

**MYTH AND MODERNITY: THE IMAGE OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FABRIC IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S NOVEL****Durgesh Mishra****Prof. Dr. Vandana Dubey**

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**ABSTRACT**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is regarded as one of the most important figures in Indian literature written in the English language. The Mahabharata, written by Vyasa, is retold in Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions*, which has a distinct personality all its own thanks to the author. Draupadi is the one who tells the story of the epic in Divakaruni's narrative. Not only does the novel invite criticism for the ambitious attempt that this poses on a formal and structural level, but it also provides insight into the interaction of gender and identity, particularly into the complicated construction of culture and myth that was already inherent in the original text. The subject matter of "*The Palace of Illusions*" includes discrimination against women, their battles, their identities, male dominance, distinctive female points of view, and the situation of women throughout the time period of "*The Mahabharata*." The humiliation that Draupadi went through is described in the epic as the trials that she faced throughout her life, illustrating how important it is for women to unquestioningly embrace the idea that tradition and culture should be followed. The perspectives that Draupadi has are completely unique in comparison to those that are held by regular women, and the results are just as influential as she is. The entirety of the book is dedicated to elaborating on her dogged tenacity and fearless spirit. It exerts its own allure and grip on the person reading it. The life of a woman has not changed at any point in time; rather, she has always been confronted with new problems and expected to respond in a manner that is appropriate to the circumstances. It demonstrates how a woman who was born a royal through hardships throughout her life. The study of the ways in which culture is produced and structured, as well as the ways in which it develops and shifts over the course of time, is referred to as Cultural Studies. This article is an earnest effort to investigate the collision of myth and modernity, which results in the emergence of a fresh appearance. It provides a fresh perspective on the voice of Draupadi as the author of the novel portrayed her in his work.

**Key Words:** *Myth, Modernity, Tradition, Culture, Identity, Gender, Humiliation.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is regarded as one of the most important figures in Indian literature written in the English language. The novel *The Palace of Illusions* written by Divakaruni is a retelling of Vyasa's *The Mahabharata*, and it has a distinct personality all its own. The subject matter of "*The Palace of Illusions*" includes discrimination against women, their battles, their identities, male dominance, distinctive female points of view, and the situation of women throughout the time period of "*The Mahabharata*." The embarrassment that was endured is an example of the difficulties that might be encountered in life. In the epic,

Draupadi's existence exemplifies how important it is for women to have unquestioning acceptance of the values of their traditions and cultures. The perspectives that Draupadi has are completely unique in comparison to those that are held by regular women, and the results are just as influential as she is. The entirety of the book is dedicated to elaborating on her dogged tenacity and fearless spirit. It exerts its own allure and grip on the person reading it. The life of a woman has not changed at any point in time; rather, she has always been faced with obstacles that she must overcome and respond to in a manner that is appropriate to the circumstances. It depicts the struggles that a lady who was born a princess through throughout her life. In the course of her life, Draupadi strives to dismantle traditional notions of what it means for a woman to be a woman. In this work, we make an honest effort to investigate how myth and modernity come into conflict with one another, giving rise to a new appearance. It provides a fresh perspective on the voice of Draupadi as the author of the novel portrayed her in his work.

The study of the ways in which culture is produced and structured, as well as the ways in which it develops and shifts over the course of time, is referred to as Cultural Studies. An creative and inter-disciplinary subject of research and instruction, cultural studies analyses the ways in which "culture" shapes and moulds human experiences, as well as everyday life, social relationships, and political power. Researchers in the field of cultural studies typically investigate the ways in which cultural practises are related to broader systems of power that are associated with or operating through social phenomena like ideology, class structures, national formations, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and generation. The field of cultural studies views cultures not as things that are unchanging, limited, stable, or distinct but rather as collections of behaviours and processes that are always interacting with one another and evolving. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's book "The Palace of Illusions" takes a contemporary look at the resurfacing of old myths and presents them in a new light. The retelling presents a blend of traditional mythology and the modernism of the contemporary world, which results in a message that is predictable both for those who are entrenched in the accepted traditionalism and for those who continue to be uprooted from the moral ethics of their own culture. Draupadi is portrayed in this book by Divakaruni as a modern lady with a desire to share her views and ideas with the rest of the world. By telling the narrative of love, betrayal, vengeance, battle, liberation, and friendship, Divakaruni has attempted to bring the past into the present in a manner that is distinct from how it is typically done.

