
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace Of Illusions: Gender, Power and Identity- Draupadi as a Subversive Voice

Mohd Hammad Wali Khan
Galgotias University

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Abstract: In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shows Draupadi taking part in life's big events while also wondering and questioning what happens presence. She prefers to stand out from the shadows shaped by her partners or by her male relationships. She keeps questioning and going against the normal roles expected of her. The chapter focuses on how Divakaruni uses Draupadi to show ideas about gender, power and identity. It explores how Draupadi uses her voice as a way of standing up against injustice and creates her own narrative in a world that tries to stop her Draupadi from sharing her thoughts.

One of the major strengths of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of illusions*.

In the book, the main narrator becomes Draupadi and her story serves to resist the usual narrative. The main role of Draupadi in the traditional Mahabharata is quiet and subdued. Novels are more likely to present her life through men's eyes; men describe her feelings, thoughts and wishes often eclipsed by the bigger political and military events. But in Divakaruni's version, Draupadi tells the story in a new way. She cannot only be described by her ties to men telling the story as a matter of discourse instead of a personal speaking voice. Because Draupadi shares her perspective, the novel resists her being overshadowed and objectified as portrayed in the original epic.

Introduction: As Gender, Power, and Identity has placed a big role in the life of Women's So as from the beginning, Draupadi talks directly to the audience which indicates her prominence in the novel. Her way of speaking is thoughtful, full of emotion and clear. She expresses her story in an honest way, using wit, pain, anger and desire. She does more than tell what happened; she investigates, argues with them and shares interpretations that conflict with conventional thinking main themes of patriarchy influence these societies. Draupadi points out, as she explains her story to them, "They are ignorant, for they claim to understand my heart as though my life were simple" (Divakaruni 3). The quote shows that she knows her identity has been defined by others and that she wants to set these misrepresentations straight.

Draupadi speaks to reclaim her power. She does not let anyone else decide what she is. by Telling her story herself, she gains control and presents herself as someone who takes action rather than one who is acted upon. It deliberately offers a new vision by switching to a woman's voice and overturning important parts of the myth. By speaking out, Draupadi fights against the expected silence of women in epics and also raises doubts about the patriarchal values and principles system of rules that directs them.

As she grows up, Draupadi shows her first acts of rebellion. in contrast to the usual image of a happy housebound princess, Divakaruni's Draupadi finds her life unsatisfying and feels restless. She demands to learn who her mother is, debates unfair rules made for women and gains information about politics and philosophy. She wonders to herself: "What is wrong with me learning what my brother is studying?" by challenging the belief that men are more important than women in learning (Divakaruni 17). The drive for knowledge makes her different and it becomes a grounding for the way she would act later on. As a result, Scarlett becomes an early feminist example since she stands up against the limits society puts on women.

These actions do lead to negative outcomes. Because she often speaks her mind with no filter, she isolates herself from the group. Some people say she is arrogant, demanding too much and aggressive. Experts used to see 'opinionated' as a negative trait for women.

However, these characteristics turn into the tools she uses to fight back. Draupadi does not follow the standard of what a woman should be in a patriarchal society. Instead, she uses her voice to argue for changes.

Literature Review:

Challenge and change the roles that society expects her to have: It is through Draupadi's voice that readers can extremely feel her emotions. She is shown as a character with common human traits and flaws and not as a flawless person. The story is told in a way that expresses her feelings like vulnerability, anger, jealousy and confusion. Opening yourself emotionally is an act of courage in most cases. Because society tells women they should keep their pain hidden, Draupadi expressing her emotions stands as a form of protest. She says that after it all happened, she wanted to cry out, grab him and inquire why he hadn't stopped it is an important event happens when Yudhishtir gambles everything she has (Divakaruni 189). Her decision not to hide her emotions stands out from the typical 'brave' woman standard and the strength she shows is in telling the truth.

When the courtroom scene occurs and Draupadi is belittled, it is a major event in the novel and becomes a place of resistance. The Mahabharata shows that Draupadi argues that gambling her was illegal, but her opinion is often set aside in favor of other dramatic events. help given by Krishna. This event is delivered by Divakaruni with strong emotional force and intellectual insights. Draupadi does not limit herself to a legal point; she points

out that the system makes it possible for men to treat women as objects. Did you first lose touch with your own identity, O King? she explains to Yudhishtir how gambling is foolish when you do not have what you are supposed to win (Divakaruni 187). Her song tells about being hurt in both a personal and musical way. A philosopher questioning the accepted moral beliefs of her people.

