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Female Subjectivity in Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

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Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Nirjala Sapkota has completed her thesis entitled "Female Subjectivity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*" under my supervision. She carried out her research from December, 2014 to October, 2015 A.D. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Female Subjectivity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur by Nirmala Sapakota has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This dissertation has explored female subjectivity based on Draupadi, the female protagonist of the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, in the light of Third-World Feminism. The novel is a rewriting of the famous epic the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective which has attempted to foreground her strength, agency, individuality, intellectuality, and the power. In the original epic, Draupadi is portrayed as a passive victim of patriarchy, whereas in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, she is portrayed as a model of female empowerment and courage who establishes her self-identity by subverting the patriarchal boundaries and female stereotypes of the typical Hindu Indian society.

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The Palace of Illusions: A Critical Study

The Palace of Illusions is a brilliant piece of novel that aims to browse the agony, domination, sufferings, cultural crisis, identity crisis faced by women in contemporary society. In the novel, Divakaruni focuses on the consciousness and strength of the protagonist Draupadi who is well aware about her responsibility, duty, interest, and the rights. In the novel, Divakaruni rewrites the story of the *Mahabharata* through Draupadi's perspectives in order to foreground her subjectivity and individuality which has been ignored by Vyasa in the original epic. Through the narration of Draupadi herself, Divakaruni wants to show her self-consciousness, awareness, power, agency, subjectivity, and resistance against the patriarchal notions and the traditional role assigned for the women in the Third world countries, specifically in Hindu Indian culture. She belongs to the Third world Indian society where women are given subordinated position and are bound within the family reputation and honour. That is why their rebellion against this male-centered notion is considered as against the *dharma* of a woman. In this challenging situation, Draupadi has taken a stance, in balance, to subvert the position of a woman given by patriarchal Third world Hindu society.

Draupadi, from birth, was assigned for a heroic role to perform that would change the history of her time. Her resentment towards her father for not choosing her name suitable to her life and role, her passion and fighting for education unlike other women in her era, her witty remarks, objection of traditional rules and customs, logical questions, sharp mind, her yearning for freedom, independence, knowledge and wisdom, her fighting for truth and justice, struggle for identity, fearlessness for speaking out, bravery to stay silent in need, power to handle the relationship with five men, having control over them, and her lifelong determination and continuous effort

to gain what she wants are the basic elements that foreground her subjectivity in the novel. Divakaruni has largely used these elements in the novel in order to give Draupadi a feminist voice that would reveal her subjectivity.

Subjectivity is the condition of being a subject i.e. the quality of possessing perspectives, experiences, feelings, beliefs, desires, and/or power. Female subjectivity means the condition of a female having above mentioned features. Female subjectivity is used as an explanation for what influences and informs women's judgments about truth and reality. It is the collections of the perceptions, experiences, expectations, personal or cultural understanding, and beliefs specific to a woman. In other words, female subjectivity refers to the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations that a subject marked as female would generally have of the world. It is often used in contrast to the term 'objectivity' which is described as a view of truth or reality which is free of any individual's influence. Subjectivity is in part a particular experience or organization of reality which includes how one views and interacts with humanity, objects, consciousness, and nature, so the difference between different cultures brings about an alternate experience of existence that forms life in a different manner. According to Donald E. Hall, "That very small degree of agency, intended often by acute anguish and profound distress is subjectivity as we continue to experience and live it today" (15).

We must never forget that even if we do not create our selves in any neat or instrumental way, we do collectively create the conditions of our own survival or destruction. Often used interchangeably with the term 'identity', subjectivity refers to our social constructs and consciousness of identity. It is social and personal being that exists in negotiation with broad cultural definitions and our own ideals. We may have numerous discrete identities, of race, class, gender, sexual orientation etc. and a

subjectivity that is comprised of all of those facets, as well as our own imperfect awareness of ourselves. The subjectivity refers to the condition of being that describes the interior life of selfhood of any individual as it is theorized in terms of its relationship to gender, power, language, culture and politics. There is close relationship between power and subjectivity while forming the identity of any individual because power constructs subjectivity. It consists of a female's conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions, and desires.

