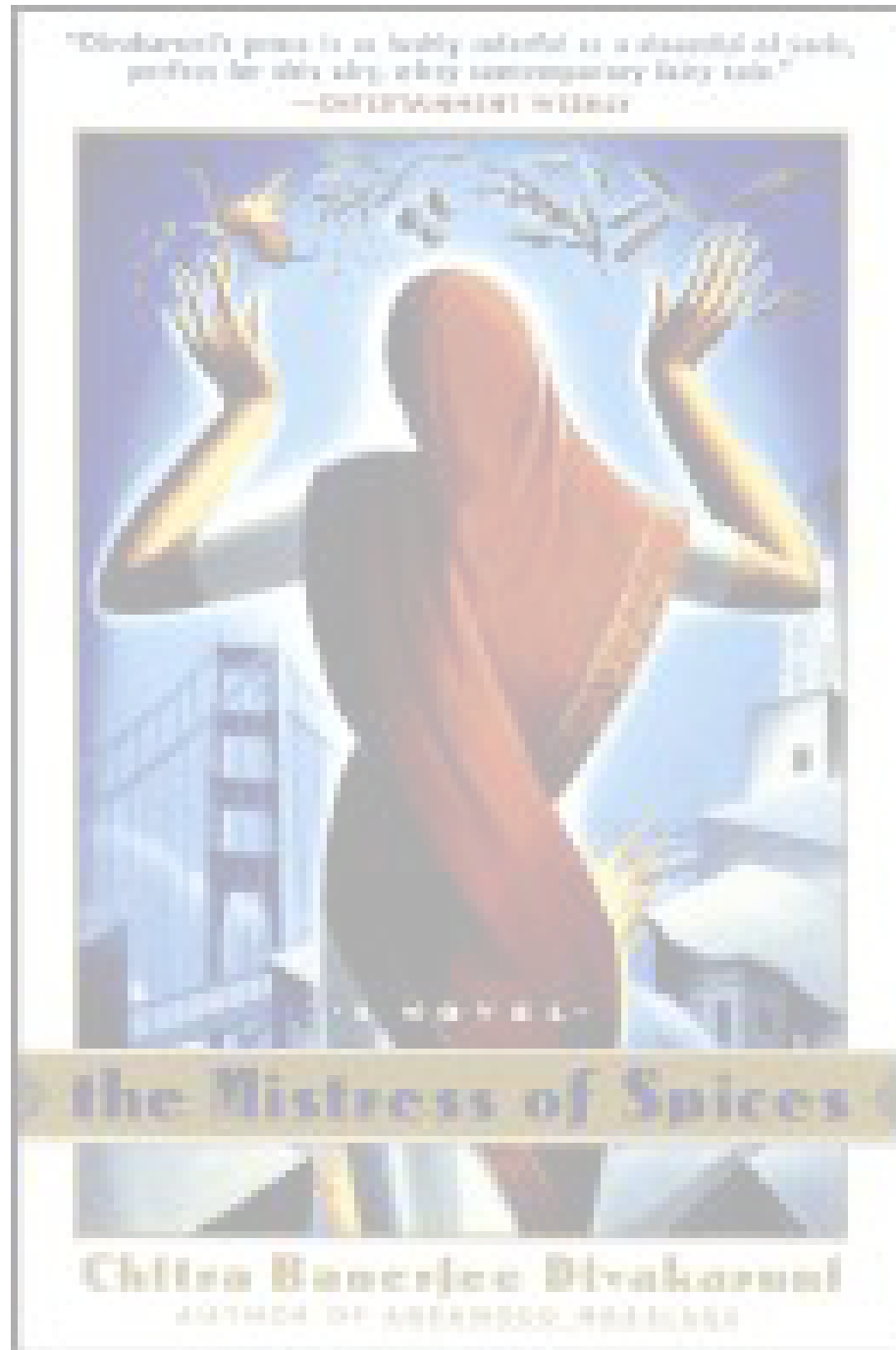


The Mistress of Spices

by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni



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Independent Research

1. Look at either the internet and/or any other source. Please do some research (in brief) into Indian Culture. Be ready to discuss aspects of lifestyle, customs, and culture.
2. What is the custom of having a 'Dowry'?
3. Also, please think about what it means to be an Indian living in America. What do you think might be difficult for a new immigrant to deal with, coming to a new country?
4. How do you think Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's profession helps her personally; and with the Indian community living in the States?
5. If you were a writer, what would you tell people about Japanese culture and lifestyle?

