



“A STUDY ON WOMEN’S PURSUIT FOR LIBERATION AND EQUITY IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI’S THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS”

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore women’s pursuit for liberation and equity in patriarchal society with special reference to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the author of fifteen books including the award winning novels such *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Queen of Dreams*, *The Palace of Illusions*. Most of her works are translated into many languages. Her female protagonists are always aware of the injustice that they countenance in marriage. Most of her female characters are liberated and break out the bonds that make them unhappy. They are ready to take up strong stand against human circumstances. *The Palace of Illusions* deals with the myth of Draupadi which is grounded in the history of the great Indian epic the Mahabharata. This novel is a written discourse on interaction between God and human being. The tale is action oriented where most of the things are ideological with political intentions.

The Mahabharata's history serves as the foundation for the Draupadi tale. It is a written discourse about how God and people interact. It is an action-packed story with a lot of ideological and political undertones. The Kurukshetra War is attributed to Draupadi in the Mahabharata by Vyasa, giving this figure a bad reputation. This object, which is the focus of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction, is subjected to many forms of discrimination, hardships, and struggles. *The Palace of Illusions* is a symbol for how marginalised women are in society. The bond between Draupadi and Krishna, a manifestation of Vishnu who represents the majesty of divinity, is also celebrated in the book. The present paper explores and interprets the significance of the myth of Draupadi and that of Krishna in Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions* using the ideals provided by the cultural critic Roland Barthes.

Index Terms - Domination, Gender Sensitization, Liberation, Patriarchal Injustice.

I. INTRODUCTION

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni offers a contemporary interpretation of the myth's resurgence. This retelling blends classic mythology with contemporary modernism, sending a message that will be understandable to both people who are firmly anchored in accepted traditionalism and others who have disconnected themselves from the moral values of their own society. Draupadi has been portrayed by Divakaruni as a modern woman who desires to share her views and ideas with the world. By telling the tale of love, betrayal, retribution, battle, freedom, and friendship, Divakaruni has attempted to bring the past into the present in a novel way. In the book review of *The Palace of Illusions* James Purdon says that “A little jejune at times, Divakaruni's languid and elegant prose remains seductive as it reimagines the woman at the heart of the story and weaves myth into a modern idiom”.(Purdon)

Women’s writings are a medium of expression and an outlet for women’s emotions and desires. Women writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni chose to write their own narrative can be attributed to the fact that they were not happy with some prejudices by male writers since they chose to write their own narratives. There is a sense of rectification that defines women’s literature rather than criticism of male writers which is a popular accusation. The focus is more laid on how women portray the gender issues and how they write about themselves. Even as a contradiction to what male writers write, then it should not be considered as a revolt against men but rather as a biased narrative. Women’s writing celebrates the rights of telling one’s story. It focuses on dark corners of a woman’s heart and essence and with new facts about history and fiction.

The Palace of Illusions is an ingeminate of Mahabharata from women protagonist Draupadi’s perspective. Noting on the narration that is made through a female perspective the project focuses on a feminist reading of the text. Indian history is inseparable from myth. It carries powerful ideological significance. The narratives of the epic Mahabharata occupy a major space in Indian culture. Even in Hindu mythology there are few women who are aggressive and who spoke their mind in a world of patriarchy. Draupadi was one of them. She is considered by many as the first feminist from Indian mythology but she was also a heroine thrown in unusual circumstances. Her marriage was more of a contest arranged by her father who had a secret wish of marrying his daughter to Arjuna. So the whole design of a winner, lifting a heavy bow and aiming at rotating fish and piercing its eye with the arrow was cleverly planned by him. It is mordant that it is called ‘Svayam-

vara', a ritual where a girl chooses her husband but in case of Draupadi it was different she was not even consulted; a inclusive case of bias but then justice was something that eluded Draupadi for rest of her life. And also the svayam-vara was the only celebration in her life till death. At last as per her father's wishes, it was Arjuna who won Draupadi. One interesting fact that Divakaruni brings here is Draupadi's secret admiration and longing for Karna which otherwise was never mentioned and is the important point in the narrative making it more heroine-centric as one gets to see the desire of a woman considered by many as authoritarian and revengeful. Many references show her inner feelings for Karna. When for the first time she saw the portrait of Karna, she was mesmerized by his sad eyes and Krishna at once knew what Draupadi was nurturing in her heart. So he tried to dissuade her by downplaying Karna as a chariot driver's son.

The novel opens with the rejection of a girl child. Dhari Ma retells the miraculous story of how Panchaali and her brother Drishtadyumna were born out of the sacrificial fire and adopted by King Drupad. Draupadi is introduced as the Girl who is not invited. When Drishtadyumna stepped out of the fire all the assembly cried out in amazement. But when she emerged later, everybody drooped their jaws. Draupadi's rejection at her birth signifies female infanticide. Drupad named the boy Drishtadyumna meaning the destroyer of enemies and her, Draupadi meaning the daughter of Drupad. The name given to her signifies women as second sex.

