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**Draupadi : A new voice of Indian woman in ChitraDivakaruni's
'The Palace of Illusions'.**

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Abstract :

ChitraBanarjeeDivakaruni is one of the leading and most prominent Indo-American novelist, story teller and poet of the present time. Her literary work is mostly set in India and the United States which always focuses on the experience of South Asian immigrants. Her world of writing is so varied from children to adults and has published her novels in different genres which can be categorized of realistic fiction historical fiction, magical realism, myth and fantasy. Most of her work is based on mythology, i.e. Hindu mythology. She has tried and remained very successful to explore those Indian women who were deprived by the Indian male dominated society only because of they were women. In the present novel, 'The Palace of Illusions'.Divakaruni has once again tried to bring Draupadi, though mythical female character who is the cultural representative of Indian woman into a very different and new form, with a new voice which was unknown to the Indian society and the readers.

Key words : Feminism, myth, patriarchy, male domination, woman identity and its search.

The present paper is intended to know the voice and the status of Indian woman with reference to the world's greatest epic Mahabharata and the depiction of the major female character Draupadi i.e. Panchali in novel 'The Palace of Illusions'. As Mahabharata is a big source of a beautiful literature in almost all Indian languages. The same is found in other languages out of India. Mahabharata is an epic, and this epic is based on mythology i.e. Hindu mythology. Mahabharata is not only a mythic tale but a cultural heritage of India. It is a moral treasure of Indian society, the Indian way of life, the cultural way of life also it is a heritage of religious, political and ethical way of life. The complete philosophy of human life is hidden in this one epic. Both the epic and myth teach the human being how to live the life and also differentiate what is right and what is wrong. Mahabharata has a big contribution in Indian cultural tradition and Indian richness. Therefore it would not be surprising that many of the Indian writers, thinkers, philosophers used this treasure of India for their written and spoken expression in last near about 3000 years. Divakaruni also could not control herself from using such a big treasure for the writing of her novels. She could never remain blind herself from using this rich tradition of retelling the story of Mahabharata into her novels. 'The Palace of Illusions' is a novel in where Divakaruni has succeeded to retell the life story of the principal female character, Draupadi from a very different angle. Told in the first person Divakaruni's tale takes us through the epic in Draupadi's voice. From being born of the sacrificial fire to her strange, lonely childhood, her tricky marriage to five new with a persecution problem and a control freak mother, her own lovely home at last, and then the unbelievable traumas that follow that nobody should have to go through. Here in the novel, Draupadi is a woman who doesn't want to make herself as like a purse of gold, a winner can take in wrestling match. Draupadi is very different from all other depiction in literature and the epic itself. Divakaruni has presented Draupadi as a very confident, stubborn, courageous, strongwilled, faithful, honest and a woman who wishes to change the history.

Biologically, it is true that women can be the change maker of history. It will be no exaggeration that women can change the history without war and violence but with a calm thinking and love, while men try to change the history with war and violence. Draupadi's, voice in the present novel is like this who announces that she will change the history. Unfortunately the women are always subordinated, put into the second order from the mythological period to the present. It is universal truth that women is a real source of knowledge, wisdom and energy. If one has to find beauty in the world, then the beauty of the world lies in the woman only. But this truth was always neglected purposefully. Such a very significant element of human race had been always neglected and kept aside, and it is the biggest loss of human race. Divakaruni presents Draupadi from a very different angle with all positivism. At the time of swayanvar, the marriage of Draupadi, she shows her confidence, wisdom and her boldness also. Her wisdom is found when she learns the story of Gandhari and replies, "If my husband couldn't see, I'd make doubly sure to keep my own eyes open," I said "So that I could report every thing that was going on to him." It very clearly indicates how Draupadi, a common woman was aware of her duties as a wife. This is the new voice, Divakaruni gives to Draupadi and therefore '*The Palace of Illusions*' is a big justice to the most wise Indian woman. As it happened that in the epics *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* only the male heroes are glorified and the work and contribution of Female heroines is literally thrown out, not considered. What Divakaruni does in the present novel is that, she gives a new voice to Draupadi and consequently the Indian women, the change maker of history.

