

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace Of Illusions: Female Relationships and Solidarity**Mohd Hammad Wali Khan**
Galgotias University**Article Received:** 12/05/2025**Article Accepted:** 14/06/2025**Published Online:** 16/06/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.06.293

Abstract: Discussion of female networks in societies where gender roles are unequal Patriarchal stories like the Mahabharata focus mostly on male heroics, royalty and battle, giving women secondary parts and roles associations with men. Peplums usually focus so much on men that women are very rarely able to express themselves or be involved. But in *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the focus is on women's lives and the emotional and ideological ties they form. In this way, Divakaruni paints a story focused on women from a culture dominated by men. The close relationships between Banasura and the women—are especially interesting in this story Draupadi visits—show as locations of connection, strength, healing and redefinition. Because of these relationships, Draupadi becomes part of a larger community, feels more deeply and reveals both the hardships and strength shared by women in Mahabharata.

Divakaruni's retelling puts great emphasis on female solidarity as women's main method of surviving in a patriarchal society. Draupadi appreciates her nurse Dhai Ma, her in-law Kunti and sister-in-law Subhadra, as they share emotions and help Draupadi overcome challenges dominant norms. Usually, these relationships form inside private homes or family spaces act as safe spaces and areas where women who do not take part in formal politics can have an impact. Within these personal settings, women share experiences, share advice and most importantly, appreciate their friends, who are often not seen in the same good light as men. According to Devika Bordia, when films re-tell epic stories, they can bring attention to stories that have been overlooked considering the personal, emotional relationships that exist between women (Bordia 88). Divakaruni brings out Draupadi's close relationships and solidarity with other women.

Introduction: Dhai Ma, Draupadi's nurse, is the first and most constant female figure in her life. As well as caregiver, she is there as a guide, trusted confidante and to help with understanding cultural differences. Dhai Ma briefs Draupadi on the rules and roles of being a woman where they live. While Cheng's advise tends to be based on customs, she is not afraid to break with tradition.

She acts within the limits she is given to keep Draupadi safe and well-cared for.

In difficult emotional times, Draupadi frequently seeks comfort from Dhai Ma, who plays the role of mother. serve as a steady point among all the ups and downs in her life. They challenge the normal ranks between people who are master and slave, clearly showing that personal love and emotions can override such distinctions go above the structure of cultural traditions. Draupadi states that, “Dhai Ma cared for me desperately, as if I was the only person she had in life” (Divakaruni 15).

Dhai Ma’s care, based on tradition and gentle mistakes, forms an essential source of support for Draupadi in her first years.

Kunti and Draupadi do not always see eye to eye. Because she raised five strong sons, Kunti plays a vital role in the Pandava family. Her role is limited by the strong patriarchy that rules in Hastinapur. Even so, Kunti manages to act independently at times, for example by organizing the marriage of Draupadi to each of her sons. There is disagreement about this decision and it often leaves people feeling angered at first Draupadi, it marks a point where women can challenge and reconsider their place in a man-dominated society by asking for sharing among her sons (instead of separate families), Kunti tries to strengthen their brotherhood. Her action also points out the limited options open to women. As time goes by, Draupadi starts to realize the pressures Kunti meets and the hardships she faces. Draupadi feels that Kunti lost much more than she did: her youthful dreams, her desires and perhaps even her personal identity (Divakaruni 123). Realizing this makes partners respect each other more and bond emotionally, stressing the role of intergenerational family patriarchy affects the way relationships are viewed and experienced.

Subhadra, Arjun’s second wife, is also a major female figure in the Mahabharata. Krishna’s sister. Though at first, Draupadi sees Subhadra as a rival, they later form a relationship marked by quiet understanding and respect. It perfectly shows how R&B music has grown over time Her work focuses on how women interact with each other because They aren’t usually friends by definition, especially in ways that involve competing with each other over male attention and acceptance. But, in certain cases, these rivalries cover up the fact that nations have comparable weaknesses. When Subhadra shows respect and kindness to Draupadi even though she is Arjun’s preferred wife.

Now, Draupadi starts to see her as someone like herself who is also grappling with the situation. patriarchal currents. At one point, Subhadra invites Draupadi to come and rest. A hard day makes the latter less angry and more able to show empathy (Divakaruni 157). While big wars and shows of power are noisy, this is a peaceful step done by many making sure empathy is important for girls and women everywhere.