As an approach to women's history, female subjectivity looks at how a woman herself as a subject saw her role and how she saw that role as contributing/or not to her identity and meaning. It is an attempt to see history from the perspective of the individuals who lived that history, especially ordinary women, and requires taking seriously women's consciousness. Female Subjectivity is an interior sense of selfhood of the oppressed which is always overshadowed by the male dominated society or any external or internal force.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has well presented Draupadi as a courageous, brave, powerful, and fearless woman having full sense of subjectivity. Draupadi questions logically the injustices imposed upon her and also upon women in her society. She, in some critical and complicated situations, reluctantly conceals her subjectivity within herself, holds her questions back, and remains mute too in spite of being conscious enough to revolt. She does so, sometimes in order to save her family's honour and sometimes thinking that same is her fate which was already prophesied by Vyasa. She is driven by her fate the whole life. Her silence towards the inner desire for Karna, her silent acceptance of the man other than the one whom she wants as her husband, and somehow, her submission towards the declaration of her polyandry are some of the examples of it. Nevertheless, she doesn't easily accept the

circumstances she meets against her will and power, which signifies her subjectivity. The only reason of her birth was to change the course of history. She is an agent to bring a great change in her time. She is not an ordinary woman. Her birth itself is noble. Changing the course of history isn't an easy task she is assigned for from her birth. Her such individuality, particularity, uniqueness and strong determination on her vow for vengeance made her change the history for which she was born from the fire on the fire-ceremony.

The way Draupadi rebels against the customs and conventions is similar to the way these days girls have to fight against century old customs that hinders their growth and developments. She is fully conscious and alert character. She is aware of her duties and rights and is also critical about the rights women are deprived of, in her society. Unlike other women, she has no interest in typical female endeavours; she would rather love to be tutored alongside her brother in the art of war and the machinations of ruling a kingdom. She is not like other women for whom their husband is God. She has a brilliant mind, is utterly one-in-herself, and doesn't hesitate in berating the Kuru elders too for countenancing wickedness.

Though the focus is on Draupadi's life, Divakaruni has also included the stories of other female characters as strong role-models. Divakaruni portrays the stories of Kunti, Draupadi's mother-in-law, who devotes her life to her sons and stepsons making sure to treat them equally and grooming them to become kings. She also mentions the story of Gandhari, the wife of the blind king, who blindfolds herself at her marriage choosing to live an equal life to her husband. She portrays the stories of all these women as conscious choices made by them, not as roles handed to them by the society or by the men in their time.

The novel *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has received many reviews and critiques from different writers, critics, and the researchers since the very beginning of its publication. They have analyzed the novel from different perspectives. Kendal Busse writes his views about the novel in the *International Journal of Hindu Studies* that though the novel has tried to include something more which was excluded in the original epic; it fails to sketch the proper character of Draupadi as a protagonist. He says, "Divakaruni's version is notable among the other *Mahabharata* novelizations for trying to include more of the original stories, but also lack of a compelling protagonist" (86).

Similarly, Sharanya Manivannan puts her review on the novel in *The Sunday Express*. She claims that the story is largely faithful to the original. For her, though the author succeeds in conveying the depth and nuance in other characters, her portrayal of Draupadi is quite unsatisfactory. She argues:

Curiously absent are the elements that truly challenge the misogyny of the original epic. Despite unexplored hints at her temper and capacity for vengeance, she is depicted mostly as obedient, pleading codes of honour as a ruse to mask cowardice. Even a single attempt at subversion, the centering of Panchaali's secret love for Karna as the great regret of her life, is trite. (7)

In the post, Sharanya is mostly dissatisfied with the depiction of the character of Draupadi. She claims that Draupadi is depicted as a mere feminine and submissive woman who silently follows patriarchal codes of conduct. Her only subversion of the patriarchal rules i.e. loving a man other than her husbands is also shown as her lifelong regret.

Likewise, Tariqa Tandon claims that Draupadi of the original epic isn't taken as a role model like other ideal women of Hindu mythology in India but this novel is different than that of the original one. She asserts:

Draupadi has been portrayed mostly negatively in Hindu society. Take a trip to India and you will fail to find girls being named after her.

Many believe that it was her headstrong actions that brought about the destruction of Third Age of Man and she is known to be a *kritya*, one who brings doom to her clan. But Divakaruni moves away from such interpretations to provide a new outlook on Panchaali. (1)

At this point, Tandon claims that Divakaruni has given new voice to Draupadi who has been portrayed negatively in the society as she is considered as the main cause to bring the disastrous war of *Mahabharata*. But, she says, Divakaruni has given her a different voice of her own to speak unlike what others interpret her character.

