

# 1 Cubist Cognizance: Calibrating Chaos, Collating Complexities

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## 5 **Abstract**

6 The article tries to construe the conflux of concentric contours in the art of portrayal in  
7 literary cubism which takes cognizance of multiple perspectives by calibrating chaos and  
8 collating complexities. The introduction to the study outlines the scope of cubist strategy in  
9 the fictional firmament through a novel as the focus of reference, for analysis based on relevant  
10 theoretical structure. The second section of the essay concentrates on the usance of paradox  
11 as a cubist tool. The third part of the paper examines the juncture of congruence and  
12 divergence of the chosen fictional reference to the rubric of cubism in black and white. The  
13 conclusion proposes adapting nuanced manoeuvring from the world of biology to stay adrift,  
14 shirking free from a floundering fusillade of the fragmented self.

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16 **Index terms**— literary cubism, paradox, assemblage, fragmentation.

## 17 **1 Introduction**

18 II.

## 19 **2 Paradox as a Literary Polygon**

20 In The Mistress of Spices Tilo the tellurian's tale is of an existence trammelled by life's tumultuous tempests  
21 and tempered by triumphs wrought by resilience and the thaumaturgical touch of benign fate, constituting  
22 a fragmented yet cohesive lifescape akin to a cubist configuration of life offering multiple perspectives of the  
23 subject. The myriad aspects of life imbricate and their convolution can confound comprehension. To allay the  
24 emerging obnubilation, the agglomeration of diverse dimensions can be perceived as an assemblage. The glossary  
25 of Deleuzean philosophy of rhizome defines an assemblage to be "any number of things or pieces of things gathered  
26 into a single context." Elucidating on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assemblage theory, Levi Bryant states:

27 Assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements or objects that enter into relations with one another.  
28 These objects are not all of the same type. Thus you have physical objects, happenings, events, and so on, but  
29 you also have signs, utterances, and so on. While there are assemblages that are composed entirely of bodies,  
30 there are no assemblages that are composed entirely of signs and utterances.

31 The materialisation of an assemblage is a tripartite process involving -"coding, stratification and territorialization." (Smith Daniel and John Protevi).

32 Coding is the process of ordering matter as it is drawn into a body. By contrast, stratification is the process  
33 of creating hierachal bodies, while territorialization is the ordering of those bodies in "assemblages", that is to  
34 say, an emergent unity joining together heterogeneous bodies in a "consistency." (Smith.D and John Protevi)  
35 Accordingly Tilo's course of life is interspersed with intrusive social determinants like gender, skin tone, class  
36 which are at variance with her notion of unconstrained haecceity. A swarthy daughter is an outcast in domestic  
37 and social circles. Her impecunious parents are dismayed at her birth because she is another daughter -?" this  
38 one coloured like mud" (9) would only compound their misery. Tilo's parents receive her with rejection. Her  
39 father commands the midwife to, " Wrap her in old cloth and lay her face down on the floor. What does she bring  
40 to the family except a dowry debt" (7). As an infant she is christened "Nayan Tara, star of the eye" (7). Her  
41 name also meant "Star-Seer" (8) and "Flower that Grows by the Dust Road" (9). Her appellation is indicative  
42 of her psychic powers and she proves her competence in clairvoyance by cautioning the village headman of the  
43 impending flood. This results in the propulsion of her presence from being the rejected to the revered. She says:

### 3 III.

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45 Abstract-The article tries to construe the conflux of concentric contours in the art of portrayal in literary  
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47 introduction to the study outlines the scope of cubist strategy in the fictional firmament through a novel as  
48 the focus of reference, for analysis based on relevant theoretical structure. The second section of the essay  
49 concentrates on the usance of paradox as a cubist tool. The third part of the paper examines the juncture of  
50 congruence and divergence of the chosen fictional reference to the rubric of cubism in black and white. The  
51 conclusion proposes adapting nuanced manoeuvring from the world of biology to stay adrift, shirking free from  
52 a floundering fusillade of the fragmented self.

53 The pursuit of propinquity in portrayal of life across florilegia has been an evolving enterprise along the cline  
54 of literary depiction. As a pulsating palimpsest life defies certitude, concord and its limn demands a punctilio  
55 sans perplexities. Such a comprehensive concept obliterating colossal complexities in representation emerged  
56 through the medium of cubism in the realm of painting. The instrumentality of cubism enabled a paradigm shift  
57 in perspective -from unidimensionality to polydimensionality. This article ventures to examine the execution of  
58 cubism in the fictional space through the novel *The Mistress of Spices* penned by Indian-American author Chitra  
59 Banerjee Divakaruni. The theoretical trellis to explore the technique of fragmented fullness in "literary cubism"  
60 (jcrewman 2011) shall be Deleuzean assemblage theory. The essay looks into plausibility of literary devices  
61 substituting for the collage of an array of geometric patterns like cubes and cones in cubist artistry. Analysis of  
62 the narrative seeks to unravel conformity to and contravention of the consuetude of cubism in literature.

63 T My fame spread. From neighbouring towns and beyond, from the cities that lay on the other side of the  
64 mountains, people travelled so I could change their luck with a touch of my hand. They bought me gifts?gifts  
65 so lavish that the villagers talked about them for days. I sat on gold-woven cushions and ate from silver plates  
66 studded with precious stones? gold-smiths impressed my likeness on medallions that were worn by thousands for  
67 luck?(8, 9).