The novel is narrated from the perspective of Panchaali, a princess who is born from fire. Her brother Dhari is also born in this way as well. They dwell in a world where celestial beings and the supernatural are commonplace. Panchaali grows up in the palace of her father King Drupad who wants to seek revenge on his nemesis Drona. When Panchaali was young, the sage Vyasa foretold that Panchaali would become a great and powerful queen married to five husbands. However, Sage Vyasa claims that Panchaali will be the cause of great destruction in her kingdom. Throughout Panchaali's life the god Krishna acts as a guide and confidant to Panchaali.

When Panchaali attains teenage years; King Drupad hosts a competition to find her a husband to be married. Karna a great warrior is initially the only one who passes the contests archery test, but Panchaali humiliates him by asking who his parents are. Though he cannot answer her question she harbors romantic feelings for him. Karna walks away humiliated. One of the Pandava princes Arjun steps in and wins the contest. Panchaali travels home to Arjun's family. His mother Kunthi insists that Panchaali marry the remaining four Pandava brothers. The Pandavas went into hiding after their cousin Duryodhan, tried to kill them in a fire.

After Panchaali gets married to the Pandava brothers, King Bheeshma split their kingdom between the Pandavas and the Kauravas the latter of whom are led by Duryodhan. The Pandavas build up the flourishing city of Indra Prastha and take up abode in the Palace of Illusions a magical structure that Panchaali grows to love. During a visit to the Palace of Illusion Duryodhan falls down into a pool and Panchaali's attendant starts laughing at him causing him humiliation. The next time the Pandavas visit Duryodhan Yudhishthira the oldest Pandava, bets away the Pandavas palace and freedom in a game of dice. As a result, Duryodhan takes possession of the Palace of Illusions while Panchaali and her husbands are exiled to the woods for 12 years. During her exile Panchaali's sole focus is revenge.

The Pandavas after living in exile for 12 years go into hiding in a neighboring palace disguised themselves as a maid Panchaali disdain the advances of Prince Keechak who threatens to rape her. Panchaali and her husband Bheem murder Keechak. As a result of this violence the Great War breaks out between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Including Drupad Dhari and Karna many people who are close to Panchaali are killed in the war. After hearing of Krishna's death soon after the war, Panchaali's husbands decide that it is time for them to die and transition to the afterlife. Panchaali is united with Karna in heaven.

In this book, Draupadi not only continues to exist in the epic as a passive character but also develops into a symbol for contemporary women. In Duryodhana's court, where her husband gambled her away, Draupadi raises her voice. She argued with the court elders that once someone was sold as a slave, they had no right to bet on others, but she was wrong to believe that the laws of men would protect her. The novel's portrayal of the scenario serves to demonstrate how the legislation, which was fair to all, would not be the same for women. The reader is presented with a society that gave up on women's rights as a result. Draupadi maintains her strength and demonstrates that she never submits to them by pleading for her dignity. She reinvents herself as a strong woman who can fend for herself without the support of her husband. She never received a response to any of her inquiries in court. The conflict that resulted in the demise of the Kauravas was caused by her rage and desire for retribution for the dishonorable deed committed against her.

Conclusion:

Revisionist writing, The Palace of Illusion reexamines our perceptions of women's lives and the place women hold in society. Divakaruni has made it abundantly clear that Draupadi has been released from the shackles of perfection and what is commonly referred to as divinity. The personality of Draupadi trusted that no guys will safeguard her from hopelessness like most ladies. They assist themselves by locating and resolving issues. By resetting themselves in opposition to conventional agreements, they rewrite the destiny of womanhood.

Human civilization has historically been patriarchal or male dominated. How they have been able to give decisions on the actual time, how they have been able to raise the family in the absence of their better halves these women are actually bold enough to become an exemplary in the society. The domination and subjugation of women is clearly seen in the text. But in spite of the discrimination and suppression women have come up with their potent personality. Challenging the patriarchal norms and values of the society the women have proved themselves as not less than their male counter parts. They are able to create an identity of their own while rejecting the norms and values that have always marginalized the women.

The contemporary issues of identity, marginalization, and discrimination faced by women in patriarchal societies are brought to light by this revisionist literary work. This is demonstrated by a mythical character. The Mahabharata made no mention of Draupadi's character in any way. Draupadi does not have a voice, a choice, or an identity of her own in the original text; however, Divakaruni brings all of these aspects to light and gives life to the character of Draupadi, who stands as a person who has unwavering courage and the strength to stand in any situation. We can observe her bravery in The Palace of Illusions, where she demonstrates her determination to demonstrate to the world that each woman possesses a distinct identity and to question existing restrictive laws. Divakaruni asks questions and says that Draupadi's marginalized character is a symbol for how the male-dominated society doesn't understand women's pain and feelings. It opens up new possibilities and imaginations in the world of literature by giving the silenced a voice and space. It brings attention to the underappreciated female character in the Epic.

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