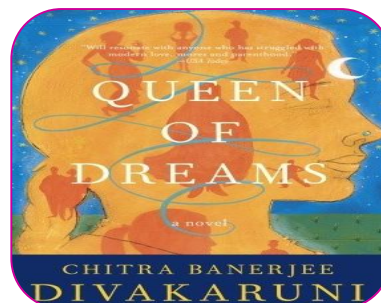




ART OF NARRATION IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S QUEEN OF DREAMS**Ms. Anju¹ and Dr. Amrita²**¹Research Scholar, Department of English , BPS Women's University, Khanpur Kalan, Sonapat.²Dean, Faculty of Arts and Languages & Professor, Department of English
BPS Women's University, Khanpur Kalan, Sonapat.**ABSTRACT**

Modern writers have always challenged the conventions of the narrative by doing away with the notions of narrator and plot; there are still elements of the story in every piece of literature ever written. Narrative actually predates literature in the sense that oral storytelling has been a part of every culture of humans that ever-had verbal communication. The writers have been excessively using these techniques to highlight their piece of art. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a renowned poet, short story writer and novelist securing a high position in world literature. Being an exceptionally creative writer, she uses her ingenious faculties with exceptional insight and displays a remarkable range and her forte of narrative captures the diasporic pulse of her readers.



The present paper aims to highlight the art of narration in Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*, exploring various techniques like stream of consciousness, flashback, oblique narrative, archetype, literary devices as symbolic title, various imageries and a mysterious plot along with the structure of the novel.

KEY WORDS : Narrative Technique, Structure, Literary Devices, Plot**INTRODUCTION**

The method of indirect and oblique narration, more precisely, the element of non-linearity in the art of narration was first perceived as one of the peculiarities of the modern English fiction way back in the first decade of the twentieth century when novelists like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf introduced certain technical innovations which revolutionized the form of the novel. In keeping with the spirit of the age, writers were motivated towards a persistent and desperate search for something new which gradually led to the emergence of a narrative form quite different and distinct from the conventional form of direct narration. Surprisingly this technique which was introduced as a mere innovation gained ground much later only to be reinstated as an indispensable element in the postmodern fiction.

Narratives through the means of oral storytelling were important to reinforce moral lessons for a culture, pass down history and traditions, and share values and norms. Narratives were also a means of entertainment and have helped people in every age develop a sense of identity, deepen their understanding of human psychology, and make meaning out of life.

Divakaruni has insightfully presented the intricacies of human relationships conveying the nuances of cultural, emotional and familial discord. *Queen of Dreams* illuminates the resonance of the past in the present and the role of forgiveness in self-discovery. She has employed various narrative techniques like

stream of consciousness, flashback, oblique narrative, archetype, literary devices as symbolic title, various imageries, and a mysterious plot. The author narrates the tale of *Queen of Dreams* with utmost finesse.

Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* is a modern American immigrant saga of a dream-teller Mrs. Gupta, an Indian by roots, presently living in America with her husband and daughter, Rakhi, for the last three decades. This story comprises of the unseen world of dreams along with the dilemmas of modern life. Divakaruni skilfully revolves the tale around three generations. Mrs. Gupta is an orphan, a slum dweller, but has an inborn art of dream telling. Her aunt recognizes her skill, and to get it refined she takes Mrs. Gupta to the elders living in caves. As a keen learner, soon she acquires proficiency in the interpretation of dreams. One day she meets a man in Calcutta, where she has gone with her mates and teachers and falls in love. For a dream teller, marriage is not allowed; even to think of a man and love is strictly forbidden, but Mrs. Gupta does not abide by the rules set for the dream tellers, pursue her desire inviting the wrath of the elders. She leaves the caves with her partial knowledge of interpreting dreams and marries Mr. Gupta.

Mrs. Gupta settles in her new abode in America and soon realizes that her life is not worth without dreams. She doesn't share this with her husband who is 'a trusting soul'. (295) He never questions his wife about anything and deeply loves her. She keeps the earth-pouch which her aunt presented her as a parting gift, under her pillow that evokes her dreams. She starts maintaining distance from her family and uses her skill in connecting with people to help them. Her profession demands private space because of which she starts sleeping alone in the sewing room meanwhile Mr. Gupta seeks refuge in alcohol. However, the married life of Mrs. And Mr. Gupta seems to be stable and quiet, but all three of them- Mrs. Gupta, Mr. Gupta and Rakhi live in their respective cocoons.