The Mahabharata is a magnificent epic, and the characters chosen for this research are connected to it. However, they also have their own place in the social and cultural paradigm of the society. The author has made every effort to fill the gap that exists between tradition and contemporary in their writing. In addition to this, the book is important since it details earlier periods in the history of the nation of India. In spite of the fact that the book *The Palace of Illusions* is a mythological and historical novel, the author has managed to imbue the whole screenplay with a humane quality. On one level, it discusses the life histories of the Kaurava and Pandava families, as well as the complexities of their connection with one another. However, the author has examined those characters based on the lives of the average man, and he or she recognises the resistance. She has also researched the ways in which ancient traditional norms and rites are still influential in modern society and how they respond to the culture of the legendary past.

Divakaruni has examined the character of Panchali through the lens of the patriarchal worldview, which holds that a woman is inferior to a man in every facet of life and every sphere of endeavour. Every idea has some bearing on the course of her life. In the southern region of India, there is a common folk belief that states, "A

woman with long hair portends disaster for her husband." Even in modern times, it is considered attractive for young women in southern India to have shorter hair. It was expected of women to give their lives up for their future husbands.

The famous Indian epic known as The Mahabharata focuses almost entirely on male characters throughout its whole. Divakaruni gives Draupadi a voice in the mostly patriarchal culture that existed in Ancient India by depicting Draupadi's existence as a sequence of decisions that she took on her own rather than those that were made for her by the people in her immediate environment. Because of the unfavourable light in which Draupadi has been cast in the public debate, no one thinks it would be a good idea to name their daughters after her. These kinds of ladies have a reputation for being kritiya, which means they bring misfortune to their clan. However, Divakaruni has examined Panchali's personality with all of the enthusiasm and holiness that she could muster. Panchali is one of the strong and independent characters that she views as fighting for her freedom, and she sees herself as one of those characters. She expresses pride in who she is as a person and in her own abilities. It has been established that Panchali's character is a role-player who is defeated by his rival in a game of dice and thus loses her. After that, Panchali's adversaries made every effort to torment her by taking off her sari in an attempt to humiliate her. This harassment did not fall below the threshold of sexual harassment or abuse. No one offered her assistance or support in any way. As a result, this harassment is a manifestation of the dominance of men. When she continues to battle with the other players, she demonstrates that she possesses bravery. She is not the only character in the book that battles or makes sacrifices; the story also has other powerful characters like Kunti and Gandhari, as well as many more who all had the same goal of playing their role in an important manner. In the book, "The Palace of Illusions," there is a character named The character of Draupadi is not that of a lady who suffers silently from the confines of her own mind and is unable to voice her opinions. She reveals a powerful trajectory that is uniquely her own. Her initial influence was felt in the realm of education, but she was denied access to it since her brother was given higher importance. Her instructor instructed her brother to tell her that "A Kshatriya woman's ultimate duty in life is to assist the warriors in her life," and her brother was to deliver this message to her (26). Her schooling was ignored by both her father and her tutor. When she questioned her brother about the definition of a woman's ultimate purpose, she said, "Who determined that women's highest purpose was to assist men?" (26). in response, the brother said, "That is exactly what I want you to do."

This demonstrates that no one cared about the education of women, and that women were expected to do the roles that males want them to perform. Divakaruni makes an effort in this passage to describe an age-old custom that was followed by every lady in those eras, regardless of whether or not she was a queen. Women were not afforded the same opportunities for education as men since it was viewed as their job to care for their husbands and pray that they would meet a heroic end in war. It is understood that they have chosen to conform to the social norm and embrace their families via marriage. The term "swayamwara" refers to the practise of the bride and groom looking for each other. Draupadi was forced to participate in Swayamvara, despite the fact that both her family and Krishna had already promised her to Arjun. In order to satisfy her father's wish, she is compelled to submit herself to everything and everything that her father suggests. The author Divakaruni suggests that in this male-dominated society, a girl is nothing more than a plaything in the hands of her own family.

