

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 3.9

Vol. 3 Issue 4 August 2017

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

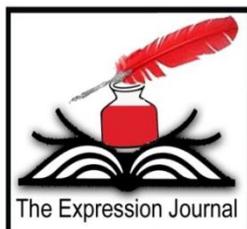
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The Expression: An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

((A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132



THE REIGN OF MAGIC AND DECEPTIONS-A REPETITIVE THEME IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S NOVEL *THE MIRROR OF FIRE AND DREAMING*

Shanthi Shenoy. S., M.A., B.Ed.

M. Phil. Research Scholar

Kongunadu Arts & Science College

Coimbatore

Abstract

The author in her second book *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, the sequel to the *Conch Bearer*, wonderfully mixes mystery and fantasy. Magic, reality and suspense are blended well and the successful end result is very entertaining. At the end of the first book, Anand had chosen to stay in the magically hidden Silver Valley in the Himalayas, is the only person who has the power to converse with the Conch. So he is chosen to be the Keeper of the Conch. He learns to become a Healer with lots of struggle and also possess a special gift to converse with the objects of power-conch, pearls and mirror, which transformed the protagonist from a timid boy who felt sorry for himself into someone who was ready to dedicate his life to help others. It's all about commingling of old and new, real and magical. There is evidence throughout to novel that the author is deeply influenced by the Indian epics and Puranas and other myths. The era of the Muslim Nawabs in Bengal with the lush beauty and pageantry of that world is beautifully depicted. The description and aroma of food takes the readers back in time to an era in India when Kings ruled.

Key-Words

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Children Literature, *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*,
Mystery and Fantasy.

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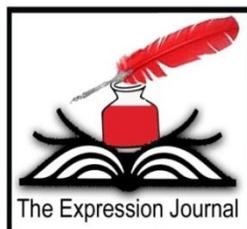
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Children's literature or Juvenile Literature includes stories, books, magazine and poems that are enjoyed by Children. It is a widely oral tradition that adults shared with children before publishing existed. The development of early children's literature before printing was invented is difficult to trace. Many classic 'Children's' tales were originally created for adults and later adapted for a younger audience. Since fifteenth century a large quantity of literature with a moral or religious message, has been aimed specifically at children.

Words and pictures go hand in hand along with simple stories drawn from childhood in picture books. Children's literature ranges from old staple of retold folktales and myths to concept books, animal stories based on childhood experience, information books and fantasies, detective, horror, and comic. There is a shift of focus in children's literature in recent times from mere fancy to rationalistic, scientific, knowledge-enriching fiction.

India has the greatest oral narrative tradition in the world. It fulfills and feeds the needs of every young and growing child. Indian folklore is rich imaginative and remains the most interesting source for the children's literature. The Panchatantra was written in Sanskrit in 200 BC, the Jatakas, the Paranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata epics are all Indian classics. These are not specifically for children but are popular with them.

Animal fables are predominant and remains as society's traditional vehicle of social and moral instruction. Tales of animal wisdom, cunning and foolishness, are retold in many languages and are universal to the country's multilingual literature. Indian folklore remains a curious mixture of tradition and pure fantasy. There are various Indian writers who have dedicated their writings to the children's literature.

Few among them are like the famous R K Narayan's Malgudi Days, Swami and his Friends etc., Ruskin Bond's The Blue Umbrella, Children's Omnibus etc., SubhadraSen Gupta's A Clown for Tenali Rama, Jodha Bai etc. Ranjital's The Caterpillar who went on a diet, The Parakeet that squawked in English etc. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Brotherhood of the Conch Trilogy and

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Grandma and the Great Gourd. Latest is Shobha Viswanath's Karadi Tales which are audio books. Writers for children in today's age understand the genre much better and try to connect and design the context to make the reading experiences so much more satisfying.

Chitra Divakaruni is inspired by the mythical tales of Bengal and magical fiction where one imagines the grandeur and heroism in a special way. Divakaruni talks about the marginalized children who lived in the slums of Kolkata in the first book of *The Conch Bearer*.

The second book *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, the sequel to the Conch Bearer, is a wonderful mix of mystery and fantasy. Magic, reality and suspense are blended well and the successful end result is very entertaining. At the end of the first book, Anand had chosen to stay in the magically hidden Silver Valley in the Himalayas, initiated into the Brotherhood of Healers. As a young boy he is the only person who has the power to converse with the Conch. So he is chosen to be the Keeper of the Conch. The Conch is a tiny shell that can fit into the palm of his hand but it is an object of immense power. He learns to become a Healer with lots of struggle.

Anand is surprised as to how people pretend to be happy when feeling irritated or nervous or miserable. He had heard the words "Evil Stirs" while reading the winds. Anand, the keeper of the conch, while practicing the art of prophesying receives the vision of a terrified wise-woman pleading for help. She tells him that the people in her village, Sona Dighi meaning golden lake, disappear into the forest "and when they come back, they are changed. Often they don't remember who they are" as the wicked magician is sucking the souls of the helpless villagers. Abhyadatta along with Raj Bhanu, senior apprentice goes to solve the problem by handing Anand a strand of pearls and telling him that if it grew dull or dark then he and Raj Bhanu are in danger. Anand has a disturbing vision that his mentor and spiritual guide are in danger.