Besides standing up to individual men, Draupadi also takes on the problems and traditions found in her community and religion. She is very reluctant to trust in divine justice and is highly critical of the gods. Krishna tries to comfort her by saying repetitions of spiritual phrases fail to soothe Draupadi. She accuses the gods of not helping and even allowing her to suffer. Why were you not there, Krishna, when men pulled me to the courtroom? She brings it up (Divakaruni 193). The fact that she wouldn't give up on justice in spite of divine decisions adds another form of defiance was part of her behavior. She rejects human patriarchy and also the faith-based structure supporting it.

In this case, Draupadi's voice is a space where the philosophical debate occurs. Her the author does not only ponder fate, duty, love and justice but also challenges the main cultural beliefs of her society. She explains the mixed messages in dharma, points out the ways tradition masks wrongdoing and describes the harmful actions people do in the name of reputation. So, she is able to problematize the conventions that define the form of the epic offering a modern rethinking that makes women's experiences central.

Her voice is also linked to other women's voices seen within the novel. She gets sympathy from people such as Kunti and Dhairya Ma, her mother-in-law and maid. The conversations show that many aspects of female experience tend to be shared. Often ignored in films about male heroes. Her talks with Kunti reveal how royal women often faced pain and sacrifice. Even though tension marks their relationship, both depend on each other and know what to expect from one another.

These stories of women, who were usually ignored before, play a main role in the story and help unite them through resistance. Through Draupadi's concerns, she is able to see her relationships from many sides. Her strong feelings for Karna, dislike of Arjun and feeling wronged by him. There is an in-depth exploration of Yudhishtir's character. She is honest about the ways her husbands were not perfect. She stresses that people should own up to the decisions they take. The effects these systems have, including the pain they inflict. Both reflect her ability to make important decisions and acts. She acts independently of her husband and clearly recognizes when men she meets are not what they seem. Because of her narrative style, readers are able to sense Draupadi's perspective strongly. Because the story is told in Draupadi's point of view, the reader always experiences the novel as she does. Her constant thoughts, dreams and memories make her into a detailed character, resisting the usual simplistic and metaphorical view. mythological texts. In the words of critic Lalita Pandit, Draupadi in Divakaruni's novel "spoke, thought and challenged" (Pandit 142). The way the novel is set up allows this

transformation to happen. the epic features Draupadi's perspective and words above the rest.

Draupadi's words and actions affect the future even after the story ends. Even during the creation of the epic As things are drawing to a close, she keeps narrating, remembering and reflecting. As the story finishes, she is able to reflect with insight, rather than anger, because of what she has gone through. She acknowledges that she is complex and has regrets and she learns to accept different aspects of herself. No matter where her life took her, she had always remained herself (Divakaruni 360). The strong voice of the poet is shown through the last part of her poem. It has managed to endure as an influence. They went through humiliation, exile, years of conflict and tragic loss and yet stood strong.

In conclusion, Draupadi's voice in *The Palace of Illusions* is not merely a narrative device but a powerful act of resistance. It challenges the patriarchal silencing of women in traditional epics, offers a gendered re-interpretation of myth, and reclaims female agency. Through her voice, Draupadi critiques, questions, and redefines the moral and philosophical foundations of her world. She is not a mute emblem of virtue or victimhood, but a vibrant, thinking, feeling subject who refuses to be silenced. In giving Draupadi a voice, Divakaruni not only reshapes an ancient tale but also offers a profound commentary on the power of storytelling as a feminist act.

Marriage and Polyandry: Rewriting Gender Roles: In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni radically reimagines the institution of marriage and the concept of polyandry through Draupadi's personal voice and inner world. While traditional versions of the Mahabharata present Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandava brothers as a matter of divine will or dharma, Divakaruni's retelling centers. Draupadi's emotional responses, highlighting her discomfort, resistance, and the emotional toll of such an arrangement. In doing so, Divakaruni challenges the deeply entrenched gender roles within epic traditions, using Draupadi's polyandrous marriage to question broader societal expectations that often demand the subjugation of women's desires for familial or religious obligations.

The usual telling of the Mahabharata justifies Draupadi's union with five husbands because of religious reasoning or actions from a previous life. Vyasa claims that her marriage came about because she had wished for it in her previous life. Yet, Divakaruni on purpose changes the path set by Destiny. As told in *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi does not feel that this odd marriage satisfies her spiritually. Instead, she begins to feel very betrayed and confused. When she is told she will have multiple husbands, she hesitates. Each husband can have only one wife. But five? He said it "made me feel dirty, made me less" (Divakaruni 86). This reaction demonstrates that many women also accept the cultural belief that being with just one man makes them pure. The sudden and unexpected happenings of disaster shock people. The grief shown by Draupadi shows the difficulty behind justifying dharma based on traditional rules.

