four women writers: Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Kamala Das and Susan Viswanathan, have put the southern state of Kerala on the fictional map, while the culture of other regions has been represented by other women writer. Besides, the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya as Music for Mohini and Ambapali by Vimala Raina also present meaningful commentary of the historical and cultural identity of India.

The East/West confrontation or the clash between tradition and modernity is the impulse behind the works of acclaimed migrant writers such as Meera Syal, Anita Rau Badami, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Uma Parameswaran, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana and Kiran Desai. The theme of migration that leads to self-discovery, with a negation of the traditions of the country of origin, is a recurrent one among migrant author, Bharti Kirchnes’s Shiva Dancing (1998), Ameena Meer’s Bombay Talkie (1994) and Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine (1989) being good examples.
Bharathi Mukherjee moves across the cultures. Immigrants in her novels leave their homes and Calcutta is to take up residence in the United States. Mukherjee writes about early American settlers. The immigrants carry their original cultures with them and simultaneously must change to survive in the New World. Characters are fully at home in America, yet they like to return to their homelands. The work that she is best known for concentrates on this density of existence as it plays out and across the lives of the immigrants to the United States.

Bharathi Mukherjee considers her work as a celebration of her emotion, and herself a writer of Indian Diaspora who cherishes the “melting pot” of America. Her main theme through out her writing discusses the condition of Asian immigrants in North America with particular attention to the changes which take place in South Asian women in the new world. Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *Namesake* describes many of the issues faced by the Indians who go in search of the green pastures to USA. She has drawn the contrast between the two cultures. Lahiri feels that home and its culture are inextricably connected with one’s identity and the Indian food habits goes on to explain the customs, rituals and the behaviour part of her root country. She is a part of the Indian culture and Indians rooted in their culture find herself uneasy to cope up with the American culture. To her view, life depends on each individual to discover or identify oneself and one’s needs and if possible break the shackles and set oneself free.

Indian women writers’ focus has shifted to issues that arise out of migration and the emergent immigrant culture. Jhumpa Lahiri feels at home with the familiar themes of identity and acculturation in the Bengali families settled in U.S like herself. In the “unaccustomed Earth, the title story, she presents the efforts of three generations of a Bengali family to take deep roots in America, being the unaccustomed Earth. She says that a long line of people uprooting themselves and replanting themselves in the unaccustomed earth. And yet each successive generation, experiences new and alienating.

Mukherjee, a realist does not believe in propaganda of Indianization in Canada or America nor in any nostalgia in foreign soil. She accepts the deforming of the past and
reforming the identities. It can be a total adaptation to the new culture too. Her focus is how the cultural transaction ultimately becomes a great lesson particularly for the Indian middle class women in terms of new culture. In Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the world*, she accepts cultural diversity and she presents a pluralistic vision of the world. In the process of her life in three countries Mukherjee has broken the linguistic and cultural boundaries. She is both an Indian and an American who does not believe in confining herself to any particular linguistic or cultural class. Infact she considers *Jasmine* as a reflection of her own emotions. The very theme of the novel is a discussion of the life and conditions of Asian immigrants in North America. There is a special attention paid to the cultural transformation that happens to south Asian women in the US. There is an experience of every kind-social violence, ill-treatment and oppression. *The Holder of the world* brings to light the juxtapositions because the Trascultural experience can create an opposition to the hierarchies of difference too such as the centre and the margin, the coloured and the white, colonizer and the colonized.

Diasporic women writers portrayed the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. These writers are deeply attached to their centrifugal homeland and they are caught physically between two worlds. Their experiences as living in-between condition is very painful and they stand bewildered and confused. In their aim at self-definition and the expression of their expatriate experiences, women from 1970s onwards chose literature to pour out their passions. Diaspora women writers sought to find words and forms to fit their experiences and have chosen narrative strategies like the auto-biography, the novels and the short stories to do so. The Indian diasporic women writers such as Bharati Mukherji, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and kiran Desai have unveiled the complexities of discrimination, assimilation, social and demographic change, which not only affected the society itself but the lives of the various ethnic groups and the immigrants. The cultural barriers, identity crisis, racism, and violence faced by the immigrant expressed in all the Diasporic literature.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is another woman writer of first generation who brilliantly portrays gender in its vivid. Her female protagonists are memorable and real representations of diasporic Indian women. Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* is a true representative of diasporic identity. She was born in India, becomes trained in spices and called *The Mistress of Spices* finally lives as an individual in America. She comes across many characters representing vivid identities of diasporic life like scattered identity, marginalized, rebellious, docile, traditional and modern. Chitra banerjee represented younger women, first and second generations who find their true identity in American land, is an example of complexities of transformation.

