

## **Towards Articulation from Silence in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions***

**Dr. T. Raja Sekhar**

Associate Professor

Department of English

Babu Jagjivan Ram Government Degree College

Narayanguda, Hyderabad.

### **Abstract:**

*Feminism has long been associated with the concept of "equality." It is undeniable that equality was a central focus of the early feminist movement. However, the relative weight of feminist demands has shifted with the years. Despite decades of feminism's fight for equality, women's signs of unrest, revolt, outright rebellion, and discontentment persist. While a drive for parity may have been instrumental in the earliest stages of the feminist movement, it has not led to lasting change. Women came to realise they needed to focus on who they were as unique individuals rather than demanding equality based on sexual orientation. Women need to break the decades-long quiet regarding their experiences by speaking out. As a first step, women should practise self-assertion. This article summarises the novel *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee and discusses its primary topics.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, equality, repression, subjugation, inequality, societal silence etc.,

Literature is a vehicle for the expression of the human experience. It is a synthesis of style and morality. Literature perpetuates human concepts in both time and space; therefore, every creative artist uses his or her voice to depict issues that are both timely and eternal. The novel is the most reliable, compelling, and powerful literary form for conveying a nation's culture to foreign audiences. It is the most effective, flexible, and widespread method of conveying an imaginative event or impression. It forces one to ponder some deep questions about the human condition. It encapsulates the author's entire range of feelings, thoughts, and ethical principles. It first appeared in India after the spread of the English language and western education.

The earliest works by Indian women writers tended to portray women in stereotypical roles. Now more than ever, female authors present a realistic portrait of a woman, one that emphasises the frustration and loneliness she often feels. As they forge new identities, they are

torn apart by the tension between the past and the present. Value adjustment and attachment to home create tension between them. The situation of working women remains precarious, and it is made worse by issues such as marital adjustment and the quest for and expression of one's identity. Women in the works of first-wave feminist novelists were typically portrayed as traditionalists. Instead of criticising Indian society, these female writers expressed sympathy and concern for the plight of Indian women through their writing. The songs lacked passion and intensity.

Torulata Dutt (1856-1877), who fearlessly dealt with the archetypes of Indian womanhood like the mythical Sita and Savitri, was one of the first women writers to emerge during the pre-independence period. Rajlakshmi Debi (1862-1894) (*The Hindu Wife or the Enchanted Fruit* in 1876), Krupabai Sathinananadhan (1862-1894) (*Kamala: A Story of Hindu Wife* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life*) Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1862-1894, *The Fatal Garland* (1913) and *An unfinished tune* (1913) (1915). Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954) was a lawyer who advocated for women's rights, particularly for widows and women living under the Purdah regime. She is best known for three great and enlightening works: *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1906), *Sun-Babies in Indian Child Life* (1904), and *Between the Twilight* (1904).

Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, and Nayantra Sahgal are all members of the second generation of women to make significant contributions to the literary world. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherji, Gita Hariharan, Rama Mehta, Meen Aexander, Arundhati Roy, Shanta Rma Rau, Namita Gokhele, Vuma Vasudev, and Jai Nimbkar are only some of the other great Indian novels.

While the topic of women is not new to Indian writing in English, the approaches taken by different authors are rather different. During the 1960s, women in Indian fiction were portrayed as perfect beings with a wide range of characteristics but no rebellious streak. Feminists with a solid understanding of their rights and privileges seek recognition of their worth. American society has undoubtedly been influenced by the feminism of western authors like Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1952), Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1963), and Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*, 1970). The feminist leaning of writers such as Geetha Hariharan, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha de, Bharati Mukherjee, and others has been rejected. The stories of Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni centre on the problems of women, hence it is not surprising to find that her works have a strong feminist goal.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who was born in India and raised in the United States, is a pioneer of the post-1965 generation of South Asian American women writers. Fictional women from Calcutta and the United States serve as lenses through which she explores universal topics like diasporic inclusion, identity, choice, and individuality. This article explores Divakaruni's contribution to the canon of Indian American women writers and South Asian American women writers by analysing her exotic and myth-filled narratives of Indian and Indo-American women. Divakaruni's novels *Sister of My Heart* (published in 1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), and *Oleander Girl* (2012) are only a few to examine the ways in which she employs female exotica and ethnic exotica to bring to life the factors that distinguish the experiences of her female characters. It is through the use of memory as a literary trope that Divakaruni is able to construct and develop distinct identities for the Indian Americans and contemporary generation of Indians that appear in her works.

