Chapter 6
Narrative Technique
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Narrative is present at all the times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narratives; all classes, all human groups, have their stories . . . . Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.

— Ronald Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”

Narrative is a human phenomenon; therefore, universal in its nature. The gift of narrative is innate in human beings but to develop it as an art, is the knack of a few. Narrative can be constructed and transmitted through language, signs, codes, gestures or visuals. Among these language is its most popular vehicle. In this context narrative is any real or imagined incident or a chain of incidents which can be described by a direct observer or anyone else on his behalf. This description can be in various forms like novel, story, folk tale, myth, epic, biography or drama and may have microscopic details as well as macroscopic vision. The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines narrative as:

A telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee (although there may be more than one of each). Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may
also include narrative speeches). A narrative will consist of a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot). The category of narratives includes both the shortest accounts of events (e.g. the cat sat on the mat, or a brief news item) and the longest historical or biographical works, diaries, travelogues, etc., as well as novels, ballads, epics, short stories, and other fictional forms.\(^1\)

In plain words what is described is “narrative” and how it is described is the “narrative technique”. According to H. Porter Abbott “narrative is the representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse; story is an event or sequence of events (the action); and narrative discourse is those events as represented.”\(^2\)

Narrative techniques can enrich the narration by creating the desired impact. It ensures that the content and intent of the narrative should not be missed. It is strategic as well as scientific because narration involves system as well as structures. The technique and form of a narrative is determined by its contents. The narration of a real occurrence is limited by the recorded facts whereas an imagined event gives a wider scope. Narrative technique varies from one form to another. A short story generally focuses on the crux and the climax is brought immediately whereas a novel covers the minute details and the climax is suspended till the end of the book. From authors’ perspective narrative technique is influenced by their background, location, intellectual approach, and by the intended reader. That is why the writers of Indian diaspora consciously adopt a complex multi voiced narrative style that mirrors their position on the threshold of cultures, histories and identities. As Gina
Wisker opines: “[F]or writers, finding and expressing a sense of identity, location and voice, can change the dialogue with diaspora from one of loss and liminality to a new configuration of hybridity and cosmopolitanism that affects everyone”.

Salman Rushdie uses mostly the first person narrative in its self-aware descriptive style. Anita Desai employs memory retelling as the main narrative method in her novels. R.K. Narayan and Amitav Ghosh’s also apply the same technique to interweave the instances of past and present. Bharti Mukherjee prefers omniscient narrative method and third person narration. Shashi Tharoor has a satirical writing style to show split images and multiple voices. Jhumpa Lahiri’s contemporary writing style uses flashback technique at its best and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni narrative technique epitomizes the above mentioned narrative methods in combination with stream of consciousness technique and epistolary form of writing. All these acclaimed authors have articulated diasporic sensibilities through their own distinguished writing style and narrative approach. Among these the narrative pattern of women writers tends to be more intricate because the straightforward assertion of their self is intimidated twice, once by their history and then by their gender. Jasbir Jain pertinently remarks in this connection:

Women writers while evolving narrative strategies are faced with double problem: how to step out of the frame-work defined by men and patriarchal values; and how to identify and create a tradition of their own.

Since Divakaruni is a professor of creative writing she has by no surprise, exceptional ability to innovate new narrative techniques. She keeps experimenting
with plot, setting, characters, narrative perspective, themes and writing styles which will be thoroughly in this study. She prioritizes the in-depth writing approach over techniques but the latter becomes intrinsic to her works. In narration she is honest and original, and in narrative techniques she is always liberal and progressive. Her narrative skills can make the dated contemporary and contemporary universal. She suggests:

Writing must come out of what we know, what we feel . . . . It must be rooted in a people and a place . . . . But ultimately it must transcend all that to reach across time and space and memory to touch those who have never – and who will never – live as we have lived.  