How Draupadi reacts to her marriage in Divakaruni's work subverts the usual sad and hopeless manner in which Draupadi is portrayed. Authors do not depict her just as someone who accepted whatever destiny brought, She underlines how resilient and determined Divakaruni is. Draupadi is not a quietly obedient child Following the wishes of others, though not being naive about what she was sacrificing such as her personal freedom, longing to be special and choosing her own way. By standing up against crimes, Kelly gains a human characteristic that was often missing from her earlier appearances. The marriage creates a clash between what people want and the social rules they must follow. In the opinion of Simone de Beauvoir, women in patriarchal societies have often been seen as not-equal or as "the Other," expected to fit roles created by men. Examples of religious codes (Beauvoir 267). This could be seen in Draupadi's marriage which is determined by her father's ambitions and her mother- in-law's sudden suggestion.

One of the standout features is how Divakaruni programs Draupadi's inner experiences with strong, many-layered emotions. The novel narrates how Anna's need for love and stability is not fulfilled by the people around her. While a real affection lives within her heart for rather than experiencing an exclusive relationship herself, she chooses Arjuna and so denies herself that closeness. Being married to the five brothers affects her feelings for each of them. Every time Draupadi went from one brother's house to another, she said it felt as though a piece of her existence was being taken away (Divakaruni 117). The vivid pictures in the song which tell us to reflects the mental harm caused by mental juggling and being shared by more than one partner. She has to recreate herself for every husband and that does not allow her to have her own identity.

The subject of emotional disconnection is also related to feminist issues over how individuality is lost for women in traditional relationships. Draupadi is made into each Pandava took turns possessing her and while she was with them, her actions and movements were controlled. By practicing rotation, Draupadi has to spend single nights with every figure this commercial aspect appears in her stepping from one husband to the next, staying only for a specific time before finding another. Being discussed using the same language as fairness, the system turns her into something meant to be shared instead of seen as an equal. Ruth Vanita observes that under traditional patriarchal rules, polyandry in contrast with polygyny, tends to act as a way to effectively erase female sexual desire (Vanita 94).

In the book, Draupadi challenges how women are left out and forgotten. Even with the limits of her marriage, Draupadi shows strong independence passive participant. She makes use of her agency within the minimal space afforded to her. If she feels offended, she argues with her husbands, manages her time and makes it known when she is neglected. A clear example is when she faces Yudhishtir after the dice game and she accuses him of both the poor decision to gamble her and his inability to properly protect her honor. She questions the idea that a man takes his wife's life for no reason and

questions his claim, saying, “You did not inquire if I wanted your property.” Is a wife owned by her husband as if she were his property? (Divakaruni 213). This period of standing up to the oppression placed in the context of marriage, this stance represents her wider attempt to resist women being presented as quiet supporters of the male faith.

Draupadi’s assertive personality in her marriage is also shown in her political role.

Although she is viewed as only a figurehead, she makes use of her title to drive change. shape both her husbands’ decisions and impact political results. In exile, Draupadi often reminds the Pandavas what they went through and discourages them from forgetting. she suffered unjust treatment. Remembering the old game is not just an individual thing for her not a desire for retaliation, but a need for justice. Her marriage, then, turns into a place where she feels distress and also turns her attention to political issues. With this, Divakaruni highlights the ways in which women can control their destiny sometimes even in difficult institutions.

The way Draupadi’s individual husbands and the family as a whole shared power is another important aspect of Draupadi’s marriage. Arjuna is the one she bonds with deeply, but she has tensions with Bhima and Yudhishtir in terms of their relationships ideological conflict. She sees herself in many situations battling with Yudhishtir, mainly because he often stresses doing what is right for everyone instead of what is best for their relationships. Gambling her non consensually and apologizing later caused a major break between them. Unlike the other brothers, Bhima sticks by his sister in a practical way; he answers her anger and helps her when others fall short. All of these aspects indicate that her marriage is not a rather than a single organization, it is made up of many different, unequal links among people. How she copes with and deals with different relationships proves that she is flexible and emotionally strong intelligence.

Because the novel centers on what Draupadi has to say, the book can evaluate the Describing female heroes as being willing to sacrifice in epic books. In most traditional versions of the epic, Draupadi’s polyandry is seen as something mysterious and unexplainable by ordinary people. This story shows how the characters deal with the emotional burdens of the tale. Draupadi’s strong desire for being exclusive, her negative feelings about being given away and her Literature from classical times rarely discussed betrayal as it relates to individual feelings. In this way, Divakaruni puts more emphasis on what ordinary people live through than on society’s values. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, an expert in feminism, claims that “The personal is political,” and knowing about women’s feelings can help us understand the barriers they face (Mohanty 42).

