

# MYTH, HISTORY AND MEMORY IN CHITRA BANERJEE'S "THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS"

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## ABSTRACT

The **Palace of Illusions** is a 2008 novel by award-winning novelist and poet **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**. Relevant to today's war-torn world, *The Palace of Illusions* takes us back to a time that is half history, half myth, and wholly magical. Terminated the tempestuous life of Panchaali, daughter of King Drupad and wife to five husbands who seek to reclaim their birth right, bestselling novelist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives voice to a bold and sensuous retelling of captivating stories from the *Mahabharata* reveals the History and Memory. Interwined into the fabric of traditional tales from the ancient Indian epic, Panchaali's destiny is a thread as golden and as delicate as the lotus she discovers. As she abides a fierce civil war, domestic power struggles, and the menace of attraction to ambiguous men, Panchaali brings a feminine sensibility to her male-dominated world. From the story of her magical birth in fire to her final moments as she brings an end to the Third Age of Man, Panchaali bears witness to her fate with insightful observations and a powerful heart. Divakaruni presents a stirring account of the interplay of warriors, gods, and the inscrutable laws of destiny, offering wisdom for today's war-torn world.

**KEY WORDS:** Mythology, Folklore, Parable, Culture.

Generations of Indians have been brought up on an oral tradition which prided itself in telling and retelling the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Divakaruni states that as part of the very same tradition, she spent many literary, entertainments, and didactic potentials were well exploited by the story tellers who brought these stories to life. Divakaruni narrates the entire story of *Mahabharata* from the point of figures; her life has been delineated from the time of her marriage. The early part of her life has been left to the imagination of the readers. Divakaruni fills up the lacunae in this area by devoting a great deal of literary space and years of life before her marriage reinforce and fortify her to face the turbulent future. Divakaruni, has to do with writer's attempt to coming in terms with the Indian past, recent as well as the remote, for the purpose of constructing and analyzing the events that led to the present situation of subjugation.

In this novel, the author tries to bring to light the early years of Draupadi, treatment of women and Post colonialist in the novel *The Palace of Illusions*. Draupadi is one of the foremost women characters in the *Mahabharata*, as represented by Divakaruni in her novel, *The Palace of Illusions*. She is also worshipped as a cult-goddess in many temples in South India. Draupadi is the most complex and controversial character in Hindu Literature. On the one hand, she could be womanly compassionate and generous and on the other, she could wreak havoc on those who did her wrong. If *Mahabharata* is an intricately woven saga of hatred and love, bloodshed and noble thoughts, beauty and gentleness, victory and defeat, then Draupadi is its shining jewel, casting the shadow of her towering personality over the epic poem and the all-destroying war described.

*The Palace of Illusions* is a magical palace built by Maya, the architect of the Rakshasas as or demons on receiving instructions from Maya for Draupadi and her five husbands soon after their marriage. It plays very important part in shaping Draupadi's identity as an individual and provides her the space to grow. That is the reason why Divakaruni titles her novel, *The Palace of Illusions*. *Veda Vyas's Mahabharata concentrates on the epic battle of Kurukshetra* because it provides a fitting platform for its male protagonists, the Pandavas to prove their mettle against their hundred cousins led by titled. *The Palace of Illusions*, because the palace is an integral part of *Draupadi's personality and has seen the Kaleidoscope of emotions which she has gone through*. It is also reminiscent of the inner-outer classification practiced by many patriarchal communities, which relegate women to the domestic sphere, while the men are expected to go into the outside world and earn their livelihood. Significantly there are three narrators in the first part of the novel: Dhai Ma, Dhri and Draupadi. All the three narrate intermittently, the same story, each choosing to focus on an event or a series of events to bring out their point of view. Of the three, Draupadi alone is very anxious to give a factual account of the things past.

Draupadi's Zealand enthusiasm to change the course of history leads her to Veda Vysa's hermitage to learn the secrets of her future. He fore tells several disturbing things, which would happen in her life. He tells that she would marry five of the greatest heroes of that period at the same time and would cause a terrible war affecting the whole of India. He cautions her in the following manner: "Three dangerous moments will come to you. The first will be just before your wedding at that time, holdback your question. The second will be when your husbands are at the height of their power: at that time, holdback your laughter. The third will be when back your curse. Maybe it will mitigate the catastrophes to come".

Before departing, the sorceress gives Draupadi two gifts. She narrates the story of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, and how she had stood for them and for their rights after the death of their father Pandu. She also gives her a map containing all the kingdoms of ancient India. Though it is not clear why these gifts had been given to her, it is clear that they have some connection with her future life. The position of women in the Indian society is restricted to the home and hearth and all kinds of adventures like war, hunting, expeditions, and unlimited freedom are meant for men. This strict division of gender roles is resented freedom are meant for men. This strict division of things does not allow her this opportunity.

Draupadi is exhilarated by the thought that she would be able to choose her own life partner when Dhristadyumna cautions her by telling that there would be a test to determine who the most eligible husband for her was. It was Drupad's intention that Arjun should win the test because if she his son-in-law he would never go against him and support Drona. The relationship between King Drupad and Drona, Draupadi reflects on the process of narration itself. She expresses her suspicion regarding the stories that she has heard about her life and about those who are willy-nilly involved in her life. According to Draupadi, the conflict between Drupad and Drona, after a long period of cherished friendship, is the most vital story because it is this conflict that makes king Drupad pray for a son who will kill Drona. Draupadi wants to reflect on the process of constructing a story which wants to interpret interpretations rather those events. Meanwhile, news reaches the Panchaala capital Kampilya that all the Pandavas had died when their palace which was made of wax caught fire. Draupadi's entire future hangs on a delicate balance as Arjun, whom her, father intended for her, was rumored to be dead. Even her marriage becomes an endeavour in state politics. The exploitation of the female is a practice which is prevalent in many patriarchal communities. Draupadi, swayamvar is just a manifestation of it. This period depicts Draupadis' coming of age and her growth as a strong and capable of being an individual ready to face the vicissitudes of life.

Similarly, she tells us that the later marriages of her five husbands with other women were also political arrangements of some sort or the other. After her marriage, on visiting to Indhraprastha with his elders, Duryodhan desires to stay there itself. Panchaali's destiny begins there to play an important role. When Duryodhan slips down carelessly in her palace, Draupadi laughs at him loudly. Her loud laughter and sarcastic comment which her friends create vengeance inside Duryodhan. Generally men treat women as slaves. When Draupadi comes to know about the failure of the Pandavas in the dice, she exposes her feelings I am a Queen, Daughter of Drupad, sister of Dhristadyuma, mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like dancing. The ideology of colonial masters who consider dark colour of the skin as inferior to the white one and thereby oppressed the natives is imbibed in the psyche of the native cultures leading to the acceptance of colonizers superiority.

At a very early stage in her life, when she pays a visit to Vyasa, the author of the epic virtually unfolds her story to her with the prediction that she will be remembered as the most amazing queen this land has seen. Vyasa's words with meaning thus turning "his story" into "history" by living it. Draupadi is presented as having a very impressive, brilliant and strong personality and is projected as the primary cause for the battle of Kurukshetra. Vyasa's *The Mahabharata* shows Draupadi as a character that took birth to destroy the Kauravas. *The Palace of Illusions* shows her as a reasonable person who was not able to stop the destruction of Kauravas. In the novel *The Palace of Illusions* Divakaruni's interpretation provides a humanistic touch to the epic, making it more realistic, more relatable, and more personal which gives new insight to the epic and it also recalls the history and memory of Mahabharata.

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