Similarly Julia Hoydis in her article "A Palace of Her own: Feminine Identity in the Great Indian Story" puts her review on the novel as:

The novel not only invites criticism for the ambitious attempt this poses on a formal and structural level, but allows insight into the interaction of gender and identity, particularly into the complex construction of femininity already inherent in the original text, while also challenging from the contemporary perspective... The text highlights a crucial relation established between womanhood and vengeance. (1)

For Julia, Divakaruni's novel brings fore the issues of gender and identity which was complex in the original text written by Vyasa. In the complex construction of

femininity, Julia claims, Divakaruni has focused on the relation between womanhood and a woman's vengeance for her lost honour.

Likewise, Jyotsna Sanzgiri, in her article "The Myths We Live By," argues that, "Divakaruni's novel brings princess Panchali into the center stage, and the Mahabharata that Panchali gives birth to is a creative, illuminating, feminist work that compels us to re-examine the original text" (46). At this point, Jyotsna claims that the novel by Banerjee, in the voice of the central character Draupadi reveals the truth of the war of Kurukshetra fought between Kauravas and Pandavas. For Jyotsna, Panchaali aka Draupadi being in the central position gives birth to the Mahabharata war that is a great feminist work to accomplish and it should lead one to re-examine the original text of Vyasa from feminist perspective. Here, actually, Jyotsna fails to acknowledge that the terrible war of the Mahabharata wasn't brought by Draupadi but by the male egos, greed, and throne-love of the characters. Draupadi was only a catalyst to re-establish the truth and to avenge her honour by deriving justice. Bringing wars is not a feminist but a destructive work indeed.

Another critic Renuka Narayan also has published her review of the novel in *Hindustan Times*. For Renuka, Divakaruni's version is mostly true to the original epic that she has told the story of Draupadi's birth, strange childhood, and marriage to five husbands, her sufferings, freedom, loss, and the war from Draupadi's voice. But, Renuka says, the author has twisted the tale by adding some more stories in the original tale of the epic, i.e. the story of Draupadi's secret and hidden love for a man which is the most resplendent discovery in the novel. Renuka says, "Most of this is true as original epic. Divakaruni adds other imaginative twists of her own: which man does Draupadi really love? How does she get to describe the battle? And most resplendent discovery of all: who is one who really truly loves her?" (9).

Some of the aforementioned critiques and reviews of the novel *The Palace of Illusions* tell us that the novel has given the different voice to Draupadi of her own which is different from the original epic. And some critics argue that Draupadi is depicted not any differently from the original one. But none of the critics has talked about her struggle for selfhood in the complex structure of patriarchal Hindu society in the particular Third World country called India. In such an extreme situation of Hindu Royal family of patriarchal Indian culture, Divakaruni has given Draupadi the light of self-awareness and subjectivity. None of them has talked about the real motive of the author to rewrite the story of the *Mahabharata*. Nevertheless she is left mute too in some of the parts of the novel as she has to go through the unique and distinct experiences vis-à-vis the Third world Hindu society where women are severely marginalized and given low position. Moreover, the novel displays the struggle for identity in a mythological context, which is distinctly Indian, yet transcends cultural borders, all the while showing the illusionary nature of those imposed by history and gender. And this is what the argumentation of my research which is not yet developed by other critics or researchers.

This research analyses Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* on the concern of Third World Feminism exploring the female individuality, consciousness, agency and, subjectivity of the central character Draupadi. The term Third World Feminism designates the experiences and politics of identity imbedded in the hegemonic feminist practice of non-western women. The concept emerged in 1990s challenging the essentialist definitions of femininity by the western feminism that studies the Third-world women as an analytical and political category. It also studies the biases and prejudices of the ethnocentric group of Western Feminism towards the Third World Feminism. It shows that the Western Feminism always neglects the

unique experiences of the Third World women. It explores the self among the history and struggle of the Third World women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism and, monopoly.

The Third World Feminism deals with the women in third world countries. However it is important to define in feminism's terms, what a third world country actually is. The third world countries are a group of developing countries of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, that are characterized by low levels of living, low income per capita, low education provisions, poverty, and starvation. It is also important to note that the third world feminism deals with extreme and taboo topics. Some of these topics include: foot binding in China, *sati* in India, veiling in Middle East, and female genital cutting in Africa. These among many other things make third world feminism a truly unique form of feminism. Also this form of feminism is deeply rooted in the specific and historical regions throughout third world countries. Moreover, the core tenets of third world feminism are the very similar to the common form of feminism found in the west. Women in third world countries desire equality in society, work, religious settings, and personal relationships. However, for women in the third world face horrible and inhuman conditions that are much worse than most other women in the western countries.

