

## Re-Touching the Image of Draupati in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's the palace of illusion

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### Abstract

The main female character of the novel *The Palace of illusion* was oppressed and denied justice in this research paper. She was primarily oppressed. This research will answer the question of how Draupati struggles against image assassination in society and in some early texts. Mythological retellings have explored those issues of the epics which were submerged in the objective representation of events. Redefining the existence of the epic characters, these revisionist writings have presented events from alternate perspectives. Contemporary mythological retellings seek to demystify the dominant ideologies and, for this purpose, have brought to the fore the overlooked characters. The perspectives of the women characters are often overlooked in epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, while the objective depictions of the events cannot provide the required space to explore their psyches. A great many contemporary mythological retellings focus on the lives of the women characters of the epics, presenting the events from their perspective to explore those aspects of the 'truth' that have been overlooked in the originals. The purpose of this study is to analyze the situation of these women in the text from their point of view. These women have been major sufferers in terms of their freedom, their rights, their individuality, and sexual harassment. In order to bring the issues of women into the limelight, *The Palace of Illusions*, authored by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, was selected. The novel depicts the situation of women in the ancient period. Throughout it, we see how courageous women really are and how determined they are to live a happy life, while enjoying their fundamental rights in the process. Moreover, an examination of a sample of book reviews of the novel reveals the important contribution of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to the presentation of women as powerful, courageous, and determined beings who are able to change history.

**Key Words:** Oppression, patriarchal, myth, women, feminism,

## Introduction:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* is a retelling of the great Hindu epic Mahabharata that is based on Indian mythology. The plot that the novel carries isn't different from the original. However, the narration made by a female character has made it a unique presentation of the story. Instead of choosing any male character as a protagonist in the novel, the writer has come up with a female character, giving the readers a different approach to looking at the already-known story of the great Hindu epic. Noted for the narration that is made from a female perspective, the project focuses on a feminist reading of the text. Divakaruni's character retelling of the modern version of the Mahabharata is noteworthy, as she has been able to bring a compelling protagonist to her creation. The retelling of the original is apt for the modern day, as it has been able to do justice to the female character the novelist has come forth with. Written in first-person narrative, the writer has given spaces for her female characters to come forward and narrate their personal experiences in their stories. Abundant spaces given to females in the novel make the readers feel that the presentation of an already-known story written with a feminist approach is more appealing while giving them a space to think about it through the lenses of feminism. Despite the fact that she presents Draupadi as a major cause of the destruction of the Third Age of Man (Dwarapa Yug) and refers to her as a Kritya-one who brings doom to her clan, her magnificent lenses present her central female character with a diverse perspective. Her female character is bold, confident, and determined to achieve the desired goal in her life. She is able to create a history that one remembers even years later. Divakaruni has given a strong role to the women in her story. The females presented in her story aren't submissive or meek. Neither are they subservient. They are bold and are change makers. They are determined and are achievers. They are presented as equals to the males in society. This approach by the author gives one an opportunity to safely argue that *The Palace of Illusions* is a feminist reading of the Mahabharata.

Literature can be classified into two categories. There is informative literature and imaginative literature. Informative literature provides a great deal of facts, explanations, history, and so forth, whereas imaginative literature revolves around the emotions and feelings of human beings. Stories from history and their historical characters are always an integral part of an Indian upbringing. According to the modern world, women were the chief

supporters of a rich oral tradition of story-telling through myths, legends, and folklore. A lot of Indian female novelists have looked at female subjectivity to create an identity independent of a patriarchal culture. The 1990s saw the rise of several Indian women novelists, whose works exposed the real conditions of Indian society and the way in which women were treated. Since these authors were born after India gained independence, they have no colonial ties to the English language. Their work is distinguished by a remarkable command of the language and an accurate portrayal of modern India with all of its regional nuances.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni makes a great effort in balancing the portrayal of the epic character Draupadi in depicting the conscious and physiological aspects of her mind that lay submerged in the epic, the Mahabharata. A pivotal figure in the Mahabharata is Draupadi, who plays a pivotal role in the story of the nation. There are very few details written about her in the Mahabharata, which makes her one of the least-known figures. The valor of Arjuna, the righteousness of Yudhishtira, the strength of Bheema, the cunningness of Shakuni, the sacrifice of Ekalavya, and the tragedy of Karna are all things we all know about, and much has been written about these characters. But Draupadi, the woman with five husbands, the woman who would not tie her hair till they were washed with the blood of Dusshasana? What about her? This book tells Draupadi's story, in Draupadi's words, through Draupadi's eyes. Divakaruni's book is coordinated for ladies, all things considered, who share a typical female encounter. Every one of her courageous women should wind up within the differentiating limits of their culture and religion.

