



## CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI INTERWEAVED MYTHOLOGY AS CENTRAL THEME IN HER NOVEL “THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS”

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**Abstract :** Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American author who interweaves mythology in her works that often incorporate elements of storytelling and retelling of Mythological texts in her unique narrative way . In her novels and short stories, Divakaruni often weaves elements of Indian mythology, folklore, and cultural traditions into her narratives. Her writing style often involves exploring the complex interplay between mythology and contemporary life, presenting ancient stories in a modern context that resonates with readers from various cultural backgrounds. Her renowned novel "The Palace of Illusions" is a retelling of the Indian epic Mahabharata from the perspective of Draupadi, a central female character in the epic. This novel demonstrates her interest in bringing new dimensions to familiar mythological tales by emphasizing the voices and experiences of often marginalized characters. She likely sees mythology and folklore as potent sources of inspiration that continue to offer valuable insights into human experiences, relationships, and societal dynamics across different eras and cultures.

**IndexTerms -** Mythology, folklores, culture tradition, epic, familiar mythological tale, marginalized.

### I INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an acclaimed Indian-American author, is widely recognized for her powerful storytelling and her adept incorporation of mythology into her works. In her novel "The Palace of Illusions," Divakaruni expertly weaves mythology as a central theme, offering a captivating reinterpretation of the classic Indian epic, the Mahabharata, through the perspective of its often-overlooked female protagonist, Draupadi. Through her skillful narrative, Divakaruni reimagines the ancient tale, presenting Draupadi as a complex, multifaceted character whose struggles, desires, and strengths are vividly portrayed. Drawing upon the rich tapestry of Indian mythology, she intricately integrates elements of mysticism, divinity, and timeless moral dilemmas, creating a compelling tapestry that combines the essence of ancient legends with a contemporary, feminist perspective. Divakaruni's deft handling of mythology in "The Palace of Illusions" not only revitalizes this timeless story but also sheds light on the often marginalized roles of women in ancient epics, prompting a reconsideration of their significance and agency within traditional narratives. Through her profound exploration of Draupadi's experiences and emotions, Divakaruni invites readers to delve deeper into the complexities of human nature, power dynamics, and the enduring relevance of mythological themes in contemporary society. In "The Palace of Illusions," Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni delves into the rich tapestry of Hindu mythology and the epic of Mahabharata, reimagining the legendary tale through a feminist lens. The novel revolves around the character of Draupadi, a central figure in the Mahabharata and the wife of the five Pandava princes. Divakaruni skillfully intertwines various mythological elements throughout the narrative, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationships, divine interventions, and moral dilemmas that characterize this ancient epic. One of the key mythological aspects explored in the novel is the concept of dharma (duty/righteousness) and its complexities. Divakaruni portrays the challenges faced by Draupadi as she grapples with the expectations of her societal role and her own desires, highlighting the intricate interplay between personal agency and the demands of fate. The author also weaves in the theme of divine intervention, depicting the influence of gods and goddesses in shaping the destinies of the characters, thereby underscoring the complex relationship between mortals and the divine. Furthermore, Divakaruni's portrayal of the enigmatic character of Krishna, a pivotal figure in the Mahabharata, serves to highlight the intricacies of his role as a friend, philosopher, and guide to the Pandavas, including Draupadi. Through her nuanced depiction of Krishna, Divakaruni emphasizes the blurred boundaries between human desires and divine plans, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the philosophical and moral underpinnings of the Mahabharata. This novel also delves into the themes of love, sacrifice, and the consequences of ambition, exploring the multifaceted dimensions of human relationships and

the intricate balance between power and vulnerability. By intricately interweaving these mythological elements into the narrative, Divakaruni crafts a compelling and evocative retelling of the Mahabharata that resonates with contemporary audiences, inviting readers to contemplate the timeless wisdom and enduring relevance of these ancient mythological themes in the context of the modern world.

## II Literature Review

**Anjali Tripathy (2020)** wrote in her article "Queen of the Palace of Allusions" about to analyse how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's retells the myth of Draupadi as the true account of the woman chapter of the Mahabharat, or stree parva. An iconic representation of the pain and humiliation a woman experiences in a patriarchal society is Draupadi. Therefore, recounting her experience in an autobiographical style offers women's personal lives and their suffering a voice and representation. In my view, reimagining Draupadi's story and portraying her in the aforementioned work forces us to rethink and challenge conventional and archetypal notions of femininity in order to both demonstrate the possibility of new models of femininity and to offer resistance to the status quo.