"Such mental dexterity seemed as difficult to achieve as controlling physical pain or translating the wind's words, and he was afraid he'd be equally unskilled at it" (15).

Anand convinces the conch to create a magic portal to reach Abhyadatta. Unfortunately, Anand gets separated from Nisha and the conch as he steps into the portal. He was thrown back in time to an ancient village of Nawab Nazib and its Chief Minister Haider Ali, where an evil jinn plans to ruin the royal family. The sorcerer is in search of a magic mirror, the mastery of the mirror will help him succeed in going back to rule the kingdom from where he was banished.

Anand sets off into the forest to defeat the evil forces in the village and at the same time to find Nisha and his master. The quest leads him to the mirror and he is one step ahead of the sorcerer. A mind message from the missing Conch helps him to escape from the sorcerer. This escape route has taken him hundred years into the past. Here in the Mughal times all the three are united, which is a good sign. But the bad news is that Abhaydatta has lost his powers and Nisha her memory. The worst thing was that the Conch was still missing and the mirror got shattered.

Anand obtains a new name Abbas in the new world and becomes a punkah-puller in the Nawab's chamber. He gets the chance to serve at the chief minister Haider Ali's residence for a special occasion; there he happens to overhear the conversation between Kasim and Haider, which makes Anand to understand that Kasim tricks over Haider to take revenge on the Nawab. At that weak moment, he is directed by Kasim to present him before the royal court for the moon

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festival, thus satisfying the condition for causing retaliation on the Nawab and his family.

Anand encounters powerful sorcerers, haughty and arrogant prince and jinn capable of unspeakable magic. Nisha as Paribanou is short of her memory and is now the niece of Haider Ali. Abhyadatta was the mahout Saleem and Raj Bhanu the assistant mahout in the Hathi-Khana of the palace. The description of the durbar with its rich pillars of coloured stones, gold and silver throne, its seat covered with thick silk quilts, marble and granite walls, Persian carpet in jewel colours covering the dais is beautifully depicted by the author.

Anand possessed a special gift to converse with the objects of power- conch, pearls and mirror. It also transformed Anand from a timid boy who felt sorry for himself into someone who was ready to dedicate his life to help others. It's all about commingling of old and new, real and magical. Usage of Bengali terms while describing food or showering words of endearment and while depicting the terraces and courtyards which are considered female spaces in Indian culture. There is evidence throughout to show that the author is deeply influenced by the Indian epics and Puranas and other myths. The era of the Muslim Nawabs in Bengal with the lush beauty and pageantry of that world is beautifully depicted. The description and aroma of food takes the readers back in time to an era in India when Kings ruled, their breathtaking finery and endless courses of food brought by servants in turbans is portrayed in detail.

The mirror acts as a key link between past and present and Anand's gradual self-realization is also evidently seen. There is depth in Anand's character. In order to find the missing conch and rescue the court from vengeful magician he has to sharpen his senses until they are sharper than the sharpest knife resulting in his mental growth. There is a wider depiction traditions by the author. Anand's connection with the elephant Matangi comes as surprising and gentle relationship.

On realizing the situation Anand wants to utilize every second to save Nawab from Kasim's conspiracy. He needs the help of Nisha. So he reveals the truth to Nisha and makes her remember her real identity. Then they both search for the conch based on the conch's direction. They discover that the conch is locked inside the vault where the Nawab's treasures are kept. With the help of Mahabet, the crown prince they go to the treasury. The mirror helps them to get inside all the doors without a great effort, which makes the search easy. During the festival to observe the proceedings, Anand climbs on a tree which gives a clear view. While presenting Kasim before Nawab, Haider Ali feels guilty and gestures him to stop all the evil plans, but Kasim already has started his plans and made a lightning to strike the throne. The whole stage catches fire. There comes a conflict between good and evil. To save the Nawab, Anand lets him to sacrifice his own life which grants more strength to the conch while blowing it against the jinn, the evil spirit which helps Kasim from the beginning.

Usage of vernacular words according to context and reveals the flavours, sights, sounds and stories of past and present Bengal. There are much exotic flavor - the journey from the crowded Indian city through rural villages and high mountains, a magical background from traditional Indian tales and description of food which is rich, enticing and savory. It is hard to believe that the arrogant prince Mahabet changes too quickly but his emotion and care for Nisha is poignant.

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While trying to attack Mahabet, Kasim and the jinn enter into the unknown world and miss their way since the mirror was in Mahabet's hand. Anand, Nisha, Abhaydatta, and Raj-Bhanu get back to the present world. But they leave the mirror with Mahabet since he wishes to keep it with him, but the mirror promises that it would come to him when he is in danger.

"Yes, O wizard, I will keep him company. Over the years, as grows in wisdom, I will teach him how I may be used to help his people. But this much you can tell him now: if he ever needs you, he may do so by concentrating on your image and looking into me. And if you should ever need him, think of me, the mirror of fire and dreaming, and he will see your reflection here." (*The Mirror* 206)

The boy-magician Anand, his sassy partner Nisha and beloved teacher Abhyadatta reunite for new adventure in folkloric Indian fantasy series Brotherhood of the Conch.

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