

# EXPLORING THE UNWAVERING STRENGTH OF FLAWED FEMALE CHARACTERS IN A SELECTION OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S BOOKS

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**Abstract:** It boils down to the author's trials with women exercising autonomy. Regardless of their ability, interest, or honesty, the characters of the story all develop a strong sense of self-will after being ignored or disregarded. By forgiving and continuing, Chitra Divakaruni deftly highlights the possibilities of redemption. The key to a seamless transition is engaging in the process of self-discovery. Instead of boasting about love, home, and subservience, she advocates for the concept of being a refugee. Through writing, we can see the whole spectrum of female experience, which sheds light on the female mind and health. It shows an unrestrained new lady who isn't going to take a back seat to anybody.

**Keywords:** Flawed, Female, Characters, Novels, Fiddle, etc.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

Literature and society have an inverse relationship. Literary works, by virtue of their exceptional and enduring creative worth, reveal not just the life of an individual but also the development of any race. The influence of literature is limitless and eternal. It will always be there, drawing in readers from all over the world and all languages. Consistently allowing new patterns, its extension cleaves into self-expression. As it illuminates the world with its amiable glow, it encourages introspection that leads to societal assimilation and heavenly approbation for humans. These days, literature's major role is to draw attention to societal problems and rally people to pursue physical and moral eudemonia. Literature in its many forms varies, yet the underlying motivation remains constant. Because of its realistic portrayal of characters and events, the book is appealing to readers of both genders. The expression of the mode book unites characters and their feelings while also building a believable environment from scratch. According to B. Worsfold, a novel "combines in itself the creations of poetry with the details of history and the generalized experience of philosophy, in a manner unattempted by any previous effort of human genius" (Prasad 194).

The presentation and topic of the book might vary across authors. However, make sure that the story's storyline, characters, conversation, setting, time, and location are all well presented. Attracting readers' engagement in a synchronized motion with the author's objective is achieved via these gates. An efficient medium for societal critique and diagnosis, the novel allows room for it and rises to the occasion. Some Elizabethans created novels or works of fiction in prose that resemble novels. The Anatomy of Wit by Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travel by John Lyly, and Euphues by John Lyly all belonged to this style. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the passionate novel form emerged as a result of a confluence of several literary movements. The book later achieved great success in adopting its contemporary form. Authors like as Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Lawrence Sterne, who lived in the eighteenth century, made genuine contributions to its development. With the publication of Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion, among others, Jane Austen brought a new level of refinement to nineteenth-century writing by rejecting the element known as

sensationalism in gothic fiction. Jane Austen exposes societal hypocrisy via irony and satire, which she employs to condemn the irrelevance.

Jane Austen's female protagonists fight for equality in education, independence, and social participation by presenting realistic events. The historical novels written by Walter Scott thereafter rose to prominence. The vivid and beautiful atmosphere of a bygone era was vividly depicted in his works. *Great Expectations*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *David Copperfield*, all written by Charles Dickens, marked a turning point in the history of the book. His works elevated societal transformation by humor, tragedy, and profound empathy for human nature, evoking both laughter and tears from his audience. George Eliot, who saw novels through the lens of philosophical dissertations, was another trailblazing author of the nineteenth century. Thomas Hardy and George Meredith, two renowned figures of the time, were both living during this period. Both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Hardy and *Diana of the Crossways* by George Meredith presented opposing ideas. While the latter were ecstatic about the concept of harmonious philosophy, the former were more committed to self-restraint and psychoanalytic approaches. The novel's style and theme encounter a radical transformation and desecrate the writer-reader connection as the world is impacted by man-made problems such as prejudice, displacement, and war.

Since the focus moved from societal factors to personal awareness and from universality to particularity, it becomes necessary to integrate the books with the psychological ideas of Freud and Jung. Everything that social-economic realism stands for and how it impacts people's lives was included within the concept. The British brought fiction to India as an art form. Fiction was written by Indian authors in almost all of the Indian languages. Indian literature has grown tremendously thanks to Indian authors writing in English from all over the globe. Fiction abounds with human aspirations, tragedies, unity, discord, cultural and socioeconomic concerns, and struggles with self-discovery.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Semwal, Sakshi (2025)** This book aims to bridge the gap between the literature of former colonies and the current trends in postcolonial literature, including discussions of gender, politics, regionalism, multiculturalism, globalization, transnational identities, and the future of postcolonial studies.