Rakhi, a painter by choice and co-proprietor of a Chai House in Berkely, California, marries Sonny, a famous DJ player. After a few years, Rakhi divorces Sonny after she is physically assaulted in the DJ club where Sonny was performing. She blames Sonny for his indifferent attitude and leaves his house with Jona, their daughter. She has a good friend Belle, Balwant Kaur, who is also her business partner. Divakaruni knits the story of the novel around the characters who support each other in the glee and gloom of life. Their lives interconnected with the events, unfold as the story moves while Mr. Gupta and Rakhi delve through the memories of Mrs. Gupta's Dream Journals.

In *San Francisco Chronicle*(2004), Malena Watrous appreciates this novel as:

... [a] magical novel... In lyrical, poetic prose, Divakaruni manages to be hopeful without offering false reassurances, showing how identity—both individual and communal—is equally shaped by loss and creation.

Roland Barthes, in *The Death of the Author*, 1967, acknowledges that an author is forever an artifact of his age; and the writer may only emulate a gesture that is always anterior, certainly not unusual. A work of fiction is based on the writer's creativity and his/her imagination. It may be based on a true story but the presentation is completely based on the writer's imagination. Divakaruni's sensitive portrayal and a deep understanding of human relationship make her writings relevant to the modern times. She is known for her distinctive style, themes, techniques and her concentrations with which she narrates tales about India, gender issues, social inequalities and ideological structure.

"A dream is a telegram from the hidden world".(34) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* narrates the mystical tale of cultural conflicts, emotional misunderstandings in the lattice of human relationships in forty-one chapters, consisting of three hundred and forty pages. The novel also explores the psychic associations and concealed facts that dreams can disclose about the characters' inner and outer worlds. It is a mesmerizing story of the unseen world of dreams with the dilemmas of modern life and the complexities of human interactions, with American soil in the backdrop. It is a combination of magic with realism- a tale of a dream teller Mrs. Gupta referred to as the 'queen' of dreams in the title of the novel, who presents the hidden truths by interpreting dreams of other people. As the novel progresses, the magical element vanishes and realistic element becomes dominant. The writer paints the picture of realism with the

colors of magic focussing on the life of women. **C. Bharathi & S. Kalamani in their research paper entitled "Study of Family Relationships in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*" writes:**

The novel *Queen of Dreams* reveals independent introspective women who have accepted their life as immigrants and observed the host country with sensitivity and objectivity. The novel gives intimate first-person accounts of first and second-generation immigrant existence.

Divakaruni's originality and talent lie in her technique of narration such as alternative narrative, oblique narrative, first and third person narrative, a stream of consciousness, letter and diary writing, myth and magical realism. Using these techniques, she presents the tragic condition of Indian immigrants while they place themselves in a new civilization. The author uses an objective point of view to narrate this tale in two contrasting styles. In the present tense, Rakhi's move towards understanding things is set out with immediacy which allows the readers to travel with her. In contrast, during the mystical presentation of the dreams and India, Divakaruni writes in a languid, relaxed and glimmering prose closer to poetry. The connection between the subconscious and wakefulness is presented revolving around three generations.

A characterization is an important tool by which a writer establishes his/her own identity in the story. The writer creates an identity of a character through her unique style of portrayal. Divakaruni uses different ways to describe the identity of her characters. She crafts her characters so skilfully that they resonate with varied hues of life. A character's performance is conceived and executed by her and she devises the plot in such a way that it becomes a performance zone or the stage on which her characters project their identities through their actions.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni assigns powerful roles to her female characters in this novel. Two out of three female characters in *Queen of Dreams* is leading throughout the story - one is the protagonist, Rakhi, and the other is a major character, Mrs. Gupta- Queen of Dreams. Divakaruni designates the central role to Rakhi in this story who actively participates in the action of the plot and also observes the behavior and performances of others while narrating the whole tale. Mrs. Gupta's presence is also quite dominant until the last, although she dies in the first half (chapter 14) of the novel. Her male characters are equally supportive in carrying out the household chores. This attempt by Divakaruni exemplifies the difference between sex and gender as pointed out by Jennifer Coates (2004)

"Sex refers to a biological distinction while gender is the term used to describe socially constructed categories based on sex. Coates also argues that gender is no longer seen as static, add-on characteristic of the speaker, but as something performed by speakers. In the field of sociolinguistics, doing gender is performing either as male or a female in interaction with others."

The plot of the novel drifts from dream to reality. A constant struggle goes on in the life of Rakhi especially after losing her mother. It is hard for her to absorb her mother's sudden demise and the facts she comes across after reading her mother's dream journals. They foreshadow the events and reveal the inner conflict of Mrs. Gupta. Her conversation with the snake in her dreams and remembrance for the losses and her negotiation with life give clues about the conflicting mood of the story.

