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Redefining World: Voice of Conscience portrayed in

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions"

Abstract

Chitra Baneerjee Divakaruni (born Chitralkha Banerjee, July 29, 1956) in Kolkata, India is an Indian-American author, poet, fiction writer and the Betty and Gene McDavid Professor of Writing at the University of Houston Creative writing Program. Divakaruni's works are largely set in India and the United States, and often focus on the experiences of South Asian immigrants. She writes for children as well as adults and has published novels in multiple genres, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, myth and fantasy. "The Palace of Illusions" is a feministic perspective; Inner voice of Draupadi redefines the world. The great epic 'Mahabharata' woven with myth, history, religion, science, philosophy, superstition, statecraft, human world, magical realms gives en-number of life lessons, but failed to portray the life of women who were equally powerful as men. Draupadi has insights, imaginations, desires, questions, doubts, worries, love, affection, care, bravery etc., but could not express it to the

world. Here in this paper the Inner voice of Draupadi echoes strongly and uncovers the state of women, Draupadi's struggle for identity is exhibited. Her thought also reflect and challenges the contemporary patriarchal society experiencing by women.

Key words: Redefining, Patriarchy, Conscience, Contemporary

Poet and writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in Kolkata, India, and came to the United States to pursue graduate work, earning an M.A at Wright State University and a Ph.D., at the University of California-Berkley. The author of numerous works of Novels, poetry, short stories and prose is known for her careful exploration of the immigration experience, particularly that of South Asian Women. Her collections of poetry include *Black Candle: Poems about Women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (1991) and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997), which won the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize and the Gerbode Foundation Award. Her story collections include *Arranged Marriage* (1994), which won the American Book Award, the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award, and the PEN Josephine Miles Award for fiction. Divakaruni's many novels include the best-selling *Mistress of Spices* (1997); *Sister of my Heart* (1999) and its sequel, *The Vine of Desire* (2002); *Queen of Dreams* (2003); *Palace of Illusions* (2008); *One Amazing Thing* (2009); and *Oleander Girl* (2013). Her works has been widely published, anthologized and translated. She is also the author of young adult fiction. Divakaruni's many honors and awards include a C.Y.Lee Creative Writing Award, PEN Syndicated Fiction Awards, multiple Pushcart Prizes, the South Asian Literary Association's Distinguished Author Award, the cultural Jewel Award from the Indian Culture center in Houston and the Light of India Award from the Times of India.

The Epic narrator starts from her birth, being born princess, experiences a prisoner life because of tighten rules. She is always proud regarding her birth and interested to hear again and again the birth story of her than any other stories from her nurse Dhai Ma. A girl who was not invited, born from Fire - a Soul of divine fire as a gift, who is going to change the history, following and holding the hand of her brother Dhristadyumna, an invited son to fulfill their father Drupad's revenge. The initial rejection was burning in her inner self. Drupad was forced to accept Draupadi with Dhri. Even though Drupad was careful in fulfilling the fatherly duty, it was her brother who comforted. She was not able to express her love towards Dhri because of her birth prophecy that it might be tested one day and how much it would cost both.

Draupadi with dark complexion as any other normal woman worried about her appearance. The skin colour of her is termed or considered as unfortunate. She compares her complexion with Krishna's Complexion even darker which was not a problem, and he has stolen women hearts. She wonders how this black complexion has its own magnetism. She doubts how a dark coloured woman is going to change the history. She understands by the words of Krishna a problem is a problem only if one believes it to be so. The beauty never lies in the outward appearance. The close associates of Draupadi are Dhai Ma, Dhri and Krishna. Her world in Paanchal is around these three people. Krishna the close friend of her and the only source shared everything about the outside world with her.

