

LIVE HEALTHY LIFE WITH LITTLE SPICE: CHITRA BANERJEE'S *THE MISTRESS OF SPICES*

V. Meenakshi,

Part time Ph.D Research Scholar(Reg.No:18121274012010),
PG and Research Department of English,
St. John's College, Palayamkottai,
Tirunelveli 627 002, Tamil Nadu, India and
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Einstein College of Arts and Science,
Sir C.V.Raman Nagar Seethaparpanallur, Tirunelveli 627 012.

Dr. D.Nalina Palin

Associate Professor of English,
PG and Research Department of English,
St. John's College, Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli 627 002, Tamil Nadu, India
Affiliated to Manomaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli 627 012, Tamil Nadu,
India.

Abstract

Chitra Banerjee is a diasporic writer. Her contribution to fiction is great. She is an award winning poet and novelist. Through her characters she focuses the real characters of Indian men and women. In her novel *The Mistress of spices* the heroine Tilotamma uses spice to cure sickness of people physically and mentally. Nature is the best healer. Spices have medicinal value. It helps to cure the sickness easily. It plays main role to lead a healthy and happy life. Our ancestors lead a healthy long life with the help of spices only.

Keyword: Spices, Physical. Mental, Nature.

Chitra Banerjee is an accomplished Indian American author. In her works she combines diaspora and feminism. In the beginning of the novel the protagonist Tilo was born somewhere in India. She possesses the foretelling power. It makes her very popular. She is plundered by the pirates from her village. Then she escapes from the pirates and plunges into the sea. She sails and reaches a shore. There she is trained by the first mother. She teaches Tilo how to use spices as healing power. She is chosen by the first mother as spice girl.

Nature is the greatest healer. Nowadays People turn to nature for Healing. Nature is a source of wonder and inspiration. It gives relief to people physically and mentally. India is an ancient land known for its spices. Spices are gifts of nature. Each spice has its own medicinal value. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* portrays about different spices and their value. Padmaja says: Kurma house,' the coffee house run by Rakhi in Queen of dreams and Tilo's Indian spice store in *The Mistress of spices* which are the places of meeting for the ethnic people, especially from the Asian community mirror the aspiration, disappointments, pains and pleasure felt by them. In America Indian grocery stores often become the flag most of cultural keepers. Most of these stores stock all general grocery items used in Indian cooking like dhal, spices, rice, flours, canned and pickled items, frozen Indian dishes, Indian sweets Utensils etc. Some even sell a few fresh vegetables and video cassettes of the latest Hindi and regional movies not available at the regular supermarket. Infact Divakaruni makes all the action happen in these places. (47)

Tilotamma is the owner of spice store in Oakland, California. She helps her customers in solving their problems through magical power of reading their mind and heart. In the novel *The Mistress of Spices*

each chapter has been named after a spice such as Turmeric, cinnamon, Fenugreek, Asafoetida, Fennel, Ginger, Peppercorn, Kalojire, Neem, Redchilli, Makardwaj, Lotus root, and Sesame. First and last chapter named as Tilo and Maya. Tilotamma who has learnt the magic of spices has come to Oakland to help the people. She says "I am a Mistress of Spices. I know their origins and what their colors signify, and their smells... At a whisper they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magic powers"(3).

The first spice used in the chapter is Turmeric. It is also named as Halud that means yellow colour. It is also called as Indian saffron. In Curry it is used as main spice. Turmeric is used to cure cold, high cholesterol, liver disease, wounds and itching. As a tradition in India turmeric is rubbed on new dresses. Tilo says: I am turmeric who rose out of the ocean of milk when the devas and asuras churned for the treasures of the universe. "I am turmeric who came after the poison and before the nectar and thus lie in between" (13). Divakaruni portrays the domestic abuse of Lalitha. Lalitha desires for a baby. She goes for checkup and found everything normal at her side. When she calls her husband Ahuja for checkup, he beats her. She suffers physically and psychologically. Finally she decides not to return to her husband. Tilo puts a handful of Turmeric in newspaper. Then she whispers the words of healing. Tilo uses turmeric to cure people from physical and mental ailments.

Cinnamon comes from a tree. The bark is used as medicine. In food Cinnamon is used as medicine as well as flavouring. It is used to cure gastrointestinal upset, diarrhea, common cold and menstrual cramps. Divakaruni uses cinnamon to depict the condition of Jagjit. He comes to store with his mother. He faces many problems in school because of his shyness. He knows only Punjabi. In English he has learnt only one word that is idiot. He is also ill-treated by other boys in the school. Tilo uses cinnamon to cure Jagjit. Tilo gives some burfi for Jagjit. She says, "...here is some burfi for you... I see him bite eager into the brown sweet flavoured with clove and cardamom and cinnamon...Crushed clove and Cardamom, Jagjit to make your breath fragrant...Cinnamon destroyer of enemies to give you strength, strength which grows in your legs and arms and mostly mouth till one day you shout no loud enough to make them, shocked, stop. (39-40)

Fenugreek is a seed which is mainly used in kitchen. Fenugreek leaves are eaten in India. It cures Diabetes, high Cholesterol and menstrual cramps. Tilo uses Fenugreek to cure Ahuja's wife who suffers without peace in her mind. 'Fennel' I tell Ahuja's wife who is plucking at her dupatta with restless fingers, 'is a wondrous spice. Take a pinch of it, raw and whole, after every meal to freshen the breath and aid digestion and give you mental strength for what must be done' (104).

