

PORTRAYAL OF THE NEW DRAUPADI IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS*

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American writer. She was born and brought up in India but later on migrated to America. She is well known for raising women's issues in her novels like **The Mistress of spices, Sister of My Heart, The vine of Desire and the Palace of Illusions.**

Chitra Banerjee has beautifully presented the feminine sensibility in the novels. She has described women's struggles, their search for identity, marginalization, male domination, gender discrimination and unique female perspectives in ancient and modern times. **The Palace of Illusions** is steeling of the epic story **The Palace of Illusions** is retelling of the epic story **The Mahabharata** from a female point of view. The novel takes us back to the world of the famous Indian epic **The Mahabharata** a time that is half history, half myth and absolutely magical. While the mythological story has a huge plot and the Kurushetra war between pandavas and Kauravas is at the centre, Divakaruni make a twist in the original tale and place Draupadi at the centre of her narrative, she is called Panchali, the daughter of Drupad, the king of Panchal. The novel is written in first person and Panchali is the narrator of her own story. The novel starts with the birth of Panchali and ends with her death is the story of the life of Draupadi, one of the most celebrated women characters of the great Indian epic and the especial thing is that she herself narrates what happened in her life' thus giving a new interpretation of the ancient tale.

Divakaruni recreates the narrative and makes it entirely feministic. She is a modern woman writer who questions the stereotype presentation of women in literature. Sita, Savitri, Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi – all have been depicted as ideal women who would sacrifice themselves completely for the sake of their male – counterparts. Divakaruni was not satisfied with this kind of portrayal of women in mythology. She opined, "I was lift unsatisfied by the portrayal of women characters....The remain shadony figures, their thoughts & motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heores, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers and sons. If I ever wrote a book.... I would place the women in the front of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits." And this what she does in the present novel. She presents Draupadi as a strong woman is possessed with a great sense of self – esteem and dignity and who can raise her voice against all the injustice and humiliation done to her.

Draupadi is extremely beautiful, thoughtful and intelligent, she is not a woman who suffers silently within herself and does not utter even a single word. The opening chapters of the novel present draupadi's obsession with her origin and introduce her as an awakened woman who revolts against all kinds of misconceptions spread against women when the tutor is teaching her and says "Women who are the path

to ruin," Draupadi tells" I resented the tutor's declaration that women were the root of all the world's trouble.

Similarly when her tutor told her brother to inform her that "A Kshatriya woman's highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in her life" She feels deeply hurt. She questions her brother "Who decided that woman's highest purpose was to support men"? The brother replied that is what I's like you to do". This reveals that nobody cared for women's education in those times and women were expected to do what men wanted them to do. Their only duty was to take care of their husbands and follow their footprints. Divakaruni conveys that in the male dominated society women were taken as slaves by men to obey their commands without any complaint.

Draupadi, through swayamvara, selects Arjun as her husband; she has all the traits to be a good wife & true companion to Arjun. Without knowing anything about the matter, Kunti asks her to marry all her five sons. Draupadi was waiting for Arjun to stand up and speak for her but nothing like that happens. Draupadi was burning with fury and anguish as that was a victim of polyandry, but she keeps quiet and suffers within herself.

After getting married to the five Pandava brothers, Draupadi had to face unusual struggles in her life. She is helpless but maintains her grace and follows the moral and ethical values of Indian society. Draupadi's greatest misfortune falls upon her when she is gambled away by her husband and lost to the Kauravas in the game. The famous Vastraharan incident in the court of Duryodhan is the most testifying & traumatic incident in her life. Draupadi raises her voice against the insult & for torture thrust upon her, she pleads & then questions her elders in the court that once a person was sold as slave, they had no right to wager others, but was mistaken to discover that the law of men would not save her because she's a woman. Draupadi is a powerful woman who raised the issues of women's rights & justice. She stays as a strong person and shows that she never lowers herself by begging for her dignity. Her anger and revenge for the shameful act against her caused the Great War to Kurukshetra which ended in the death of the Kauravas.

Divakaruni presents many other undiscovered dimensions of Draupadi's character. Draupadi is not only a story but a sorrowful woman also. Her secret love for Karna remains unfulfilled and caused pain in her heart at times. The novelist makes a certain amount of fiction into the archaic tale without destroying its original flavor. The new Draupadi falls in love with Karna whom she sees at her swayamwar. He is handsome, manly and respectful towards her. Everytime she sees him, she is charmed by his personality. She has a constant yearning for Karna. She says when she fell on the way to Himalaya that "Karna would never have abandoned me thus He would have given up heaven for my sake"(347). Till death Draupadi has special feelings for Karna & regrets not having expressed them to him.

Divakaruni's portrayal of Draupadi's relationship with Krishna – a mixture of friendship, faith and devotion is also unique. Shri Krishna is a companion, caretaker and guide from the beginning to the end of her life. Whenever, she was in trouble, thoughts of Krishna brought peace & comfort to her. On the most unfortunate day of her life, when nobody comes forward to help her, not even her husband's &

elders, she closes her eyes, calls Krishna in prayer and thus saves herself from the treacherous plan of her enemy. It is in her devotion to Krishna that she found salvation.

The Palace of Illusions has a new coloring added to the epic **Maharashtra** through which the novelist has given voice to the heroine Draupadi. The myth of her life has been revisited, restructured and retold from a female point of view. The focus is on the inner life of women as well as on the empowerment of women. In the original text Draupadi has no voice or identify of her own but Divakaruni presents Draupadi as a person of great strength and unshakable courage who faces all the challenges of life fearlessly. Divakaruni said in an interview: “women should always be strong – we hope we can be strong, but when we are not, there should be a space for us. For centuries, it’s okay for a man to do all kinds of things, but for women not so much.”

Divakaruni’s interpretation adds a humanistic touch to the story of Draupadi. The stereotypical concept of women is deconstructed and Draupadi emerges as a new woman who is independent, confident and daring enough to come out with her aspirations, frustrations and feministic assertions in her own terms.

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