Because the attention was placed on the words and promises made to others, the sentiments or emotions that women experience are not given value. Men enslaved women and forced them to carry out their commands without providing any feedback. She was wracked with emotional torment on the inside. When Kunti requested Draupadi to marry all five of her sons, Draupadi did not express her feelings during the entire story. She was anticipating that Arjun would defend her against Kunti's proposal to marry all five of them despite the fact that they were already pledged to one another, but nobody objected to Kunti's statements. As a consequence, she finds herself a victim of the societal evil known as polyandry. At that time, many women were forced to participate in polyandry, therefore it was an everyday occurrence. The readers of this book get the sense that Draupadi, although continuing to play a supporting role in the epic, is ultimately elevated to the status of a metaphor for the figure of a contemporary woman in more recent times. In the court of Duryodhana, where Draupadi was gambling away her life after being abandoned by her husband, Draupadi raises her voice. She questioned the elders in the court that once a person was sold as a slave, they had no right to wager others' fates, but she was incorrect to realise that the rules of mankind would not save her from her predicament. The novel's retelling of the scenario, which serves as evidence that the law, even if it were applied uniformly to everyone, would still treat women differently, The reader is presented with a society that has given up on the rights of its female citizens as a result of this. Draupadi maintains her dignity while demonstrating that she is not willing to submit to anybody or anything, including pleading with them. She makes a conscious effort to transform herself into a strong independent woman who is not reliant on her spouse in times of crisis. She was ever given a response to any of the questions that she posed to the judge in court.

Her rage and the desire to exact retribution for the dishonourable deed committed against her were the driving forces behind the conflict that resulted in the deaths of the Kauravas. Draupadi played the role in The Palace of Illusions not only as a strong woman, but also as a sorrowful person who wishes to be with Karna, comparing her husbands with Karna, and always is apologetic for the insult that she threw on Karna's way during her Swayamwar. In other words, Draupadi was not only a strong woman, but also a person who wished to be with Karna. Draupadi will regret to her dying day that she did not tell Karna how she felt about him sooner, thus she will preserve a particular spot for him in her home. Her sentiments toward Sri Krishna are more akin to those of a friend at this point. From the very first act to the very last, Sri Krishna served as a companion, caretaker, and guide in all of the deeds. It's possible that this is what drew her to Sri Krishna in the first place. Karna is portrayed by Divakaruni as a sad hero since he possessed all of the necessary talents, yet he was unable to prevail over his adversaries, even the one who yearned for Draupadi's affection. He passed away as a result of being aware of every truth but being unable to respond to any of them or accept any of them. In the book, Kunti's character is depicted as the manipulative mother-in-law. Throughout the story, Kunti is shown to be concerned solely with the honour, fortune, and happiness of her children. It is possible to see it as a mother's love for her children, which she harbours despite Duryodhana's treachery. In every chapter of the book, Kunti plays the role of a domineering mother-in-law, never making an effort to comprehend the difficulties or emotions experienced by her daughters-in-law.

Divakaruni is an Indian-American woman novelist, who writes novels out of her very own understanding about the lives of women in an alien land like America. Her emphasis is mostly on Indian women, who struggle in the midst of the male-dominated society looking for their own particular genuine identity, which is fractured due to the cultural clash. Her women are simply the persons who adjust themselves as per the

necessities and the prerequisites of the others. However, this ought not to be considered that they restrict themselves just to the desires and wants of others. When the circumstances demand them as per the conditions, they have to overcome the battle for their rights and emancipation. In this specific situation, Divakaruni's *Sister of My heart* features the feministic approach and the idealistic belief system of two sisters, Anju and Sudha, who remain separate due to the standard traditions and social set up which push them ahead into their way of flexibility where neither patriarchy nor matriarchy control them. Divakaruni got the motivation to write this novel from her childhood recollections in which her grandfather used to tell her stories from the incredible Indian myths the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. While tuning into these sagas, she saw that women of these stories are more pulled into their contrary sex. They never get attached to their women partners. This idea has been used in a considerable measure to write a novel under the title *Sister of My Heart*. In fact, Divakaruni has endeavored to explore different avenues of relationship between women, where a woman turns into a heart of the other woman and without the one there is no importance and presence for each other.

