

Women as Men's Dignity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's***The Palace of Illusions*****Pravitha.V.S**

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Abstract:

The Palace of Illusions reimagines the epic tale, Mahabharata with the perspectives of the character Draupadi. This paper examines the conception of women as men's dignity and the portrayal of traditional gender roles. It further highlights the complex interplay between supremacy and societal expectations. The tale queries the conventional notion of dignity which is tied to the masculinity and presents the nuanced examination of dignity as a universal human trait. The lives of women are intertwined with the dignity of their man which emerges an emotional conflict in the patriarchal society. Chitra portrays the position of the women in the historical and mythological context. The women are trained to be more silent and the society needs such a submissive

woman. *The Palace of Illusions* explores the voices of a women from ancient to modern times and the author discovers the different roles of a women in her life as daughter, wife and mother.

Keywords: Men’s Dignity, Stubbornness, Humiliation, Sacrifice, Epitome

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an acclaimed India American author and she is known for her exploration of themes like identity, immigration, cultural identity, family dynamics, love and self-discovery. Her writings and storytelling technique had a great impact on literature especially in the stream of diaspora and multicultural writings. She has been voicing for the immigrant people as well as marginalized communities.

Chitra is celebrated for her excellent insight exploration on powerful storytelling, cultural nuances, and her connection with the reader. Her writings suitable for both youngsters as well as adult people. She is an educational activist and she voices against the domestic violence. She is a diaspora writer and her writings highlight the conception of feminine tribulations, Dominance of male, Quest for Identity, position of women in the society, Indian mythology, tradition and folklore in her narratives.

Chitra scrutinizes the conception of how the women were objectified by the men. The novel *The Palace of Illusions* demonstrates Draupadi as a protagonist and the narration connects with her emotions. It further highlights the characterization and portrayal of women in the ancient era. In the article “A New Voice in Indian English Fiction”, Agarwal conveys that, “Divakaruni within the plot of *The Palace of Illusions* exhibits her specific concern for those female characters who were subjected to torture

and neglect in Mahabharata. The feminist consciousness becomes the voice of humanity at large” (67). The novel is based on the holy Hindu epic, Mahabharata and it concentrate on the woman character Panchali (Draupadi). The epic work elaborates the male characters and the historical war sequence. Here the novel shows the significance of women and how they were treated in the society. Draupadi is portrayed as a woman of knowledge, courage, confident and stubbornness.

The Palace of Illusions gives a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics and the interconnectedness of integrity, dignity and relationship in a mythological and historical context. Draupadi is the central character in the novel and she embodies the resilience and intelligence in her scuffle. Her wisdom and actions have a great impact on the male character including Pandavas and important figures in the novel.

The paper highlights how the women are considered as a men’s pride and how this dignity distresses the women. The women are considered as an object, where they believed that their family pride is in women’s deeds. From the earliest period, this ideology is trailed by the society. In the contemporary world, the women are dominated even though they excelled in several arena. The people contemplate that the woman is holding the dignity of the men and they are praised as God, by capturing their freedom.

Discrimination is considered as an immense impact on the society which anguishes an individual of being separated from others. This act was from the ancient period where the male child pampered than the female child. Chitra describes the yearnings of Panchali towards numerous things in her life. She is given practice in the

field of singing, dancing arts rather than politics and wrestling. But Draupadi desires to learn martial arts but she is restricted to have proper education. “In his own harsh and obsessive way, he was generous, maybe even indulgent. But I couldn’t forgive him for that initial rejection. Perhaps that was why, as I grew from a girl to a young woman, I didn’t trust him completely” (*TPI* 6). She holds an emotional conflict because she is discriminated as a female child by her father from her birth.

Draupadi is portrayed as a significant contributor to men’s dignity. She symbolizes integrity, honor and fight against the oppressions. The novel deeply analyzes the relationship of Draupadi and Karna with complexity and emotional intensity. Draupadi had a deep feeling of love and admiration on Karna in Swayamvara. And these feelings remain unspoken due to the societal norms and family alliances. Draupadi’s love for Karna in *The Palace of Illusions* is portrayed as a significant and poignant aspect of her character, it further shows the complexities of love, loyalty and destiny in the context of Mahabharata.

Swayamvara ceremony plays a substantial part in the narrative. Swayamvara is a traditional ceremony where a princess chooses her husband among a group of suitors from different regions. Here, King Drupada, father of Draupadi has arranged the meeting to find a husband for his daughter. He organized a problematic state to win the competition. The suitors have to string a massive bow and shoot an arrow through a revolving target and this is to test the valor of the suitors. The bravery and wisdom of the

individual can win the woman of the Panchal. And here, the woman becomes the price object for the victory.