### **The Palace of Illusions by Divakaruni**

Draupadi, a central figure in Indian mythology, is portrayed allegorically in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. The quest for justification is depicted as essential to the survival of the Mahabharata, which is portrayed as a mythically predetermined woman. In fact, Draupadi, the fabled heroine, had her character brilliantly explored in the novel. The mythological Draupadi is reimagined in this story as a human being and a person through the use of first-person narration. The Mahabharata tells the story of the Kurukshetra war, which was sparked by a power struggle between two Kuru dynasty branches (the Pandavas and the Kauravas) who wanted to rule the city of Hastinapur.

Divakaruni reimagines Draupadi's or Panchaali's life as an allegory, detailing the heroine's growing excitement, confusion, struggle, triumph, heartache, distress, and accomplishments. By rewriting her own past in her own words and switching to first-person narration, Divakaruni performs a psychoanalysis on Draupadi as she reads the text. To meet one's subjective needs and expectations, psychoanalysis is largely a philosophy of unconscious struggle, resistance, and reality distortion, according to Brumann (2010).

### **Identity Crisis in The Palace of Illusions**

Draupadi continues to feel miserable despite receiving countless gifts. She doesn't use them since she thinks they're too simplistic. She wants her culture to help her become a better person by giving her the tools to become who she was meant to be. Her given name reflects this origin story. Drupad needs her brother to exact revenge on Drona, the legendary warrior who trains both the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Drupad gives him the heroic moniker "Dhristadyumna" (the destroyer of opponents) to drive a wedge between him and Draupadi. Drupad doesn't know where Draupadi came from or why, so he treats her like she's just another one of his numerous children. Her father recognises that she would unwittingly inherit his genes and thus he gives her the name Draupadi, which means "girl of Drupad." While considering her name, Draupadi questioned, "But Daughter of Drupad?" Draupadi has been taken aback. Even if he hadn't known I was coming, couldn't my dad have thought of something less self-centered to do in advance? A more appropriate name for the girl who would one day change the world. Even though an oracle predicted her birth, Draupadi feels that her father takes her for granted.

The novel's protagonist, Panchaali, believes she has the right to live and fantasises that she would choose her own fate if given the chance. Panchaali is not allowed to have any manly chats with her brother other than with Dhri during the heated arguments with Dhri's teacher. All the women are afraid of Panchaali because it was foretold that she would bring about change due to her dominant demeanour.

Panchaali believes that she is unloved and unappreciated by her family and friends. As a result of her growing sense of isolation, she starts to think about her options outside of her marriage. She has made up her mind that her future husband will be an outsider and radical like herself. She speculates (TPI 33) that her future husband or wife will be among the rare individuals who are also precursors of change and death.

Divakaruni shows how a lady uses her imagination to construct a fantastical world in which she might find refuge from her troubled circumstances. Draupadi isn't happy until she gets what she wants by fighting the facts of reality, even though she doesn't exactly set a good example for her life. This was no ordinary need; rather, it was an effort to maintain mastery over her precarious position in the male-dominated real world. The positivism in her life is exemplified by her resolve, which inspires everyone around her. They provide a mental safety net to keep her from going crazy. Her ideal culture and society are represented by the image of

her palace, as is her chosen way of life. Panchaali has been denied freedom and property, symbolised by her makeshift palace, ever since she was a little girl.

Panchaali, the protagonist of Divakaruni's novel, too dreams of finding true love. Draupad's father arranges a Swayamvar (a ceremony in which a woman chooses her husband from a group of men) for Panchaali's wedding, and the news makes Panchaali very happy. Panchaali's teacher prepares her for the roles of wife and daughter-in-law by teaching her the feminine values and behaviours expected of her in those roles. The start of Panchaali's Swayamvar competition marks a watershed moment in her development. When she finds out that her dad has planned an archery tournament to gauge her skills, it hurts her feelings. The chosen eligible suitor will be Panchaali's husband.

As a result of the incorporation of myth into the epic, supernatural forces began to shape the course of human history, while the conditional element represents patriarchal intervention with women's freedom of choice and existence from the beginning of civilization. Chitra Divakaruni's writing does this subject justice with beautiful and economical language. The author's goal is to put women's feelings centre stage and re-center Orientalism inside diasporic city cultures (Mishra, Vijay, 439–462). This hypothetical historical event places post-colonialist and post-nationalist narratives side by side to create a diametrically opposed framework. Theorising historical processes through the physical and cultural contestation of a woman by a woman author allows readers or critics to interact with a "historically subjugated section of human societies across the globe" and "expresses deficit in terms of education, human progress, and humanitarian interests" within the context of a "national representation" (Andreotti 01).