Myth is a unique writing style of Divakaruni. The novelist found in mythology and the epic *Mahabharata* a big source of writing. The only thing she did in the present novel, is that Divakaruni brought Draupadi in light with all her strength. To a creative writer, though the contemporary reality is the only authentic field of his activity for its perception and imaginative apprehension, myth has been a great source of creativity. It is because India is a limitless land of mythology. In the country like ours where there is not much of historical tradition, myth has become a powerful instrument of preservation of culture. Of course, Divakaruni like Indian writer took full advantage of this mythical resource to frame her novels. '*The Palace of Illusions*' though the novel is retelling of the great epic *Mahabharata*, is Draupadi's voice, which is a completely new voice of Indian woman who was utterly neglected in her all aspects. All the myths associated with Draupadi are found in this novel, beginning from the birth of Draupadi, who born out of fire, which is myth of birth. Most myths are instructive which teach human being a lot regarding how to live and act as a guide to social norms. Chitra Divakaruni uses all myths to present Draupadi in a very new form and new voice. Her marriage with five men is also one of the leading myths and Draupadi succeeds to handle all the men who were the heroes of her time. Here the courage and confidence is found and again the honesty and purity also is observed. Because Draupadi warns her five husbands how she will be a wife. She tells that she will be a wife of each man (Pandava brothers) for one year and in the course of that one year, remaining four men will not even touch her finger, will not look into her eyes even. What it shows, the purity and virginity of that Indian woman who adheres to herself. Here myth gives such a self confidence and inspiration to human to attain their goals.

This novel seems to have drawn equal amounts of flak and of admiration for its retelling of the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's point of view. The author has maintained the original plot of the epic and the only change is that of perspective. Some love it for feminism some hate for the same. But there is no taking away from the fact that Divakaruni is a masterful story teller in '*The Palace of Illusions*' and represents the voice of one of the epic's most complex characters. The novel is no doubt a fine expression of feminism, it is a voice from all the sides, the voice of an Indian woman. Draupadi, expresses very confidently and firmly her life with all good and bad experiences. Her

relationship with Krishna and Karna are the highlights of this work. '*The Palace of Illusions*' is read as the best feminist writing. The basic idea of feminism is told as feminism is that writing which speaks of the experiences of the life of women in general. When we apply this basic meaning of feminism, then the novel is a fine book of feminism. The first reason is that the major voice heard from the beginning of the novel to the end is the voice of Draupadi. She narrates her life story in a very confident and courageous voice. The novel traces the princess Panchali's life beginning with her birth in fire and following her spirited balancing act as a woman with five husbands who have cheated out of their father's kingdom. Panchali is swept into their quest to reclaim their birthright, remaining at their side through years of exile and a terrible civil war involving all the important Kings of India. Meanwhile, we never lose sight of her strategic duels with her mother-in-law, her complicated friendship with the enigmatic Krishna or her secret attraction to the mysterious man who is her husbands most dangerous enemy.

Panchali is a fiery female redefining for us a word of Warriors, gods and the ever – manipulating hands of fate. Here in this novel, a woman who has five husbands wished on her as she comes into this world from a fiery column is worth hearing, because a woman who maintains five husbands, and those all were the heroes of that time is not an ordinary thing, and again she keeps herself so pure after having sexual relationship which we find between husband and wife, with five husbands. In this respect Draupadi is so strict and firm, also who tells her five husband, that when she will be the wife of one husband the remaining four would not even touch her finger what I found very strong and confident is the voice of Draupadi in this novel. Because in such a male dominated, patriarchal society, Draupadi, an ordinary woman controls and governs her five husbands, that her five husbands do not break the boundary line which was marked by Draupadi. It is the wisdom and courage of that woman whose husbands were able to win the battle which was a decisive battle between Pandavas and Kauravas. Here Draupadi is found so dashing became when they return after 12 years of exile and the five Pandaves were declared the share of Karudynesty, the war become obvious. But it was Panchali who could stop that war. But the voice comes of Draupadi, '.... I didn't want to heed anything that might keep me from the revenge. I had waited it for so long'.

Divakaruni has expressed her feelings about Draupadi in her 'Author's Note' of '*The Palace of Illusions*' which clearly shows her way of presentation of Draupadi in her novel. In the note itself, Divakaruni has mentioned by which angle she is going to present Draupadi. The novel is but the voice of Draupadi. The author's Note is enough to understand how Divakaruni has to present Draupadi in her novel. Divakaruni writes in her Note, "Like many Indian children, I grew up on the vast, varied, and fascinating tales of the *Mahabharat*. Set at the end of what the Hindu scriptures term DvaparaYug or the Third Age of Man (which many scholars date between 6000 BCE and 5000 BCE), a time when the lives of men and gods still intersected, the epic weaves myth, history, religion, science, philosophy, superstition, and statecraft into its innumerable stories-within-stories to create a rich and teeming world filled with psychological complexity. It moves with graceful felicity between the very recognizable human world and magical realms where yakshas and apsaras, roam, depicting these with such exquisite surety that I would often wonder if indeed there was more to existence than what logic and my senses could grasp.