The inspection of Divakaruni’s narrative techniques begins with her plot construction which ranges from linear to the twisted ones. She selects different plot design for almost every novel. Her fondness for non-linear plots results in frequent back and forth movement. She models her plots to accommodate various plot techniques like back story, flashback, frame story, in media res, plot twists and poetic justice etc. In back story technique she sets a background by giving account of preceding events that lead to the plot. It assists the reader in better understanding of the plot. The back story has been purposely used in “The Love of a Good Man” and Shadowland, the third book of the Brotherhood of the Conch trilogy. In the very beginning of Shadowland the incidents of the second book have been summarized to give a sense of connection and comprehension to the current circumstances. The handling of flashback technique is remarkable in Queen of Dreams, The Mistress of
Spices, The Vine of Desires, The Conch Bearer and “The Maid Servant’s Story” and “The Ultrasound”. Through altering time sequence the author has employed flashback for memories, dreams and re-telling of historical incidents. The narrator who is mostly the chief protagonist frequently plunges into the past out of nostalgia or remorse. The frame story also known as story within a story reaches its perfection in One Amazing Thing. In this novel there are nine characters and each one of them relates one amazing thing of his/her life through a story. This series of nine stories constitutes the main story of the plot. In media res is another plot technique which is often availed by Divakaruni. She intentionally begins her story from the middle with several sprinkled situations and scattered elements which get organized by the end of the book. Queen of Dreams and The Mistress of Spices have such a beginning which arouses the curiosity of readers to know the preceding and proceeding events of the plot. Amid the plot twists, there are novels like The Palace of Illusions and Neela: Victory Song that follow the chronological plot with proper beginning, middle, conflict and end. When it comes to poetic justice, Divakaruni ensures it in Brotherhood trilogy where virtue is rewarded and vice is punished at the end of every book.

The perfect execution of a plot largely depends on the narrator. Among multiple characters, it is author’s decision to pick up the narrator. Narrator can be the chief protagonist himself (The Mistress of Spices) who presents his own point of view in first person and gives vent to his own desires and doubts. A secondary character, who is very close to the protagonist, can also be the narrator (“The Bats”). The first person narration gives direct access to character’s mental state and circumstances. It permits the author to investigate deep into the psychology of the
protagonist. First-person narrative can be singular (*The Palace of illusions*), plural (*Sister of My Heart*) or several (*The Vine of Desires*). In second person narrative the narrator addresses one of the characters directly as ‘you’. Divakaruni has deliberately used it in the story “Word Love”. Second person narration is not so popular. The most commonly used narrative mode is the third-person narrative in which the story is conveyed by an uninvolved narrator. In this impersonal kind of narration, the narrator addresses the characters as ‘he’, ‘she’ or ‘they’. Third person narrator can be omniscient (*Brotherhood of the Conch trilogy*) or limited (*Queen of Dreams*). S/he can describe the events as a detached observer or give a commentary upon them. Divakaruni, for the sake of variety, has used all these modes either exclusively or in different combinations. The change in narration is denoted by chapterization in every novel. In *Queen of Dreams* there are two narrators, Mrs. Gupta and her daughter Rakhi who represent different perspectives of the same situation in first person narration. Mrs. Gupta’s angel is revealed through dream journals while Rakhi directly puts forward hers. To connect these diverse stances there is episodic use of third person narration which comments on Rakhi’s actions and reactions and reports the on goings of the plot. Thus the narrative develops with the alternation of these narrators. The tense also changes with each narrator. The journal entries are all in the past tense. Rakhi’s chapters are both in past and present tense depending on the events they present. The element of magic realism is also conspicuous in the cult of dream interpretation, practiced by Mrs. Gupta. In *The Palace of Illusions* there is a single narrator Panchaali. This novel is Divakaruni’s audacious attempt to rewrite the historical text of the *Mahabharta* from Panchaali’s prospect, so first person narration in the past tense becomes mandatory. Panchaali
tells her story “with all her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs, her heartbreaks, her achievements, the unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it.”6 The action, reaction and depiction, everything revolves around Panchaali. *The Mistress of Spices* also has first person narrative but in a totally different manner. At the very outset of the novel Tilo breaks the fourth wall and introduces herself to the readers saying “I am a Mistress of Spices. [...]From Amchur to Zafran, they bow to my command. At a whisper, they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magical powers.”7 Tilo, the chief narrator gives a kaleidoscopic vision of the enchanted island of spices in India, her magical spice store in multicultural America and the troubled lives of immigrants. Her voice is time to time interrupted by many other voices- of the spices, first mother and that of her customers. Tilo describes the spice store with such an exactness that the readers are able to visualize its shelves, counter, racks and sacks. Tilo introduces her family and Indian background via flashback method and interacts with First Mother at the island through dreams and inner conscience. The fragmentary thoughts, dilemmas and inner turmoil of Tilo have been presented through stream of consciousness technique. The whole drama is executed in Tilo’s mind. Gita Rajan rightly points out:

The novel resembles a wheel, where various characters serve as spokes for Tilo’s narrative, who is located at the center as the hub. The sequence of events too is non-linear, chaotic, and episodic, and thereby makes real the turbulent, human experience of various characters.8
Divakaruni has used narrative and stylistic devices to create a sense of interior monologue. Tilo’s monologues reflect not only her psychological conflict but that of her customers also. At times Tilo appears to be author’s surrogate who supports her personal views on the state of immigrants and especially the women immigrants. Tilo becomes author’s mouthpiece when she says, “Daksha here is seed of black pepper to be boiled whole and drunk to loosen your throat so you can learn to say No, that word so hard for Indian women. No and Hear me now.” As Divakaruni counsels immigrant women in her NGO likewise Tilo guides her customers in the spice store. This novel is divided into chapters, the first being Tilo and the last being Maya. In between there is journey of Tilo described by the agency of spices. The novel Sister of My Heart followed by a sequel, The Vine of Desires is a first person narration by Anju and Sudha alternately. The thematic division of the plot has been indicated by breaking it up into two books: “The Princess In The Palace Of Snakes” and “The Queen Of Swords”. The Vine of Desires has jumbled narrative with multiple voices of Sudha, Anju and Sunil in first person. Divakaruni has consciously clubbed these voices with the voice of third person omniscient narrator in order to mirror the web of intricate relationships. This novel witnesses a rare seen narrative of its kind where Divakaruni elaborates individual desires and justifications with episodes: ‘what I said’, ‘what I wanted to say’, ‘what I didn’t say’, ‘what I said when I regained a bit of control’, ‘what you said’ and ‘What I wanted you to say’. It is evident that using the first person narrative requires crucial justification of the events described and Divakaruni has cleverly handled it with her highly imaginative and personal style of writing. Letters and assignments play an important role here in unearthing the hidden recesses of mind. The plot is majorly
divided into two books: “Subterranean Truths” and “Remembrance and Forgetting” furnished with a prologue and an epilogue. Beena Agarwal remarks:

The novel The *Vine of Desires* is structured as a post modern novel that has a narrative admitting of the several disjoined regressions and forward actions. There are several separate letters and these letters like the monologue in a dramatic structure contribute to expose the hidden recess of the mind and sensibility of the characters.10

The *Brotherhood of the Conch* trilogy consisting of *The Conch Bearer*, *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* and *Shadowland*, is third person narrative which is the author’s voice. All the three novels have a synchronous narrative style with multiple utterances of Anand, Conch, Nisha, Mirror, Abhaydatta etc. In this trilogy stories emerge out stories. The content is explicitly magical, fictional and mysterious. The narrative of this story is dramatic and the writing style is contextual as well as specific to the scenarios. This helps in creating vivid illusions which is the basis of fantasy fiction. Through flashback technique the main Protagonist Anand intermittently goes back to his old days in India and comes back to the magical world of Silver valley. Divakaruni has once again used the dreams as messengers from the other worlds. Magical chants and mantras create a lyrical charm. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* the healing properties of ancient Indian herbs and meditation techniques have been exaggerated to create an aura of magic and exoticism. The magically fictional writing befits the description of Mughal court, grand palaces, pageants, magicians, Jinns and sorcerers. It makes reading a
spectacular and adventurous experience. *Shadowland* showcases a cleanly woven script and magnificent coordination between various worlds like the Silver Valley, Kolkata, Kol, Coal and Futuredome. Divakaruni’s imaginative capability can be noted with her dramatic visualization of the future city of Coal and the illustration of scientific innovations. All the three books have chapterization and the heading of each chapter indicates its key element. *One Amazing Thing* consists of nine short stories interwoven within the main story which is about nine people stuck in the US embassy office by a sudden earth quake. The narrative technique of this novel is similar to that of the *Arabian Nights*, *Panchtantra* tales, Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. There is interchange of narration between third person and first person. The nine protagonists narrate nine stories by means of flashback and memory technique. The tense and narration varies from story to story. The stories of Malathi, Tariq, Lily, Mangalam and Uma have first person narration in past tense. Jiang’s story is narrated in third person and swings between past and present tense. Mrs. Pritchett’s story starts in third person and shifts to first person in state of emotional tension. In her story stream of consciousness technique has been used as she moves from present state of affairs to her early days of marriage and then again leaps back to her college days. The stories of Mr. Pritchett and Cameron are related by third party in present and past tense respectively. The narrative consists of multiple voices brought together from random spaces and speaking for their personal and social issues. The Washington Times has critically acclaimed *One Amazing Thing* by comparing it to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* because the stories in it “throw the spotlight onto varied lives, each with its own joys and
miseries” as well as the “shared experiences and fears form the frame that holds together this compendium of short stories into an absorbing novel.”