**R, An u & Deepa, P. (2024)** This article explores Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* through the lens of magical realism, myth, and the diaspora experience of Indian immigrants to the US. This research delves deeply into these aspects to find out how the story uses them to create a web of alienation, cultural identity, and magical realism. In this story, we follow Tilo as he faces the difficulties of diasporic life and finds his way through the mystical and mythological worlds. Through an analysis of the novel's depiction of an enchanted Indian spice store in California, we delve into the tremendous impact of cultural myths on immigrant experiences and the transformational power of spices. This fascinating and very human story follows Tilo as he navigates the complexities of the immigrant experience, which combines old customs with modern obstacles. The complex relationships between storytelling, cultural memory, and the tale of the Indian-American immigrant are better understood via the interdisciplinary lens through which we analyze the novel's themes.

**Manimurasu, Kannadhasan & Saravanan, Dr. (2024)** The great variety of human experiences, viewpoints, and cultural traditions is embraced by multiculturalism. The event honors the many people whose voices reflect the many tales, customs, and histories that make up our national identity. As a medium, it transports readers to strange lands and helps them empathize with those places by illuminating the intricacies of the human condition. In contrast, social realism is realistic and shows the problems, inequalities, and challenges that people confront in society. It helps readers face unpleasant facts by reflecting back to them the terrible reality of the human situation. Social realism challenges us to address the systemic injustices in our society and fight for change by portraying poverty, oppression, prejudice, and inequality. Together, multiculturalism and social realism provide a multifaceted prism through which modern literature examines the intricacies of our global community. Writers may bring attention to the underrepresented realities of disadvantaged populations by including varied voices and viewpoints, which

amplify their voices and shed light on their difficulties. All of these ideas come together in modern writing to highlight the socioeconomic problems that many different societies are experiencing.

**Maity, Supriya & Shukla, Dr. (2023)** A new perspective on the past is sought by revisionist mythological fiction. Fiction within the mythological revisionist tradition, which is mostly written by women, presents new points of view on gender roles, power dynamics, and social justice by questioning the established canons of old myths. The revisionist depiction of Rukmini in Saiswaroopo Iyer's *Rukmini: Krishna's Wife* (2021) is the subject of this article. The story breaks with convention by depicting Rukmini as a strong, independent woman who defies the patriarchal restrictions and accepted standards of her day. Rukmini breaks out of the constraints of a patriarchal culture via her own free will and acts, becoming an icon of strength and independence. Her incredible agency is on full display in her refusal to conform to gender norms and her ability to overcome tremendous odds. As a theoretical framework, Indian feminism takes into account the intricate interplay between gender, power, and cultural mores in India. Traditional gender roles are being challenged and redefined with an emphasis on women's agency, autonomy, and empowerment. This study explores issues that are relevant to modern Indian culture, such as female empowerment, self-discovery, and challenging cultural conventions.

**Raj Pal, Vikash (2022)** Literary works provide light on the beliefs and practices of other communities by expressing cultural values, attitudes, and ideas. All around the world, people live according to their own unique cultural norms, which in turn reflect their own unique worldviews and values. Not only do writers share their opinions with the world, but they also show readers the variety of human experience. Literary narratives often serve as vehicles for the expression of cultural ideals. Economics, sociology, anthropology, ethics, human rights, and literature are just a few of the disciplines that have taken an interest in food as a literary topic. The centrality of food to the human experience has been the subject of a great deal of research. Literature often uses food as a prism through which to see and comprehend ethnic diversity. The book *Fasting, feasting* by Anita Desai is filled with allegories about food and how we eat it. The title of the book alludes to consumption, and the plot explores people's relationships with food to show disparities in wealth and starvation. Narrative techniques that investigate the cultural and personal significance of food via the use of metaphors, symbols, and representations are the focus of this research.