The Indian Diaspora plays a significant role in reflecting the complexities of diasporic experiences in literature. It aims to examine the displacement and the nostalgia for their homeland and alienation caused by displacement or dislocation as well as conflict between generations and cultural identity. Diasporic women writers tend to portray the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. The spirit of exile and alienation enriches the diasporic writers to seek rehabilitation in their writings and establish a permanent place in English Diasporic literature. Divakaruni is herself the embodiment of the themes prevalent in her writings, or, as she states on her personal website, those of “women, immigration, the South Asian experience, history, myth, magic and celebrating diversity.” Her literature allows for a variety of readings such as Feminism, Transnationalism and Multiculturalism, with notions of exile, postcolonialism, and hybridity mixing with myth and magic situated at the very core of Divakaruni’s numerous narratives that would not exist without these dimensions.

One of the key and unique elements in the novels of Chitra’s use of magical realism, a literary technique that explores how different cultures perceive reality. Magical realism is found within a variety of literatures. What is absolutely ‘real’ to one culture is magical to other culture. From a western viewpoint, the other culture’s reality is often described as superstition, witch craft or nonsense; from another culture’s viewpoint, western logic and science are viewed as ‘Magic’ or disconnected from the spiritual
world. The intersect of these different world views is magical realism. In some of Chitra’s novels, the intersect occurs between the traditions of India and the modernity of America. Influenced by her grand father, who told stories from South Asian epics, she has woven those childhood tales into her novels. She explains that the “aloneness” of epic heroines seemed strange to her even as a child. In a 28 February 1999 San Francisco Examiner article, she declares that in South Asian mythological stories, “the main relationships the heroines had were with the opposite sex: husbands, sons, lovers or opponents. They never had any important friends. Perhaps in rebellion against such thinking, I find myself focusing my writing on friendships with women and trying to balance them with women, and trying to balance them with the conflicting passions and demands that come to us daughters and wives, lovers and mothers.” (Bold Type)

The Mistress of spices has a mystical quality to it and as Divakaruni puts it in “Dissolving Boundaries,” an essay for the on-line journal Bold Type (May 1997): I wrote in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth and magic in my attempt to create a modern fable.” She drew on folk tales of her childhood memories such as that of a sleeping city under the ocean and speaking serpents, but she changed them almost completely. In an interview with Esha Bhattacharjee published in The Sunday Statesman on 2 February 2003, Chitra was asked how she was to be identified and what she felt if she was—an Indian, an American, or an Indian living in the United States Chitra confessed: “I have to live with a hybrid identity. In many ways I’m an Indian, but living in America for 19 years has taught me many things. It has helped me look at both cultures more clearly. It has taught me to observe, question, explore and evaluate.” (9)

Divakaruni’s journey from being a young graduate student to a mature writer seems to have come full circle. She believes that there are both pluses and minuses to belonging to the growing body of Asian American writers. The interest in Asian American literature makes it easier to get her published ten or fifteen years ago. she told Neela Banerjee of Asian Week.com (27 April-3May 2001): “the best part is that my writing is now available to so many people, both within and outside of the community.
This story has helped me to understand my mother and my culture” (12). In Vine of Desire, she not only does away with italics and glossaries but uses many Bengali and Hindi words within the text. Through this means she seems to be attempting to get the reader to accept these as a natural part of the characters’ world and their language. She hoped that the narrative technique of each of her books would connect with the readers.

Divakaruni also offers her readers a window into a multicultural world of her characters. She makes the people to relate to her characters and make the people feel their joy and pain as their own. Her interest in women began after she left India, at which point, she came to revaluate the treatment of women in America she volunteered at a women’s centre and became interested in helping battered women. Divakaruni substantiates the culturally transcendent quality of magical realist literature as an oxymoron which presents a binary opposition between reality and imagination, a permanently contradictory relation between two worlds. These find a meeting point in magical realists writing, thus giving a voice to the unthinkable, and unspoken or to those living on the margins. Her novels conclude with a synthesis of cultures on the protagonists terms what was once unspoken is left expressed, proving that in utilizing the diametrically opposed characteristics of magical realism female immigrant writers do have a voice.

Divakaruni, in the author’s note, says that, it was left unsatisfied by the portrayals of the women … they remain shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heros, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If I ever wrote a book … I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men’s exploits. ( PI xiv-xv) By becoming both the narrator and agent of action, Divakaruni’s Draupadi recovers the voice of womenhood.

