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## PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY: CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The Indian epics like The Mahabharata and The Ramayana are considered as a great instructor of human life. Divakaruni's novel The Palace of Illusions is based on the great Indian epic The Mahabharata. The original epic deals with almost all kinds of human issues, but males are the dominating characters. Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions traces out the real life situations of women in the epic, explains the cruelty of human mind and speaks about legendary heroines. Divakaruni chooses to re-narrate The Mahabharata to give a picture of the female position in the patriarchy society. Divakaruni has the highest purpose of re-narrating the epic to help her protagonist Panchaali to seek justice for the shameful act and the re-narration makes Panchaali alive through her questions raised to the patriarchy society. The paper is a sincere attempt to bring light on the treatment of women in Divakaruni's novel The Palace of Illusions. Panchaali is one of the foremost women characters in the novel.*

**Keywords:** *Gender, Identity, culture, Patriarchy society.*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has an eminent place in Indian English Writing. Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions* is the re-telling of great Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. Through her skillful re-narration, she maintains originality as well as uniqueness. *The Palace of Illusions* deals gender discrimination, identity crisis of women, male domination, ancient culture and tradition. Instead of choosing a male character as a protagonist in the novel, Divakaruni has come up with a female character giving the readers a different approach to look at the already known story of the great Hindu epic. The re-narration most probably discusses Draupadi's struggle for identity in patriarchy society. The protagonist's determination and courage has been explained throughout the novel. To represent protagonist's struggles, the writer has used myth as an instructor. According to modern women writers like Divakaruni, whether it is the ancient period or modern period the life of women are not yet changed.

As a woman Divakaruni travels deep into the world of women and takes women oriented subjects to deal with her novels. She depicts her female characters as a women iconoclast and warriors to fight against the dogmas of the society. Most of her novels fight to bring in a strong identity for women; they rewrite the history of women in the society. Divakaruni has shown Panchaali as a modern woman, who wants to express her thoughts and ideas to the contemporary world. Her struggle starts from her birth, when she rises from the holy fire along with her twin brother. Panchaali has treated as an unwelcomed guest to the world from the fire. Even the domination starts from names, her father named her brother "Dhristadyumna, 'Destroyer of Enemies' and Draupadi, Daughter of Drupad"(5). She demands more heroic name "who was supposed to change the history" (5). She wants to reject her father's egoistic attitude and domination so Draupadi called herself as Panchaali Queen of Panchal.

Panchaali's quest for identity begins unknowingly, at a very young age. Due to her father's domination, she passed her childhood alone "I could not forgive him for that initial rejection"(6). He segregates her from everyone, moreover he never allows Panchaali to step out from the palace of Panchaali. Her father's palace seemed to be a gold bar cage for Panchaali "I hated the thick gray slabs of the walls" (6). The portrayal of Drupad's palace reveals key points about patriarchal hegemony in the narrative. In order to escape from the domination of her father, she often dreams about her own palace, thereby consoling herself.

Divakaruni tries to re-construct traditional values against women in patriarchy society through Panchaali. According to the writer, ancient epics speak more about the majestic activity of men but not women. When Panchaali tries to peruse war techniques to show her majesty, her father denied her request. She wants to be a great warrior like her brother, but her father refuses her to learn war crafts. According to him “A Ksahtriya woman’s highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in her life: her father, brother, husband, and sons:” (26). Instead of accepting her father’s words, Panchaali decides to change the history of women.

Women are made as prisoners in the name of tradition and cultural, whether it is ancient or modern era. By depicting the reality, the novelist makes the readers to think, why such traditional system are formed and maintained still. Panchaali has projected as a strong female icon who questions the dogmas which arrested the freedom of women. The re-narration of the great epic of India helps the readers not only to understand the cultural and traditional system in an easy way, but also it helps to connect the lives of the ancient days with the current world.

The patriarchal society believes, women are common property belonging to their fathers’ and husbands’. King Drupad carries the same kind of attitude towards Queen Panchaali. He considers his personal benefits, while organizing the *swayamvar* of Panchaali. When she comes to know about competition in the *swayamvar*, she sates that “Why even call it *swayamvar*, then?” I cried, “Why make a spectacle of me before all those kings? It’s my father, not I, who gets to decides whom I’ll marry” (PI 56). Panchaali’s marriage is a just political treaty according to her. The exploitation of female is a practice of patriarchal society and Panchaali’s marriage is an evidence of exploitation and domination.

Panchaali’s life continues to be different from that of any other women she knows. She falls in love with Karna, who is not allowed to participate in *swayamvar*. After her marriage with the Panchapandava brothers, Panchaali faced unusual struggles in her life. She was forced to marry all the Pandava brothers. A single chance is not given to expresses her opinion regarding her marriage with Pandava brothers in patriarchy society. In the same way, she questions the shameful act, she experienced in Hastinapur, after Yudhistir lost everything, including Panchaali in a game of dice. According to her husbands’ she is considered as an object. Panchaali, disgusted that none of her five husbands’ defend her. Though she strengths her courage take vow to revenge upon the Kauravas for the shameful act. Without entering into the war field she revenge upon her enemies.

Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* has given new outlook to the ancient epic. The novel is definitely a feminist writing in retold from a woman point of view. The novel concentrates on the inner life of women. Many believe that it was Panchaali's fate and action that brought about the destruction to her clan. But Divakaruni consciously moves away from such interpretations to provide a new outlook on Panchaali. She projects male society and their domination against women. Modern feminist writers bring forth the sufferings of women to the world. Their literary works depicts the characteristics of patriarchal society and found out how women were denied their basic human rights. Their roles are determined by the society even before their birth. In all possible ways, the society repressed them and considered them as inferior to men. Through *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni shows how these methods of suppressing women were used by the society from the ancient times onwards and how they were forced to fit into the norms prescribed by them.

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