“Self Revelation in Chitra Banerjee’s *The Mistress of Spices*” by P.Valli Deivanai discloses Tilo’s inner conflict of establishing self identity. Being Chitra Banerjee’s first and the most popular novel, it received many critical appraisals for its uniqueness and the fused narrative technique of prose and poetry using the literary device of magical realism. The author of the research article figures out the protagonist Tilo’s distinct identity from her birth to present. Being born with super natural power of fore saying she is named as Nayan Tara and when the pirates carries her away she is named Bhagyavathi and in the island she is named as Sarpakanya by the snakes and finally to become the mistress of spices she changed her name into Tilo meaning „life giver“. The article also criticized the test posed on Tilo to choose between her identity of saving people from their adversity and her love towards Raven (American) like an ordinary woman.

Vasigaran in his doctoral work titled “Cross-Cultural Experiences of the Indian Womanhood through a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective: A Study on the Select Works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni” presents the Cross-Cultural experiences viewed by Divakaruni in her short stories such as *Clothes*, *Silver Pavements*, *Golden Roofs*, *The Word Love* from the short story collection *Arranged Marriage* and the novels *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart*. The researcher attempts to bring out women’s misery in a patriarchal society stating “The ideal of the traditional, oppressed woman persisted in a culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husband, the Hindu goddesses Sita and Savitri, serves as powerful cultural ideals for women” and the cultural clash encountered by South Asian immigrant women. The research article “Reading Feminine Mysticism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Queen of Dreams*” by Wenying Xu maps the story of Mrs. Gupta and Rakhi and reveals Divakaruni’s feminine mysticism. Divakaruni diminishes the power of patriarchal society by centering the extra ordinary super natural elements of women through the characters of Mrs.Gupta and her daughter Rakhi. The representation of female deity in the reading of Pre historic period in the novel evidences feminine mysticism. The *Queen of Dreams* has strong Hindu cultural background delineating the tradition of worshipping female goddesses which is contrast to the contemporary gender practices of India that degrades the possibility of women empowerment. “In other words, in Hindu culture “the Goddess pervades the world and everything in it.... Beyond and above, within and without, nothing exists or stirs in the cosmos that is not infused with the power of Goddess” (1). The researcher in the article exemplifies the „Amaterasu“, the sun Goddess of Japan and many Greek Goddesses

parallel to the Hindu culture in the Prehistoric religious worship that promotes feminine mysticism in a patriarchal society. Divakaruni's feministic aspect is transparent in most of her works and in the Queen of Dreams, her abundance in incorporating super natural powers and potential to women characters indicates her contradiction to patriarchy.

The article named "Trauma and Repercussion in Golding's Lord of the Flies and Divakaruni's One Amazing Thing" written by Aparna Tiwari aims to compare and contrast similarities and dissimilarities in both the works. The article presents the elementary nature of trauma and its effects in human behavioral science instancing two novels that has similarities in imposing characters to struggle for life. The children in Lord of the Flies enter into an isolate island during an air crash and struggle to signal for survival and in One Amazing Thing, the nine characters from different parts of world trapped in the basement of Visa office during earthquake seeking for the rescue team to approach them, come together and form basis for the comparison with the theme of trauma which is a common factor in both the novels. In One Amazing Thing the story of the nine characters revealed to one another at the trauma of life or death discloses the lives of loss, guilt, betrayal and misdeeds that bring salvation to all the characters. Divakaruni features the psychological change and the behavior at the known end of a life that influences in revelation of own self and the realization of self identity.