Literature Review: Divakaruni has Draupadi think about the situations of Gandhari, another influential woman of Hastinapur. The novel Amba and even Queen Sudeshna, to highlight the many ways women can be strong and experience pain. Gandhari places a blindfold on

herself to share the experience of her husband describes how Draupadi tries to understand the wordless resistance and control that Yudhishtira and other women possess. Even though Draupadi is doubtful, she soon understands the courage needed by Gandhari to act that way. Also, the stories of Amba and Sudeshna which were previously overlooked, are mentioned quietly in *The Palace of Illusions*, making the common, but often silent mistreatment of women in epic stories more recognizable. They build a picture of women's lives which reflects Draupadi's experiences and shows that she belongs to a group of extraordinary women who have persevered.

Female connections within the novel are not only about emotion, but also about beliefs. Because of these relationships, Draupadi begins to think differently about gender, holdings of power and who she is. The way she spoke with these women, whether there was much conflict or not her bond with her family—whether positive or strained—leads her to explore her wishes and doubt the usual ways of living choices. Instead of just having women in the epic, these novelists use these frameworks to reshape the narrative with women as central characters. As Uma Chakravarti points out, the re-tellings should let women speak for themselves. It is important for covering the forgotten parts of history and for criticizing the main ideas in the texts (Chakravarti 56). Draupadi starts to notice and understand more about politics and how it affects her personally. strongly influenced by how the women around her thought and felt.

Female relationships often result in tensions or don't always make the women equally powerful. Divakaruni shows the uncertain aspects of how women relate to each other openly.

Jealousy, betrayal and competition sometimes come up in romantic relationships. As an illustration, Draupadi's Passions about Kunti and Subhadra are never fully worked through and she continues to judge sometimes using traditions held by men. At the same time, this the author handles the book's treatment of female relationships in a way that is very real and true to life. Relationships work best at making a difference when they endure through changes and keep moving forward. They still have a powerful emotional effect, letting Draupadi feel her grief, anger and hope, even in the most difficult times. In sharp contrast to the Mahabharata, female connections are shown much more richly and are not just there for the benefit of male characters narratives. Draupadi's character and choices in Divakaruni's novel are mainly influenced by the carts. They challenge the main ideas of war and male-centered stories. By including ambition, O'Brian makes it possible to look at the epic through a new point of view. According to Meenakshi Malhotra, highlighting friendships and feelings among women in her books, Divakaruni not only reclaims women's part of the epic backstory but also points out the flaws in the epic's patriarchal core (Malhotra 104). It is the loyalty and support of her womanhood that gives Draupadi the ability to handle public disgrace, being moved from home and dignity and insight are shown by the author in handling personal loss.

All in all, The Palace of Illusions changes the focus of the Mahabharata by focusing on how women cooperation influence their world. Being close to Dharmya and the other women in the family lets Draupadi discover moments of unity, understanding and recognition which are rare for women in epic tales literature. Such relationships ensure people have emotional support as well as opportunities to developing ways to go against dominance and transform their lives. Divakaruni demonstrates that similarities in women's experiences often show that their relationships, even if difficult, can greatly change their lives. Through highlighting their female relationships, the story speaks about a strong feminist approach that challenges the male-dominated silence found in the old epic. Draupadi and Gandhari Suffered Similar Pain but Had Different Worldviews Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tells the story of the Mahabharata in her novel The Palace of Illusions, making its ancient heroes speak about their feelings and moral choices. Among the most touching of these changes is the story of how Draupadi the wife of the Pandavas and Gandhari the wife of Dhritarashtra. These women, not traditionally mentioned a lot, take on larger roles because of what they share and do not share in terms of views. While even though their lives look different, Draupadi speaks out and faces struggles and Gandhari deals with silence and reserve, both owners of great strength. Because their situations unite them in sadness, especially after a war, their opinions on morality, loyalty and justice still differ a lot.

Many see Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself as a cautious sign of her true and selfless love for her husband Dhritarashtra. Divakaruni reimagines the story however, now it involves not only the wife's devotion, but also her protest being forced by her family to marry a man she did not want. Donning the blindfold, she shows autonomy and the ability to make choices even in a controlled world. While thinking about Gandhari's silence, Draupadi comes to see it not as resignation but as an expression of power. The narrator says that with a blindfold over her eyes, Gandhari was able to perceive truth more clearly than those who could actually see normally (Divakaruni 146). It illustrates the double nature of Gandhari's cinematically, she is portrayed as basically uninvolved, though she truly understands politics, family and her destiny. Gandhari feels her sons, like Duryodhana, grow up and develop every day instruments of death and although she is sad about what has happened, she must not waver in her maternal obligations.

No matter the context, Draupadi is detected by her speech—often loud, confident and opposed to the traditionally patriarchal pressure. Gandhari represents stoicism, but Draupadi actively fights against what holds her down. Draupadi faces humiliation but never gives up; she instead demands justice and revenge. When she Gandhari and Kunti come face to face after the war and it's a moment without words recognition. Just because the war has ended does not mean that the emotions are gone. Gandhari does not have a single surviving son; Draupadi has lost all her children by the Pandavas assassinated in the darkness before dawn. Rather than being in harmony, the women simply feel the same sadness and stand side by side.