The review of Chitra BanerjeeDivakaruni’s novels is essential to justify the main themes of her works. For this purpose, the reviews in net sources as well as the textual evidence have been included in the first chapter. When Chitra gave an interview to Shaun
Farrell on June 2005, she told her magic and mysticism are important themes in her works. When she was asked about magic, she replied: “I think the world is magical in its essence - there are layers of existence beyond the one we commonly experience, based on the sense and logic. Magic is one way of entering that world, or entering your own depths. That is how magic works in my novels The Mistress of Spices and Queen of Dreams.” According to Chitra Banerjee, magical fiction particularly helps in challenging our underlying beliefs about the nature of the world. It makes us imagine grandeur and heroism in a special way. She has been reading widely and that helps her grow - as a writer and a human being. She says: “I particularly like reading old Indian literature - our epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharat.” [Interview 2005]

When Girija Sankar had a conversation regarding the novel The Conch Bearer with Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni on April 25, 2010, Divakaruni said: "After 9/11, I really felt a need to write books about my culture, to show children what it was like from the inside. I am sure you know how important it is to see oneself reflected in literature and art in positive and complex ways. I also wanted children of other cultures to be invited into my culture and to relate to characters who are Indian."[Interview 2010] She believes that deep inside we all struggle with similar issues. Getting attuned to cultures that might initially be unfamiliar to readers is one way to open up their minds and see those similarities.

When Uma Krishnaswami had a telephone interview to the journal of IBBY on October 23, 2003, Divakaruni had given her opinion about that The Conch Bearer echoes themes from the epic poem-story, the Mahabharata: “Elements of young Anand's journey are linked to ancient Hindu mythologies and sacred geography. Readers who know this context will recognize many archetypes and symbols. The visitor who creates a feast out of minimal offerings of food, the conch itself, the rejection of a heaven-like place in favor of loyalty-each of these echoes themes from the epic poem-story, The Mahabharata.” [Interview 2003]

Lavina Melwani points out how Divakaruni influenced from books especially from The Mahabharata. She could understand about it when she had an interview with
Banerjee on Jun 5th, 2009. She says: “The stories told to her by her maternal grandfather in their home village have also proved a great storehouse of inspiration, not only for children’s books (‘Neela: Victory Song,’ ‘The Conch Shell’ and ‘The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming’) but also for her latest novel, ‘The Palace of Illusions’ in which she used the rich tradition of Hindu epics to create a powerful re-telling of The Mahabharata from a feminine perspective.” [interview2009]

Elizabeth Softky high lighted the works of Chitra that they were oriented towards women. An Interview with Banerjee on July 12, 2007 proves it: “At Berkeley, I volunteered at the women’s center,” she says, “Women in particular respond to my work because I’m writing about them – women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships,” she says. “I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to [be] prejudiced when they meet them in real life.”(Interview 2007).

When Banerjee was asked byTerry Hongin apersonal interview in The Bloomsbury Review, on June 2004 about what she was writing then. She replied: “I’m working on the second part of a children’s trilogy[…]. The Conch Bearer was the first […]. It’s both a mystical quest and an adventure. The two characters are named after my sons, which has increased my stock at home immensely.” (Interview 2007). Ismat Sarah Mangla opines that Divakaruni strives to weave her observations with “the element of myth, magic and ancient culture alongside contemporary culture. Chitra tries to bring those things together—a sense of ancient culture and the daily realities of immigrant life. She certainly does so in Queen of Dreams, her latest novel that combines the story of a young Indian American woman and her dream-teller mother with the events of September 11, 2001. (Review2004)

Divakaruni in a personal interview on March 8, 2002 expresses her remarks about the cultural differences between India and America: “I think being here, as an immigrant, gave me this unique perspective of being able to look back at India and understand my heritage and culture. And since, I didn't grow up here, in America, I can look at everything here with freshness and objectivity. The blending of the two cultures
has worked to my advantage. There are a lot of autobiographical elements in my work. My stories are set in Calcutta, the city of my birth and the memories of the local scenes; cuisine and stories told by my grandmother are faithfully and diligently recorded.” (Interview 2002)

Moreover Divakaruni explains how the epics help to transmit culture from generation to generation. **The Mahabharat** is an ancient Indian epic, similar to Homer’s *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. It is a very famous story. Most people in India, even those who cannot read or write, would know this story of a great war because it is passed on orally from generation to generation. Like the *Iliad*, **The Mahabharat** has literally hundreds of characters and tells the complicated, fascinating story of a great war. Chitra said: “One of my challenges in *The Palace of Illusion* was to be true to the original story while changing the focus and the significance of actions and characters, to suggest different motives, and to create intimate moments to give us a whole different understanding of Panchaali’s character.” (Interview 2002)