Women in the patriarchal society were controlled to make a decision on their own. The women face numerous honors killing even in the contemporary times. And there is no wonder that woman like Draupadi in ancient era restricted with the marriage proposal. Draupadi loves to marry Karna but her family discards him because of his birth and further he was mortified. “Before you try to win my hand, King of Anga, tell me your father’s name.” For clearly, a bride-to-be, who must divorce her family and marry into her husband’s line, has the right to know this” (*TPI* 95). Then, Arjuna triumphs the competition and married her. Draupadi’s opinion is not concerned from her young age where her father and the game decide her destiny. “Why even call it swayamvar, then?” I cried, “Why make a spectacle of me before all those kings? It’s my father, not I, who gets to decides whom I’ll marry” (*TPI* 56). The woman becomes a doll in the hands of the family reputation.

As a princess of Panchal, she epitomized for her vision and bravery. She embraces the dignity of her family esteem and the family trusts her as God. By suppressing all her desire with herself, she obeys her father and decided to marry according to his wish. The woman imposed to do such thing as they were denoting the dignity of her family. Draupadi renders unwavering sustenance and guidance to the characters like Pandavas during their critical times.

Chitra depicts the mentality of the women in the midst of extreme humiliation. Humiliation has diverse phases and it can lead to any extend. The bitter enemy of

Pandavas believes that humiliating their women will suffer their dignity. Is it true? By disrespecting a women can cause their men, then what about the emotional state of the victim?

The tale of Draupadi is relevant to the contemporary group and her life can connected with all the generations. The novel inspects from the perceptions of Draupadi and the author focusses on the life of Draupadi from her childhood to her end where she subsists her life for others. The society expect women to be dependent on someone and the women are struggling to get a good position which they deserve. But the women confidently face everything and rises their voice for their rights. The dominance over women were portrayed from the ancient times where they constantly surpassed by the men.

The character Draupadi become a central charisma, and Chitra stretches a best example of how a women should behave in the society through the portrayal of Draupadi. In an interview with Metka, Chitra utters that, “Women should always be strong – we hope we can be strong, but when we are not, there should be a space for us. For centuries, it’s okay for a man to do all kinds of things, but for women not so much”. Chitra shows that Draupadi’s life is relevant to the contemporary women who are confronting the tribulation to achieve.

Draupadi confronted transcending hostility in the middle of the court in front of her husbands, all the courtiers and King Dhritrasta. She is pawned by her husband in the gambling with the Kauravas. She is disgraced by unwrapping her saree where there is no one in the hall volunteer to defend her from such a dishonor. “I found myself in court, a

hundred male eyes burning through me. Gathering my disordered saree around me. I demanded help from my husband's" (*TPI* 191). The court becomes more silent in the shame and the women in the state of humiliation wipes her tears and curse the Kuru dynasty.

The broken woman born as a new woman to break the barriers and she curse them as no heir will remain in their Kuru dynasty. In the gambling, the women are pawned because she is considered as a dignity for their men. And when they lose the game, the opponents use the women as a toy to demean their men. Why the women were considered as dignity rather than a human being? Akhila Variyar pronounces in an article "Myth and Modernity in Chitra Banerjee Divakarunai's *The Palace of Illusions*" that, "From re-telling's we are able to think that women have not been given any priority. No one is willing to accept their views or ideas as it their duty is to obey their husbands at any cost and the dignity of the family is all that matters in the end and women are taken as weak and disempowered (307). A shattered woman could do anything where she elevates her standard from shackles and bring down the entire dynasty. She emerges from the formidable humiliation and inspires all the women to be brave in dire circumstances.

Draupadi character is presented with huge emotions and longingness. The author shows the sacrifices of the women and how they become submissive for the society where they still yearning for the freedom. Draupadi's dishonor is initiated from her home where she is disregarded of being a female child. Draupadi is a multifaceted woman of strength, resilience, intelligence, moral integrity and emotional depth. In the Journal, *The Creative Launcher*, Roy Chayanika articulates that, "Not only is Draupadi a bold

character, but was also a devoted wife, virtuous, spiritual and compliant to dharma and thus an iconic figure in Hindu mythology. Draupadi's distinction among other women from the epics is preponderant and well deserved; she was far ahead of her time" (117). Chitra encourages the contemporary women to break their barriers and motivates them to achieve in different fields.

The Palace of Illusions raises a question that the exploitation of women is being granted even in the ancient times where they considered women as Goddess. Why the women are always treated as property of someone? The character Draupadi taught a lesson to every woman to discover herself, no one will arise to liberate from the torment but a woman herself should voice her rights against the adversaries.

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