### 3. ACUTE CHOICES

Women are perpetually relegated to the status of a woman's relative in patriarchal societies. Their position has been studied and improved over the last several years. Concepts of male supremacy and limited understandings of women's roles have been the obstacles that this evolutionary process has had to overcome. Developing one's sense of self-identity is a process that requires independence from authority figures and the ability to make one's own decisions. However, males always act as a barrier between women and logic. They tend to see the world through the lens of males who have traditionally prioritized taking care of women. Men believe that women should be confined to homes because they are weak, unseasoned, and imperfect. The first contemporary feminist, Virginia Woolf, championed women's liberation in the realms of education and space. She asserts that males want to subjugate women to maintain their dominance. "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and the delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35), she writes in her cryptic feminist essay, *A Room of One's Own*, her own language.

The problem is not that women can't make decisions; it's just that they've never been taught about the options available to them. Because the decisions they made would either highlight or downplay the shortcomings of men's conduct. The males in the mirror shrink back in horror at her harsh assessments of their performance, which she relentlessly criticizes. Women are discouraged from exercising their autonomy in society, particularly in traditional societies. Throughout history, there have been erroneous beliefs about women's superiority that have led them to worship their fragility and submit to their oppressors. For them, this is the pinnacle of creation. Chitra Divakaruni's goal in writing is to let others know how liberating it is to stop being a puppet and start acting out their wildest dreams.

"And not only placing them at the center of their stories but making them unapologetically complicated," Chitra Divakaruni reveals in an interview. The protagonists of stories don't always need to be admirable women" (Datta). Norms and practices established by the past shape her characters' upbringing. In this case, Chitra Divakaruni allows her main characters to walk in directions quite different from those their forefathers took. Characters inspired by Chitra Divakaruni seek redemption outside of conventional wisdom and convention itself, in contrast to Shashi Deshpande's heroes. Without achieving self-actualization, they find a way out. Chitra Divakaruni advises her sisters not to remain shackled by oppression or to expect anyone else to liberate them while Shashi Deshpande isn't for shattering conventional wisdom. On the contrary, she gives them the strength to seek refuge in an uncharted world. Since the freedom to choose is innate to every human being, regardless of gender, it is our collective responsibility to eradicate sexism by empowering women with the facts, wisdom, and reason that we have. The world would be a better place if women were given the chance to use their brains and bodies to accomplish great things. This is a necessary step toward achieving a higher degree of human progress on our planet. "Remove that protection, expose them to the same exertions and activities... Anything may happen when womanhood has ceased to be a protected occupation" (39), Mary Wollstonecraft writes in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Equal opportunities are not being afforded to women. However, they have continued to be guided and evaluated based on antiquated practices, rather than their ability to seize opportunities. Women will not be allowed to go to the next level because of this. Even though Chitra Divakaruni has shown the wonderful bond and personal support between men and women, the protagonists in her novels are always female. "It will be found, that the employment of the thoughts shapes the character both generally and individually... yet some degree of liberty of mind is necessary even to form the person" (Wollstonecraft 95), the function of women in her view has shifted from that of lovers to that of pursues. So, the author provides them a fresh perspective and makes use of their presence. The author wants students to find their own unique identities and attain their full social potential, so she blends eastern and western ideals to help them do just that. Life is about learning from errors and experiencing new things, which is why all of Chitra Divakaruni's chosen works emphasize the importance of making choices. The historic and social literature shape the ideology of the ancestors, and women are following in their footsteps. In the book, the foolishness of passing on the wisdom of the elders to the next generation is laid bare.

The wise parent or teacher may help the kid develop physically and intellectually, but the honey must come from the hard work of the person. Trying to teach a young person from another's mistakes is about as ridiculous as expecting a body to become stronger by theoretical or observed exercise (Wollstonecraft 139).