Divakaruni also refashions the long-forgotten Indian myths, traditions, rituals, beliefs, culture which are the part and parcel of Indian life. The writer uses her memories as her narrative tool in representing and reinventing the identities of her characters' cultural memory. Her narrative memories are in accordance with Alison Landsberg's aspects of "[p]rosthetic memory [ies that] emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at the experiential site such as a movie theatre or a museum"⁸. She employs archetypes to represent the latent as well as overt aspects of the personality of her characters. Snake, cave, dream, chai house all have been used as archetypes. Snake as an archetype occurs very often in literature. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, (an epic poem, published in 1667) Satan comes to Eve in the form of a snake (a symbol of temptation and death) and lures her to eat the 'forbidden fruit' which eventually leads to their (Adam & Eve) expulsion from the 'Garden of Eden'. In *Queen of Dreams*, the snake is presented as a messenger from the dream world, who appears at two places in the story; one in the first chapter in the dream of Mrs. Gupta and "it was death he was foretelling" (02), and at the second place in the thirty-eight

chapter when it comes in her dream to tempt and lure her to come back to the dream world. “He was the only thing of beauty in my dim and suffocating existence.” (283) Caves are also used as an archetype representing a confined mystical place, where only the dream tellers can stay, away from the conventional world. Dreamlikecaves represent the dreamy and imaginary world where human mind travels to escape from the harsh realities of life.

The author has used the ‘Chai House’ later known as Kurma House (Kurma symbolizes as an assorted dish which has a perfect blend of a variety of ingredients) as a common but ‘something unique’ (197) place where all characters meet to show that unity lies in diversity. Similarly ‘Sewing Room’ represents Mrs. Gupta personal space where she dreams and uses her mystical powers to help people. These places are deliberately created by Divakaruni to show the symbolic significance and their relation to the characters. (10) Like ‘Custom House’ and ‘Scaffold’ in *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorn, Divakaruni also wants to create the same effect by using this technique. Divakaruni uses these archetypes and symbols to blend the real with the imaginary.

Language plays an important role in creating a good impression of any literary work. An impressive language appeals to the reader that enriches his/her experience of human life. To study a literary text understanding of its language is essential. A reader needs to understand that why and how a writer uses a framework of language and fictional elements to establish its importance in literature. Language is the cardinal feature of fiction. Theorists have explained paradigms of identity in different manners in their writings but in a work of fiction spoken words become very important as the writer chooses both basic building blocks of language like vocabulary and the structural elements that can be attributed to creating various linguistic patterns which assign beauty and aesthetic appeal to the overall schema of the novel.

Divakaruni transliterates a lot of words from Indian vocabulary to establish the glocal identity of her characters and to give her work an Indian flavor. The title of this novel *Queen of Dreams* means ‘sapno ki rani’ which has been extracted from the popular Bollywood Hindi song of 1969 “mere sapno ki rani...”(33)In the novel, Mr Gupta is found singing this song “in his husky voice until she (Mrs. Gupta) smiled.”(33)

The vocabulary comprises a mixture of Indian words like chai house (84), *cha*, *sindoor*, *bindi* (120), *saree*(35), polyester *salwar kameez* and *dupatta* (27), *turban* (190). The writer also uses the name from Hindu mythology like Shiva of the dark throat (91), *Ravan*, *Narad Muni* (3) and ancient testimonials *Brihat Swapna Sarital*(18) and *Swapanpuran*(174). Divakaruni repeatedly uses Hindi words to exhibit nature roots of her characters. For food, she uses ‘*saag*’ (80), ‘*palak paneer*’, ‘*tandoori chicken*’, ‘*Makkiki roti*’ (27), *boiled rice*, *pakora*, *jalebi*, *Sandesh*, *singharas*, Brooke Bond Tea, *Bharatnatyam* (87), *Granth Sahib*(219) Divakaruni also uses phrases from popular Hindi Bollywood music like ‘*mere sapno ki rani*’ (33), ‘*gaata rahe mera dil*’(194) to express the connectivity with her native soil. After the death of Mrs. Gupta, her dream journals are not easy to comprehend for Mr. Gupta and Rakhi as Mrs. Gupta uses a lot of “archaic Bengali words”. (39) The characters place themselves in a new land but in their own space keeping their ethnicity intact.

Divakaruni uses the technique of inner monologue to provide her readers with a clear picture of her character’s emotions and conflicts. Mrs. Gupta expresses her pain when she realises the cost of continuing her dreams after marriage.

“I knew then what I had to do (178)... I awoke weeping... I knew now how much my link with the dream spirit meant. I couldn’t give it up.”(178)

At another instance, when Rakhi troubles herself because Sonny has taken their daughter to a trip. Rakhi’s friend Belle tells her that Sonny is a responsible father but that Rakhi hardly feels the same.