Draupadi speaks about the equality - The life lead in palace raises question why a Kshatriya princess not allowed performing the duties as Kshatriya prince. She craved for education. She wonders when a boy is given education why not to a girl. With the help of Krishna she was allowed to get education. She always wished to break the rules that the society

has designed how a woman should live her life. She wished to learn the world of the senses. She felt strongly that the woman's highest purpose is not only supporting men in her life, she exposed it to her brother strongly,

“A man, I would wager! Myself, I plan on doing other things with my life.”(p.26)

She envied her brother of learning Martial arts and state craft which was the lessons that conferred power. Draupadi was given lessons a woman should learn, she felt it was noose around her. The Prophecy and her complexion made all including Queens and maids to keep her in distance. The inner feelings, alienation, longing for equality, wariness around her, prophecy contagion broke her into pieces. Her world were of two classifications,

1. Boundaries of customs - Importance of man – Woman as destruction
2. People as harbingers

The secret visit to sage shattered her dreams of changing history that she is going to be the cause of great destruction. The visit of Sikandhi and the purpose of her birth are connected with prophecy. The story of Sikandhi, a woman who transformed herself to man gave courage to Draupadi.

The Suyamvar, plays an significant part of woman's life. Draupadi came to know through Krishna that arrangement of suyamvar is of kingly plan. More than happiness it is designed to form alleys and to fulfill the revenge. The lessons of Sorceress were a ridiculous one. Her soul idea about women was wrong, that woman is born to serve a man and love is not a lasting one. Draupadi's idea of marriage is that no marriage life will be a successful one without love, and that which she deserves more. The sorceress warns that a woman contributes problems to the world, and she must be careful, by keeping passions away from her. After seeing the portrait of Karna with all other Princes including pandavas and Kauravas she liked him more. The

simplicity and the fire in his eyes attracted her. The choice to who marry is of her brother's and Krishna. There flooded questions in her, what was left to her choose. Her thoughts and wishes were not allowed to share. The similarities of the birth and life of Draupadi and Karna made to grow liking on him. The both were victims of parental rejection. The story of Karna inspired her lot. Draupadi pondered why Krishna did not tell about Karna. For Draupadi, Karna has equal chance to win her in suyamvar like Arjun. What's wrong if he wins and marries her wouldn't he be a great ally for Paanchal. She sensed that there are unknown secrets that Krishna knows. According to Dhri honour of the family is very important but how does the honor will get affected if she marries the great warrior Karna. The way of birth and existence is the true virtue up to this world. Dhri's care on her to not marry a cursed man shows the wonderful and strong bond. But she was strong enough that by the historical stories, those women had saved their husbands from their ill luck with their virtue. Why not she could do the same for karna. The two important men in her life changed her thoughts marrying karna. Both of tragedy and dangerous nobility, it was clear to her that the traps of God even defeat the Conscience. The desire and loyalty conflicted inside her. But the loyalty took over the desire her to refuse marrying karna. She strongly felt to not give up anything easily to the fate's hand. The warning of the sage regarding her prophecy made her to stop karna, a woman unaware of future consequences of her deed believed that she saved her brother. She knows well which will lay down karna. The loyalty made her to speak in the court during suyamvar. She a young and fearful person and the ill-chosen words extinguished the light seen in Karna forever. At last she marries a Brahmin and follows him as an ordinary wife of him leaving all her wealth and sophisticated life. When she came to know that who she married was Arjun, the great warrior, she plans her future in spite of her prophecy. She is very firm shaping her future.

Draupadi as of any other ordinary woman with all dreams, plans and desires has entered her marriage life. It was a big shock that when Kunti told to share her by all the five pandavas. Is this the Kunti who she admired the more by her stories? Her marriage life was a question regarding her future, No one questioned Kunti. Even Arjun did not ask a word to his mother. The palace life in her mind and life in hut made her to realize the reality. Kunti, never failed to be a perfect mother to her sons. Draupadi again stood for a task of marrying all five pandavas. Even in the crucial situation Draupadi was strong enough to face it. She did not fear on her future or did not have intentions committing self-immolation. The special code of marital conduct designed by the sage Vyasa was a big surprise. No one had idea how it will kill a woman's feeling. Here she become helpless, a communal cup passed from one hand to another. No question whether she likes or not. The only peace is that of virginity boon, but still it is again for a man's benefiting than for a woman. Draupadi connects it with Kunti whose boon was the cause of her state. Draupadi probe herself whether Kunti would've felt the same, when she was told that the Gods would be happy to impregnate her? She puts in other way also, if sage would've asked her, requested the gift of forgetting, If Arjun loved her back, she might been able to forget Karna. She feels that it is all because she hurt Karna. The unusual marriage ceremony for no woman in this world would've happened with five men.