#### **4. RESPLENDENT WILLPOWER**

Chitra Banerjee acknowledges women's strength of character to the same extent that she elaborates on the significance of choices. Women need more than just desire to be bold enough to propose their choices; they must also have the strength of character to face the inevitable difficulties and fallout. In order to define their achievements, the author stresses that they must have both desire and determination. As a sign of their inherent value and a source of subsistence, women in bygone eras mustered the strength to endure oppression in silence to earn the admiration of society. The idea of exchanging one's willpower is a reasonable one that Chitra Banerjee uses to navigate life. The heroes aren't portrayed as narcissistic or avoiding responsibility in any way. Without identifying with a certain gender, they carry out their responsibilities and demonstrate compassion as one of Earthlings. Their goal embodies both honesty and taking advantage of others. Even if the protagonists' maximum number of options has led to fruitless consequences, their unwavering determination has given them an unending disposition. Even though they are deeply impacted by both personal and societal concerns, their determination helps them change traditional limits and elevate their social position to a level where it is appropriate for them. The author portrays life as a teacher who will continue to impart knowledge until we master it. So, the heroes face several challenges until they rise beyond the mundane by reviving their sense of self-worth and meeting

their own needs. Concerning the fallout, the female protagonists have maintained their reclusiveness while standing firm on their decisions. After experiencing both victories and humiliations, people slowly assimilate everlasting cures. According to Willstonecraft, "errors are useful; but it commonly to remedy other errors" (90). They often display a variety of manifestations of their willpower, including manipulation, obstinacy, resoluteness, and forfeiture. In particular, the author has no intention of pitting the woman against patriarchy so much as she wants her to smash exterior boundaries and prejudices. Their circumstances and the forefathers' legacy are under siege as they fight for glory.

Lalita, Pishi, Gandhari, and Sarojini, along with all the supporting characters in Chitra Banerjee's works, were naïve to the strength of their own resolve and were overshadowed by the conventional femininity that made them seem like Stepford wives. Female protagonists, however, stop being submissive and instead promote being watchful. The poignant story of six ladies, *Ladies Coupe* by Anita Nair, who want a fresh beginning by overcoming societal discrimination is at the heart of the book. The forty-year-old spinster Akhilandeswari, one of the six main characters, came to the realization—much to her regret—that giving in to the opinions and pressures of her peers is detrimental to one's own happiness and well-being. So, she mustered the strength of character to develop a thick skin and break out of her false identity. Similarly, Chitra Banerjee's heroes stand for the importance and right to develop one's own inner ideas. They want to savor every moment of life. Their passion becomes both their strength and their weakness. The strength of character that Chitra Banerjee emphasizes so much is what has kept the ladies from giving in to the thoughts of self-immolation. The characters' failure to overcome the grief of loss, together with a danger to their honor and a life issue, has driven them to take their own lives. Anxiety and melancholy are brought on by their lack of expertise and haste. Tilo from *The Mistress of Spices*, Anju from *The Vine of Desire*, and Panchaali from *The Palace of Illusions* are just a few characters that have experienced the ecstasy of suicide when their desires and the importance of their life are rendered meaningless by imminent monumental difficulties. Their need for life triumphs over the issue when their frustrated desires for pleasures push them to hazard their lives. The author effectively portrays the characters' opposites in this way.

*The Palace of Illusions* is one of her books. What Chitra Banerjee means is that you can't manage your heart. That is both its strength and its vulnerability. (213). Consequently, the characters' dogged determination acts as both a subservient servant and an unruly master. Skillful management of choices and situations is the key to discovering both desire and resolve. Faults and objections, however, guarantee its failure. Similarly, our heroes fail miserably when it comes to dodging danger. Human existence revolves on the concept of desire. Similarly, it absorbs repercussions that make you want to show a lot of self-control. Throughout her formative years, Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* had no consistent adult figure to lean on for help or stability. However, she has a keen eye for seeing the possibilities of leading a life without external interference. Once Nayan Tara reaches the spice island, she assumes the persona of Tilo. Except for her ability to discern people's secrets, Nayan Tara's existence is meaningless, much like a wayside flower. The pirates decimated her town because she was naïve and didn't know how to control her power when she was a youngster. Tilo has begun to dwell on her vulnerabilities and fears without fully understanding or accepting them. In time, it develops into an innate sense of shame and retaliation. She becomes queen of the pirates and is known as Bhagyavati by them. Her vanity leads her astray, and she loses control of herself, which leads her to kill the pirate leader. She becomes self-inflicted misery instead of the desired result of satisfying her wrath. Emotionless breathing serves as a hinge as she swallows her pitiful condition. Nayan Tara has resolved to seek solace in the sea as she feels her spirit deteriorating. "But when I saw that funnel mouth poised over me...", she admits, her desire and resolve having become strong. Well, I understood I was unprepared. All I could feel was intense desire for the world's abrupt, searing sweetness (*The Mistress of Spices* 22). And the sea serpents rescued her. Eventually, Nayan Tara's mind flips, and she frequently feels her fickleness when her stubbornness and love work together. She had a profound emotional scar from her parents' criticism and the cruel circumstances. She finds a community of accepting, non-arrogant individuals on the Spice Island, where she breathes in the spirit of camaraderie and love. There, the urge to make a difference in her life takes root. So, Nayan Tara transforms into Tilo.

