

The Ideal Woman Draupadi in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

The Palace of Illusions

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ABSTRACT:

Mahabharata, the great epic in India retold by a prolific writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Palace of Illusions*, through Draupadi's point of view. When we think about Ideal Women in Indian mythology, there are some memorable women in our mind such as Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, Kandhari, Savithri, Urmila and so on. The identity of the women is grounded in the subjective experiences of individuals, which are not only their dreams, but also their thoughts and their daily activities. In every age, woman has been viewed as a mother, wife, mistress and so on in their relationship to men. In ancient epics seem to focus only on the male heroes while the female characters are put into the back stage. They are discussed only when they affect the lives of the male heroes. Men and women are equal in God's eye, but they are not equal in the society. This study aims to discover the ideal womanhood in the image of Draupadi in her own perspectives.

KEYWORDS: *Mahabharata*, Indian mythology, identity of the women, ideal womanhood

Indian mythology is mainly personified in two great Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The backbone of the Indian civilization is formed by these two epics, irrespective of individual religious beliefs. Several hundred centuries after, these epics continue to shape the society and politics of modern India to a greater degree than one might imagine. In recent times, novels and movies that have been inspired by the epics, mainly focus on the set of events. The epic is a tool undertaken by novelists of the specific genre who seek to uphold the epics in manner hitherto unexplored. In this way Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni took the fruit of *Mahabharata* and gives the essence to her novel '*The Palace of Illusions*'. She didn't modifying the details of the events of *The Mahabharata*, she presents the epic from the point of view of Draupadi.

Divakaruni has two reasons to pick Draupadi as a narrator in the novel. The first one, she was the cause behind the great war of the Mahabharata. On the other hand, all the earlier versions seem to focus only on the male heroes. Thus, Divakaruni has shown Draupadi as a contemporary woman who wanted to express her thoughts and ideas to the world. In the book review of *The Palace of Illusions* James Purdon says that, “Mortal women cause war, become its spoils, bewitch its victors or just wait for their menfolk to make their way back home..... A little jejune at times, Divakaruni’s languid and elegant prose remains seductive as it reimagines the woman at the heart of the story and weaves myth into a modern idiom”.

The novel starts with the conversations of Draupadi, her nurse Dhaima and her brother Dhri. She hears the story of her own birth and her brother Dhrishthadyumna, as she is referred to as Dhri, through her nurse Dhaima. Her birth is not a normal thing. She emerged from celestial Yagna which is referred to as fire along with her brother Dhri. This yagna was made by her father King Drupad. The reason for creating the yagna is, King Drupad wanted a son for taking revenge on Drona who was an enemy for him. When she came from fire, the prophecy said that she will change the history when she becomes queen. But King Drupad doesn’t like her arrival. Draupadi is longing for her father’s love. She missed her childhood and she never gets the love of her parents too.

The father – daughter relationship is one of the most powerful and vital relationships to individuals, communities and nations. Girls appear to be born with an emotional, relational, and evolutionary void that a father is designated to fill. Here, Draupadi also shows her feelings about her father. Draupadi couldn’t be happy with her father’s too much of control. She finds her father’s palace has no privacy and she says, “though the long, lonely years of my childhood when my father’s palace seemed to tighten its grip around me until I couldn’t breathe” (Divakaruni 1). Dhaima expressed these feelings in her words, “the Girl Who Wasn’t Invited” (Divakaruni 1).

When Draupadi came to know that her father needed a son not a daughter, she quickly reasserts herself and renames herself Panchali, which is derived from the kingdom of Panchala. Thus, she rejects the egotistic name that her father gave her at first. She believes that the identity is to be given by men in her life. There are many who believe that it was her headstrong actions. But Divakaruni portrays Panchali as a powerful, strong and independent woman, an equal to the men around her.

Divakaruni beautifully portrays the relationship of Draupadi with Lord Krishna. She had platonic relationship, a friend in Krishna. She proved it to the world, it is possible to be best friends with the opposite gender. This is shown an example of true friendship. Lord Krishna serves as Draupadi's mentor and protector throughout her life.

Draupadi was insisted to be educated like her brother Dhri. But nobody was supported her except Krishna. She rebels against the typical training of women, the skills of patching, painting and pottery, against the knowledge taught to her brother the lessons of royal rule, justice and power. Her tutor told her that "A Kshatria woman's highest purpose in life to support the warriors in her life"(Divakaruni 26). Women were given equal opportunities as men in education, but instead of this, they were only exposed to domestic work and family responsibilities. They were schools instead, they were trained to do household work.

Even nowadays, women are the backbone of families and communities. They provide care, support nurturing to their families and are essential to the development of children. They play a significant role in community building and often take on leadership roles. The roles of the ideal women have been exclusively portrayed through the character of Draupadi. This novel vividly explores the glorified women's duties that are intensified with their roles as daughter, wife, mother-in-law and a progressive ideal women of the nation. Through these characters the roles of women are highly shown. They are proved themselves as an Ideal woman of the nation.

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