Introduction

1. Where does the story begin?
2. What are the main themes in this novel?
3. What is special to Oakland? How could this be advantageous to our author?
4. What kind of place is California?
5. Who is the heroine of our story? What do we learn about her?
6. Look at the list of spices? Where would you usually use these spices in your own life? Do you use any of them? How could they change your life, according to the description in the introduction?

Chapter 1: The Island of Spices

Vocabulary and Expressions

Look at the following vocabulary and expressions. Please make sure you understand what they mean in the context of the story.

- ◇ “India is a land of passionate poetry and glowing colors.”
- ◇ caul
- ◇ midwife
- ◇ dowry
- ◇ “a girl would bring them poverty....”
- ◇ foretold
- ◇ proud
- ◇ vain
- ◇ “I longed for something exciting to happen.”
- ◇ Seized
- ◇ kidnap
- ◇ plunged

Comprehension and Discussion

1. What was special about our main character?

2. How did her powers affect her life? What were the good effects and what were the bad?

3. ‘There’s an expression in English that goes...
“Be careful of what you wish for, it may come true.”
What does this mean?

4. Our main character wished for something to happen in her life, and it did, but with terrible results. How do you think this event changed her life?

5. How did she change her fortune? How did she change from prisoner to chief? How did she feel during this time?

6. What is this ‘Island of Spices’? What do we learn about it in the first chapter?

7. Who did our main character meet on the island?

8. What was the Old One’s first impression of our main character?

Chapter 2: Shampati's Fire

1. There's a condition that the old one places upon each of the young girls. That is that they have to give something in return. Why do you think that they must pay such a high price for becoming a mistress?
2. Would you pay such a price to achieve your greatest desire?
3. What were Tilottama's reasons for choosing her name?
4. What reservations (doubt) did the old one have about Tilo going to America?

Points of Understanding

Please complete the points of understanding section for Chapter 2 at the back of the book (page 84)

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Study guide: Ch 3-4

Ch 3

1. Where is Tilottama's new home and what does it look like?
2. What does Tilottama look like?
3. Describe Ahuja's wife Lalita.
4. What is Lalita's problem?
5. Why does Tilottama give turmeric to Lalita?
6. Why does Tilottama want to give black cumin to Haroun?
7. What is Jagjit's problem?
8. Why does Tilottama give cinnamon to Jagjit?

Ch 4

1. How come Tilottama does want to help Kwesi?
2. How does the lonely American make Tilottama feel?
3. Why does Tilottama want to give asafetida to the lonely American?
4. What kind of magic did Tilottama thought about doing so the lonely American might come back?

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Chapter 5: Geeta's Grandfather

Comprehension and Discussion

1. What freedom do American girls have that maybe Indian girls don't?
2. What complaints does the grandpa have? Make a list...
3. Why wasn't Ramu happy with the granpa's arrangement?
4. How does Geeta react to the letter?
5. Are there any arranged marriages in your country? How are they arranged?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of an arranged marriage?
7. What do we learn about Juan?
8. How will Geeta bring shame upon her family?
9. How can our mistress help the family?
10. "I'm learning how love can twist itself around your heart like a rope, and pull you away from everything that you know is right." What is meant by this expression and how does it relate (connect) to our story?
11. What is the meaning of the dream?

Chapter 6: Spice Magic

Comprehension and Discussion

1. What is Lalita's problem? How can the mistress help her?
2. How does the American make her feel?
3. Why is she embarrassed by what Haroun says? Why do you think that Haroun is suspicious about the American? How would you feel living in a strange culture? Would you seek out other people of the same culture as you? Why?
4. Why doesn't she give the American asafetida, the antidote of love?
5. How does Jagjit react to the mistress? Why? What does the mistress do for him? What affect does this have?

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Chapter 7: Out into the World

Comprehension and Discussion

1. Which spice does Tilottama take to give her courage for the night out?
2. Where does Tilottama buy her clothes? What is significant about this store?
3. Why do you think Geeta was disappointed to see Tilottama?
4. Why does Greeta seem to have hope in her voice when Tilottama leaves?
5. In Tilottama's dream what does 'First Mother' tell about her? Why?
6. What did Tilottama buy from Sears and why doesn't she want to use it?