**S. Jeevitha (2020)** analysed in her research paper entitled "Patriarchal Hegemony: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions" Indian epics, such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, are regarded as some of the best teachers of human existence. The renowned Indian epic The Mahabharata serves as the inspiration for Divakaruni's book The Palace of Illusions. The majority of the characters in the original epic are men, even though it covers nearly every human problem. The Palace of Illusions by Divakaruni explores the real-life circumstances of the ladies in the epic, clarifies the brutality of the human mind, and highlights historical heroines. Divakaruni decides to retell the Mahabharata in order to portray the status of women in a patriarchal culture. The retelling of the story by Divakaruni serves the noble goal of assisting her heroine Panchaali in her quest for justice for the ignominious deed, and Panchaali comes to life via her inquiries.

## III The Palace of Illusions as a Mythological Novel

Mythology serves several important purposes in human societies, both historically and in contemporary contexts. Myths often form the backbone of a culture's identity, helping to preserve and transmit its values, beliefs, and history across generations. They provide a sense of shared heritage and common origin, fostering a collective understanding of a community's past and present. Myths frequently contain moral lessons and ethical guidelines that help individuals understand societal norms and values. They often present narratives that illustrate the consequences of certain behaviors and choices, serving as cautionary tales or models for desirable conduct. Myths have historically been used to explain natural phenomena and events that were not understood by ancient civilizations. They provide narratives to make sense of the world, the cosmos, natural disasters, and the origins of the universe, offering an early form of scientific understanding before the advent of modern scientific explanations. Mythology can provide deep psychological and spiritual insights into the human condition, offering symbolic representations of universal experiences such as love, loss, heroism, and the struggle between good and evil. Myths often touch upon existential questions and offer frameworks for understanding complex human emotions and experiences. Myths have inspired countless works of art, literature, music, and other forms of creative expression throughout history. They provide rich narratives and archetypal characters that continue to influence contemporary storytelling, allowing for the exploration of timeless themes and universal human experiences. Myths contribute to the development of shared cultural references and symbols that facilitate communication and understanding within and across different societies. They provide common ground for people to connect, relate, and share experiences, fostering a sense of unity and interconnectedness.

*"I am Panchaali, born in fire, and I will not be tamed."* (Palace of Illusions)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions" is a reimagining of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, from the perspective of its key female character, Draupadi. The novel delves into the internal conflicts, emotions, and experiences of Draupadi, giving readers a deeper insight into her character and the events of the Mahabharata from her point of view. In the novel, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni connects mythology to "The Palace of Illusions" by retelling the story through a feminist lens, highlighting Draupadi's struggles, strengths, and vulnerabilities. She weaves the mythological aspects of the Mahabharata into the narrative, bringing out the complex relationships, political intrigues, and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. Through her narrative, Divakaruni explores themes such as power, gender dynamics, love, and the impact of war on individuals and society. By incorporating elements from the original epic, she stays true to the essence of the mythology while presenting it in a contemporary, accessible way, making the story relatable to modern readers. Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions" thus serves as a bridge between ancient Indian mythology and modern readers, allowing them to engage with the rich cultural heritage and timeless themes of the Mahabharata through a captivating and thought-provoking narrative centered around the character of Draupadi. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's choice to retell the story of the Mahabharata through the perspective of Draupadi in this novel is influenced by her desire to give a voice to the often marginalized female characters in ancient Indian mythology. The Mahabharata, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, is rich with complex characters and intricate storylines, but it is predominantly focused on the male characters and their exploits. By centering the narrative around Draupadi, Divakaruni seeks to offer a fresh perspective on the epic, providing insight into the thoughts, emotions, and struggles of a key female character who is often overshadowed in traditional retellings. Through Draupadi's voice, Divakaruni sheds light on the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society, exploring issues such as gender inequality, societal expectations, and the limitations placed on women in ancient Indian culture. In doing so, Divakaruni aims to challenge existing narratives and highlight the strength, resilience, and agency of female characters in the context of ancient Indian mythology. By giving Draupadi a platform to express her experiences and perspectives, Divakaruni emphasizes the importance of recognizing and amplifying the voices of women, thereby offering a reinterpretation of the Mahabharata that resonates with contemporary readers and addresses timeless themes of identity, power, and the human experience. In her writings, particularly in works like "The Palace of Illusions" and "Sister of My Heart," Divakaruni masterfully combines elements of Indian mythology with a contemporary narrative, creating a juxtaposition that serves to emphasize the timeless relevance of mythological themes to the human experience. In "The Palace of Illusions," she retells the Mahabharata from the perspective of Draupadi, infusing the narrative with a nuanced exploration of gender, power, and the human struggle for self-determination. This juxtaposition of mythological realism with contemporary themes allows her to explore complex issues of