It also explores the concept of desire which usually goes denied to them mythological women. Divakaruni makes an adventurous choice when Draupadi desires Karna in the book. Usually, the possibility is not addressed in the main versions of this epic condemned. She gives a detailed examination, showing how Draupadi’s experiences

bring growth Karna appeals to Sonaghat because she wants to experience a relationship that isn't attached to duty or politics. In her confession, she states, "Part of me often wondered, what if?" (Divakaruni 174). Showing desire for someone apart from your marriage is almost never done in Indian epics usually value chastity and self-control. Because of her strong feelings, Draupadi brings up the topic of marital fidelity and points out how little is said about women's yearnings in old texts.

Divakaruni shows that Draupadi's experience testing the limits of marriage was challenging emotionally and thus examines marriage as a whole. Instead of glorifying marriage as something special, the novel depicts it as involving a lot of negotiation, give-and-take and often disagreements. Draupadi fights to make ends meet instead of pursuing satisfaction in the course of her marriage. Because of this, The Palace of Illusions parallels literature defined by feminism as a place where ideas of masculinity and femininity are put in place contested. In her writings, bell hooks states that marriage, traditionally, has kept women as the partners who must do everything and not speak up (hooks 97). Divakaruni's Draupadi challenges the traditional role of a wife and creates a marriage where these roles are questioned and reconsidered.

Ultimately, Draupadi's marriage to five brothers in The Palace of Illusions allows Divakaruni to revise the usual gender roles seen in stories. Uncovering the emotions and thoughts in Draupadi's head highlights the effects of what she goes through choosing roles for themselves that society approves, even if they are not personal choices. By not accepting her marriage arrangement, dealing with it as she saw fit and being open about how she felt, Draupadi becomes much like an actual human. She is not just defined by the titles of wife or queen, but a person exploring the questions of love, obligation and identity in society often takes away her right to decide. As a result, Divakaruni brings a forgotten account to life and also reimagines traditional ideas about marriage and women.

Summation as Draupadi Challenges the Narratives of Myths and Lasting Memories: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni retells the Mahabharata using Panchali, its most intricate female hero, as the perspective. Draupadi. Chapter Three discussed the way Draupadi began to act against the accepted order questions, upsets and reclaims gender, authority and selfhood in a mythological realm that used to silence her. By featuring Draupadi as someone who decides. Divakaruni puts us into the mind of the figure, so we see a real woman facing decisions, ethics and who she truly is. This part of the chapter draws together the main points about Draupadi's stance of resistance and her questioning of patriarchal ideals. her marriage, its unusual nature, Karna's unfulfilled desire, motherhood, suffering and loss, her struggle to reclaim herself and her spiritual-political journey. By focusing on Draupadi and her relationship with Krishna, the novel argues that through history silenced women are seen as similar to Draupadi.

Above all, Draupadi's voice acts as a form of resistance, shown by her telling and shaping her account. Draupadi is usually recalled as a victim: abused by others in the

royal court, shared among five husbands, Struggles because of the ways power is used in politics. With Divakaruni, her account does not simply accept injustice; it fights back against it. There is no narrator throughout the book attempt to make people understand, but mainly reveal the systems that conceal women. In *Because Draupadi* rebels against what happens to her, she becomes the voice for women in generations who have been forced to suffer in silence. She fights against the enemy. Affecting in personal and intellectual ways, though not extreme.

Resistance is developed by internal reflection, expressing ideas and remembering the past which allows the marginalized to resist and find new forms of agency.

Problems of hierarchy and ownership are central to what *Draupadi* is about subversiveness. In a way unusual for female characters in classical tales, she argues with kings, gods, husbands and cultural norms. She doesn't ask these questions just to discuss; she challenges the ethical core of the Mahabharata. One example is when Katy is given away because of a dice game—her question, “Am I my husband's property?” shows her disagreement with how patriarchy sees women and the exploitation involved. *Draupadi's* protest, in front of the court, symbolizes a wider wish to question the usual bias in favor of men in society. She shows that putting dharma (the divine law) on a pedestal has the effect of unjustly favoring men and denying opportunities to women. With this story, Divakaruni portrays *Draupadi* as someone going against established gender norms and also criticizes the role mythology gives to patriarchy.