Asafoetida is a culinary herb. It is used as digestive aid in food. It enhances the flavor of numerous dishes. It is heated in oil before sprinkling on food. This spice is added on the food at the time of tempering. It helps indigestion. Tilo is attracted by an American. According to the rules mistress was not allowed to fall in love. Tilo is helpless. She couldn't break the rules. Mahamul is a special spice. But Tilo being a mistress she couldn't use the spice for herself. Tilo is bored with her life as mistress. She doesn't want to give Asafoetida to her lonely American because she doesn't want to lose his love. Tilo writes "This is dhania, I say, 'Coriander seed, sphere shaped like the earth, for clearing your sight. When you soak it and drink, the water purges you of old guilts'...his hand is on the rim of the bin, touching mine. I snatch my hand away obedient to the Mistress laws, but the sensation stays" (68- 70).

Fennel is the spice of Wednesday. Tilo gives Fennel to Lalitha. It gives mental strength. It also cools temperature. so Tilo suggests Lalitha to give fennel to her husband. When two people eat the spice at same time it takes power from one person and transform to another person. It is Tilo's belief that Lalitha got power to protect her. Ginger is a common spice used in cooking. Ginger tea cures stomach upset. Tilo uses Ginger to get her original appearance. She uses Ginger for her own benefit by breaking the rule of mistress. Tilo also uses Ginger to cure Geeta's problem. Geeta was the daughter of an Indian family but she was brought up in America. She fights for independence. Peppercorn was considered as the king of the spices during ancient times. It was more valuable than gold. It helps in immune boosting and fever reducing. Dhaksha is a nurse. She works at a hospital. She also takes care of her old mother-in-law. She isn't able to open her mouth that she can't do more work. Tilo gives black Pepper to help her. She also gives her amla for immunity.

Kaløjire is used to reduce pain and suffering. In addition to its medicinal properties it is known for its medicinal properties. It gets rid of head ache and blood pressure. It keeps a check on Diabetes. Tilo says Kaløjire protects and saves one from evil eye. Tilo has the power to see the future happenings. She had foreseen an accident to Haroun. In order to help him she uses the spice Kaløjire.

Neem leaves have anti-bacterial properties. It makes wonders on infections and burns all kinds of skin problems. It destroys the bacteria totally. It is an excellent source of moisturizer for skin. Raven calls Tilo for an outing. Tilo mixes boiled milk and neem powder. She uses the paste to make her beautiful. The spices tempt her saying "O Mistress what did you think. The voice of spices is like skipping water, cool laughter that dances over my chagrin. If you want true change you must use differently, must call on our powers. You know the words. Spices, what are you saying. My spells were not given for myself to use. For you, for him, where do you separate the desires" (189).

Red chilli is used for the treatment of joint pain, lack of appetite etc. Red chilli was the son of Fire God. Red chillies come from Lanka. Another name is danger. Lanka is the daughter of Fire. She is the purifier of evil things. Chilli.spice of red Thursday, which is the day of reckoning. "Day which invites us to pick up the sack of our existence and shake it inside out.Day of suicide, day of murder." (37)

Makaradwaj is an ayurvedic medicine. It is used to improve the strength of heart. It helps to relieve fever. Tilo likes to change her old body into youth for the sake of Raven her lover. She calls the spice Makaradwaj the king of spices. She was surprised at her beauty. Chitra Banerjee says "On its own shelf in the inner room sits makaradwaj, king among spices.He has sat all this time, certain in the knowledge that I will one day come. Sooner, later.Days months years. It does not matter to makaradwaj, who is the conqueror of time." (261)

Lotus root is rich in nutrients. Eating lotus root reduces cholesterol, helps to reduce blood pressure and also helps the immunity system. Haroun was a Muslim cab driver. Hameeda who is the neighbor of Haroun. She stays with her brother in America. She got talaq from her husband. She is interested in Haroun. Tilo gives Haroun lotus root which makes him to love Hameeda the widow.

Sesame seeds are powerhouse of protein. In food Sesame oil is used as cooking oil. Sesame oil injection is used to improve the vocal cords. Sesame seeds are used in food for flavor. It is used to cure hair loss, wound and warts. Tilo chooses her name after sesame seed, "Til is the sesame seed, under the sway of planet Venus, gold-brown as though just touched by flame. The flower which is so small and straight and pointed that mothers pray for their children to have nose shaped like it"(42). Sesame seed was grounded into paste with sandalwood. It helps to cure heart and liver disease. Tilo says she is giver of life, health and hope.

At last Tilo disobeys her promise by surrendering herself to Raven. So she enters Shampathi's fire. She lost her conscious. Next morning Raven comes in search of Tilo. Earthquake destroys the entire Oakland. He finds her lying down unconscious. They left the place and went in search of earthly paradise. When Tilo opens her eye she thinks that she was responsible for everything. So she changes her mind to help people. Raven also changes his mind. He returns with Maya. Tilo was renamed as Maya to begin a new life. Finally Tilo returns to serve the people. She also loves the power of spices. In an interview with Morton Marcus, Divakaruni says that:

In Indian folk belief, spices are used for more than flavourings. They have magical powers all their own, and they provide remedies for physical maladies as well as cures for spiritual ills. You have to be careful how you use the spices, since their misuse can be dangerous. If you don't follow their rules, the spices can destroy you. In the novel, I made the rules into laws from the divine realm, laws Tilo could not transgress without serious consequences. (Marcus n.p.)

Spices not only add flavor in food. They also have superhero qualities. They have the power to heal ailments.Modern science has proved that the spices give excellent health benefits. In ancient times people lead a healthy and happy life with the help of spices only. Nature is the best medicine. It is the duty of everyone to save nature. Natural herbs have no side effects. Spices play a major role for leading a healthy, happy and peaceful life.

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