

Psychological Agony of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Select Novels

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni frequently delves into the inner worlds of women, portraying their psychological struggles and victories. She is the author of the novels Mistress of Spices, Queen of Dreams, and The Palace of Illusions. These novels explore the mental anguish that women can experience when they are conflicted about meeting society's expectations and objectives. Tilo, a mysterious woman, struggles with her magical responsibilities, while Draupadi manages her intricate relationships with the Pandava brothers and their difficulties. Rakhi, an artist and the child of a dream interpreter struggles with issues of identity, motherhood, and creative expression. The narratives of Divakaruni shed light on the complex psychological realities of women by highlighting their hardships, desires, and fortitude in the face of adversity. The study provides readers with a peek into the minds of Divakaruni's characters, illuminating the psychological struggles and successes that women might experience in a variety of situations.

Keywords: Gender roles, Isolation, Trauma, Emotional Suppression, Identity crisis.

Introduction

The psychological experiences of women are explored in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, which also touch on issues of identity, cultural tensions, relationships, and empowerment. Her characters struggle with complicated emotions, societal norms, and personal development, representing the psychological suffering that women may experience in many situations. Indian-American novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is renowned for her evocative writing, which frequently explores the lives, emotions, and problems of women. Divakaruni was born on July 29, 1956, in Kolkata, India. Her writings deal with issues of cultural identity, romance, feminism, and immigrant life. Readers from all around the world have found her novels, short stories, poems, and essays to be compelling.

Divakaruni's first novel, *Mistress of Spices*, which skillfully combines magic, culture, and female empowerment, Divakaruni rose to notoriety. Her later works, including *Queen of Dreams*, *The Palace of Illusions*, *The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Last Queen*, and *Independence* demonstrate her exceptional talent for reimagining historical and mythological narratives from a woman's perspective, giving substance to frequently underrepresented voices. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has won various prizes and recognition for her literary achievements thanks to her rich and varied writing style. Her narratives emphasized women's psychological and emotional challenges as well as more

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general societal issues. Divakaruni has made a name for herself as a compelling storyteller who elevates the experiences of women in literature through her works.

A wide range of feelings, experiences, and difficulties that women may encounter in numerous facets of their lives are included in the complex and varied issue known as the psychological pain of women. Social expectations, cultural standards, interpersonal interactions, and personal objectives can all contribute to this pain.

Women frequently deal with social constraints, gender discrimination, juggling many responsibilities, abusive relationships, reproductive health difficulties, cultural and familial expectations, career obstacles, the stigma surrounding mental health, trauma and abuse, and issues with self-identity and empowerment. Feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and problems with body image might result from these demands. Due to unequal treatment based on gender, women may also feel frustrated, angry, and helpless. Feelings of overburden, stress, and burnout can result from juggling roles such as careers, professionals, relationships, and other things.

These emotions may be made worse by problems with the reproductive system, such as infertility, miscarriages, and difficult pregnancies. Women may face greater responsibilities due to cultural and familial expectations, and internal conflict and psychological suffering can result from trying to balance one's objectives with cultural norms. Career difficulties in environments with a male predominance can also engender sentiments of imposter syndrome, self-doubt, and frustration. The stigma around mental illness might deter women from seeking treatment and make their problems worse. Exploring self-identity and strength may be both empowering and upsetting for survivors of trauma and assault, who may be in excruciating psychological pain. Recognizing and addressing these psychological issues requires the use of resources for mental health, open dialogue, supportive communities, and campaigns to dispel gender stereotypes.

Anything about a person's mind, emotions, thoughts, behaviour, or mental processes is referred to as psychological. It relates to the discipline of psychology, which investigates the inner workings of the human mind and how they affect cognition, behaviour, and emotions.

Psychological agony is the term used to describe the extreme mental suffering, distress, or torment that people go through as a result of numerous emotional, cognitive, or psychological issues. It entails intense emotional suffering, internal conflict, and a feeling of intense psychological discomfort that can affect one's mental health and general well-being. This phrase covers a broad spectrum of emotional challenges, such as depression, trauma, anxiety, and other types of psychological anguish.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Mistress of Spices* explores the life of Tilo, a woman who ends up running an Indian spice business in California. The book focuses on Tilo's battles with her supernatural abilities and the emotional upheaval she goes through as she uses these ingredients to aid others, frequently at the expense of her happiness. The psychological complexity is enhanced by Tilo's internal conflict, the conflict between her wishes and her magical responsibilities, and her relationship with the women who come into her shop. It's a narrative that explores issues of love, giving up something important, and the complexity of human aspirations.