## RADICAL TRANSMUTATION

Every single one of us wants to be the one to decide what's important and how to get things done. A person may have the power to choose not to have such desires. When it comes to matters of the heart and mind, however, the decision is infinitely malleable. Everyone will be encouraged to ease up on their decisions until they see results if the need arises. However, a fresh sense of self-definition will emerge if need and desire unite. While doing so, they must push themselves beyond their comfort zones and limitations while providing solid justification for their actions. Being ready for an ongoing practice of their collected experiences is more important than achieving achievement or establishing one's identity. Sulkiness manifests in both the results and the way individuals act when wants and needs collide with undesirable circumstances. Some, however, see that offer as a chance for metamorphosis. Legends exist in every industry, and those who follow them often undergo a metamorphosis. In the face of adversity, great minds like India's Sudha Murthy, Pakistan's Muniba Mazari, and the United States' Abraham Lincoln exemplify the development attitude. Their adaptability and toughness have made them renowned. All things considered, the books aim somewhat at that type of rootage. Because even a little drop makes a big ocean, the offered perfection may serve as a spark to greatly elevate moderation. Every aspect of the cosmos is subject to change. Unfortunately, the other chosen, submissive individuals can't partake in the procedure since the aristocracy ban it. Evidently, such folks are too proud to stand out from the crowd and settle for mediocrity. In this piece, the author features powerful but betrayed Indian women who are expressing their latent desires and embodying the buoyancy of the ocean.

Providing women with an equal platform inside families and social groups is something that our culture is still clumsily working on. The author has given their stamp of approval to the notion of addressing their area of weakness by ongoing experimentation. The author aims to highlight the distinction between just existing and really living. In their pursuit of physical survival, social acceptance, and a sense of belonging, most humans have a shared set of needs and sources of existence. Of course, it isn't enough to sustain life. With this fact in mind, Chitra Banerjee has driven her heroes to find meaning in life. By allowing women the space to make errors, she has created a portrayal that highlights the many ways in which women may achieve self-actualization. Those ladies may make a livelihood just by existing if they are stubborn, enthusiastic, and too enthusiastic. At the start of the book, none of them are trying to do anything. Their irrational and unruly behavior keeps them occupied. Not only does the hunt vary for each protagonist, but so does the emotion.

They never stop looking until they achieve social awareness, individuality, prosperity, and singularity. Essentially, they go through every stage until they get control of their conscience, driven by their nature and love of adventure. The likelihood of mistakes decreases as individuals develop self-control via experience. Connecting their decision and attention turns existing into living, which is prone to a good self-defining, as soon as it happens. Sudha Murthy and Shashi Deshpande's works seek to liberate women from the complex system that is eroding their status. The difficult lives of Indian women in other countries are well depicted in Bharati Mukherjee's books. Chitra Banerjee logically propels her books by blending the ideas. Despite her first selfish decision, Tilo ultimately resolves to play a role in the country's resurgence in *The Mistress of Spices*.