“Not true, jeers my whisper voice. You know that what you really want is for Sonny to prove himself completely and criminally irresponsible so you gain full custody of Jona and never let her see him again.”(63)

In the dialogues of Rakhi, Divakaruni selects negative verbs which indicate the resistance in Rakhi’s nature. She’s not ready to accept anything easily in her life. Sentences like ‘I’m not hungry’, ‘I don’t trust my father’s crumbled eggs’ (183), ‘I don’t want to accept any favours from my father’ (154), ‘I’m not ready to unburden him’ (155) display the unrelenting part of her identity.

The usage of modals also presents the unpredictable shades of the characters' identity. In dream journals, the use of 'would' shows the mood of Mrs. Gupta's character, where she is apprehensive about her actions to make up with her husband before going to the 'sewing room'. She says, "I didn't know it would be enough". (178) She is not sure in her unconscious mind where her decisions would take her. Mrs. Gupta, when goes to the cave, is not sure about her own desires about marriage. "I never thought I would marry..." and again further on the page 'would' shows her doubt on her choice, "How little I knew myself, to think, that I would not desire human loving." (147)

Divakaruni sharpens the narrative by using numerals for raising various points for emphasis and clarity of expressions indicating the reasons, consequences, and options for the characters in a given situation. It also shows that the character is a sorted person and firm in decisions. For example: when Rakhi says that she is not hungry, she states reasons:

1. 'I don't trust my father's crumbled eggs' (83)'I don't want to accept any favors from my father' (184)
2. When their 'Kurma House' is attacked by a group of young men; 'there's a loud crash, a crack appearing like magic in the storefront glass, bisecting the *M of Kurma* with its shiny curvature, and four men burst into the shop.(266)

The elders take action at Mrs. Gupta when she decides to marry a man of her choice. This action of her is not acceptable to elders, but because she is good in her skill they give her three choices:

1. To live the rest of her life in a cave and be a teacher. This was the safest choice because she would not have suffered there and elders would erase all the memories of that man from her mind. She would be happy and contented in the cave.
2. The second choice given to her was to give up her talent and live an ordinary life like any ordinary woman. Elders of the cave would have helped her to erase all the memories of the cave and their teaching. It was also a safe choice but not a good one.
3. The third choice was that she would be allowed to keep some of her powers so that she could help other people and could also live with the man of her choice but not to marry him.

Divakaruni uses third-person narrative (limited omniscient) technique to tell the tale of *Queen of Dreams*. Rakhi is the mouthpiece of the story. In chapters titled 'from the dream journals', Rakhi slips into the skin of her mother, tells the details of her mother's life, her gain and she loses, from an orphan, slum dweller, novices to the 'queen' of dreams to continue the tale. She also uses the pronoun "I" to give proper emphases and to unfold the layers of Mrs. Gupta's identity. The subjective narrative allows the reader to comprehend Mrs. Gupta's identity as she herself projected. To revive Mrs. Gupta's character, flashback becomes an effective technique. Using this technique, Divakaruni helps the readers to access the hidden aspects of her past life.

Divakaruni unfolds the technique of oblique narrative by telling the story of Neehar and King TungaDwaja. This input is given in the form of lessons by the elders in the caves that render a message to the dream tellers they must assimilate sincerity to the laws that govern the life of a dream teller.

Elder Samyukta in her lesson to the learners in the caves teaches that they all possess the power of dreaming but should understand its significance. In the novel, *Queen of Dreams*, Divakaruni postulates the meaning and interpretation of dreams, and her approach to dreams leans toward mythology and symbolism. The objects in dreams are symbols, and have a meaning, though this meaning changes with the gender or situation of the person. For instance, a virgin seeing a thorn in dreams foretells that she will marry in a good family and if the woman, not a virgin, sees a thorn that means that she is pregnant. Some of the examples of the symbols and their interpretation are seeing milk would mean falling ill, cockatoo means the end of a quarrel for men, while it is birth of a girl-child for women, a tree with green leaves foretells improvement in a sick man's condition. Divakaruni's interpretation of dreams derives from ancient literature, taking up the objects from the dreams, and assigning a fixed predefined meaning to the object.

Paula Friedman in *San Diego Union-Tribune* (2007) comments:

Divakaruni structures the novel in alternating chapters... followed by more traditional narrative chapters recounting Rakhi's life. The strategies work well for the most part, though occasionally the method can seem contrived, with description straining too hard to support the narrative.

To conclude it can be analysed that Divakaruni too carefully crafts her language which attributes to her work a desired literary significance. Divakaruni's choice of words in the novel shows that she is able to get into the skin of her characters and express their emotions through apt expressions.

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