The bond between Draupadi and Arjun was broke by Kunti. It was Kunti the sole reason for this marriage. Draupadi was not able to outpour her feeling but the bitterness as revenge made her to decide to wait for the right time. Draupadi felt that analysisation of a person is important to take revenge. As daughter-in-law she entered the great and grandeur Hastinapur palace. She was one who liked to leave her father's palace to set free herself, but Hastinapur palace was a curiosity, the grandness gave intuition that something ominous to her husbands. Draupadi met

everyone in the palace. Her heart searched for Karna, every time when she got the thought of Karna she promised herself to not allow her mind to wander as she is a married woman and must be a dutiful wife. Bheeshma's unnatural sacrifice and boon blessed by God raised several questions in her. She believed that love on pandavas one day may go against them. When Bheeshma shared the words told by his mother to Draupadi, it started haunting her. Being part of the family how she will destroy the great house and what reason going to be for this deed. The travel to Khandav Kingdom, an injustice partition made and given by Dhritarashtra made draupadi to think lot. The distance between Krishna and her after marriage bothered her lot. She understood that world we live is transient. She worried because of the avoidance of Arjun.

The dream palace always she wished to live was built by Maya 'The palace of Illusions'. The grandeur and magical illusion of palace no one would've imagined made to envy. The positive thought of Draupadi of her marriage life made her to move forward with her five husbands. She proved her strength always and gift of five sons was the result of her happy and balanced life. She was very much satisfied with her unconventional domestic situation. She built strong bond with the palace, 'mistress of palace of illusions'. She little hesitated regarding Kunti's visit, a daughter-in-law with natural fear of losing the power in her palace. As a queen, life of the kings well known to her, But still Kings marrying for the desires, political reasons are common. She was a practical woman, and the marriage rules are only for her and not for her men. She was sure that she was special to her husbands. She gave her support to build a strong and great kingdom. Her life was designed by the people around her for several reasons. Arjun's marriage with Subadra, Krishna's sister which she could not endure. Again the explanation and reason for this marriage connected to the history has great purpose, consoled her.

The boundaries of afterlife are complicated one, the karma decides it. But for women Draupadi wished, a good woman would surely go the place where men were not allowed so that they could be finally free from male demands.

Invitation to all the Bharath kings for the Rajasuya Ceremony and the grandeur of Palace of illusions was the starting point of all the consequences faced by Draupadi. Death of Sisupal, revealed the true love and care she had on Krishna and the insult faced by Duryodhan cost the life of whole family. Draupadi wanted to use the chance to put everything right for what she did to Karna. But she did not get chance to redeem. The yagna did not touch its final in full. The sudden earth quake and deeds of karna melted the heart of Draupadi. She couldn't forget the activities of Karna and also worried that Palace had failed to impress him.

The birth prophecy which was at the back of her mind always gave new thoughts. She has done unforeseen things in her life, marrying five men, combined their strength and made them over lords of the entire Bharath. She believed that she had made significant mark in the history. Partially she felt good and partially was doubtful whether her life is all about this.

“Desire is a powerful magnet”(p.176)

Invitation of Duryodhan to Hastinapur – except Yudhisthir all other pandavas doubted, even Draupadi was silent. Visit to Hastinapur and meetings were going well. She met Karna's wife Bhanumathi. The liking on Karna was always there in her. She did not get chance to speak with Karna. Pandavas were enjoying and spending time happily. This happiness ended in tragedy when Yudhisthir lost everything in gambling including his brothers and wife Draupadi.

“ the wife is the property of the husband, no less than cow or a slave”(p.190)

Draupadi felt What is the use of Nyashastra, law designed in this universe. A man who lost himself has no longer had any rights over his wife. But laws of men did not save her.