Even while they both feel the pain, the differences in their beliefs are easy to notice. Gandhari, though she tried to prevent Duryodhana from following his desires, still believes Krishna should have prevented the war. She says mean words to him, predicting the downfall of his family lineage. She believed both men and gods had failed morally because the war happened. Draupadi agrees with the need for the war despite the difficulty it caused. Megan couldn't allow herself to forget what happened and she now looks for her own justice. Since many lives were lost, she sees the war as the sole way to restore dharma. Remembering the fighting on the battlefield, she worries if peace could really have been achieved by including Duryodhana. She understands that her arrogance made things worse and admits her responsibility in the deaths caused by the war (Divakaruni 254). Draupadi considered justice to be more important than facing an unsurvivable challenge. When the war ends, Draupadi has a confrontation with Gandhari that takes place.

Especially notable in Divakaruni's novel. Because Gandhari led a life of austerity after being widowed, she puts some blame on Draupadi, wondering if her desire for retribution led to the deaths of so many. Then, Draupadi understands Gandhari feels terrible, but thinks remaining silent or yielding would have done more harm. She refuses to apologize when demanding treatment with respect and compensation. Their clash brings up the contrast between Gandhari's way of thinking and Bhishma's and Draupadi's trust in herself and her actions versus the outcome laid down by the rules of the game. The example also sparks a key feminist debate—must virtuous women withstand injustice quietly or is it OK for them to use their voices despite disrupting rules within society?

Even though they had different backgrounds, both women did not have the power or authority that society gave to men. People identify Gandhari by her relationships with her family and her beliefs stem from that. The family's needs have formed and shaped her identity. Even though Draupadi is assertive, her own actions are outshined by those of the men in her story—forced to marry five brothers against her wishes, humiliated by a ruling where no man stood up for her and treated like a tool by men involved in politics. They go through a lot of damage. personal loss and both try to be acknowledged as individuals and not just for their roles.

Although they have different reasons for their grief, in the epic they represent how women are affected by male ambition and pride.

She brings out the common pain among characters by describing their inner thoughts and with vivid imagery. Her mind often goes back to her innocent children dreams, now no longer alive. She can see them playing, laughing and wanting to impress their father warriors. She is still troubled by her memories after the battle is over victory, when sounds of fighting are replaced by the silence that comes from sadness. Also,

Gandhari's grief is for all her sons, who, despite being brought up for glory, ended their lives on the losing side of the conflict. When Gandhari meets Krishna one last time, her emotions are not of anger but of sorrowful resignation. From the depths of a serious betrayal of what it means to exist. She thinks that the gods ought to have tried harder.

Here, Divakaruni gives new meaning to the Mahabharata as a place for action and values are the emphasis of the epic and this is why the characters act the way they do. Draupadi and Gandhari are certainly not opposites, but rather show how female resilience can be influenced by powerful contrasting beliefs. The disagreement between the characters in ideology is not resolved at the close of the novel rather, it asks readers to think deeply about what they have gone through. Solidarity, Divakaruni seems, according to the text, to believe that sometimes disagreement can still work out. Sometimes, we don't have to say much, just sharing the pain can make someone feel supported.

Draupadi and Gandhari are compared in the epic to emphasize the different aspects found in the tradition of female characters. According to feminist critic Ruth Vanita, looking at myths from a woman's point of view encourages discussions about moral values and true emotions (Vanita 122). In traditional versions, Gandhari and Draupadi are mostly at the margins, but Divakaruni puts them at the heart of her story. Both individuals going through the same pain functions as a tool for the reader to see how gender influences events in the midst of war, loss and resistance.

Also, Divakaruni's choice to have Draupadi explain what happened to the audience she is given a form of narrative justice that she missed out on in the epic poem. Because of this narrative style, viewers experience Draupadi's encounters with Gandhari as clear outpourings of emotion, rather than only as disputes of ideology. Draupadi does not see Gandhari as an enemy but admires her while also feeling sorrow for her. Draupadi sees that, like herself, Gandhari is trapped by the roles assigned to her by society. What separates them, rather, is their real experience in the world, not personal ill will Draupadi Has Feelings of Jealousy and Remembers Other Women.

