



The Illusionary World And The Reality In *The Palace Of Illusions*

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The novel *The Palace of Illusions* is an extremely engrossing story of Draupadi, who is an embodiment of strength and sacrifice. The paper examines the illusion and the reality in the novel. The novel is the retelling of epic Mahabharata from the feminist view. Draupadi, who is the mouthpiece of the novelist, posed a strong role. The story is about the epic Mahabharata, which is a bundle of lessons and learning for the whole mankind. The feminist perspective is also discussed in the paper, that how patriarchy portrays the objectification of the women. Draupadi is also treated as a possession in the game of dice and how she is easily won by Kauravas. The humiliation and the violence that is faced by Draupadi are similar to the violence faced by women of contemporary times.

Keywords: patriarchy, illusion, reality, epic, conspiracy.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an acclaimed author, poet, and professor. She is known for her unique style and dramatic storytelling. The ease with which she blends the character with reality is commendable. She was born and brought up Kolkata, India, and later moving to the United States for higher studies. Her transition from India to America reflected experiences in her works. Divakaruni is a versatile writer who writes novels and stories, exploring the theme of identity, diaspora, feminism and others also.

The Palace of Illusions is a retelling of the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. The book chronicles Draupadi's childhood friendship with Krishna, her marriage to the Pandavas and eventual exile. Chitra Banerjee portrayed Draupadi as a strong woman who questioned the society and her husband(s) for her humiliation. She is having a strong connection with Lord Krishna whom she considers as her best friend. The illusionary world of Pandavas is shattered when conspiracy is planned against them and sent to exile.

The reality in the novel is shown as the rift between Panadavas and Kauravas. The animosity between them is clearly seen when they humiliated the women of their own clan. Kauravas have a strong feeling of hatred among them and that is why every time they make conspiracies. Moreover, Divakaruni exploration of themes such as love, power, and destiny add depth and resonance to the narrative. Through Panchaali eyes, readers are offered profound insights into the human condition, prompting reflection on the nature of identity, duty, and sacrifice.

The novel is centrally revolving around Draupadi who eventually emerges as a character of woman. Right from her birth to marriage and exile all the stories reveal that she is a woman with high hopes and desire. Although, she was born and brought up like a queen from childhood, yet she got mastery in all the arts. Her father groomed her like a strong headed woman. Her father arranged a huge 'swayamvar' for her where she chooses her husband. She rejects Karan in that 'swayambar' because of her caste. This is the reason the animosity start between Kauravas and Pandavas. After selecting Arjun, she got married to him and bare farewell to her parents. When Arjun told his mother that, "Ma, come and see what we have brought home today." The mother says that "I can't come right now, otherwise the food will burn. But as always, whatever you brought should be shared equally amongst all my sons."(106). This is how Draupadi got married to all of the Pandavas. Women are also considered the property of their husbands and must obey them unflinchingly.

When it is time for Panchaali to marry, she has no say in the matter. Instead, she must respect the results of the swayamvar, a contest that her father sets up to determine her husband. When Panchaali learns that she will be married to five husbands, she says, "Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it or not" (120). Here, she is little more than an object of comfort and pleasure for men. Thus, her community consistently removes agency from women and reaffirms their position as second-class citizens.

Pandavas built their own Indraprastha which is a magnificent work of art. The palace is an exemplary work of art where it is full of illusions. And when Dhuryodhan came and visited Indraprastha, he fell into the water giving him the illusion of the floor. On this Draupadi who is watching all this remarks, "blind son of blind father". These words left Dhuryodhan with a sense of embarrassment and then he decided to take revenge from Draupadi. After this incident Dhuryodhan along with his maternal uncle, Shakhuni planned a conspiracy against the Pandavas. The game of gambling is then decided and all the Pandavas were invited for that. The trick in inviting them was that the dice will give them number which is in their (Kauravas) favor. By knowing this Shakhuni will win the game and in turn resulted in the defeat of Pandavas. This This whole plot was executed and also when Pandavas were playing they lost all their property and at last they, also lost Draupadi in gambling. The feeling of retribution, hatred and animosity

grew between the two groups. The rivalry between these Kauravas and Pandavas resulted in the battle of Mahabharata.

Women here are considered as the sole property of their husbands. Panchaali was given a choice to freely choose her life partner through swayambar. Panchaali's after her marriage to views five husbands says, "like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it or not (120)." These lines reflect the subaltern status of Panchaali. Many Feminists were of the view that Draupadi was treated like a commodity in the hands of man, who is having no choice of her own. Feminists argue that women need to break these shackles of slavery and set themselves free. The condition of Draupadi is like that of a caged bird that was set free but with a thread around her. In *Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi is neither shameful of her desires nor for her sexuality. Her body was in control of her husband but not her mind. Divakaruni's Draupadi writes herself and her body and reveals her own sexual desires and fantasies. She reveals her love towards Arjun and her desire to have Karan.

To conclude, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions* can be taken as a text which challenges the authority of power, exercised on women through masculine literature by creating this literature as 'reality' and 'truth'. This novel tries to change this process of execution of power, by revealing the structures of power and by creating a new 'reality' and 'truth' in which even women have their say through the process of constant interrogation or dialogism. Also, the novel critically examines the illusions and the reality. For example, the palace is itself an embodiment of illusionary world. Secondly, the relationship between Kauravas and Pandavas are not that good. The bitter relations and animosity between these two is a reality. Draupadi's love for Karna is true and not an illusion. Although, she fails to get Karna because of his caste system, yet she was happy. So, the novel is altogether filled with lots of illusions and reality.

Chitra Banerjee here presents the separations of power in the society. This rendition continues even today. The theme of gender equality in education, marriage evoke by the novelist. Draupadi, a woman born from fire her way to draw her life. She never thinks normally. But in other words Draupadi thinks simple and normal just like other men and women. The problem of gender inequality is the major theme of the novelist. Either the woman is passive or she doesn't exist. Novelist here forcefully raises the issues that in our philosophy or culture, woman are always on the side of passivity.

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