According to Divakaruni "Women in particular respond to my work because I am writing about them,...I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain..." (Chaturvedi 55).

In her novel *Mistress of Spices*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni examines the psychological suffering of women via the persona of Tilo, a mystic and supernatural being known as the *Mistress of Spices*. Tilo can use spices to alter and cure people's lives. She nevertheless deals with her psychological issues as she juggles the tension between her duties as a mistress and her aspirations for love and happiness.

Tilo's suffering is a result of the rigorous guidelines and restrictions that come with her job as a spice guardian. She must utilize her abilities to aid others while repressing her feelings and desires, which are both a gift and a burden. A feeling of loneliness and desire results from this internal conflict. Her interactions with the customers at her store also serve as a reflection of the psychological difficulties women may encounter while interacting with others, particularly when it comes to issues of love, identity, and cultural expectations.

The complexity of the psychological torment that women might go through while juggling societal expectations, individual wants, and the need to forge one's path is exemplified by Tilo's emotional journey.

In *Mistress of Spices*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depicts the psychological suffering of female characters via the experiences of Tilo, the Mistress of Spices, as well as the ladies who come to her shop in search of solutions and guidance. The study's analysis of their psychological issues is as follows, the complicated feelings, wants, and difficulties that women, like Tilo, the Mistress of Spices, who has magical abilities to heal and aid others, must overcome are that she is torn internally between her obligation to assist others and her desire for personal fulfilment because her powers are constrained by rigid regulations. As Tilo attempts to strike a balance between her aspirations and her need to serve others, this conflict causes her psychological suffering.

Tilo's psychological suffering is made worse by her isolation and yearning for human experiences. She is prevented from developing intimate relationships, which makes her feel alone and makes her want a life like other people. The tales of the women who seek solace at Tilo's business illustrate a variety of emotional issues and the psychological anguish that women experience as a result of unmet desires, strained relationships, cultural expectations, and societal constraints.

Tilo's relationship with Raven, a man she cares a lot about, is an example of forbidden love, a psychological torment that is deeply established. The symbolism of the spices employed in the novel emphasizes the complexity of women's psychological landscapes and the depth of emotions they feel. "I want, I want," I whispered. But what I longed for" (*Mistress of Spices* 1998, p.21) longing of Tilo portrayed.

The decisions and outcomes of Tilo and the female characters highlight the psychological cost of their actions and emphasize the anguish of dealing with the results of their decisions. *Mistress of Spices* illustrates the complex web of feelings, wants, and difficulties that contribute to women's psychological suffering through various portrayals. The novel urges readers to identify with the inner struggles of the characters and comprehend the complexity of their circumstances.

In *Mistress of Spices*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the psychological agony of various women characters who visit Tilo's spice shop seeking remedies and guidance. Each character's story represents different aspects of psychological struggle and emotional complexity. Nalini, a young woman, struggles with unrequited love and the burden of her family's expectations, reflecting the emotional turmoil women can experience when navigating familial pressures and unfulfilled romantic desires. Dolores, a woman dealing with the aftermath of an abusive relationship, struggles with the trauma she endured and the challenge of moving forward while healing from emotional wounds. Harper, a successful businesswoman, grapples with the emptiness and loneliness of her life, highlighting the psychological struggle of achieving success while feeling unfulfilled in personal relationships. Emily, a woman seeking escape and adventure, reflects the psychological agony of women seeking to break free from monotony and explore their passions. Amisha's internal conflict revolves around her arranged marriage and longing for love, illustrating the psychological challenges of reconciling cultural expectations with personal desires. Geeta's story revolves around her struggles with infertility and societal pressure to become a mother, reflecting the emotional challenges women face

when dealing with fertility issues. Pilar, a woman torn between the responsibilities of caring for her family and pursuing her dreams, highlights the psychological turmoil of trying to balance personal aspirations with familial duties. Monica's story revolves around her grief over the loss of her child, illustrating the psychological agony of coping with profound loss and the challenges of moving forward. These women characters collectively illustrate the diverse ways in which psychological agony can manifest in women's lives, offering a comprehensive exploration of the emotional complexities that women navigate.

Another novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, is about Rakhi, an artist and the offspring of a dream interpreter. The book dives deeply into Rakhi's psychological journey as she negotiates her dreams, memories, and the difficulties of her mother-daughter relationship. The narrative examines issues related to family dynamics, cultural legacy, and the psychological effects of dreams. The journey of Rakhi in the novel illustrates how our past, dreams, and emotions may influence how we view ourselves and the world around us.