The major output of Divakaruni’s literary genius is in the form of novels yet her love of storytelling is peerless. She is among the most noted story tellers from India. Stories have always been close to her heart. Her childhood memories are full of stories narrated by her grandfather. *Grandma and the Great Gourd* is the retelling of one such ancient Bengali folktale in third person narration illustrated by colorful picture collage. The author has used rhyming technique and other elements loved by the children. There is clever use of letter technique. The scenic beauty of the forest, the traits of different animals and the dialogues between grandma and the animals make the whole narration life like. This story is supplemented by timely repetition of the grandma’s face off with the animals. Onomatopoeia has been used in distinct style like grandma walking ‘khut-khut’, elephant walking ‘thup-thup-thup’, heart beating like ‘dhip-dhip’, the dog saying ‘gheu-gheu’, or the lizards slithering over dry leaves, ‘khash-khash’. The language of the story is English but the whole ambience is strictly Bengali. *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* consists of nine stories which are mostly narrated from a female’s point of view. *Arranged Marriage*, her first collection of short stories includes eleven short stories with variegated narrative perspectives shown by first, second and third person narration. In some stories she has shown a blend of first and third person narratives e.g. “The Maid Servant’s Story”. Divakaruni has such a command over story telling that she can persuasively relate a story without even naming the characters e.g. “The Word Love” and “Disappearance”. Within the small canvass of short stories she has effectively used all forms of narratives and has explored various perspectives.
However, a narrative is never convincing unless the characters are strong. Divakaruni’s artistry is evident in her art of characterization also. The author has displayed fabulous character construction. She has earnestly made every character so alive that the reader believes in what the character says and does in the story. She has crafted every character in such way that the distinct personalities and the emotions are well conveyed to the reader. In a conversation with Rajini Srikanth, Divakaruni iterates: “We’ve got to work with truth and honesty and care for our characters. When we care for our characters, the readers will start to care for and about them, as well. And when the reader connects with the characters in this emotional way, that’s when the stereotypes breakdown.” She incredibly elevates her characters and highlights their journey from self accusation to self realization. She firmly believes that “storytelling itself is very powerful. It transforms us, the teller as well as the listener.”

Her narratives are immersed in the characters and her technique is in sync with their circumstances. Most of the characters are round. They grow and change with progress of the plot. She has used anthropomorphism in applying human characteristic to inanimate objects. Objects like conch, mirror and spices are also independent characters in her novels and actively participate in the human drama. The spices in *The Mistress of Spices* get angry when Tilo transgress rules of her fraternity. They show their non-cooperation saying, “Why should we, when you have done that which you should not? When you have overstepped the lines you willingly drew around yourself?” Divakaruni’s competence in characterization is reflected distinctly in *The Palace of Illusions* where she has used suggestive phrases to describe the personality traits e.g. ‘even-tempered’ Dhri, ‘mild-mannered’
Yudhishtir, ‘Ill-tempered’ Durvasa, the ‘Iron-limbed’ Bheem, and the ‘hot-tempered’ pandvas. About the cast of “rich and complex character” in *The Mistress of Spices* Gita Rajan surmises:

Interestingly, none of the characters interact with each other; it is a novel in the imaginary terrain of Tilo’s mind. Further, the characters themselves are not fully fleshed out; it is their hopes, desires, and pain that make them recognizable as typical diasporic, exilic, marginalized, damaged figures.¹⁵

