Chapter 5
Realism vis a vis Magic
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When people use the term magic realism, usually they only mean ‘magic’ and they don’t hear ‘realism’, whereas the way in which magic realism actually works is for the magic to be rooted in the real. It’s both things. It’s not just a fairytale moment. It’s the Surrealism that arises out of the real.

— Salman Rushdie “Interview by Rob Carnevale”

This inscrutable universe has many levels of existence where reality and magic run parallel. Magic and miracles are as much a part of this cosmic world as reality is. Reality has the advantage of establishment and magic has the power of astonishment. Absolute reality becomes boring, whereas pure magic can be jarring. Magic realism is an attempt to bring forth the latent magic and suffuses it with creative imagination to give it a semblance of reality. It rejuvenates reality by mixing it with magic, myths, mystery, fantasy, fiction, dreams and godly spirits. In this fusion reality ascends to strangeness, magic descends to usualness and both meet at a common ground called magic realism. Magic realism should not be bemused as anti-realism; it is derived from and dependent on realism. It needs truth, facts and realistic information to stretch onto the limits that it can be believed by the audience. Realism, as a literary term, came into vogue with the French realist school of the mid-19th century to stress:

‘sincerity’ as opposed to the ‘liberty’ proclaimed by the Romantics; it insisted on accurate documentation, sociological
insight, an accumulation of the details of material fact, an avoidance of poetic diction, idealization, exaggeration, melodrama, etc.; the subjects were to be taken from everyday life, preferably from lower-class life.¹

The term is applied to English literature in varying senses and contexts, qualifying social, psychological, scientific and historical realisms. In simple words realism is the portrayal of real life instances that are practically possible and are based on solid facts and observations. From literary perspective, realism is the honest and straightforward depiction of cultural values and ethics, societal elements and scientific facts. Magic realism adds a variety to the depiction of reality by making it more engrossing, interesting and saving it from much of its mundanity. According to *Oxford Companion to English Literature* the term magic realism is coined by Franz Roz in 1925:

. . . to describe the tendencies in 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, or the fantastic in a realistic or rational manner. The term was adopted 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, Alejo
Carpentier (1904-1980) and the elements of it have been noted in Grass, Calvino, Fowles and other European writers. In 1970s and 1980s it was adapted in Britain by several of the most original younger fiction writers, including, notably, Emma Tennant, Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie. Magic realist novels and stories have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and the inexplicable, and in which elements of dream, fairy story, or mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence.²

The writings globally known for the genre of magic realism are penned by Gabriel García Márquez, Alenjo Carpentier, Gunter Grass, Toni Morrison, Franz Kafka, Isabel Allende, Sadie Smith and Salman Rushdie etc. The elements of magic realism have always been present in English literature overtly or covertly. Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Coleridge have made a name for their use of circe, fairies, elves, witches, wizards, magic, sorcery and super-natural element. In Indian diasporic literature the abundant use of myths by Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Shashi Tharoor, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Vikram Chandra has also established its lineage with magic realism. The legacy of magic realism has been extensively developed by two distinguished diasporic writers Salman Rushdie and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. According to Rushdie, the migrants suspect reality for they have already experienced the multiple ways of being. Their vivid experiences and memories of the homeland and hostland make them understand the illusory nature of reality. Therefore they carve out a novel scenario with the
concurrence of magic and reality. Both Divakaruni and Rushdie have tried to track down diasporic realities in America and Britain respectively. Both deploy magic-realism with distinct purpose and techniques. Rushdie’s magic realism is different from the contemporary fairy tales and fantasies; it is a somewhat truthful perspective of a realistic situation. Rushdie grew up in Post-Independence India with its painful memories of India-Pakistan division, Indo-Pak Wars, formation of Bangladesh and the unstable political situation. He has captured this experience through magical realism. By mixing the power of literature with magic realism, he goes on to show how better a political situation could have been. Whereas Rushdie is more inclined towards historical and political instances, Divakaruni uses it to portray social realities and human predicament in this mysterious universe. The situations in her novels and short stories are more mystical and magical. The hypothesis behind her magical realism holds, “Many parallel worlds exist, and in worlds where magic is stronger, inter-world travel is possible. And these worlds still have objects of power.”