### **Conflict between Reality and Illusion during Swayamvara**

Divakaruni's work takes a different approach to telling the story of Panchaali and Karna's love than the original epic. She has an interest in researching the role of women in traditional Indian marriage. Marriage in India is not as private as people think, says Divakaruni. In addition, Jones argues that the bride does not play a decisive role in marital choice. On p.91 of Jones and Ramdas.

Marriage in India is a social occasion, thus the eldest members of the family play a key role in the matchmaking process, as Divakaruni explains. Panchaali seems to have misunderstood the

role that love plays in a marriage. In classical Indian thought, this was simply accepted as the way the world worked. Panchaali's unintentional internal resistance to her feelings for Karna leads her to assume that she can act independently of her elders and the norms of marriage, despite the fact that a man-woman bond is built on trust and affinity.

### **Mythic resistance**

The image of Panchaali is linked throughout the narrative to the diaspora cult in *The Palace of Illusions*. It alters their homeland's past, present, and future. At the same time, the expat community looks for new reasons to stay in the country. The author elaborates on the "myth of resistance." In the novel, oral and graphic manifestations of ancient beliefs and ceremonies are reestablished and reorganised inside a complicated network of cultural items. The author's main point is that mythology is what shapes political and social importance. To show that "resistance stories" reflect and mediate "essential antinomies of human existence (life/death, good/evil, God/human, piety/impurity, freedom/bondage)" (Weaver 90), the author avoids saying she dislikes old epiphanies. The author explains how the popular epic serves as a vehicle for transmitting social practises, societal structures, and the thoughts, feelings, and ethics of the African diaspora. (Weaver, p.45)

Panchaali is lured away from a normal life by Divakaruni's unexpected exposure of her delusions and ego. She gives in to the destructive power of wrath, which washes away the mythical identities of every Mahabharata soldier. When a woman faces her own realities, she discovers her strengths. Her dependence on others stems from the understanding that she cannot influence her future through retribution. She needs to lower her expectations of everyone around her. She learns that she must first fortify her own character before she can effectively help others overcome their trauma. A prisoner woman's hopes of freedom are her only hope. When she gives up wanting or needing anything from other people, she is free. Women, too, need to understand that sexism is never the answer.

Rather than criticising the epic story of the Mahabharata, Divakaruni employs meta-narrative to show that war never achieves its goals. The Mahabharata served as inspiration for Divakaruni's story in *The Palace of Illusions*. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni portrays Panchaali's ultimate failure as a result of growing in the eyes of others and being condemned by them. As a result, she keeps her fragile identity intact. Her resentment stems from her

inability to rise above sexist stereotypes and her fragile sense of self-importance. Unwilling and stereotypical is the patriarch's underlying tone. Her existence does not recover from its demise. Mahabharata is a political and social document that affects the entire era's society. The well-known feminist Jasbir Jain claims, "Feminism is a movement that strives to merge public and private space. (Jain 2003)

Panchaali, unable to allow herself to be publicly shamed, freed herself using the same strength. Panchaali's anger transformed her into a helpless creature who whined and relied on others to complete her domestic tasks. Post-feminist Divakaruni probes women's psyches to find out why they avoid conflict but are vulnerable to verbal abuse, when they are just as capable of overcoming physical threats with tolerance. If they don't, they resort to a metaphor reminiscent of patriarchal power structures. At the end of the day, their competitors can't match their success.

In particular, Divakaruni's works expand cultural materialist methodology and evaluation, and she makes it a point to teach her audience about both indigenous and recognised evaluation criteria. By blurring the lines between literary and popular culture, Indian authors writing in English have helped to explore the mysteries of India's advanced past and its mysterious social history. They have also tried to figure out how the underappreciated species is affected by different social contexts. Other works by this author that accurately portray such pervasive public practises include *Queen of Dreams*, *The Palace of Illusions*, and *Oleander Girl*.

## Conclusion

By establishing a logical connection between the past and her fictional works, Divakaruni has helped modernise the old world's belief system. She argues in her essays that societal and cultural mysteries are encapsulated and recreated inside a linguistic process. The political and sociocultural artefacts that predominate in her scholarly works are subject to semantic constraints that affect how they will be seen and used historically. Her alternate timelines are built using "incorporations," which are events whose backstory can be pieced together from present-day information. As a result, the foyer is lively, despite its emphasis on the dead past. Divakaruni makes an effort to recreate the past in the here and now.

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