

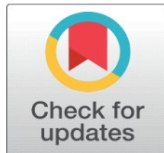
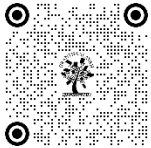
THE EXAMINATION OF MYTHS IN THE LITERARY WORKS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Bhargavi Anilbhai Bhagwat ¹, Dr. Nilanjana Ghosh ², Dr. Nilesh P. Sathvara ³

¹ Ph.D. Research Scholar, En rol. No-211008210202 Silver Oak University, Ahmedabad, India

² Assistant Professor (English), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Silver Oak University, Ahmedabad, India

³ Co- Supervisor, Shri H. K. Arts College, Ahmedabad, India



DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5193](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5193)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

This study shall examine how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni pens myths in her literature; indeed, new, creative versions of India's ancient epics, 'The Mahabharata' and 'The Ramayana'. In this context, by taking a modern feminist viewpoint, this raises the voices of the almost largely marginalized female characters. She actually visualizes the very old mythological stories in her novels, "The Palace of Illusions" and "The Forest of Enchantments," along with modern significance. Another aspect that compliments how the author integrates mythological themes with current concerns like identity, gender, and personal agency allows these ageless stories to speak to today's readers. In this regard, Divakaruni breathes new life into old stories besides translocating them to answer the challenges of the contemporary world.

Keywords: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Indian Mythology, Feminist Retellings, "The Mahabharata", "The Ramayana", "The Palace of Illusions", "The Forest of Enchantments", Feminist Criticism, Reinterpretation of Myths, Women in Mythology, Postcolonial Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an acclaimed author who explores themes of mythology, identity, and the immigrant experience. Through her works, she not only celebrates the richness of Indian culture but also interprets myths that are very relevant today. With tremendous attention to detail and an engrossing narrative style, Divakaruni adeptly weaves ancient tales with modern experiences to ponder human relationships and cultural conflicts. The article discusses how, in the author's work, mythology is used-this suggests how it becomes an essential ground on which stories are built and applied at the same time in a greater cultural context.

2. REVISITING ANCIENT NARRATIVES

1) Reinterpretation of Traditional Myths

One of the notable aspects of the writings by Divakaruni is her ability to reimagine ancient myths. In "The Palace of Illusions," this Bangalore-born tells the Mahabharata from the perspective of Draupadi, one of the principal characters often overlaid by the male-dominated narrative. Here, she depicts the struggle and empowerment of a woman in a

How to cite this article (APA): Bhagwat, B.A., Ghosh, N., and Sathvara, N.P. (2024). The Examination of Myths in the Literary Works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(1), 2321-2324. doi: 10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5193

2321

patriarchal system. It is this amplification of voices by characters that stirs in readers a reflective review and question of the roles women play in history.

The only wonderful ability of Divakaruni is the fine imagination in remaking traditional myths, which is one of the most interesting and exciting components of her writing. In her much-praised novel, "The Palace of Illusions, she undertakes the very broad work of retelling the epic Mahabharata from the focal point of view of Draupadi. This key figure - often marginalized within a story dominated by male figures - is thereby redefined in this version created by Divakaruni. The author effectively points out the hardship and empowerment of a woman in a patriarchal society through this bold and spirited heroine.

Through such vivid portrayals of the female character, Divakaruni goes about provoking readers to think and reflect on great histories in which women played pivotal parts. These women are anything but minor figures relegated to the margins of the major story, but rather they represent mighty leaders with power over their choice of actions. Such females' protagonists do not play the role of being passive victims to male circumstance because Divakaruni's retelling of Draupadi's tale strongly brings forward the fact that, belonging to a world often so absorbed in itself as to forget them, women still possessed distinct strengths, desires, and aspirations.

Divakaruni's re-interpretation speaks not only to the agency of women but opens up our understanding of the Mahabharata. In the focus of the story on Draupadi, the storyteller offers a perspective unknown and unexplored in this great and ancient epic, through the eyes of this storied character. This process puts our assumptions and prejudices under scrutiny, asking us to read those stories again that we thought we knew.

Through "The Palace of Illusions," we get to see that Divakaruni has the art of retelling the ancient myths as well, and there remains a rich quality in her literary masterwork. By centering stories about suppressed women, she helps them embrace their challenges and strength, while making readers realize how changes occurred in the roles played by women across the script written historically. It is new, and therefore fresh by giving a new perspective that challenges established history; hence, it is rich in understanding these age-long tales.

2) Fusion of Myth and Reality

At times, Divakaruni often leaves the distinction of boundaries between mythology and reality quite blurred in her literary creations. In "The Forest of Enchantments," for instance, she apparently provides a seamless narration where the mythical relationship is intrinsically married to the mundane existence of her characters, underlining the influence of mythology over personal identities and their implications over value systems within society. Her writing encourages the reader to think about how such timeless stories are still influencing modern culture and people's lives.

Divakaruni is also popular for the ability of merging myth and reality in her literature, which she has been able to do very well with "The Forest of Enchantments." In this epic novel, the author interlaces the ancient mythical elements so skillfully in ordinary experiences of characters that it defies a reader to decide whether it is real or only a fantasy. This approach brings out the great role myths play in informing individual identities and values within societies, a theme that is very incessant through the narrative.

The masterful way in which Divakaruni writes makes the reader enter the complex tapestry of those old tales, almost coaxed into musing over their relevance today and to their own lives. As we watch the characters as they navigate their own lives, trying to come to terms with issues and disappointments similar to our own, we are reminded of the timeless themes and estual topics and leitmotifs found in the legendary stories. One powerful way in which Divakaruni's work shows that our shared history impacts significantly upon our present, including shaping beliefs, values, and behavior, is through the blending of myth and reality.