The genre of magic realism serves manifold purposes. The harsh realities that might be otherwise un-acceptable due to their crudity, vulgarity and shokingness, are made endurable via magic realism. In the present multicultural scenario magical realism becomes crucial to plumb multiple realities in variegated interfaces. Sometimes magic realism is used to break the stereotypes and pre-conceived notions so as to present a novel way of looking at established philosophies and laws. Its significance is undeniable for postmodern and postcolonial diasporic writers since realism seems inadequate to decipher the fluidity, hybridity and plurality of diaspora. “The profound uncertainties” and “the physical alienation” represent the
decentred existence, rootlessness which violates the sense of self. Magic realism comes to the fore to facilitate a writer to express the realities of self and surroundings amid the prevalent chaos. The genre of magic realism has always been under experimentation and new feature keep enriching it. Wendy B. Faris has neatly encapsulated these features as five primary characteristics of magic realism in her essay “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction”. According to Ferris the first requisite for magic realism is “irreducible magic” which disrupts the ordinary logic of cause and effect, secondly there is “presence of material world in all its detailed and concrete variety as it is in realism- but with several differences”, thirdly “the readers may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of the events- and hence experience some unsettling doubt” and fourthly the “closeness and near-merging of two realms” can be seen. Finally these “fictions question the received ideas about time, space and identity.” In the light of above mentioned characteristics, Divakaruni’s works neatly fall under the genre of magic realism. Her magical realism is rooted in her culture and traditional background. She comes from the Indian city of Kolkata where black magic, voodoo magic, miracles, superstitions, dream interpretation and myths form a part of local culture and tradition. She has combined the cultural givens with her fertile imagination to interpret human condition in general and immigrant experience in particular. Her works give an insight into different realms of myth, magic, fantasy, exoticism, adventure, dreams, extra sensory perceptions, black magic, powerful spirits, supernatural creatures, wizards, sorcerers and evil jinns etc. The interplay of magic, mystery and reality becomes very smooth, natural and convincing in her hands.
Divakaruni has firm faith that magic and mystery prevail this universe. She has evoked the magical wealth of medieval Asia for the readers from the west in *The Conch Bearer* and *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*. There are instances of pure magic that bear no resemblance to reality and seem almost impossible to happen in the real world. On the importance of magic and mysticism in her works she states:

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*.11

The element of ‘irreducible magic’ is evident in the very setting of the Silver Valley where apprentices study white magic. They memorize freezing spell, the fading chant, and rudiments of Transformation, Persuasion, Search and telekinesis. They learn to make magical potions such as “the lost-object-finding potion, the truth-telling potion and the death-dissembling potion”12 Once the apprentices master these magical skills they are sent to the outer world to serve humanity. There are magical objects in the valley. These objects of power have speech, sentiments, will power and wit like human beings. Nobody can steal or find them without their consent. In *Brotherhood of the Conch* trilogy only the honest and fearless Anand can communicate with these magical objects and use their magical powers in the times of need. The ‘magical conch’ is something that looks like the real conch shell however it glows like magical objects. It talks to Anand and chooses him to be a conch bearer. There is an emotional connect between the two, that’s why Anand is
able to communicate with the conch despite the jammers installed by the scientists. The way conch guides and chides Anand in friendly manner, is purely magical: “You humans! Always wanting to know everything ahead of time. Where’s the drama, then? Where’s the adventure? Besides, you know I’m not supposed to tell you things that you’re capable of finding out by yourself. How else will you grow?” Another magical object ‘the mirror of fire and dreaming’ looks like any ordinary mirror but has magical properties. It can adjust its shape and can locate the hidden objects. It not only reflects image but reflects one’s past also. It is a kind of time-machine or gateway to the past and the future. By stepping into it Anand is able to go back to the 16th century Mughal era and the self same mirror enables him to jump into the future city of Coal. The mirror is intelligent enough to adjust one’s speech and getup according to the place one travels to. Looking into this mirror is like looking into one’s soul thus it helps Anand and the scientists of Kol in self realization. Apart from the Silver Valley and its magical objects, Divakaruni has introduced 16th century Mughal court with its free play of alchemy and black magic. There is magician Pir Bismillah who can “manufacture men out of thin air” and can forge a protective shield with the spells. There is evil sorcerer Kasim who is hell bent to destroy the royal family with the help of jinn Ifrit. In The Conch Bearer the metamorphosis of Abhaydutta into mongoose and Surabhanu into snake is also a good example of supernatural powers. In Queen of Dreams and The Mistress of Spices magical element has been imported through snakes. In these novels snakes are ambassadors of magical world. They appear at very crucial juncture in protagonist’s life to foretell, forewarn and to guide. Apart from their friendliness what is striking about snakes is the fact that they talk to human beings as if it is the
most casual thing in this world. *Queen of dreams* begins with a conversation between Mrs. Gupta and the snake. The snake appears twice in this novel once to warn Mrs. Gupta of her diminishing powers and second time of her approaching death. Tilo, the mistress of spices also has cordial relations with snakes. Sea serpents save her from the typhoon and extend a friendly invitation in the very first meeting: “Do not go. Come with us instead. We will give you a new name, a new being. You will be Sarpa Kanya, snake maiden. We will take you over the seven seas on our backs.” Such magical happenings at once startle the readers and leave them awestruck. One is compelled to believe like Anand that “magic could happen. No, that it *did* happen. That it was happening all the time, all around them, except that most people didn’t know about it.”