68 The narrative draws our attention to the paradoxical assemblage of exclusion and exclusivity wrought by the  
69 process of coding and stratification. Tilo draws into herself, internalises the agonizing abandonment she faced for  
70 being a dark skinned daughter (coding) and claims an authoritative allegiance and affluence through her adroit  
71 magical powers availing a superior status (stratification). "Assemblage theory provides a bottom-up framework  
72 for analyzing social complexity by emphasizing fluidity, exchange ability and multiple functionalities" (Texas  
73 Theory Wiki 2010). Tilo's progression from egregious exclusion to elite exclusivity serves as a validation of the  
74 "fluidity, exchangeability" of divergent elements within an assemblage. The exclusion -exclusivity paradox is  
75 also indicative of viewing different aspects of a dimension in a subject through cubist lens -of fragmenting and  
76 expelling exclusion as well as the augmenting aspect of exclusivity. All of which coalesce into a united whole  
77 as in "territorialization." Tilo's boredom with her life makes her yearn for excitement and she wishes to see  
78 pirates, of whom she had heard stories in childhood. Her calling thought brings destruction to her village for  
79 the pirates arrive, pillaging the residents, murdering her father and abducting her. Tilo's desired destruction  
80 makes her subordinate to the chieftain of the pirates who names her "Bhagyavathi, Bringer of Luck" (20). The  
81 contradiction in desired destruction also points to the eclipsing of her opportunity into oppression. She soon  
82 transforms her deprivation into acquisition when in an act of revenge, overthrows the commander of the pirates  
83 and declares her supremacy as "Bhagyavathi, sorceress, pirate queen, bringer of luck" (19).

84 Bhagyavati's disenchantment as the queen of pirates makes her yearn for an elusive power. She gets to know  
85 of the island of spices whose suzerainty is wielded by a woman in her senescence, addressed as the "First Mother"  
86 (34). The sea serpents who divulge to her about the magical island also caution her of the entry to the island  
87 being forbidden to ordinary mortals unless the First Mother willed it. As soon as she ventures into the waters  
88 reigned by the old sorceress she is appalled at her dispossession of her powers. She says: ?the chant died in my  
89 throat. My arms and legs grew heavy and would not obey. In these waters charmed by a greater sorceress, my  
90 power was nothing. I struggled and thrashed and swallowed brine like any other clumsy mortal until at last I  
91 dragged myself onto the sand and collapsed?"(32).

92 The clash of supremacy and subordination in specific spaces can be elaborated vis-à-vis Deleuze and Guattari's  
93 concept of "smooth space" and "striated space".

94 Smooth space exists in contrast to striated space -a partitioned field of movement which prohibits free motion.  
95 Smooth space refers to an environment, a landscape in which a subject operates. Smooth space is filled by events  
96 or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things? Therefore in the "striated space" that Tilo has set  
97 her foot on she faces her fragmented self -stripped of power and cast asunder, helpless and at the mercy of the  
98 First Mother. The facticity of her vanquished preeminence which she enjoyed in her "smooth space" as the queen  
99 of the pirates dawns on her. When she becomes an accomplished mistress of spices under the tutelage of the  
100 First Mother, she must pursue her vocation with a curtailed carte blanche. The First Mother asks the mistresses  
101 trained by her: 'Are you ready to give up your young bodies, to take on age and ugliness and unending service?  
102 Ready never to step out of the places where you are set down, store or school Or healing house?' 'Are you ready  
103 never to love any but the spices again?'(40).

### 104 3 III.

105 Literary Cubism -Points of Convergence and Divergence Scott Neuffer enumerates the characteristics of "cubism  
106 in writing" and states that "cubists were more concerned with the internal landscape of the individual than the

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107 external landscape of the objective world." Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in The Mistress of Spices preponderantly  
108 probes the train of thoughts of the protagonist Tilo and presents a multitude of facets of the choices she makes in  
109 life and this is in concurrence with Neuffer's "various planes and angles of perception?A stark collage of images  
110 revealing the subjectivity and relativity at the heart of human experience." "Fragmentation of the individual  
111 (where) the individual (is presented) as an assemblage of broken images" is yet another technique in cubism  
112 which he puts forth. Tilo's narrative chronicling her life bears testimony to fate ripping her life asunder. The  
113 analysis of the events Tilo The mistress of spices in California willfully indulges in thoughtful transgressions of  
114 all the restrictions she had to abide by to remain obedient to the spices -the real repositories of power. She risks  
115 the obliteration of her puissant privilege by heedlessly harnessing spice power for her novaturnent pursuits. These  
116 select snippets from the fictional narrative demonstrate the efficacy of paradox as a device in literary cubism, to  
117 infuse polymorphic perspectives of a subject, akin to the geometric configurations in a cubist painting effacing  
118 ambiguity and explicating varied points of view. earlier in the essay within the framework of assemblage theory  
119 converges with Neuffer's tenet of cubist writing. Jcrewman in his article "The Rise of Literary Cubism" posits  
120 "using different narrators for different chapters or even different paragraphs, so as to describe how each character  
121 views the others, put in the words, thoughts and feelings of the characters themselves." Here lies a point of  
122 divergence in the narrative chosen for analysis wherein Tilo is the sole narrator.  
123

IV.

## 124 **4 Conclusion**

125 The cubist mode in the novel selected for study reveals that despite the depiction of splintered self -the multiple  
126 points of view assert the existence of amoeboid acuity in individuals and this is not in any way barmecidal. Like  
127 the biological amoeboid, independent in its motility with its cytoplasmic concurrence, each human being must  
128 agnize the need to develop hexicological aptitude by depending on ourselves in times of crisis and move towards  
129 an empowering independence to reconfigure our fragmented selves so plangently portrayed in cubist works of art.

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