After shaping up the plot, characters and narrative perspective, Divakaruni provides an appropriate backdrop to set the drama on. She tries different settings in her novels. One can find real location (*Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desires*), virtual (*The Mistress of Spices*), utopian (Silver Valley in *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*), mythical (*The Palace of Illusions*) and futuristic location (*Shadowland*). She has ingeniously penned various genres like poetry, essays, short stories and novels, and subgenres as fantasy novel (*The Conch Bearer* and *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*), science fiction (*Shadowland*), historical novel (*The Palace of Illusions*), social novel (*Sister of My Heart*) bildungsroman (*The Mistress of Spices*) and epistolary novel (*The Vine of Desires*). Her novels don’t strictly fall in the above mentioned categories yet they have all the fundamental features of these subgenres. Most of her novels can be called bildungsroman or the ‘novel of formation’ since the main protagonist gains psychological and moral maturity in the course of action. S/he learns from the experiences of life and comes out strong and enlightened. *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desires* map Sudha’s growth from
a submissive, dependent girl to a bold, independent single mother. In *The Palace of Illusions* Divakaruni has outlined the odyssey of an unwelcomed girl Draupadi who turns into an awful queen Panchaali and changes the course of history. The Brotherhood of the Conch trilogy shows the journey of a poor boy Anand from the slums of Kolkata to the unimagined lands of the Silver Valley and Futuredome. *The Mistress of Spices* records Tilo’s transformation from Nayantara to Maya. Nayantara is a dark complexioned girl who has special powers as a star-seer. In an early age she is abducted by the pirates who want to exploit her powers for hoarding the wealth hidden in the sea. Soon Nayantara becomes Bhagyavati, the queen of pirates. One day the pirate ship drowns but Bhagyavati is saved by the sea serpents. She manages to reach the enchanted island of spices where the First Mother instructs her in medical and magical properties of the spices. There she is given a new name Tilo, the mistress of spices. Through Shampati’s fire Tilo is transported to Oakland in the bodily frame of an old woman. Here she runs a spice store and helps her customers through the magical powers of spices. The depiction of Tilo’s inner and outer world has been marvelously showcased by the author. By the end of the novel the First Mother directs Tilo to leave America. Tilo begins a new life with new name Maya that signifies hybridity of her identity as Indian-American and duality of existence as real and illusory. About the journeys mentioned in her works Divakaruni writes, “No journey is commonplace. Each person’s journey is unique and changes that person in a special way. I hope I am able to show that through my different characters.” The epistolary form of writing has been adopted in *Queen of Dreams* and *The Vine of Desires*. In the former novel almost half of the novel is furnished with journal entries of Mrs. Gupta. In *The Vine of Desires* a significant portion of the plot proceeds
through letter, some of which are exchanged, some are written but never exchanged and there are others which are written and then crossed. These letters contain heart breaks, dejection, regrets, confessions, resolutions and realization on the part of characters. Myths have also been an integral part of Divakaruni’s narrative technique. Myths are not merely embellishments in her works, their purpose is manifold. Divakaruni has employed them to show the belief system of Indian society and dynamism of Indian culture. The myths of the ‘island of spices’ and ‘caves of dreams’ serve as a tool for her feminist agenda. At many places myths work as an elaborated allegory in the given context. In this regard Wilfred Guerin discerns:

What psychoanalysis attempts to disclose about the individual personality, the study of myths reveals about the mind and character of a people. And just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, so myths are the symbolic projections of a people’s hopes, values, fears, and aspirations.\textsuperscript{17}

In \textit{The Vine of Desires} the myth of Sita’s transgressing the ‘magic circle’ finds a parallel in Sudha’s life. This myth also projects ubiquitous inclination of Indian women towards restraints, rules and moral codes. Sudha encompasses both men and women in mythical ‘magic circle’ and says:

Each of our lives has a magic circle drawn around it, one we must not cross. Chaos waits on the other side of the drawn line. Perhaps in leaving Ramesh I had already stepped outside my circle. With the Kiss, Sunil trampled the circle his marriage had
etched around him. What is there now to keep us safe from our
demons?\textsuperscript{18}

Along with technical know-how Divakaruni has toiled hard on literary
aesthetics pertaining to the syntax, tone, selection and arrangement of words and
writing craft. Shashi Tharoor comments on her writing style:

Divakaruni’s style is distinctive. Her penchant for sentence
fragments, once you get used to her cadences, often works to
good effect ("Then she feels it. . . . Taking on its inexorable
shape. And suddenly. There is no air. To breathe.") She has an
allergy to question-marks that sometimes leads her interrogatories
to fall flat. But her narrative is infused with poetry: “silence like
quicksand sucking at her wrists and ankles," a woman's fingers
"light as an unspoken wish.”\textsuperscript{19}

Divakaruni has made abundant use of figurative devices like symbolism,
imagism, simile, metaphor, Irony, humour, satire and rich sensory description etc.
Routine activities like bathing, painting, writing and ordinary objects like doors,
clothes, hairs become symbols of culture, ideologies, moods and emotions. In
Divakaruni’s novels and short stories bathing is a powerful symbol of new
beginning where the protagonist washes off bruises of the past; rinses away the dark
memories; cleans up fears and dilemmas; dips into hopes and is ready to start afresh.
Sudha’s taking a shower in \textit{Sister of My Hearts} signals her new beginning after her
separation from her husband. The repetitive use of ‘washing away’ signifies her
repulsion. She says:
In the shower I scrub until the last vestige of red is washed down the drain. I am washing ways unhappiness, I tell myself. I am washing away the stamp of duty; I am washing away the death sentence that was passed on my daughter. I am washing away everything the Bidhata Purush wrote, for I have had enough of living a life decreed by someone else. How easy it seems! What power we women can have if we believe in ourselves.20