The protagonist of *Queen of Dreams*, Rakhi, an artist and the offspring of a dream interpreter, allows Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to dig into the psychological suffering of women. Relationships, family dynamics, and Rakhi's link to her mother's dream interpretations all influence her psychological experiences.

Rakhi's internal conflicts center on her quest to comprehend her individuality and discover her unique artistic voice. She struggles with emotions of bitterness, admiration, and the need to be her own person as a result of her problematic relationship with her mother, which exacerbates her psychological distress. Rakhi's dreams, which she experiences and interprets, also bring forth her inner problems and doubts.

The novel examines Rakhi's quest for self-discovery and the psychological effects of her childhood tragedy. It explores issues like cultural legacy, generational expectations, and the frequently complicated relationships between mothers and daughters. The story revolves around Rakhi's psychological suffering, which illustrates the complexity and depth of feeling that women can feel as they negotiate their roles, aspirations, and dreams.

In *Queen of Dreams*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni uses a variety of themes and narrative components to depict the psychological suffering of female characters, particularly through the experiences of Rakhi and her mother. This novel examines their psychological battles.

Rakhi and her mother, Mrs. Gupta, a dream analyst, have a complicated relationship that serves as the backdrop for the novel *Queen of Dreams*, which addresses the psychological suffering of women. Rakhi struggles to balance her desire to follow her path and adhere to her mother's traditions with feelings of admiration, hatred, and desire. The novel also examines Rakhi's mother's dreams and their interpretations, which provide a window into her repressed feelings, apprehensions, and wants.

Rakhi battles self-doubt, creative obstacles, and the worry that she won't live up to her mother's heritage as she embarks on a journey to uncover her artistic identity. This journey mimics the psychological torment Rakhi goes through. Rakhi's unease is exacerbated by cultural norms and traditional ideals, which conflict with her personal goals. The emotional difficulties women frequently encounter in close relationships are further illustrated by marital difficulties, including infertility.

Through Rakhi's emotional journey, family secrets and healing are examined, addressing the psychological suffering of past trauma and its influence on the present. The journey of Rakhi for self-discovery and empowerment is entwined with her psychological development; thus, the book also tackles these concepts.

Divakaruni projects through this line “The snake grew dim until he was the colour of weeds in the water, a thin echo suspended in greenish silt. It was a death he was fortelling ” (Queen of Dreams 2005, p.2). She expresses the feeling of fear and insecurity experienced by the women.

Through these narrative components, Queen of Dreams provides a detailed examination of the psychological suffering experienced by women, showing their emotional complexity, ties to their families, cultural influences, and personal aspirations. Readers can identify with the character’s inner conflicts and self-discovery journeys, which helps them negotiate the difficult obstacles and profound changes that come along with achieving autonomy and their aspirations.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni addresses the psychological suffering of several female characters in Queen of Dreams, mainly via the experiences of Rakhi and her mother. Neelima, Rakhi's cousin and best friend, is the focus of the narrative. She struggles with relationships and self-worth. Rakhi's aunt, Kamala Maasi, struggles with societal expectations and her responsibilities as a career. The transgender character Naveen experiences discrimination and social rejection. Rakhi's little daughter, Shantha, must deal with domestic abuse as well as the psychological effects of seeing abuse. Rakhi's childhood friend, Madhu, struggles with stagnation and unfulfilled goals. Rakhi's grandmother is an example of a generation that dealt with its psychological difficulties. The complexity of identity and individual decisions is best exemplified by Rukmini, a friend of Rakhi's mother. The representation of these female characters' depth in the psychological Queen of Dreams, enables readers to empathize with their challenges and victories.

The Palace of Illusions is a retelling of the Mahabharata, a famous Indian epic, from the viewpoint of Draupadi, the main female character. By reimagining Draupadi’s life and experiences in this novel, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni sheds insight into her feelings, motivations, and psychological challenges. The narrative explores Draupadi’s complicated relationships with the five Pandava brothers, her goals, her part in the epic’s events, and the difficulties she encounters as a woman in a patriarchal society. As Draupadi navigates her life’s difficulties, the psychological suffering of the character is shown, giving the book a potent examination of gender, power, and fate.

In The Palace of Illusions, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores women’s psychological suffering via the persona of Draupadi, the main female character in the Indian epic Mahabharata. The events of the epic, her status as the five Pandava brothers’ wife, and the social mores of her day all have an impact on Draupadi’s psychological experiences.