*The Palace of Illusions* is a retelling of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, from a female character's perspective. The title, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), refers to the Pandavas' palace at Indraprastha, built by the Asura architect Maya. *The Palace of Illusions* is a woman's saga. It's the story of a young girl who grows up with the illusion of grandeur about the world disappearing after her marriage to her five husbands. Here, Panchali is portrayed not as a queen but as a lonely woman caught in the web of fate interwoven around her. Panchali has been portrayed as a negative character in Hindu mythology. It is a belief that due to her self-esteem, a war was happening and was considered to be doom in her society. But Chitra Banerjee moves forward to bring her into the light of a positively good character packed with many sorrows in her mind. She exposes her as a powerful, strong, and independent woman who is equal to the men around her. She depicts that Panchali leads her

in choosing herself but not other patriarchal societies. The novelist has given a strong role to the characters and highlighted to them that they are equal in society. Draupadi is one of the leading female characters in the Mahabharata. She is the daughter of King Drupada and the wife of five Pandavas. She is also called Panchali, as she is from the kingdom of Panchal. The other name for her is Yajnaseni, meaning she was born from a Yajna, or fire sacrifice.

Sairandhari is the other name for an expert maid, as she worked as a hairstylist for the queen of the Virat kingdom during her second exile. Draupadi has been described as one of the most accomplished heroines of the Mahabharata, as well as being one of the most suffering, sacrificing, and yet misunderstood characters. There is still stigma attached to the name Draupadi, as people in society are often contemptuously referring to her as the woman who brought about the greatest war in history as the reason for her suffering. Draupadi is the common wife of the five Pandavas brothers and the queen of Hastinapur. She was born from the fire sacrifice of the king of Panchal, Drupad. Arjuna (one of the five Pandavas) disguised as a Brahmin wins her in the Swayamvar, but she is compelled to marry all five brothers on command of her mother-in-law, Kunti. Though Panchali loves Karna, she does insult the Kaurava Karna in the Swayamvar. I don't wish to have a family with him. She felt that Karna was not from the royal family, and so she chose Arjuna. She insulted and played a role in general against Karna in the Swayamvar. But fate played a role in her life when Arjuna introduced her to his mother when she was at work, and she replied to share it with his brothers. This made the panchali be shared by the Pandavas. She insults the Kaurava and Karna in the Swayamvar. The Kauravas take revenge when the eldest brother, Yudhisthira, loses her to the Kauravas in a game of dice. Dushashan tries to disrobe her in a royal court; however, God Krishna stays with her dignity by making her wrapped in cloth infinite in length. Draupadi pledges to keep her hair untied till they are drenched by Dushashana's blood and mocks her husbands and all those present in the court. The Pandavas and Draupadi finally accept thirteenth years of exile for losing the game. While in exile in the thirteenth year of exile, Draupadi and her husbands spent life in disguise in Virat's court. She became the maid of a queen after living in exile. A war breaks between the Kauravas and Pandavas, in which the Kauravas are slain and her insult is avenged, but Draupadi also loses her father, brother, and sons. Yudhisthira became the emperor of Hastinapur, with Draupadi as the chief consort. At the end of their lives, Draupadi and her husband set off to the Himalayas for heaven. Here, Draupadi falls in the middle, as she loves Arjuna more than her other husbands.

Bheema is the most devoted lover and husband of Panchali compared to others. When Kunti, the mother-in-law of Panchali, revealed that Karna was also her son, she was very shocked and disappointed when Karna was lost on the battlefield. When Panchali's life comes to an end, Krishna appears to her and reveals that he is the Almighty. After the war, when all die, their souls reach heaven, whereas the soul of Panchali joins Karna's soul. She is acclaimed as a village goddess and depicted at times as an avatar of the fierce goddess Kali or the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi.