In *The Mistress of Spices* Ahuja’s wife makes up mind to leave her tyrannical husband. She takes a hot water shower and scrubs off all her hesitations and apprehensions. Sumita in story “Clothes” takes a dip in the lake to “wash the hot nervousness” before her bride viewing. Thus bathing signifies a fresh beginning. Creative activities like painting, sketching and letter writing symbolize virtual fulfillment of deep down desires. Rakhi who has a strong urge to go to India and explore her roots, visualizes India through her paintings. Ashok, who deeply and truly loves Sudha, makes sketches in her memory as a fulfillment of his longing to be with her. Anju has never seen her father as he died before her birth. The imaginary letters that she writes to her father give her a sense of nearness. Doors in the story “Doors” have great symbolic significance. Open doors stand for connectivity, communication and the closed doors symbolize disconnection. Preeti is a single child to her parents and has been brought up in America with the notion of privacy. She likes to keep the doors shut. Deepak is a guy from India who has grown up with the sentiment of sharing in his joint family setup. He is unable to understand Preeti’s obsession with closed doors because in India the doors of his house would always remain open to welcome all. The doors assume more importance when
Deepak’s friend Raj comes from India to live with them. Raj is in a habit of leaving the doors open. It indicates his frank and friendly ways. Preeti takes this habit as an encroachment upon her privacy. A great disharmony arises out of doors whether open or closed. Ultimately the story comes to a juncture where Preeti and Deepak slam doors in each other’s face “And when the door finally clicked shut, she did not know whether it was in the guest room or deep inside her own being.”

Clothes generally connote cultural conventions. In the story “Clothes” the selection of clothes and their colors represents Sumita’s moods, her cultural preferences and subsequent metamorphosis. On her bride viewing Sumita chooses to wear sari in pale pink color, the ‘color of transition’. On her journey to California she wears a midnight-blue sari with red border which combines the blue, ‘colour of possibility’ and the red, ‘color of luck for married women’. In America her husband Somesh gets her some western clothes like a pair of jeans and orange T-shirt, black lacy nighty and a cream blouse with a long brown skirt especially to be worn on her first day at work, whenever it comes. Somesh’s murder takes away all the fancy clothes and vibrant colors from Sumita’s life and she is left with a white sari, ‘widow’s color, color of endings’. But Sumita is not ready to end up her hopes and Somesh’s dreams who wanted her to go to college and choose a career. She decides not to wear the white sari and comes out wearing blouse and skirt meant for her new beginning. Here sari symbolizes traditional restrain and skirt-blouse shows modern possibilities. Switching over from sari to skirt blouse suggests Sumita’s transformation. Like clothes hairs are also cultural emblem. In Indian culture “Long, well-oiled, obedient hair symbolizes virtue in women” and are looked upon as “the essence of womanhood.” Despite these constant reminders girls like Geeta and
Anju keep their hair short or unkempt which is an open challenge to the stereotypical notions of womanhood that measure a woman’s virtue through the length of her hair and dress. The titles of her stories are also suggestive. Bats in the story mirror social conditioning and silver pavements and golden roofs in the story of same title epitomize ‘American dream’.

Besides symbolism, Divakaruni has dexterously used imagism. She chooses apt words, phrases and expressions to draw mental pictures that directly appeal to the senses of the readers. The way Divakaruni depicts the languid atmosphere of Tilo’s spice store is a forte of water imagery:

The day passes so slowly it is like being underwater, every movement a huge effort. The light seems dim and green, filtered. Through it the few customers swim lazily to the shelves, and then back to lean languid elbows on the counter. Their questions are tiny bubbles breaking against my ears. My limbs too give in, grow seaweed-slippery, swaying to some submarine adagio only they can hear.24

The author has a penchant for similes. They ooze out in her sentences as honey from a bee hive. She has a readiness for finding the exact comparison for physical appearance, complex emotions and mental state. She draws her similes from everyday world but makes them fit in so well that at once they become exciting. To describes the facial expressions she writes “...my lips felt stiff and dry, their edges ready to crack like leather chappals left too long in the sun.”25 The stiffness of face feels “like it’s sprayed with starch”, one more word “might make it
Emotions of regret and state of impatience have been very well reported as “Regret layered his mouth like mud” and “Impatience pricks her skin like darts, enters her bloodstream.” At times author’s humorous comparisons make the readers smile even in a grave situation. As she writes “Bad times are like visits from the in-laws . . .” or “The two letters sit on the kitchen counter, side by side, calm cream, calm blue, like a husband and wife who have been married a long time.” The cross-section of Indian immigrants in Tilo’s store is perceptible through this beautiful simile, “All those voices, Hindi Oriya Assamese Urdu Tamil English, layered one on the other like notes from a tanpura . . .” The absence of any punctuation mark in this sentence suggests the “wholistic impression of Indian nationality existing within the consciousness of Tilo.” Divakaruni comes up with a flood of similes to describe Tilo’s bodily transformation. One can visualize “Forehead flawless like a new opened shapla leaf, nose tipped like the til flower. Mouth curved as the bow of Madan . . .”