Difficult Discussion Questions...

(You do not have to answer these questions in writing, but they may be discussed in class.)

- ◇ If you had the power to help someone, would you help them even though it may bring bad luck upon yourself?
- ◇ Tilottama says, "What if a mistress wants her life back?" Do you think it is possible to get your life back, once you have started out on a certain path? Try and relate this to your own experiences...

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Ch 7

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3. Why do you think Greeta was disappointed to see Tilottama?
4. Why does Greeta seem to have hope in her voice when Tilottama leaves?
5. What does First Mother tell Tilottama about her powers in her dream?
6. What did Tilottama buy from Sears and why doesn't she use it yet?

Ch 8

1. How does Raven describe the strange man that came to talk to his mother?
2. How does Raven describe the place where his mother's people lived?
3. How does the author give you a hint of Raven's name in chapter 4?

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Chapter 9: Protection

Comprehension and Discussion

1. Our mistress is very self-reflective (looks deeply into herself) at the beginning of this chapter. What observations (discoveries) does she make about her situation?
2. How is the situation between Geeta and her grandfather progressing?
3. For what purpose did our mistress give him the *Kantak*? What special care must be taken with this herb? What side-effects come from the herb?
4. Why is it that she mustn't go out to help people?
5. What does she do to contact Haroun? Why does she have to see him so desperately?
6. What effect did Raven's note have on the mistress?
7. Do you think it would be worth her taking the risk of being cursed for all eternity, by using the spices for herself.

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Chapter 10: A Paradise on Earth

Comprehension and Discussion

1. "It's a dress for a young woman." What does she mean by this, and what do you think is the difference in style?
2. What do you think was the meaning of his vision?
3. How has our mistress changed? At the point where our mistress is on the beach and the two girls make comments, she speaks as if she is a different person. What is she now feeling, and thinking?

Chapter 11: The Red Spice of Anger

1. Why is Hameeda living in the U.S.?
2. How does Tilo know that Hameeda is in love with Haroun?
3. What has happened to Haroun?
4. What spice does Tilo prepare for Haroun? While preparing it, what vision does she have?
5. What has the spice turned into?
6. Who does Tilo help in this chapter?
7. Summarize Raven's story to Tilo.

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Chapter 12: The King of Spices

1. What is the King of Spices? What does it do?

2. How is Greta getting along with her family?

3. What does the letter from Lalita say?

4. What does Tilo give to Jagjit?

Chapter 13: "I'm still the same Tilo"

1. What does Tilo look like?

2. What does Tilo notice about Haroun and Hameeda?

3. What does Tilo give to Haroun?

4. What strange things are happening at the Oakland Zoo?

5. What is Raven's plan for the future?

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Chapter 11: The Red Spice of Anger

Comprehension and Discussion

1. Why is Hameeda living in the U.S.?
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Chapter 13: I'm still the same Tilo

Comprehension and Discussion

1. What does Tilo look like?
2. What does Tilo notice about Haroun and Hameeda?
3. What does Tilo give to Haroun?
4. What is Raven's plan for the future?
5. What strange things are happening at the Oakland Zoo?
6. Why did Tilo leave the not and what do you think she will do next?

Difficult Discussion Questions...

(You do not have to answer these questions in writing, but they may be discussed in class.)

- ◇ Tilo says, "Violence is not the answer." Why does she say this? For Tilo, why is it the right thing to do?
- ◇ Why can't Tilo simply give up her previous life and go with Raven?

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Chapter 15: The Only Paradise

Comprehension and Discussion

1. How come the spices didn't punish Tilo by turning her into an old woman?
2. Why couldn't Raven stay angry towards Tilo?
3. Why does Tilo want to go back to the city?
4. Tilo says, "there is no paradise." What does she mean?
5. What is Tilo's new name? What is the importance of choosing a new name?

Difficult Discussion Questions...

Try to reflect on the whole story. Think of at least three events that you think are significant to the story. Be ready to talk about them in class.

- ◇ What happened?
- ◇ Who was involved?
- ◇ Why is it important to the story?