Mahabharata, the great epic of India retold by Divakaruni in her novel The Palace of Illusions is advocated as a Postcolonial work of art by Ashalata Kulkarni in her article "Gender and Postcoloniality in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions". The article connotes the fact of gender discrimination after British rule in India as explored by the famous psychologist Ashish Nandi "According to him earlier to British rule Indian gender roles were much more fluid and flexible but after the advent of British the imperial ideology of superiority of male and masculinity brought in the change of increase in the Kshatriya mode of masculinity". The saga is written from the perspective of Draupadi by Divakaruni. The Postcolonial aspects of gender, race and colonial impact were the chief discourse of the article in which Draupadi reflects gender bias. Racial discrimination is often spotted in the ancient period where the great legend like Dronacharya in Mahabharata rejects to educate Ekalavya as he belongs to the tribes.

Raminderpal Kaur in his article entitled "Female Quest for Identity by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, with special reference to Oleander Girl" voices Divakaruni's prominence of female characters and their individuality in her novel Oleander Girl. The novel centers the lead character Korobi Roy who deserves everything which an ordinary Indian girl longs for but struggles to find her identity after becoming aware of her migration to America in search of her father and past history. The article "The Old Rules Aren't Always Right": An Analysis of Four Short Stories by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" by Felicity Hand analyses the four short stories *Affair*, *The Word Love*, *Doors*, *Ultrasound* from the short story collection *Arranged Marriage* in multiple context. Divakaruni's appeal to gross Indian women through her writings is explored by the researcher in the article. Especially Divakaruni voices out for the Indian immigrant women who suffers for their self identity in a patriarchal society. Felicity Hand signifies the term „Social Realism“ which is rooted in the select four short stories of Divakaruni. The article titled "Travelling across time: A Critical Analysis of *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming and Shadowland*" by P.V.L. Sailaja and N. Ramakrishna deals with the notion of travelling across different time and space zones. The trilogy of the conch series revolves around the magical conch hidden in the mountain folds of Himalayas and the adventures behind the attainment of conch by Anand, the protagonist of the series of three novels and the evil characters ways out for the incorporation

of dynamic theme by Divakaruni. Anand's time travel to past, future is described by Divakaruni by the means of fighting against the evil to locate all his missing friends and to protect the conch from corruption.

The review of the research articles and dissertations discusses various themes like alienation, feminism, patriarchy, cultural conflict, social realism, magical realism, self identity, incorporated by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as an eminent Indian diasporic writer. The research on the literary works of Divakaruni appeals her social contribution and the expression of personal experience to the world as the writer herself is an Indian born settled in America. The knowledge gap identified through the review is lack of criticism related to the men characters and societal provocation for the migration.

In the novel, *The Palace of Illusions* Draupadi's portrayal is not as a lady who suffers within herself and is not able to speak about her opinions. She pulls forth a powerful trajectory of her own. Her initial influence was on schooling which is not offered to her as her brother was given priority over her. Her teacher urged her brother to inform her that "A Kshatriya woman's ultimate function in life is to help the warriors in her life" (Divakaruni. 26). (Divakaruni. 26). Her father and tutor disregarded her schooling. When she questioned her brother "who determined that woman's ultimate role was to help men?" (Divakaruni. 26). The brother said that is what I'd like you to do. This indicates that nobody cared about the education of women and women were compelled to do what males wanted them to do. Here Divakaruni strives to bring forth the traditional practises of every lady of those ages whether she was a queen or a normal woman. Education was not given to women as for men since their responsibility is to take care of their husbands and to hope that they die with glory on the battlefield.

Marriage is considered as their decision to comply by societal rule and family acceptability. Swayamwara implies the practise of finding their own groom. Draupadi was exposed to Swayamwara, although she was already committed for Arjun by her family and Krishna. To achieve her father's goal she is obliged to devote herself to anything her father points out. Divakaruni conveys that in this male-dominated society, a daughter is a toy in the hands of her own family, the feelings or emotions of women are not given importance as the priority was on the words and promises given to others. Women were taken as slaves by men to obey their orders without any comment. She was burning with inner torment. In some instances Draupadi neglected to convey her opinions when Kunti requested her to marry all the five. She was expecting for Arjun to stand up for her against marrying all the five since they were devoted to each other but nobody complained against the statements of Kunti. Thus, she becomes a victim of a societal evil polyandry. In those times it was a regular phenomenon since many women were exposed to polyandry. In this tale we sense that Draupadi not only remains in the epic as a passive person but also rises up to become a metaphor for modern woman figure in current times. Draupadi raises her voice at Duryodhana's court when she was gambled away by her husband. She questioned the elders in the court that once a person was sold as slave they had no right to wager others, but she was incorrect to realise that the rules of mankind would not defend her. The depiction of the scene in the novel as it demonstrates that the law which was equal to all would not be same for women. This lays to the reader a society which relinquished the rights of women. Draupadi maintains as a strong lady and proves that she never lowers herself to them by pleading for her dignity. She re-invents herself as a powerful woman that is not reliant on her spouse in the hour of need. She ever obtained a response for any of her queries before the court. Her fury and retaliation for the heinous deed against her was the motivation for the battle which culminated in the death of Kauravas. In *The Palace of Illusions*, we find Draupadi not only as a powerful lady but also a mournful person who aspires to be with Karna, comparing her husbands with Karna and constantly