The state of Panchaali was pathetic in the court. The men she believed more failed to save her, starting from her husbands, grandfather, Blind King, women in court and the hope she had on Karna who can control Duryodhan. It was Krishna who saved her. She realized and understood the reality. The punishment heaped on her was so much than any other crime. She came out of all guilty that she had for Karna. The defeated heart poured out in form of words – curse and oath. A woman will not think in the way as men, she will throw herself forward to save her husband at any cost. She would have stood for them at any situation. She changed her view in her relationship with her husbands and decided to not depend on them completely in the future. For men the softer emotions are always intertwined with power and pride. The deeds of Karna proved it, when Draupadi was in suffering. He is of person who always goes with code-of honour. The patriarchal quality suppressed the humanity. He would've regretted but he tried to hide his pain with a fierce smile. She learned the final truth at last. The thoughts within woman were better than all men in the world. She felt a woman's heart is purer than anything in this world. The revenge, loss, betrayal killed her and left her to shame, but with no fear. For her future was big question, the love on her sons and absence of her may also blunt the edge of her vengeance which will fail to achieve the goal.

She compares herself with the historical character Damanyanthi who with stood for her husband. Draupadi did not love any of her husbands in full, even though she was a dutiful wife. She knew that no one had the power to agitate her the way the Karna did. The heart is beyond control, that is the power and weakness. The life in the forest and in Matsaya kingdom is again a painful and harder. The dreams regarding krushetra brought many changes on the opinions she had on Karna. Draupadi who disliked Hidimba , first wife of Bheema envied on her for who was a tough woman and followed her mind, she was on her own way even after the marriage.

Draupadi annoyed by the fact, a poor tribe, without husband had led a complete life, with all draupadi was incomplete. Draupadi felt that all women are also equally going to face the challenges. The impact of war is more than men to women.

As per the prophecy she faced the worst part of her life – Kurushetra, victories and loss. During kurushetra she got chance to know the real Karna. The conversation between Bheesma and Karna revealed many truths, where she learnt the love of Karna on her, and worries for humiliating Draupadi in open court. This response of Karna was the one she expected all her life. She was gratified that there is a place for her at bottom of his heart. The love on Draupadi is going to be there till his death for sure. Through this conversation she understood, the promise made to another or to oneself could paralyze a life. She felt that she realized it very late that vow of vengeance had locked the pandavas and kauravas in their stance of enmity. The promises, curses, blessings, prayers, secrets and consequences are all the part of law. After the victory, forming kingdom was a great deal for pandavas. The kingdom was filled with darkness, largely with women(widows), no work, no help, children started begging. The role of Draupadi was remarkable. Formed a court for women, where all woman's problem shared. Draupadi with the help of other women in kingdom improved the state of life in the kingdom. Again Draupadi broke because of Pariksit's prophecy.

The end of Krishna, emptied the lives of pandavas and particularly Draupadi which made them to end up their lives. The empowering words of Krishna was the one always made her to withstand in her life. The implacable law of their final journey is that no one could stop for another. Draupadi's decision to follow her husbands is of renounced worldly life. She was not ready to let go of her life. The past with victories, adventures, glory, and shame struck in her mind. She wanted to live it all again and wished to full fill her dreams and duties. The temptation

to live was suppressed by her decision and determined to move on with her husbands. This was her problem, to rebel against the boundaries that society has prescribed for women. The life journey of her ended in Himalayas . On the death bed which was filled with snow she was able to feel the caress of Krishna. The discussion of Bheema and Yudhisthir on the reason of her fall and could not complete the journey was able to overhear by her, according to them the major fault was which the love she had on Karna. Even in her last moment she felt strongly that Karna would have perished with her instead of continuing the last journey.

A woman born as princess, balanced her fivefold role precociously, rebellious daughter-in-law, the queen mother, beloved companion of Krishna, woman obsessed with vengeance – none of them were the true Panchaali - if not who was she? The last question raised in her was whether she lived for her. This is the question of every woman in this contemporary world, that the modern society is of kurushetra for women. The self-respect is inevitable to be identified as an independent individual in the society.

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