Her metaphors are as startling as her similes. The metaphorical phrases like ‘bark-wrinkled face’, ‘needle-sharp question’, ‘ash-colored lips’, ‘bone-white kurta’, ‘fat-bellied clouds’, ‘thorn-fingered world’ ‘pebble-hard fenugreek’ ‘live-coal eyes’ and ‘rust-edged tone’, get straight to the mind. The metaphorical use of love is noteworthy in the following sentence: “But love is a code sketched in dust. You look away, the wind blows, the pattern shifts, and when you look again, you discover it says something else.” In Queen of Dreams Divakaruni has metaphorically used Java Café and Chai House to characterize America and India culture respectively. Java like America “is a roomful of nameless, faceless folks. . . happy to be left
alone, to gaze into the middle distance, to notice no one." The anonymity offered by Java Café is a contrast to the familiarity encouraged by the Chai House. Rakhi, the owner of Chai House takes pride in telling that “our customers allow us into their lives just as we’ve invited them into ours.”

Divakaruni’s expressiveness is phenomenal. She painstakingly chooses phrases like “a deep wordless sorrow” and “disobedient tears like pomegranate seeds” to articulate female desires and dejections. Her love of natural exoticism has been jubilantly conveyed through “Sunset skies brilliant as blood”, “birds with diamond throats sing and silence when it falls is light as mountain mist” and “beautiful peaks shining like a crown of burnished silver in the sun.” Divakaruni’s language is fascinating by the virtue of its simplicity. Instead of bombastic expressions she has used the language of common people. Poetic sensibilities make her prose sonorous. Her language establishes its own special order and unique artistic system within the text. It orchestrates the intended theme. She uses simple diction so that her works can make their way through the average readers also. At places she has exaggerated on the realistic scenes and location from India to give a fictional touch. She uses Hindi and Bengali words occasionally to give a realistic and local touch: Chee-Chee, Dada, Aree Baap, Didi, Firingi, Kalapani, Uff, O Mataji etc. In some novels she has used poetic prose in order to give magico-realist effect. Makardhwaj guides Tilo through the mysteries of female body saying, “Let him be discoverer of the land that you are, mountain and lake and cityscape. Let him carve out roads where none went before. Let him enter finally where you are deepest and most unknown . . . .”
The pithiness, terseness and vigor of language in the following sentences echo Bacon: “Truth, like a diamond, has many facets.” “Desire is a powerful magnet.” “Some illusions are essential. We need them to live by.” “Sometimes vulnerability inspires love more than perfection does.” “A woman’s beauty can be her wealth, but also her curse.”

Reading Divakaruni is like feasting on rich sensory descriptions. In sensuousness she can be compared to Keats. She has got amazing eye for colors and ear for sound. In the story “Clothes” she has almost created a verbal rainbow with different shades and colors, Yellow, like a sunflower after rain; pale pink, like the dawn sky over the women’s lake; green as a young banana plant; gray as the women’s lake on a monsoon morning; ‘flame-orange’ Benarasi sari; ‘sunrise-orange’ T-shirt; jeans in ‘pale blue as the nayantara flowers’; sari in ‘midnight-blue’; and cream blouse matched with brown skirt looks ‘like the inside and outside of an almond’. Her sense of sound is equally marvelous:

One moment it sounded like the whisper of rain on the feathery leaves of the tamarind tree. Then it sounded like droplets falling into a pool, one at a time. Then it was the gurgling of a brook, then the rush of a river over rocks, then the roar of a waterfall.

The mouthwatering delicacies like biryani, kebabs, roasted lamb, aromatic dashmul tea, spicy yoghurt sauce, fried fish, and chilled buttermilk tickle the taste buds. The farm in Shadowland with its ‘trees laden with luscious, ripe fruit’, ‘rows of corn and okra’, ‘sweet peas clambered up trellises around which bees hummed’, ‘Pristine white cauliflowers’, ‘soft, dew-sprinkled grass’ and ‘ripe mangoes’ lays a
buffet for the senses. The plush attire of the Mughal era with its elegant silk garments, loose pants and tunics embroidered with gold threads, bright turbans and long jubbas, ghaghras and thin veils sparkling with sequins creates a scintillating vision.

Use of satire, irony and humour is pretty entertaining in Divakaruni’s works. She hurls satire on orthodox Indian society for its double standards for men and women by saying: “. . . the unlucky man’s cow dies, the lucky man’s wife dies!”