*Sister of my Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* both include heroines Anju and Sudha, who, like Sudha, expand their view of being independent by stepping beyond their comfort zones. As a queen and a decent human being, Draupadi succeeds in *The Palace of Illusions* in being distinctive. Finding fulfillment in life is essential, and Rakhi and Mrs. Gupta discover it in *Queen of Dreams*. While Sabitri, Bela, and Tara in *Before We Visit the Goddess* choose their success in life, Korobi in *Oleander Girl* achieves her true identity. Infanticide, injustice, male supremacy, and society's judgmental ideas are just a few of the societal hurdles that Chitra Banerjee deftly lays out for aspiring women. Along with them, her works sometimes suggest a preference for non-traditional sexual orientations. A continual quest for an identity outside of anthropology, sociology, and academia runs through her "sensitivity of contemporary voices, today's issues" (Dhanam K.S.). After going through her agenda in order, Tilo from *The Mistress of Spices* has discovered the secret to life. She now has self-confidence and doesn't care whether she's a mistress or not.

She has evolved into an independent and resourceful woman who is no longer afraid to confront the repercussions head-on, regardless of the outcome. Chitra Banerjee shows human nature clearly by embracing fairy conceptions and the magical spectrum. There is no clear way to understand human evolution since the human heart is incomprehensible.

By combining these ideas, the author provides a simplified description of the human brain. The spices represent the many qualities that make up a person's lineage. It determines their worth, weaknesses, and strengths. Behind the words and deeds of people who may aid one another in times of trouble lies the secret power of spices and medicines, it seems to imply indirectly. As an example, Tilo offers Jagjit cinnamon so that he may be brave and get along with others. However, it introduced him to naughty, aggressive pals who trained him to fight and use a knife among other things. Tilo is astonished to see him in this state later on, but she now understands that he was influenced by dazzling America and lacked parental care. As a result, she resolves to dissuade him from following the wicked road. She offers him her whole shop earnings as an incentive for him to attend the karate class and work on his physical and mental virtue. For Jagjit, my savior of the world, to begin again. Put power to use; don't let it use you (275, *The Mistress of Spices*). Because of this, Jagjit becomes a Pollyanna who seeks to justify Tilo's confidence in him. So, the author has used this method in an effort to extract truth from a theoretically flawed framework. The importance of introspection and self-reflection is shown by Tilo's conversation with the spices.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Being able to put oneself in another person's shoes is essential if mankind is to survive in this dynamic and unpredictable environment. Similarly, people need a trustworthy channel to sense the supernatural and out-of-the-box thinking. One of the inculcation schemas, literature, suits this mix. Because of its recording capabilities, it has seen several transformations, reformations, and exiles. Typically, fiction serves as a reality stimulant by providing an unprecedented platform for the diverse mental landscapes of many individuals. Without sacrificing the essence of Indian heritage, Chitra Banerjee's fiction captivates all our senses. One thing that writing fiction has altered for Chitra Banerjee, according to an interview she gave to *The Punch Magazine*, is that she no longer views people in absolute terms—as horrible or terrible—when she approaches them. Their lives are complicated, and I attempted to understand that. As a writer who encourages women to make certain decisions, she brings up the topic of the role of imitation and the long-standing ideologies that affect women. Intentionally subjecting the protagonist to several blows and letting them wander until they are prepared to overcome the expectation of being once replica is what the writer has done. Even if it means challenging certain preconceptions, her goal is to encourage readers to rethink their goals. At the same time, the books discuss how a supportive community can bring out the best in a woman. "If men would simply release us from our shackles and accept reasonable companionship rather than blind obedience, they would discover that we are better citizens, more attentive daughters, more loving sisters, more devoted wives, and more reasonable mothers" (Wollstonecraft 184). A person's unique individuality is a constant magnet for admiration and engagement.

Working to please other people may provide women work pleasure, but it won't bring them happiness. They must first shred their self-doubt before they can define their pleasure, yet doing so requires them to make their own purpose-driven decisions. This research, titled "Delineating the Resolute Dynamism of Fallible Women in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni," has followed the tenacious journeys of imperfect heroines as they strive to make their lives right. The introductory chapter focuses on the evolution of Indian literature, particularly the milestones marked by great women writers.

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