identity and agency within the framework of a rich cultural and mythological backdrop. The combination of these elements in her works reflects a deep understanding of the intricacies of human experience, cultural identity, and the ways in which mythological narratives can serve as a lens through which to explore contemporary themes. Through her nuanced storytelling and insightful exploration of these themes, Divakaruni invites readers to contemplate the intersection of myth, culture, and personal experience, encouraging a deeper understanding of the complexities of the human condition. "The Palace of Illusions" is a novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that presents a mythological retelling of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, from the perspective of Panchaali (Draupadi), one of its central characters.

The novel beautifully weaves together elements of myth, history, and fiction to create a compelling narrative that delves deep into the human psyche, portraying the complexities of human relationships, power dynamics, and destiny. As a mythological novel, "The Palace of Illusions" remains faithful to the essence of the original epic while also offering a fresh and contemporary perspective. Divakaruni adeptly incorporates the rich tapestry of Indian mythology into her storytelling, creating vivid and engaging imagery that brings the ancient world to life. Consider this quote, which reflects the complexities of Draupadi's emotional journey:

*"My friendship with Karna had never been a simple thing. It was full of undercurrents, dark and powerful, like the hidden confluence of two great rivers." (Palace of Illusions)*

Through her skillful narrative, she not only captures the grandeur and magic of the Mahabharata but also infuses it with a modern sensibility that resonates with contemporary readers. The novel explores various themes such as power, honor, love, and the complexities of human desires and motivations. Through Panchaali's voice, readers gain insight into the internal conflicts, emotions, and struggles of the characters, thereby humanizing the mythological figures and making them relatable to a modern audience. Moreover, Divakaruni's portrayal of Panchaali as a strong, independent, and multifaceted character challenges traditional gender roles and norms, adding a layer of feminist interpretation to the mythological narrative. By reimagining a well-known epic from the perspective of a female character, the novel prompts readers to reconsider and question the dominant patriarchal interpretations of the Mahabharata. In essence, "The Palace of Illusions" stands as a captivating example of how mythological retellings can breathe new life into ancient tales, offering fresh perspectives and insights that resonate with contemporary sensibilities. Divakaruni's masterful storytelling and her ability to blend myth with modern interpretations make the novel a compelling and thought-provoking read, appealing to both enthusiasts of Indian mythology and general fiction readers alike. "The Palace of Illusions" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni offers a profound exploration of the Mahabharata through the eyes of Panchaali, providing readers with a unique perspective on the epic. Divakaruni's use of language and imagery effectively captures the essence of the story, while also infusing it with a contemporary touch that resonates with modern readers. Her portrayal of Panchaali as a resilient and determined character challenges traditional gender roles, emphasizing the significance of female empowerment within a patriarchal society. The novel also delves into the intricate dynamics of love and relationships, highlighting the complexities that arise from conflicting emotions and desires. Divakaruni invites readers to contemplate the interplay between destiny and free will, exploring how characters grapple with the choices they make and the consequences that follow. This quote encapsulates the theme of fate and free will:

*"Fate is a strange and capricious creature. Often it does not let us see what lies ahead until we're right there, at the place where the forked roads meet." (Palace of Illusions)*

The novel also examines the themes of betrayal and loyalty, delving into the moral dilemmas faced by the characters as they navigate conflicting loyalties and obligations.