The presence of phenomenal world with its every day realities is equally strong in Divakaruni’s works. Amidst the magical aura she doesn’t skip the commonplace. Her magic realism is anchored in realism itself. She takes up realistic setting and gently gives it a magical twist. In her magical fantasy *The Conch Bearer* she begins with the real Kolkata city with its crowded streets, roadside vendors, slum dwellers and poor chaps who get into child labour to support their families. Anand, the chief protagonist is one among these. He is a 12 years old boy who lives in utter poverty with his mother and sister Meera. His father who went to another country in search of better earning, never returned home. Meera suffers from mental trauma as she had witnessed a murder in the city. Anand works at tea-stall owned by Haru. Haru is a typical employer who maltreats Anand and rebukes him at the slightest pretext: “For fifty years we’ve been using ash to clean the tea stall’s pots, but now it’s not good enough for Prince Anand! And who’s going to pay for the
soap? Your dad, the millionaire?” However, in this depressingly real situation
coincidences and magic happen that lift Anand from the slums and take him to a
never imagined journey. Anand’s meeting with Abhaydutta and his admission to the
Silver Valley changes the entire course of his life. There is stark realism in the
description of Sona Dighi village in *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*. In this
village there had been no rains for the last two years and crops have failed terribly.
The poor, helpless villagers are forced to sell their cattle and other belongings to buy
food and medicines. Their desperation drives them reckless and they are ready to
stake their lives for a few coins. Magic and mystery creep into Sona Dighi village
through an evil magician in the guise of a contractor who hires these villagers as
labourers. This stranger takes them to a mysterious forest where “It’s cold there,
cold like death, and the blue fire freezes the heart. Deep underground you can feel
the worms crawling over your skin.” This forest turn the poor labourers into living
corpses. This gives the readers a sizzling effect and goose-bumps when fantasy and
magic is clubbed with real life situations.

There is frequent mention of ‘distant worlds’, ‘parallel worlds’, other worlds’
and ‘Outer Lands’ in Divakaruni’s novels which signifies that there are multiple
domains and diverse human positions. Life can be lived at various planes at a given
time. This crisscross existence has been effectively projected through the chief
characters like Tilo, Mrs. Gupta, and Anand. Tilo, the mistress of spices lives on the
boundaries of two worlds. One is the mystical world of spices and the other being
real world of Oakland. She judges the latter through the commandments received
from the former. These two realms magnificently blend in her personality. The
intersection of multiple realms in *The Mistress of Spices* can be noticed in the way
Tilo treats Mrs. Ahuja who is physically and emotionally harassed by her husband. Tilo chooses Fennel for her as it has the potential to impart mental strength needed by Mrs. Ahuja. Surprisingly, the spice changes its position from shelf to the top of a stack of *India Currents* magazines. Tilo understands the hint and gives Mrs. Ahuja a copy of the magazine along with Fennel. This magazine carries the contact details of a women helpline centre. The mysterious power of Fennel conspires with the real power of helpline centre to empower Mrs. Ahuja. She decides to leave her husband and starts afresh in the shelter home of this helpline centre. Like Tilo, Mrs. Gupta also lives on the threshold of two worlds- the mysterious world of dreams and the real world of America. Divakaruni’s Silver Valley is another magical place where “the worlds of dream and reality melted together.”¹⁹ The scientists of the *Shadowland* also stand on the crossroads of two worlds Kol and Futuredome. These scientists are revealed to be the magicians of the past who have forgotten their original identity. The concurrence of the two realms is obvious in the simultaneous existence of the scientists of future and magicians of the past. Divakaruni uses magic realism to integrate miscellaneous spheres. She admits, “And 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.”²⁰