Conclusion: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tells the Mahabharata from Draupadi's point of view, sharing her inner life. Various kinds of female relationships play important roles in the epic. How Draupadi communicates with Subhadra, Madri and the Pandavas' other wives shows moments of concern, envy and awareness that these women live under strict patriarchal rules. These Draupadi's insecurities are shown in her relationships which eventually lead her to better understand herself and overcome society's norms, helping her become strong nuanced identity. Subhadra's jealousy is very clear right from the beginning. Arjuna's sister, Subhadra, stands for a gentle quietness that contrasts strongly with the courageous and strong Draupadi. Draupadi envy Arjuna's bond with Subhadra and what that bond represents—an ideal of being a woman that is seen as more right, more ideal by both society and the men she knows. Draupadi tells the audience in her story that

seeing Arjuna treat Subhadra so kindly reminds her of her broken self- esteem and her small role in the family (Divakaruni 143).

There are many types of jealousy involved. Draupadi participates in romantic rivalry, but her quest for identity and respect in the shadow of polygamy and male rule is also involved. As described by Divakaruni, Draupadi understands very well that how the other women connect with Arjuna changes her own position in society. Because Subhadra was the uniting role of presence which brings peace and affection to the family, is very different from the situation with Draupadi. Usually defined by frequent conflict and disagreements. As a result, she becomes more convinced of her own shortcomings and her envy which she openly admits. Even so, being honest means It means that Draupadi does not hide how she truly feels which is a trait most people can identify with. Besides this, Draupadi's mind turned to Madri, another wife of Pandu and mother to Nakula and Sahadeva, makes me think with a touch of melancholy. While she is shown to be dignified and graceful, her story includes a lot of sorrow and royal duties as well. personal loss. Draupadi sees how hard Madri struggles and she understands their shared pain. seeing how women become stuck in the roles expected of them. However, this admiration includes a feeling of separation, because Draupadi's personality and resistance to being totally feminine stand apart from what Madri portrays (Divakaruni 168).

How Draupadi interacted with the other wives, most notably the eldest wife, Kunti these characters also uncover some of the inner struggles she is dealing with. Draupadi often notices that Kunti's calm and in charge persona makes her recall how innocent and impulsive she was during her youth. Kunti has her respect, but Draupadi also begrudges the part she takes in supporting the sometimes she is put aside because of the patriarchal system, ignoring what she wants and believes. This disagreement is created by respect and rebellion play a major role in what Draupadi thinks about. Kunti is viewed by Rupa as a friend who also upholds the systems that oppress everybody, including herself (Divakaruni 192).

The way these women interact with each other is not simple personal matter they divulge ladies' deeper confidence issues, caused when girls feel set against each other by the broader culture. The way Draupadi is jealous, pulls away and has at times tense moments with Yudhisthira all come from her experience with patriarchal society. In the palace's cold corridors, female characters struggle to find a balance between teaming up and competing, trying to secure meager compassion and protection. She demonstrates that despite her ability to stand up for herself, Draupadi does see herself differently and questions her own worth against the expectations of fulfilling her responsibilities, obligations and desires (Divakaruni 205) And it is exactly because she is emotionally honest that Draupadi's story stands out depth. She is shown as someone dealing with her flaws, fears and changes within herself, rather than as a perfect heroine. This ensures that her process of self-awareness is all the more interesting. As the book progresses, Draupadi

thinks critically about her jealousy and her relations with the other women which is a clear sign of her growth. She can tell that feeling envious is not as simple as she thought. Her struggles are caused more by the extensive unfairness in her world than by her individual choices. Thanks to this knowledge, her rivalry with Katniss changes into an appreciation of fighting alongside other girls.

An example is how Draupadi and Subhadra come to understand their roles in the family. marks an important moment in her growth emotionally. She begins to consider Subhadra as a friend going through the same issues in a male-dominated culture and so worthy of respect. than resentment. Although the transformation is minor, it clearly shows how Draupadi's feelings and ways of relating are developing (Divakaruni 221).

Draupadi's perspective of Madri gradually changes from respect from afar to an awareness of the same weaknesses they face as a family. Rosa notices how Madri gave up many things and was quiet, realizing their lives both faced the challenges of the same oppressive situation. This process brings women together instead of dividing them, demonstrating how women's empathy is greater than their feelings of jealousy (Divakaruni 234).

Dealing with Kunti, Draupadi realizes when she should be defiant and when it is better to be respectful. She admires Kunti's cleverness and understanding, but she does not want to submit to Kunti's direction. This depicts the change in Draupadi from being jealous to becoming empowered. By allowing herself to feel her emotions, Draupadi shows her strength and rebels against the men and women who seek to limit her (Divakaruni 247).

Basically, the bonds Draupadi forms with Subhadra, Madri, Kunti and the other wives mirror the struggles she keeps in her heart being honest with your feelings and progress slowly bit by bit. Divakaruni does not paint Draupadi as perfect but as a woman trying to handle and survive despite all the burdens imposed on her patriarchy. She is not wrong to feel jealous of Paris; it's a natural feeling she has Because of the situations she experiences, her insights about her feelings indicate a powerful development in understanding herself.

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