At the core of the epic lies the fierce rivalry between two branches of the Kuru dynasty, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The lifelong struggle between the cousins for the throne of Hastinapur culminates in the bloody battle of Kurukshetra, in which most kings of that period participated and perished. But numerous other characters people the world of the *Mahabharat* and contribute to its magnetism and continuing relevance. These larger – than- life heroes, epitomizing inspiring virtues and deadly vices, etched many cautionary morals into my child – consciousness. Some of my

favorites, who play prominent roles in *The Palace of Illusions*, are : Vyasa the sage at once the composer of the epic and a participant at crucial moments in the action; Krishna, beloved and inscrutable, an incarnation of Vishnu and mentor to the Pandavas; Bheeshma, the patriarch who, bound by his promise to protect the Kuru throne, must fight against his beloved grandsons; Drona, the Brahmin-warrior who becomes teacher to both the Kaurava and Pandava princes; Drupad, the king of Panchaal, whose desire for vengeance against Drona activates the wheel of destiny; and Karna, the great warrior, who is doomed because he does not know his parentage.

But always, listening to the stories of the *Mahabharat* as a young girl in the lantern – lit evenings at my grandfather's village home, or later, poring over the thousand – page leather-bound volume in my parents' home in Kolkata, I was left unsatisfied by the portrayals of the women, I wanted as though the epic didn't have powerful, complex women characters that affected the action in major ways. For instance, there was the widowed Kunti, mother of the Pandavas, who dedicated her life to making sure her sons became kings. There was Gandhari, wife of the sightless Kaurava king, who chooses to blindfold herself at marriage, thus relinquishing her power as queen and mother. And most, of all, there was Panchalli(also known as Draupadi). King Drupad's beautiful daughter, who has the unique distinction of being married to five men at the same time-the five Pandava brothers, the greatest heroes of their time. Panchaali who, some might argue, by her headstrong action helps to bring about the destruction of the Third Age of Man. But in some way, they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons.

If I ever wrote a book, I remember thinking (though at that time I didn't really believe this would ever happen), I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits. Better still, I would have one of them tell it herself, with all her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs, her heartbreaks, her achievements, the unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it. And who could be better suited for this than Panchalli?

It is her life, her voice, her questions, and her vision that I invite you into in *The Palace of Illusions*.

“ Despite an intrusive retrospective voice and sometimes heavy – handed feminism
Divakaruni's rich, action filled narrative contrasts well with the complex
Psychological portrait of a mythic princess-”

Publishers weekly.

‘*The Palace of Illusions*’ is a beautiful portrait of a voice of a bold, courageous,
and stubborn woman, Draupadi.

“ Occasionally the novel falls flat, decades and events flash by with mere
mention one suspects a result of compressing such a rich work into such
a small space - but Divakaruni mostly succeeds in creating an intimate,
feminine portrait that both contemporary and timeless.

Kirkus Reviews.

Conclusion :-

Thus ‘*The Palace of Illusions*’ is really a new voice of Indian woman, the voice is strong, confident, courageous, and most important faithful and affectionate woman. After having a big humiliation and insult, Draupadi remains unbreakable and unchangeable, unchangeable from the

principles of womanhood. It is a woman only who is always constructive in the big course of time, Draupadi proves herself the most constrictive. She remains a guide, a teacher, instructor, to all her five husbands and to the coming generations of woman. She not only fulfills her duties as a wife but actively participates in all the activities and actions of Pandavas. Her balancing act is indeed beyond imagination. It is DivakarunisPanchali who a becomes a role model for all coming Indian women. Divakaruni has beautifully presented such a mythic female character in the most contemporary time, that the Indian women will learn a lot from her, her thinking, her actions, her decision and all, if Indian women has to establish their place in such a male dominated society. It is true that though epic has made a big injustice to women, Divakaruni has given all justice to the most neglected mythical woman Draupadi.

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