She playfully criticizes the dowry system by stating, “…for even though dowries had been officially banned in India, everyone knew that without one you had no chance of landing a halfway decent man.” The attitude of Indian immigrants has been satirized via simile, “Leela’s parents never discussed their homeland India a country they seemed to have shed as easily and completely as lizard drops its tail.”

There are several instances of situational and verbal irony. In *Sister of My Heart*, seeing a shooting star Sudha thinks that if only Anju and she could marry the same man who could love them both. In this way both the sisters could live together. The irony lies in the situation in which Sudha’s wish is granted. Anju’s husband Sunil falls in love with Sudha. Although married to Anju, he cherishes Sudha in heart. After her divorce Sudha goes to America to live with Anju. All the three live under the same roof as wished by Sudha but there is loneliness instead of togetherness. A fine example of verbal irony and word play can be seen in Dr. Sumita's statement when she is taking the magical conch out of Futuredome to Hazardous Dump 61, the territory of magicians. The guard on duty is anxious regarding her safety. Dr. S. convinces him saying: “I’m as much at home there as I am inside Futuredome. As for the object falling into the wrong hands, rest assured that I will do everything I
can to prevent it."  \(^{52}\) The words ‘home’ and ‘wrong hands’ have different meaning for the speaker and the listener. The guard is unaware of the fact that Dr. S. belongs to the family of magicians and has spent her childhood in the locality now known as Dump 61. For the guard the wrong hands mean the hands of magicians whereas Dr. S. uses the word with reference to the scientist Dr. X. who wants to convert the energy of this powerful object for his selfish motives and the guard thinks. Thus, the actions and intentions of Dr. Sumita are exactly the reverse to what is understood by the guard. The humorous description of stale vegetables is very amusing in these lines:

\[
\text{\ldots several plastic wrapped vegetables displayed various stages of fungal growth. After a search, I managed to come up with a quarter of a tired-looking lettuce, some radishes shriveled to half their size, a passable cucumber, and a couple of tomatoes that slid around only a little inside their skins.}^{53}
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Divakaruni’s writings are storehouse of practical wisdom, maxims and precepts which remind us of the astuteness of Benjamin Franklin and Bacon. “Ignorance is a great promoter of harmony.” \(^{54}\) “Everyone breathes in air, but it’s a wise person who knows when to use that air to speak and when to exhale in silence.” \(^{55}\) “Calamity happens so we can understand caring.” \(^{56}\) “Expectations are like hidden rocks in your path-all they do is trip you up.” \(^{57}\) “Because one knows people best through their fears-the ones they overcome, and the ones they are overcome by.” \(^{58}\) “But perhaps to ask a human not to worry is like asking a fish not to swim!” \(^{59}\)
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is undoubtedly an accomplished narrator and writer who carries a magic box of narrative techniques, stylistic devices and literary aesthetics. The outstanding feature of Divakaruni’s narrative method is its seamless transition. She fluidly moves from one narrative mode to another. Divakaruni tirelessly experiments narrative techniques and writing styles. In every story or novel she comes up with new mechanism of writing that make reading itself a richly textured experience. Fredrick Luis Aldama applauds her narrative technique saying:

Chitra Divakaruni’s different story telling techniques – the third person narrative, interior monologue, epistolary exchange, diary entries, stream-of-conscious dream sequences – powerfully convey the pain and confusion . . . during . . . moments of life-changing awareness. Her skillful use of these different techniques and styles allow the reader unique access into the complex consciousness of each of the characters – including the men.60

Her style of writing has an immense impact on the reader’s perception and ideologies. Her descriptive ability is exceptional. No mood, no sensation, no pang remains unattended and unarticulated. She uses theatrical creativity and lyrical language in her works that arouse the curiosity and interest of readers. As a writer she continues to “bridge the divide between mainstream fiction and high literature.”61
References


6. *The Palace of Illusions* xv


24. Ibid. 173.


27. *The Place of Illusions* 17.

28. *Queen of Dreams* 43.

29. Ibid. 237.

30. *The Vine of Desires* 90.


34. *The Vine of Desires* 93.
35. *Queen of Dreams* 85.
36. Ibid.
38. Ibid. 15.
39. Ibid. 3.
40. Ibid. 7.
42. *The Mistress of Spices* 288.
43. *The Palace of Illusions* 55.
44. Ibid. 176.
46. *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* 225.
47. *The Vine of Desires* 69.
49. *Sister of My Heart* 269.
50. *One Amazing Thing* 15.
52. *Shadowland* 96.
53. *Arranged Marriage* 274.
55. *Queen of Dreams* 290.
56. Ibid. 237.
57. *The Palace of Illusions* 127.

60. Fredrick Luis Aldama, “Review: *The Vine of Desire* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni”