The original epic claims that *Draupadi's* polyandrous marriage was done on Kunti's request, while in *The Palace of Illusions* it is shown as a strange event that challenges long-standing gender roles and norms. She is not seen as a lucky queen who has many husbands, but as someone alone, apart and emotionally unstable. Her feelings about her marriage point to her feeling less autonomous and seen as an object is involved in, not only through marriage but also as someone used in political moves. Even so, her stamina and attempts to unite her unusual family show a lot of strength. As a complex character, she does not fit into standard roles for women like a docile spouse, a freedom-loving partner or a caring mother. She doesn't completely fit one of these roles, but moves between them, showing the hardships and paradoxes real women go through. Divakaruni lets *Draupadi's* polyandry represent struggles and complications rather than being something that tarnishes or honors her.

Divakaruni includes a tender storyline about *Draupadi's* love for Karna which she writes about delicate and thoughtfully. The feeling they had for each other remains lightly hinted at in the traditional version of the Mahabharata. She provides the details and main events in this novel by allowing *Draupadi* to confide about something she can't openly talk about, but won't hide. This secret wish breaks with the standard rules for women's emotions which are believed to belong to their domestic tasks and responsibilities.

The way she bonds with Karna surpasses moral guidelines and makes the arbitrariness visible the differences between what love, loyalty and betrayal mean. But this impossible love could not come to life, points out how much Draupadi is like every woman, as she faces huge loneliness and longing. Through adding these deeper emotions to the character, Divakaruni rejects the myth of the self-sacrificing woman and gives her freedom to be emotional. The experiences of motherhood and loss help shape who Draupadi becomes.

While the usual Draupadi's experience is far from the fine that we find in classical literature. Motherhood causes mothers to become distanced, ashamed and deeply miserable. After the loss of her sons in the war, she feels the final blow to her sense of self-esteem belief in having control or satisfaction. She is meant to be a mother, but her position as a mother is taken away from her. War and politics play a role in how her kids are raised their lives show the total harm caused by repeated acts of violence. Divakaruni does not idealize Draupadi as a mother; she points out the harsh and honest feelings of her grief all the sacrifice in the name of honor did not turn out true.

Conclusion: The story presents Draupadi as a symbol for women who feel their responsibilities at home are oppressed by society's norms. Taking back control over your life is most likely the most powerful transformation you can make Draupadi's journey. After facing betrayal, humiliation, being forced to leave home and losing people close to her, she starts to slowly reflect on herself and come to terms with things. She does not recover her sense of self as a result of the film rather than seeing justice or romance, we see how the characters reflect on what happened. She discovers the differences between the person she is brought up to be and the person she wants to become. Such evolution suggests that Utilitarianism has grown and changed through the years with success of personal feeling over being part of a group. Putting her own story down into words is a way Draupadi seeks to reclaim herself. Her identity is separate from the view people form of her a narrator who reveals her own self to the reader. The narrative lets Draupadi renew her identity from being treated as someone's prize to a person who matters on her own. Doing these things for themselves The idea supports a feminist argument by insisting that owning your stories is essential for building who you are.

Draupadi's connection with Krishna is also very important, functioning as her strong faith and platform for political talk. Unlike her bond with the Pandavas, there is their relationship is flawed by imbalance and hopes, yet she treats Krishna with respect and openness and he feels the same. Krishna functions as an advisor and companion, instead of a savior. Their dialogues include issues of faith and action as well as difficulties in their personal lives and challenges as rulers. This relationship replaces the previous one. a traditional view of the divine as far away or strict. Likewise, what people value shifts to built on trust and fairness such relationships are both close and open. Draupadi managed to work with Krishna learns both comfort and knowledge. Here, Gorgias is the first person who listens to Socrates's ideas wholly without judging her. It also shows that

spirituality Which is commonly used to reinforce male authority, can also be used by women as a source of resistance.

Draupadi eventually stands for all those women who remain voiceless in history and present. She shows how many women's lives are never told, their words are never heard and their identity is built by others in their place. With Draupadi, Divakaruni means for these women to share their voices and challenges never so their pain is glorified to make suffering more relatable for people. The story of Draupadi stands for the reawakening of feminism: it is a journey that is painful, difficult to follow and fights for recognition and self-affirmation.

Her life story confronts us to see the epics more as alive and flexible stories that can be reinterpreted. Through this, Divakaruni takes part in the larger effort to decolonize American fiction creating feminist stories, giving space and new roles to different kinds of people.

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p. 117: "Each time I left one brother's home to go to another's, I felt as though I were being unmade, piece by piece."

p. 174: "There was a part of me that always wondered—what if?"

p. 213: "Did you ask me if I wanted to be staked in this game? Is a wife the property of her husband?"

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