feels remorseful for the insult that she flung on Karna's path during her Swayamwar. She claims that after she collapsed on the route to Himalaya, she thought to herself, "Karna would never have abandoned me in such a way... If it had been up to him, he would have willingly given up paradise for me (Divakaruni, 347). Draupadi will regret to her dying day that she did not tell Karna how she felt about him sooner, thus she will preserve a particular spot for him in her home. Her sentiments toward Sri Krishna are more akin to those of a friend at this point. Every step of the way, from the very beginning to the very end, Sri Krishna is accompanied by a caretaker and a guide. It's possible that this is what drew her to Sri Krishna in the first place. After meeting Draupadi, Karna, who is portrayed throughout The Mahabharata as an unfavourable character, is portrayed as a love-stricken individual. Their love for one another has been discussed, but from Draupadi's point of view, it has been discussed in a different way. In this book, Karna admits to his grandfather Bheeshma his feelings of attraction toward his brother's wife, Draupadi. This is a difficult part to accept because Bheeshma was Karna's grandfather, and it is against the law for a man to express his feelings for his brother's wife.

## Conclusion

Divakaruni's female characters learn about love, sorrow, and yearning via the sour experiences that come from the world they fight for. Scriptures are so firmly embedded in the assumptions that govern our cultural practises that it is impossible to dispute or overthrow them easily. Divakaruni's female characters learn about love, sorrow, and yearning via the sour experiences that come from the world they fight for. Scriptures are so deeply ingrained in the assumptions that underpin our cultural practises that it is difficult to criticise or overturn them. Panchali is given a new voice by myth and history, which inverts the way she is positioned according to the prevalent sociocultural assumptions. A woman's mythical past cannot provide her with an ideal image or a definitive identity. It is necessary for her to have a separate address and identity. There are two addresses for the woman known as Panchali: the first is that she is the daughter of Panchal, a royal king of an Indian province; the second is that she is the wife of the Pandava brothers; it is considered an insult to someone if they call her Panchali. Panchali is the name commonly used to refer to her in both of these capacities. As a result, Panchali moves her identity from one place to another, but she is unable to firmly create her own horizon from which she might launch herself into the open air. Within the context of The Palace of Illusions, this is the issue that has been brought up. Myth, folklore, and history are the artefacts that convey knowledge from one cultural area to another. However, the significance of their role is amplified when they are used to depict modern civilization. They are the picture of the social and cultural fabric of the society as a whole, and they represent it. People decipher the meanings by using the text that has been created inside the cultural scripts in question. Divakaruni has not only deciphered the meanings of the signals and symbols, but she has also enacted them with a humanistic touch. The myth and image of modern civilization are both embodied in the figure of Panchali. The female protagonists in the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are not inherently defiant people; rather, it is the situations, the surroundings, in which they find themselves that cause them to act out. Panchali is given a new voice by myth and history, which inverts the way she is positioned according to the prevalent sociocultural assumptions. A woman's mythical past cannot provide her with an ideal image or a definitive identity. It is necessary for her to have a separate address and identity. There are two addresses for the woman known as Panchali: the first is that she is the daughter of Panchal, a royal king of an Indian province; the second is that she is the wife of the Pandava brothers; it is considered an insult to someone if they call her Panchali. Panchali is the name commonly used



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