She thus presents us with the mythological and makes it easy for us to mix the mundane with the sublime reality. She makes readers question what is on the other side of the far-off ceiling that actually acts like an iron curtain, informs them of the arbitrary limits we draw in appreciating the world, and invites us into a reality in which the visible and invisible, logic and mysticism are intertwined. It is in this way that she opens before us a landscape of possibilities, where the mythical influences that shape our existence are tied up with the concrete experience we have day after day.

"The Forest of Enchantments" is an altogether different a la mode fantasy that Divakaruni has skillfully wove with reality in this highly talented and skilled narrator. When reading this riveting narrative, one can feel the stark influence of historical myths in contemporary times and individual lives. When blending the fantastical with the mundane, Divakaruni challenges the mind to re-evaluate perception and lets one take a trip inside into introspection.

3) Exploration of Feminine Strength

Through numerous stories, Divakaruni deeply and convincingly portrays the strengths and resilience of her female protagonists often as the representative of mythical power.

As shown in "The Mistress of Spices," the protagonist possesses a special attribute of using spices for magical purposes and healing, while emulating some of the later characteristics of the goddesses from Hinduism. This makes it an empowering gesture while raising suspicion about how myths from previous eras are sometimes interpreted to come forth with a message that speaks of feminine strength and toughness in the era of today. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni often tells the strength and durability of her female characters by likening them to Hindu goddesses. The most graphic example would be her novel "The Mistress of Spices," whereby she equips the main character with supernatural powers to use spices for magic and healing purposes, much like the nurturing powers generally associated with goddesses in Hindu mythology. It is out of this narrative approach that Divakaruni manages to print multiple themes of empowerment while re-interpreting traditional mythologies to applaud the strength and resilience of the female within the modern society. It is from reclaiming these old stories and filling them with ideas of feminine power that the narratives she battles against deliver a new sense of what it is to be strong and invincible as a woman in today's world. Portraying women characters as manifestations of the strong mythological beings she works with reminds the world that women always had and will always possess strength, a call to their stories being equally recognized and celebrated as they are. In Divakaruni's work, the reader is challenged critically to question the norms and stereotypes attached to femininity and celebrate the unique strengths and qualities which women bring forth in this world.

4) Utilizing Symbolic Motifs

Most of the mythological symbolism is put together in her tales as she implores mythical elements to further her plots. One such constant theme is the forest, which symbolizes transformation and self-discovery. Like in many myths, magic forests often provide the backdrops of pivotal events in her characters' paths. Through the motifs, she emphasizes that though the myths are rooted in history, their teachings remain valid over time.

Symbolic elements from mythology are well combined by one of the finest writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in her work, with a remarkable skill. The motif of the forest, as implemented in her collection, is transformation and self-discovery, and it is so strongly used in many classic myths, where an enchanted forest obviously represented change and personal evolution. The crucial experiences that her characters face serve as a backdrop, reflecting the profound transformations they undergo. In the use of such mythological elements by Divakaruni, one sees beyond mere references to ancient stories; it cuts deep into revealing that the insights and teachings are forever relevant. While weaving these themes into her tales, she is encouraging the readers to find the eternal themes and messages that these myths hold within them, which in turn make a profound impact on her readers. She has the strength in this form of literature as she can seamlessly weave the myth with modern storytelling, thus giving more depth to her stories and linking her readers to universal truth within them.

5) Cultural Commentary Through Mythology

Traditionally, Divakaruni approaches myths as a culture-critical application. With this interpretation of classic stories, she actually projects modern social issues like gender roles, immigration, and displacement in terms of culture. Most of her short stories include elements of folklore and mythology to represent the complexities of the immigrant reality, showing how such myths can be a source of consolation and a sense of belonging while experiencing a form of cultural dislocation.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work is very much expressed in the effective use of myths in the study and exploration of cultural values. She presents a different perspective on contemporary social issues, especially in gender relations and cultural identity vis-à-vis immigration, based on analysis and reinterpretation of folk tales and myths. Divakaruni uses folklore and mythology with great skill as parts of her short stories to make a poignant point about the complexity and challenge of immigrants. Here, in doing so, she subtly states that even myths can become a source for solace and bonding during cultural revolutions. They create in people a sense of belonging. By colliding myth with modern-day troubles, Divakaruni brings out the relevance and long-term utility of these timeless tales in the current scenario of the fast-changing global scenario.

3. CONCLUSION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most versatile writers I've ever read about, especially when it comes to mythology; she explores it really deep and complicatedly in her narration while adding rich layers of meaning in the reimagined version of classics, the intermingling of myth with reality, and the strong theme of female protagonists that resonate deeply with today's audience. It is through symbolic elements and heavy cultural critiques that Divakaruni reinterprets and revives the essence of old myths, but she also gently pushes readers into engaging with the stories in completely new and innovative ways. For as long as she explores and redines the subtleties of mythologies within modern literature, her works are bound to be foundational in sharpening how such previous stories inform our contemporary living. Lastly, the creative use of myth by Divakaruni raises questions for the readers' selves, in light of their own identity and cultural background, and reminds them that the real power of myth lingers even in a quick-changing world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Doniger, Wendy. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 2006.
- Narayan, R.K. *The Mahabharata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. New York: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Narasimhan, C.V. *The Mahābhārata: An English Version Based on Selected Verses*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.