In the thick of different domains and several stances the readers may find themselves suspended between ‘belief and disbelief’. It becomes difficult to decide where one ends and the other begins. Divakaruni increases the level of complexity by transforming the real into magical. She initiates with natural, scientific or psychological phenomena and remodels them into wondrous. In *The Mistress of Spices* Tilo guides the customers in medical and magical attributes of the
spices. She tells that chilies are ‘cleanser of evil’, cinanamon is ‘friend-maker’
turmeric which can expunge wrinkles also works as ‘shield for heart’s sorrow’ and
black pepper ‘loosen your throat’ to give the courage ‘to say No’. The natural and
supernatural properties of spices have been mixed with such a mastery that one can’t
differentiate one from the other. In Shadowland Divakaruni picks up the modern day
reality of network towers and jammers, and makes them function incredibly. These
towers and jammers obstruct the communication between magicians and the
working of their spells. The natural phenomena of rain has been given magical
dimensions in this novel. Rain purifies the air since the impurities settle down with
rain water but the magicians of Kol believe, “If rain comes, it’ll remove some of the
impurities in the air. Then our cleansing spells will work faster.” Divakaruni has
rendered the psychological experience of dreams in fantastical way. Dreaming is a
psychological reality but dreaming the dreams of others is something miraculous.
This is what Mrs.Gupta does in Queen of Dreams. She interpret dreams for others
and warns them of the impending danger. Surprisingly enough she buys nightmares
also. In all these instances the reader attempts to reconcile between the two
contradictory understandings of the event and is left in the state of limbo. Readers
wonder “if there is such a thing as reality an objective and untouched nature of
being. Or if all we encounter has already been changed by what we had imagined it
to be. If we had dreamed it into being.”

In Divakaruni’s writings the notion of time, space and identity becomes
virtual, fluid or fractured. She designs her plot in such a manner that the distortion of
time and place becomes inevitable as well as convincing. In every novel she uses a
different technique for melting the boundaries of time and space. The Mirror of Fire
and Dreaming and Shadowland are based on time travel, therefore, back and forth movement is indispensable. In The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming the author blends the past of India with immediate present of the characters. Anand who is an apprentice in Silver Valley in present day is transported to the 16th century Mughal empire in India. He has to rescue the Mughal court from the evil magician Kasim, find the lost conch and travel back to his time so that he may help his master Abhaydatta. A noticeable aspect in the story is that all the characters of the immediate present are available in the past also but with different identities. Nisha is the niece of the chief minister and her name is Paribanou. Abhaydutta is in charge of the Nawab’s elephant stable and his name is Saleem. He has lost his magical powers and requires to be rescued by Anand alias Abbas who himself is a punkah-puller in the royal court. This dual identity of the characters and their present/past connection demonstrates the author’s forte of blending the binaries. The concept of the Mirror which allows travel through time can be compared with the sci-fi novel, The Time Machine by H.G. Wells. However, Chitra in her novel has rather blended the story with magic and supernatural instincts instead of science. In Shadowland the old hermit tells Anand that a force from a distant world came to the Silver valley in search of magical conch and “When the force sensed the conch, it focused all its power on it and pulled it through the abyss that underlies time and space into its own world.” Anand is again sent on a mission to retrieve the stolen Conch. The magical mirror takes Anand to future time and he lands in the city Coal. The evil scientists want to harvest the objects of power to enhance energy sources in Futuredome. Unlike the previous novel that portrays the magic mixed with centuries old tradition, Shadowland is the story of ill-effects of scientific innovations. The characters of
present time are also there in future with different name and identity. Master Abhaydatta is a cook now in Futuredome, Master Mihirdatta is a garbage collector, and Rajbhanu is a truck driver. *Queen of Dreams* invokes the past of Mrs. Gupta into the present of Rakhi through the dream journals. The Mistress of Spices Tilo simultaneously lives in present time and the timeless world of mystical island. Her existence floats between the limited space of spice store and the limitless powers of spices. Tilo changes her name to Maya, a name that signifies that her existence and identity is in a flux. Hence through time travel, dreams and spices the author has creates a viaduct between the two worlds and articulates a fictional space for the quest of characters.

Divakaruni has been inspired by the works of Gabriel García Marquez, Isabel Allende, Salman Rushdie and other magical realists still she has her own exclusive techniques. She delves on the powers of dreams, intellect, inner voice, myths and imagination as tools to achieve the desired effect. Her use of dreams has strong psychological and mythical lineage as it is inspired by the Freudian theory of dreams and the cult of dream interpretation popular in West Bengal. For Freud dreams are a ‘royal road’ to the unconscious and to Divakaruni describes them as ‘telegrams from the hidden world’ by Divakaruni. Dream technique is the base of her novel *Queen of Dreams*. In this novel dreams are a kind of forewarning and a clue from the mysterious world. The chief protagonist Mrs. Gupta is trained in dream interpretation and can dream the dreams of strangers. She warn them of the upcoming calamities in their lives. Unfortunately Mrs. Gupta can’t practice her talent over her own family members. Her daughter Rakhi has a recurrent dream that a man is chasing her in the lingerie section of a store. She is tirelessly running away
from him but he catches hold of her wrist. For nights Rakhi wakes up weeping over this dream. Her mother Mrs. Gupta finds herself helpless in interpreting this dream for her daughter which forewarns the sexual assault in a nightclub. To relieve Rakhi she buys this nightmare and Rakhi has dreamless sleep since then. Years later Rakhi starts dreaming again. This time she dreams that in an underwater cafe her mother has sipped coffee ‘black as squid ink’. Her throat has become instantly blue as that of Lord Shiva when he drank poison. She begins to crack apart. This dream hints at the impending death of her mother. The very next day Mrs. Gupta dies in a car accident. After her death the special powers of dream telling gets transferred to her granddaughter Jonaki. Jona has dreams and visions that forecast future. Jona’s collection of paintings depicting various types of fires and flames, is a clue to the fire accident in Rakhi’s Chai House. Jona also has a recurrent nightmare like her mother in which “There’s burning building, with people trapped inside, but they’re all adults.” Afterwards it is revealed that Jonaki had already seen the Pentagon Tower attack in her dreams. The world of dreams is very secretive. Dreams come to everybody but can be decoded only by those who are trained in the art of dreaming. In *Sister of My Hearts* Anju’s nightmare symbolizes her miscarriage and Sudha’s abortion but unschooled as Anju is, she can’t understand the implications of this dream. She tells:

> In my nightmare my baby’s trapped somewhere underwater far from me. He lifts a tiny black receiver to call me for help.

> There are faces in the torrent human faces—Ramesh, Sudha’s mother in law, Aunt N. Sunil. But as I watch their features flatten out, their skin grows black and scaly, and their tongues forked.
They are serpents now throwing their coils around my baby,
pulling at him. His face crumples as he begins to disappear into
the writhing, looped mass of their bodies. Anju, he cries Anju,
Anju, Anju. Then he’s gone.\(^{25}\)

Apart from dreams Divakaruni has dexterously utilized the powers of
intellect and mind. She frequently pertains to the use of intuitivism, extrasensory
perceptions, sixth sense, telepathy, instinct, insight, foreknowledge, gut feeling and
premonitions to create magic realism. These mental powers lie with everyone in
active or dormant state. There is nothing fantastical or magical about them. Once in
a while everyone experiences them. But the frequency and sharpness of these
capabilities in Divakaruni’s characters makes them magical. What is called wish
making in regular life, is named as ‘calling thought’ by Divakaruni. She writes:

The calling thought can draw to you whoever you desire a lover
to your side, an enemy to your feet. Which can lift a soul out of a
human body and place it raw and pulsing in your palm? Which
used imperfectly and without control can bring destruction
beyond imagining.\(^ {26}\)

It is a thrilling to notice how ‘calling thought’ works wonders in case
Nayantara and Anand. Nayantara, feels saturated with adoration and adulation as a
future seer. She wants an escape from her uneventful life. She yearningly thinks of
the adventurous world of the pirates who have new exploits every day. Without her
knowledge her thoughts are poured over the air and like a gold hook pull pirates to
her house. The pirates burn the whole village and abduct her. She is bound to guide
the pirates in their adventures and earns fame and glory for them. Soon she becomes the queen of pirates. Within a few years she is again fed up with plundering and meaninglessly amassed riches. Perhaps she desires death now to get rid of inner vacuum. This time her thoughts spill on water and the great typhoon engulfs the ship. Tilo is about to drawn when she is saved by the sea serpents who lead her to the ‘island of spice’. She is stunned by this response to her wish or calling thought which had set in motion a ‘juggernaut wheel’ whose turning can’t be arrested. The same calling thought works for Anand in Brotherhood of the Conch trilogy. Anand is a poor boy from the slums of Kolkata who believes in magic and keenly desires to be a practitioner himself. One night on his way back home Anand feels that somebody is chasing him. There is neither any road light nor any crowd to relieve him of his fear. He starts running but suddenly the weather is ‘windy and foggy’ and everything becomes hazy. He is unable to locate his house. His heart pounds with fear and he cries, “Help me! He called inside his head, not knowing to whom he called.”

The very next moment the fog thins, he finds himself in front of his house and an old man appears before him. This old man is Master Abhaydatta and he tells Anand “But I was called to you because of your belief in magic- and your desire to enter its secret domain.”