*"A betrayal of the heart is the cruelest of all. It leaves the soul ravaged and raw, like the open shell of a clam after the meat has been stolen away by the tide." (Palace of Illusions)*

Divakaruni skillfully portrays the pursuit of power and the consequences of ambition, shedding light on the darker aspects of human nature. *"Power changes everything, even the hearts of those who wield it." (Palace of Illusions)*

### III Themes, Symbols, Imagery in "The Palace of Illusions" Novel

"The Palace of Illusions" is a novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that retells the Indian epic Mahabharata from the perspective of Panchaali, also known as Draupadi. This narrative is rich in themes, symbols, and imagery that contribute to the depth and complexity of the story. Some of the key themes, symbols, and imagery in the novel include:

#### Themes:

- 1) Femininity and Patriarchy:** The novel explores the challenges faced by Panchaali in a patriarchal society, highlighting the struggles of women in a male-dominated world.
- 2) Power and Politics:** It delves into the themes of power, politics, and the manipulation of power for personal gain, which are central to the plot of the Mahabharata.
- 3) Fate and Destiny:** The novel emphasizes the role of fate and destiny in shaping the lives of the characters, particularly Panchaali, who is bound by her destiny and the curse of her previous life.
- 4) Love and Relationships:** It portrays the complexities of love and relationships, including Panchaali's relationships with her husbands, as well as her friendship with Krishna.

#### Symbols:

- 1) The Palace:** The palace symbolizes illusions and the transient nature of material possessions, reflecting the idea that worldly power and grandeur are often deceptive.
- 2) Dice Game:** The game of dice symbolizes the unpredictability of fate and the power dynamics within the story, highlighting how the game becomes a turning point in the lives of the characters.
- 3) Fire:** Fire symbolizes purification, destruction, and transformation. It is used to depict moments of intense emotion, turmoil, and eventual transformation in the lives of the characters.
- 4) Forest:** The forest represents a place of refuge, introspection, and self-discovery for the characters, serving as a backdrop for important events and moments of revelation.

**Imagery:**

- 1) **Vivid Descriptions:** The novel employs vivid descriptions of landscapes, palaces, and battle scenes, creating a rich visual imagery that helps readers immerse themselves in the world of the Mahabharata.
- 2) **Natural Imagery:** Natural imagery, such as rivers, mountains, and forests, is used to evoke emotions, reflect the mood of the narrative, and emphasize the connection between human experiences and the natural world.
- 3) **Mythological Imagery:** The novel incorporates various mythological images and symbols from the Mahabharata, weaving them into the narrative to enhance the depth and complexity of the story.

**IV Conclusions**

"The Palace of Illusions" is a novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, published in 2008. The book is a reimagining of the Indian epic Mahabharata, narrated from the perspective of Panchaali (Draupadi), the wife of the five Pandava brothers. The novel presents a feminist retelling of the ancient tale, exploring the complexities of love, ambition, and power within the context of a patriarchal society. Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions" offers a poignant portrayal of the struggles faced by Draupadi, her desires, and her quest for identity and self-determination in a world dominated by men. The story delves into the intricacies of her relationships with the Pandavas, particularly her relationship with the enigmatic Krishna, shedding light on the emotional dynamics and conflicts that defined their lives. Through the rich narrative, the novel delves into themes such as the nature of destiny, the consequences of ambition, and the price of power, while highlighting the timeless relevance of the Mahabharata's characters and their inner conflicts. The retelling provides a fresh perspective on one of the most revered Indian epics, inviting readers to reconsider the story from a more intimate and personal vantage point. The novel delves into Draupadi's tumultuous journey, offering a nuanced portrayal of her desires, struggles, and resilience in the face of adversity. Divakaruni reimagines the well-known events of the Mahabharata, highlighting Draupadi's relationships with the Pandava brothers, her complex bond with Krishna, and her experiences in the midst of political intrigues, familial conflicts, and the brutal Kurukshetra war. Through her skillful storytelling, Divakaruni weaves together themes of love, sacrifice, power, and destiny, bringing to life the intricate nuances of the Mahabharata's characters and their moral dilemmas. The novel's conclusion emphasizes the tragic consequences of power struggles, personal vendettas, and the complexities of human relationships, ultimately leading to the devastating war of Kurukshetra. Despite the overwhelming challenges faced by Draupadi and the other characters, the story serves as a timeless reminder of the strength and resilience inherent in the human spirit, even in the face of insurmountable odds. Divakaruni's retelling encapsulates the essence of the Mahabharata while infusing it with a contemporary sensibility, inviting readers to contemplate the timeless themes of love, duty, and the pursuit of truth. Through the lens of Draupadi's perspective, the novel offers a profound exploration of the intricacies of human nature, the consequences of choices, and the eternal struggle between destiny and free will. In its conclusion, "The Palace of Illusions" leaves a lasting impression, compelling readers to reconsider the profound lessons embedded within this ancient tale of valor, betrayal, and the ultimate triumph of the human spirit.

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