Her complicated connections with the Pandava brothers, her sense of identity, and her fortitude in the face of tragedy are the focal points of Draupadi’s internal conflicts. She struggles with her love and loyalty for her spouse and the circumstances that keep her tied to them, as well as with sentiments of anger. Her experiences, including the infamous incident in which she was publicly humiliated, showcase the emotional upheaval she goes through.

The novel also looks at Draupadi's yearning for autonomy and desire to control her destiny. Her internal problems serve as a reflection of the difficulties women can encounter while attempting to negotiate their responsibilities in a patriarchal culture. Themes of power relationships, loyalty, and the effects of war and politics on interpersonal relationships are intricately entwined with her psychological suffering.

In general, The Palace of Illusions presents a distinctive viewpoint on Draupadi's psychological journey, emphasizing the emotional intricacies and challenges that women may experience within the setting of epic narratives and historical limitations.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tackles the psychological suffering of women characters in The Palace of Illusions, particularly via the sufferings of Draupadi, the novel's main

character. The emotional complexities of women's relationships, their quest for individuality, their place in a patriarchal society, loyalty and betrayal, perseverance and inner strength, and the narrative perspective are all explored in this novel.

The intricate interactions between Draupadi, the Pandavas, and her co-wives reveal her emotional agony. Her desire for acceptance and originality, as well as her wish to be viewed as more than merely the Pandavas' wife, show the psychological anguish experienced by women trying to carve out a place for themselves outside of social norms. Her public humiliation deepens her anguish by exposing her feelings, which range from rage and fury to a sense of injustice.

The psychological difficulties women may experience in such settings are highlighted by Draupadi's struggles with her place in a patriarchal culture. Her attempts to share her ideas and be heard in a world dominated by men reveal emotional struggles brought on by cultural expectations. The complexity of devotion and individual interests is also highlighted through loyalty and betrayal.

Draupadi shows the emotional endurance of women by displaying persistence and inner strength despite the psychological suffering she endures. Readers can explore Draupadi's inner thoughts, feelings, and psychological journey thanks to the narrative perspective, which sheds light on her emotional suffering and the nuanced nature of her emotions and choices. Overall, *The Palace of Illusions* provides a multifaceted depiction of Draupadi's psychological suffering while illuminating the emotional hardships, resiliency, and empowerment of women who negotiate societal expectations, individual wants, and the difficulties of their period.

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the psychological agony of various women characters, including Draupadi, within the Mahabharata narrative. These characters include Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, who struggles with her relationships with her sons and the moral dilemmas associated with their actions. Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas, grapples with her love for her sons and the moral dilemmas associated with their actions. Hidimba, a Rakshasi princess, and Bhima's wife navigates the complexities of her marriage and identity as a non-human being, highlighting the psychological agony of women on the fringes of societal norms.

Amba and Ambika, the princesses, experience psychological agony due to their fates being intertwined with the decisions of men. Amba's desire for revenge and Ambika's obedience reflect the challenges faced by women who lack agency in their destinies. Subhadra's journey revolves around her love for Arjuna and her desire to marry him against her family's wishes, reflecting the emotional turmoil of women who must make difficult choices between their hearts and societal norms.

Satyavati, the stepmother of Bhishma and grandmother of the Kauravas and Pandavas, faces internal conflict as the stepmother of Bhishma and grandmother of the Kauravas and Pandavas. These women characters contribute to the multidimensional portrayal of psychological agony within the Mahabharata's epic narrative, highlighting the emotional complexities, societal pressures, and personal struggles women face within the context of the Mahabharata's epic narrative.

Conclusion

Through themes of identity, empowerment, internal tensions, complex relationships, personal growth, cultural norms, yearning for autonomy, the interaction of dreams and reality, and reflection on mythology and history, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the psychological anguish of women in her novels. Her characters struggle with issues of identity, empowerment through identification, internal tensions, complicated relationships, personal development, cultural conventions, autonomy, metaphors in

dreams, and the interaction between dreams and reality. These themes emphasize the psychological struggle women have as they attempt to develop their own identities and balance tradition and personal fulfilment. Through their experiences, Divakaruni's characters frequently turn their suffering into strength, becoming powerful people as a result.

The Internal conflict between adhering to tradition and pursuing personal fulfilment, as well as the need for independence and agency, are also explored in Divakaruni's writings. Her retellings of mythological and historical themes stress the underrepresented experiences and viewpoints of women while deepening the psychological landscapes of her characters through the interaction of dreams and reality. Overall, Divakaruni's writings provide a complex representation of women's experiences, emphasizing the value of relationships, self-discovery, empowerment, and internal turmoil brought on by societal expectations.

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