Anand is amazed at the way his innermost wishes and thoughts are being heard by the Universe. Years later when he is imprisoned in the cell of Futuredome Anand tries ‘calling thought’ and earnestly wishes to be hired as servant by the proposed buyers for it is the only way to escape the prison. Once again his wish is granted and both of them are chosen and employed by Dr. S. Divakaruni highly counts on the power of myths as a tool in magic realism. Myths have a kind of verbal authority and cultural conviction. As Tilo has spices for
almost every ailment, Divakaruni is ready with myths for every situation. Her myths range from Hindu mythology to the Greek and Roman ones. Her pages are replete with myths pertaining to gods, goddesses, deities, demi-gods, demons, witches and wizards. It seems as if these supernatural entities are also one among the characters. Every spice in Tilo’s store has a myth behind its origin. There are frequent references to mythology, legends and folklore in Divakaruni’s novels. *Sister of My Heart* begins with a popular Bengali myth which entails that on baby birth, Bidhata Purush comes to decide the future of the baby. Divakaruni introduces magic through myth when she writes: “The old tale say this also: in the wake of Bidhata Purush come the demons, for this is the world's nature, good and evil mingled. That is why they leave an oil lamp burning.” The way she uses myths inspires awe, reverence, amazement and bewilderment which is essential for magic realism.

The author has unleashed her cohesive ability to reveal something insightful and real by fusing magic into realism. She understands that the magic lies within the human senses and basic instincts if harmonized with spiritualism, become too strong and can entrench as supernatural. When someone starts communicating with invisible elements or from a world apart, it seems magical and this is what Chitra Banerjee has portrayed through Tilo who is well trained in the mysteries of spices. She spiritually interacts with the spices and with their help she suggests remedies for the loneliness, longings, fears, frustrations, dilemmas and doubts of her customers. She carefully chooses the right spices and breathes over chants. She discusses her confusion with the spices which is like speaking to her inner soul and deciding what is wrong and right. It is interesting to read how the kingspice Makaradwaj trains Tilo in art of love-making saying, “Use everything. Mouth and hand, yes, nails and teeth,
flutter of eyelash against his skin, that special look in your eye. Give and take back, teasing. As did the great courtesans in the courts of Indra the godking.\textsuperscript{30}

Spices counsel her like a friend and punish her like a stern teacher if she violates the code of conduct laid down by the First Mother. Such communication and response from the spices is possible only in the inner realm of Tilo. Commenting on Divakaruni’s distinct approach Gita Rajan writes:

But, unlike Garcia Marquez’s sorcery, Esquivel’s and Allende’s magic spells, or Rushdie’s and Power’s ghosts from the past, Divakaruni uses mysticism to achieve her goal of making the commonplace wondrous and the real extra ordinary.... She operates by drawing upon internal powers to gesture towards a deliberate mysticism, albeit a personalized, orientalized mysticism.\textsuperscript{31}

In Divakaruni’s fiction world there is Coleridge like ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. In the manner of Coleridge she takes the readers to mysterious islands, caves and valleys which are beyond time and space. She sets her novels in far off lands like six thousand years old Silver Valley, the future city Kol, the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Mughal court and the haunted ruins of 100 years old palace. She creates proper atmosphere by pouring hints of strangeness. One can find weather which is ‘windy and foggy’ at the same time, the fire that doesn’t burn but glows red, a flame which is bitter cold and the growls of thunder can be heard cloudless sky. The Silver Valley has warmth of spring as contrasted to the biting cold of the world outside.
Here the weather is controlled by weather masters and the surroundings of this valley keep on changing every day. The ruins of the old palace have something ‘mournful and ominous’ about them. Everyday two men are taken to the underground chamber of ruined palace which is lit by an unnatural blue fire. Having noticed any human presence, this light leaps from the pit and seizes up the mouth of that being. It is found that the blue light is a Jinn called Ifrit and it feeds on human spirits to gain strength. The appearance of the jinn doesn’t come as a shock. Divakaruni attunes the minds of the readers for something awful. She gently moves from strange towards fantastical and mystical. There is a dream like sheen over the whole depiction. The rationale of the readers is lulled to sleep and they are unable to distinguish between reality and mystical. By the time mystical turns into magical readers are mentally conditioned to accept it without astonishment.

The characters in Divakaruni’s novels are also in sync with the strangeness of the atmosphere. They are endowed with extra sensory perceptions which are further developed under proper training. Anand has innate faith in magic and can communicate with the objects of power. His talent is identified by Master Abhaydutta who takes him to the Silver Valley to polish it further. Tilo is a born star seer. Destiny takes her to the ‘island of spice’ where she is schooled in the mysterious powers of spices. Mrs. Gupta has the ability to peep into the realm of dreams. This faculty is refined further in the caves where she learns the cult of dream interpretation. The exceptional talent of these characters paves way for the fantastical. The queer appearance of the characters signals the bizarre which is to follow. Tilo speaks about her odd appearance:
They do not know, of course. That I am not old, that this seeming-body I took on in Shampati’s fire when I vowed to become a Mistress is not mine. I claim its creases and gnarls no more than water claims the ripples that wrinkle it. They do not see, under the hooded lids, the eyes which shine for a moment . . . like dark fire. The eyes which alone are my own.32

