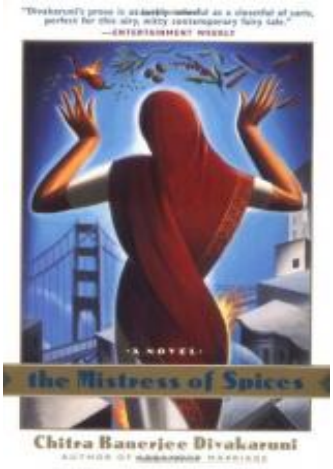
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The Mistress of Spices

by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni



About the Book

Although it is her duty to remain emotionally detached, Tilo breaks the rules of the spices and is drawn into the lives of the customers in her shop, helping them through their spirals of trouble: abusive husbands, racism, generational conflicts, drug abuse. And when an unexpected romance blossoms with a handsome stranger, Tilo is forced to choose between the supernatural life of an immortal and the vicissitudes of modern life. Spellbinding and hypnotizing, **The Mistress of Spices** is a tale of joy and sorrow and one special woman's magical powers.

Discussion Guide

1. The New York Times Book Review states that **The Mistress of Spices** "becomes a novel about choosing between a life of special powers and one of ordinary love and compassion." Did Tilo choose correctly? Why or why not?

2. How do the spices become characters in the novel?

3. Tilo only speaks her name out loud to one person in the novel. What is the significance of this action? What role do names play in the novel?

4. What do the spices take from Tilo? What do they give her? Is it a fair exchange?

5. Tilo left her shop for the first time early in the novel to look at Haroun's cab. But later she is drawn even further out by Raven. Was her course already set at that point? Would she have left again even without Raven's pull?

6. In what ways is punishment seen as a natural force in this novel? How are punishment and retribution tied to balance?

7. Tilo says, "Better hate spoken than hate silent." Does hate spoken achieve the effect Tilo intends or not?

8. Divakaruni chose to write **The Mistress of Spices** in the first person present tense. Does this point of view add or detract from the story?

9. What passages in the novelresemble poetry? How does Divakaruni make use of lyricism and rhythm?

10. What role does physical beauty play in this story? In Tilo's feelings about her body? About Raven? About the bougainvillea girls?

11. Does Raven's story (pp. 161-171) differ from Tilo's story of her past at the points where she tells it? Do these differences say anything about the differences between women and men, or between Indians and Americans?

12. How are physical acts of violence and disaster (earthquake, beatings, guns) foreshadowed in the novel? What is the significance of foreshadowing in the Indian culture?

Author Bio

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning and bestselling author, activist and professor. Her work has been published in over 50 magazines, including *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*, and included in *The Best American Short Stories* and *The O. Henry Prize Stories*. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew, Bengali, Russian and Japanese. Several have been used for campus-wide reads and made into films and plays. She teaches at the University of Houston.

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Publication Date: February 17, 1998
Genres: Fiction, Literary Fiction
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Anchor
ISBN-10: 0385482388
ISBN-13: 9780385482387