Meera. M. Nakade gives a remark about the magical realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* in *The Universal Research Analysis Research Journal* (Sept.2011) that Chitra Banerjee uses different techniques in writing such as first person narrative, third person narrative, alternate narrative, epistle and diary writing, stream of consciousness, myth and magic realism especially to convey tragic and chaotic condition of Indian immigrants while establishing themselves to the new culture. (Research Journal 4 6) Meera continued that myth and magic has been a perennial source of themes for literary writers all over the world since times immemorial. Hence magic realism is an aesthetic style or genre of fiction in which magical elements blends with real world. In this technique the story explains this magical element as real occurrences presented in a straight forward manner places real and the fantastic in the same stream of thought […] it is used in modern fiction to mix fabulous and fantastic events in a narrative to maintain reliable tone of objective real report. It attributes the novel the features like folk tale, fable, myth, dream, legend, fantasy, mysticism, romanticism, meta narration, specially related to the culture.(4 6)
–Meera M. Nakade continues her opinion about the magical realism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s The Mistress of Spices in The Universal Research Analysis Research Journal that Chitra Banerjee […] highlights dispora women protagonists, living in two culture, their alienation, isolation, exile, mental trauma, dispersion, dislocation at the level of diasporic consciousness particularly. Her writing also stresses upon Indian culture, society with grave feeling of isolation and fractured human perception under two cultures one which is native and past and the other adopted and present, without compromising themselves. However she proved balance between east and west. (Research Journal 4 7)

It is pointed out in the international journal The Criterion on 14 March 2012 that Divakaruni represents the women of her novels as a class just as Marxian epistology. As a fight against the atrocities, women were shown different areas to work and stand on their own with their creativity and hard work and thus breaking the male geocentricism. Divakaruni represents the women of her novels as a class who constantly struggle to achieve financial self sufficiency. (The Criterion 2012)

Malathi,R. in her article “Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Queen of Dreams and Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Name Sake.” in Language in India. (9 Sep 2012), gives her view on Queen of Dreams that itopens with Mrs. Gupta’s premonition of her own impending death, facilitated by a vision of a snake. Mrs.Gupta’s story literally gives credence to the magical, the mysterious and the supernatural. It argues that in portraying this dream reader. […] Chitra Banerjee uses the words like, Ice-Cream sellers’ song “pista kulfi chahiye, pista kulfi” (QD 150)“Cha”(QD 159), “pakoras” (QD 160)“Chaer dokhan” (QD 165), “gawjas”, “rasogolla syrup” (Q.D.185), “Brihat Swapna Sarita” (QD 52), “beta”,(QD 188) “beti”(QD188), “Chhaiya Chhaiya” (QD 304), etc. (Language in India350)

Poornavalli Mathiaparanam and Juliet Esther Prasanna in Language in India, 2007 comments on their balanced view of facts in Divakaruni’s fiction. They highlight the fact that Sudha[ protagonist] determines to go back to India and further continues her family contacts back in India shows the hope and trust she has towards her native land.
Her homeland also plays a significant role in her redemption and renewal. (Language in India, 2007). It is stated in The Criterion March 2012 that Divakaruni takes up the image of the spices and the woman as complementary, and fuses them in the enigmatic and mysterious character of the mistress of the spices. But here the spices also represent the heritage of tradition that forms and restrains the mistress. (The Criterion 2012)

Mantri Raghuram, and Sujit Kumar Rath, Md. Sharifulla in their article in The Criterion: An International Journal in English, remarked how Divakaruni had portrayed spices as characters along with the mythical stories: “India is the land of different spices such as Turmeric, Chilly Cinnamon, Seasom, Chandan, Hina, Fenugreek, Asafoetida, Brahmi, Tulsi, etc. are nothing but characters like other human beings speaks to Tilo have magical properties for solving problems. (The Criterion 2012). When asked by Esha Bhattacharjee in The Sunday Statesman, (February, 2003) how she has matured as a writer, Divakaruni’s candid reply was: “The Mistress of Spices has been very different because I tried to weave some magic into it. My research included Bengali folk tales, Indian myths, oriental magic and also the immigrant experience. The Vine of Desire is more about The unknown Error of our lives. Here I’ve experimented with an omniscient narrative voice. I’ve looked into things more deeply here, and I hope my book connects with its readers.” (Bhattacharjee, 2003: 3).