Draupadi questions the terms of the myth that records her existence. She wishes to give an authentic account of her life, which would completely question and constantly challenge the previous constructions of her life. All that she requires now is an account of history that will truly represent her and articulate her real life. So she decides to narrate her own version of the story, which, according to her, is the most authentic. Identifying her father's palace with a prison house, she expresses her wish to create a different reality that will cancel out the melancholy of her real existence. A shawl of iron would settle around my shoulders as the feeling of dejection would settle like a shawl around my shoulders, as I stared down from the room at the bare compound stretching below. When I had my own palace, I promised myself it would be totally different. I closed my eyes and imagined a riot of color and sound birds singing in mango and custard apple 85 orchards, butterflies flitting among jasmines but I could not yet imagine the shape that my future home would take. Would it be as elegant as crystal? Solidly precious, like a jewel-studded goblet? Delicate and intricate, like gold filigree? There was only one thing I knew, and that was that it would reflect the deepest aspects of my being. As soon as I reach the Palace of Illusions, I will feel as if I am at home" (The Palace of Illusions, p. 7).

At this point, one can identify the palace in which Draupadi lives with the previous versions of Draupadi story, which are both belittling and stifling. Draupadi's desire to have a palace of her own can be seen as her wish to have a story of her own, a story of her life that does not stereotype her. The outlook of Draupadi in the novel begins with Panchaali's almost obsessive interest in her life's story: Through the long, lonely years of childhood, when my father's palace seemed to tighten its grip around me until I couldn't breathe, I would go to my nurse and ask for a story. I think I liked it so much because it made me feel special, and in

those days, there was little else in my life that did. (*The Palace of Illusions*,). Throughout the book, King Drupad makes it very clear that as a father, he acted in accordance with the rules of Manu, protecting and caring for Draupadi in accordance with his duties as a monarch. This protective care Draupadi finds suffocating (I couldn't breathe, *The Palace of Illusions*).

The construction of self-identity through an appropriation of interpretations In the case of Draupadi, all the previous versions of her story have been "constructionist accounts," which served the cause of patriarchal hermeneutics. That is why she attempts to turn the apparently complementary male narrations into conflicting female narrations, which bring out the tensions the male narrations seek to smooth over. An illustration of this can be found in the novel when Draupadi is interrupted by Dhri in her narration of her father's story. She stops to allow Dhri to take over: "Having shaped our father's motivations the way he wished them to be, he was willing to let me tell the rest" (*The Palace of Illusions* 17). By the simple act of recording this happening, Draupadi manages to transform her seeming involvement into confrontation. She raises doubts about the authenticity of Dhri's story. By opening up the gaps in Dhri's narrative, she prepares the ground for establishing a self-identity through self-interpretation. It is also remarkable that Divakaruni's novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, is also known as Panchaali's Mahabharata. As the sutradhari, who plays the lead role, Draupadi wants to freely sing the song of her life, which is colorful, intricate, and multivalent.

### She says:

"I'd played a crucial role in bringing them to their destiny. I'd shared their hardship in Khandav. I'd helped them design this unique palace that so many longed to see. It would be like if the pearls were strung on gold wire, and I was the gold wire that strung them on. Alone, they would have scattered, each to his dusty corner." (*The Palace of Illusions*, 151).

Divakaruni's novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, creates the impression that, among all the versions of Draupadi's story, this one is the most authentic because Draupadi herself narrates and enacts the story of her life seemingly without an authorial imposition. She brings into the frame of her narrative Vyasa, the author of the first version of the Mahabharata story, to suggest that there could be two authors operating in tandem to bring out the most authentic version. Desiring to change the course of history, Draupadi's *Palace of illusions* will become



the focus of both domestic and political activity. This palace, which has already been seen as her telling of her life's story, will artistically and significantly respond to other versions of the same story. This concern is because Draupadi does not want either a sanitized version or a distorted version of past events.

"Were the stories we told each other true? Who knows? At the best of times, a story is a slippery thing. Perhaps this is the reason that it changed with each new telling of the tale. Or is that in fact the nature of all stories, the reason why they hold such power, that makes them so compelling?"  
(The Palace of Illusions, 15).