Suspense and surprise awaits the readers at every page. The author purposely skips the details and descriptions at certain places and leaves the readers to unravel the mysteries, anticipate the wonder and engage in the stupefaction. The readers are also invited to participate in the exciting journey of these characters through suggestiveness. Mrs. Gupta’s death in a car accident is kept a mystery. Mrs. Gupta who is always a cautious driver recklessly chases a black car bearing the license plate Maerd Emit. She hits the car on the sideways and is dead. The author doesn’t clarify whether it is an accident or a desperate attempt of the protagonist to hold the dream time. It is left on the readers to fill in the gaps through the journal entries of the protagonist which read like:

But for others the message will come at the moment of death, and will be inseparable from it. For those who need extra guidance, a messenger may appear at the time. Do not lose him or her- it will be your last chance to grasp the truth of the dream time.33

In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* the conch commits the jinn to the ‘Great Void’ which is another name for ‘Death-in-Life’. The readers are free to formulate this ‘Great Void’ in their imagination. The climax scene in *The Mistress*
of Spices also remains obscure. It has not been specified what happens to Tilo’s mystical powers, her spice store and what kind of a new beginning Tilo expects from her new identity as Maya. These riddles and labyrinths compel the reader to think, “Ah, mysteries. In the magical realm, no matter how much we know, there are always questions we cannot answer.”

Pure fiction and plain magic might not be welcomed by a serious reader, therefore, they have to be interwoven with imagination. Creative imagination helps the writer to present the magical things in miraculously realistic way. A writer’s imagination may be inspired from science, nature, culture, traditions or myths. Divakaruni’s prolific imagination is privileged with all these. Whether it is recreation of historical past or futuristic scenario of the world, she stumbles nowhere. In her hands history becomes alive and future concrete. Her distinguished imagination can turn common place things like food, spices and network towers into something wonderful. Divakaruni has magnificently used her imagination in creating a future city Kol out of the current city Kolkata. In Shadowland the sci-fi city of Coal is hi-tech with inventions like Instant-communicators, flying vehicles, pod-messages, ‘Fresha-vents and Simulo-Suns’. This city lacks natural resources which results in problems like “prolonged droughts, receding oceans, dying animals, withering crops, air that is increasingly harder to breathe.” There is neither natural wind nor natural beauty, everything is artificial. Even the sun and the moon are also synthetically created. Such a vision of futuristic city creates simulacra for readers. In The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming she has ingeniously exaggerated the real history of mogul empire through a fantasy tale and fictitious characters. She has portrayed
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the exoticism of Mughal era in its entirety. The splendid monuments, classical artifacts, rich cuisine, grand feasts, lavish costumes, carved palanquins, majestic elephants, full-moon festival, the conspiracies of the court, royal nawabs, shahazadas, magicians, sorcerers and jinns everything is steeped in her vivid imagination.

Howsoever high the flights of her imagination may be, Divakaruni never fails to supply internal logic to the fantastical and magical. Her magical fantasy appeals more to the readers because it is mixed with their local beliefs, superstitions and myths. This six thousand years old valley is hidden in the Himalayas which accounts for its affluence and mysterious powers. The framework of esoteric teaching has been taken from the Himalayas. The beginners in the Silver Valley learn to control mind and body. They are trained to regulate the force and direction of winds as well as to correspond through them. These magical skills and accomplishments may seem very normal to the Indian readers who are acquainted with Indian mythology and Indian gurukul system. Abhaydatta’s magical powers and Tilo’s mystical powers find answer in Indian spiritualism. The concept of waking dream as mentioned by Master Abhaydatta is purely a psychological state known as amnesia in patholog y:

Sometimes a person’s mind is blocked out something important—something without which he or she couldn’t function as a whole human being. The blockage usually occurred because of a traumatic event or psychic interference, but unless it was removed, the person couldn’t live fully.36
Generally a psychologist or therapist helps the sufferer in removing the block. He takes the patient back to his/her past and locate the block. Divakaruni gently blends this psychological process with fantasy. She makes the magical mirror do the work of therapist. It takes Dr.S and other scientist into their past and lets them see their childhood. Mirror makes them realize their origin as magicians and their subsequent exploitation by the devils of Futuredome. Author’s dream technique is also pitched up in Freud’s theory of dreams elaborated in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. According to Freud the unconscious is a store house of repressed desires, longings, impulses and prohibitions which can be fulfilled only by being expressed via dreams. Dreams decode these repressions. In this light Sudha’s dream sequence are purely Freudian in nature. They are a kind of outlet for her fears, apprehensions, longings and sense of guilt. Sudha tells:

In my dream, a woman is packing up an apartment and a life. She reaches into a closet, into the folds of suits belonging to a husband that no longer was. She takes a black –and white photo, a child not yet born. She slips it into her bra. The husband that no longer was opens his arms to me: come, come. I peel the pomegranate; my hands are stained with juice the color of blood.[…] In my dream, a different man this time. He holds out his passport to be stamped by an official in the San Francisco airport. He is taking a taxi in a country he’s never visited, to an apartment he’s never seen.
Sudha is filled with a sense of guilt after her sexual encounter with Anju’s husband Sunil. Her guilt conscience is symbolized by stained hands in her dream. She is afraid that her incest might shatter Anju’s married life which is indicated by the woman packing up the apartment. Sudha desperately wants to confess her guilt and open her heart to someone who can understand her situation. This latent desire points towards Ashok who is the man holding passport in this dream. Sudha’s dreams produce magic realistic effect when Anju actually leaves Sunil and Ashok really comes to America to give her moral support. Dreams of Tilo, Rakhi, Jonaki, Mrs. Gupta and her clients relate to the pre-Freudian classification of dreams which includes direct prophecies received in the dream (oraculum); previsions of some future event (visio) and the symbolic dream (somnium), which requires interpretation. The ‘Calling Thought’ of Divakaruni is identical to the ‘Law of Attraction’ proposed by Rhonda Byrne. This law implies that one’s thoughts, desires, wishes and expectations emit powerful signals which are received and responded to by the universe. Byrne believes “Like Aladdin’s Genie, the Law of Attraction grants our every wish” and “...when you emit the frequency of having received it, the Law of Attraction moves people, events, and circumstances for you to receive.”

Divakaruni’s magic realism is not a kind of escape from reality like pure magic or fantasy. On the contrary it is magical or fantastical way to define realities of society, culture and of human existence. Her magico-realistic novels are a kind of socio-cultural critique. She admits: “My hope is always that what I write is artful enough that art and social criticism are balanced and the social criticism comes to us through the lives of the characters.” The realities of class, race and gender discrimination, child labor, patriarchal tyranny and ecological imbalance are
underpinned in author’s works. The class conflict has been shown through the scientists and the magicians, child-labor has been introduced by Anand and Nisha, the pauperized education system has been satirized through Ramu who tells Anand that the teacher gives special treatment to the rich students and punishes the poor ones severely. He adds:

But he never really teaches us, and the problems are hard to understand. I think he spends more time thinking up punishments than preparing lessons. He makes us stand out in front of the schoolhouse sometimes, with bricks on our heads, until our necks. And sometimes he makes us stand on one leg until we fall over, and then he canes us some more.41

The activist and the feminist in Divakaruni is always on duty even in the magical, mystical surroundings. The whole magical, mystical and fantastical drama is motivated by social and human welfare. Mrs. Gupta’s dream world and Tilo’s spice store are designed to help those who are in pain- emotional, physical or spiritual. The adventure series of Anand ends up with the reconciliation of scientists and magicians who come together to restructure environment. He gives away his prize money for a noble cause of setting infrastructure in Sona Dighi village where draughts and famine have made life worse than death. Divakaruni has given magic realism “a feminist slant by fashioning strong, female protagonists who employ elements of fantasy and myth with passion to critique patriarchal traditions and dramatize the potential of women in a new world order.”42 The titles of the two impeccable novels *Queen of Dreams* and *The Mistress of Spices* are conferred on
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Mrs. Gupta and Tilo respectively. Even in *Brotherhood of the Conch* trilogy Nisha is the first girl to be admitted in the Brotherhood. She is an equal partner in Anand’s feats. At times she proves to be more resourceful and intelligent than Anand. Thus Divakaruni is always focused on her motive and keeps a balance between her content and intent.

To conclude it can be said that the genre of magic realism which was popularized by Salman Rushdie, has been given entirely new heights by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. She has made it more profound by exploring its mystical, spiritual, social, psychological, mythological and scientific dimensions. Her fantasy is grounded in myths, science or cultural practices. The key ingredients of her mystical realism are her spiritual and mythological heritage, and subtle imagination. On the strength of these two she dares to go beyond what is probable and acceptable. Brenda Cooper deciphers that Divakaruni’s’s magic realism thrives on transition, “with its strange relationships, weird linkages and multi-dimensional spaces [. . .] contests boundaries, seamless communities and ethnic purities.” Undoubtedly she has made magic-realism her own. The integration of realism and magic realism is so consummate in her works that one can’t determine where one ends and the other begins. Anand’s remark “How intricately they were woven, the threads that made up this mysterious universe” is true of Divakaruni’s creative universe where characters are entangled in the web of real and magical, normal and paranormal, fear and courage, and doubts and determination.
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