Draupadi considers herself specially selected. It is absolutely ironic that the role of Dhristadyumna, whose birth is celebrated by King Drupad because he is born with a mission to destroy the king's archrival Drona, is rendered almost unimportant when compared to that of Draupadi. For Draupadi, the only way to put an end to the dreadful monotony of her existence is to listen to the tale of her life and to believe that her birth is as significant as that of her brother's. She wants to be an agent of action because she wishes to redefine the role of a woman in the context of her life.

**She says:**

What exactly is the purpose of a woman if the highest purpose she is to fulfill is to support her husband? I would wager that it was a man. I plan on doing other things with my life. (The Palace of Illusions, 26).

This assertion brings to light Draupadi's purpose to script her own destiny and not be captive to various belittling constructions of herself. Being the driving force behind action, she not only decides the course of action but also forces others to face the consequences of their actions. In Divakaruni's novel, Draupadi presents herself as someone who will happily take over the reins. Earlier, Draupadi was portrayed mostly negatively in Hindu society. Many believe that it was her stubborn actions that brought about the ruin, and she is known to be a *kritya*, one who brings doom to her race, but Divakaruni moves away from such interpretations to present a new viewpoint of Panchali. Divakaruni portrays Panchali as a

powerful, strong, and free woman, an equal to the men around her rather than submissive or oppressed.

Draupadi pondered her own existence as a woman in their society. "I'm a queen, a daughter of Draupad, a sister of Dhrishtadyumna, and the mistress of the greatest palace in all of creation. In my opinion, I cannot be gambled away like a bag of coins or summoned to court like a dancing girl" (Divakaruni 190). Through these words, Draupadi was not only expressing her own resentment for the injustices done to her, but indirectly, she was also highlighting the plight of those women who didn't belong to the royal families, because if even her royalty could not save her dignity, then what would women of ordinary birth expect? When she decided to renounce her worldly life with the Pandavas, everyone around her, including her husbands, advised her to stay back. But Draupadi had already made up her mind about that, and she became the first woman to attempt this. Draupadi once said, "The more people tried to dissuade me, the more determined I became to succeed.". There is no doubt that rebelling against the boundaries society has prescribed for women has always been my problem." (Divakaruni 343) Draupadi knew very well that, besides Yudhishtira, all of them would die on the mountain, but as a strong woman, she had never learned to fear death. What disturbed her during their journey through the Himalayas was the fear of failure. Because their failure to reach their divine destination would be considered a moral failure and not a physical one. At the last moment of her life, with Krishna's blessing, she got what she longed for throughout her life, and she said, "At his touch, something broke; a chain that was tied to the woman's shape crumbled on the snow below. I am buoyant, expansive, and uncontained, but I always have been so—only I never knew it! I am beyond name and gender and the imprisoning patterns of the ego" (Divakaruni 360). In this way, Draupadi had fulfilled her journey to freedom, and this freedom had rescued her true identity.

Patriarchal ideology defines women as inferior beings or the 'other' of society. Draupadi was also taught to live as the shadow of her husbands, which implies that she must stand behind her husbands in all circumstances, and she had to follow their every command blindly because they were her mentors and guides, and her duty was to obey their expectations and follow their path. But Draupadi, encouraging the Pandavas to stay on the path of courage, herself became their mentor and the source of their strength, and in this way, she played a vital role in intensifying the victory of justice. With her strong determination and indomitable courage, she reversed the prevailing belief regarding women's existence. By



influencing the Pandavas to stay on the path of dharma, she herself became their mentor and the source of their strength, and in this way, she played a vital role in intensifying the victory of justice.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that in *The Palace of Illusions*, Devikaruni has not only explored the unheard voice of Draupadi, but in the process has also recreated Draupadi's identity through this exploration. The way Divakaruni presented Draupadi's character well integrated contemporary issues related to women in countries like India into her portrayal of Draupadi's character was very clever. The issues related to women have not changed much till today even though Draupadi belongs to an ancient age and to a forgotten society, ironically, even though she belongs to an ancient age and a forgotten society. Our country is still fighting for the rights of women from different parts of the country and they still struggle for the education they deserve. The Palace Illusions by Divakaruni can also be seen as an attempt to criticize the baseless gender prejudices prevalent in our society due to the fact that it promotes the notion that the time for change has come.

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