Though feminism came to be a very popular and vibrant movement, it couldn't be beyond the criticism of being Eurocentric. The feminists of the developing third world countries including Gayatri Spivak claimed that Western women's issues aren't appropriate for the women having distinct issues in the third world countries. For example, the African-American women's issues and the South-Asian women's issues are much more distinct from that of the issues of Anglo-American women from the past to the very recent times. Non-western women have

the experiences of double marginalization or many other forms of marginalization in terms of class, caste, gender, ethnicities, religion, region, colonization etc. Third world feminism has been described as a group of third world feminist theories developed by feminists who acquired their views and take part in feminist politics in the third world countries. Although women from the third world countries have been engaged in the feminist movement, Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes western feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and doesn't take into account the unique experiences of women from third world countries. According to Mohanty, "Women in the third world feel that western feminism bases its understanding of women on "integral racism, classism and homophobia" (49).

Mohanty, in her work *Feminism without Border Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, recognizes a deep belief, power, and significance of Third-World feminist thinking in struggles for economic and social justice. It emphasizes an enterprise and project that embodies the international commitment for best practices. Through this commitment, she is urging the possibility of the borderless feminism. She argues:

Feminism without border is not the same as "border-less" feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflict, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent. It acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real-and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division. (2)

In her analysis, the speaking of plurality and crossing the narrowness of borders avoiding the silence and exclusion is evidential. For her, feminism without borders

stresses the most expansive and exclusive visions of feminism thereby transcending the very borders of feminism established by the western feminists.

Third world feminism is one of the important critical tools for representing the women's issues of the third world developing countries because the western feminism can't represent the distinct experiences and problems of the non-western women. The issues of the colour and the South Asian women's issues are much more distinct than the issues of the so called first world women. Divakaruni's text however represents the issues of the third world women in one hand and tries to subvert the existing women's position in the third world Hindu society and culture on the other.

Third-World Feminism has risen as a result of male domination and women's oppression in the Third-World countries. Like any other change, initially Feminism was shown cold shoulders. But gradually, the movement for equal rights for men and women was accepted by the elite of the nation. They realized that treating women as an object had led the society to decay. The oppression of women was the prime reason for the diminishing marriage institution and crumbling values of the balanced society. The dominating males of the society had always granted only subordinated status to women. Women had suffered immensely due to their sex. This movement has brought benefits to the society in general and women in particular.

Feminism is defined as a movement aimed to achieve equal rights for women. It is the pursuit of achieving equal social, economic, and political privileges for women. The western and the non-western Feminism share certain issues like fighting for gender equality, equal wages for work, the right to equal access to education and health, right to vote, right to have equal opportunities and privileges to have equal political rights. However, feminists in patriarchal Indian society had to battle for more cultural issues like widow immolation, polygamy, dowry system, violence against

women, equal rights for dalit women, common benefits of life for the women whom their husbands have deserted, equal rights in the inheritance of property, and saddest of all combating all pervasive sex-selective abortion. Feminism is against the long been dominant patriarchal values and biased normative notions imposed on women in the name of cultures or values. It is an intervention on long been dominant patriarchy and a subversive consciousness has been discovered and used against the hegemony of patriarchy. It examines the ways which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women by seeking female identity and by raising the voices against the patriarchy.

Feminism is the belief in the importance of gender equalities, invalidating the idea of gender hierarchy as a socially constructed concept and feminists are the persons of either sex who believe in Feminism. Feminism has changed traditional perspectives as a wide range of areas in human life, from culture to law. Feminist activists have campaigned different types of legal rights. They have struggled to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of oppressions, dominations, and subordination. Feminism is an anti-normative thought or discourse that gives space for feminists to raise voice against the injustices towards women. Feminists argue that the role of women in all sectors of society is equal to the males but that is not the case and rebellion is required to achieve this position. Feminist activists believe that the change will not come about simple negotiation or consent that means it must be forced. They argue that it must be achieved through the staging of activities or protests that will draw attention to issues in a dramatic way but till females aren't treated as equal human beings to males, women have to fight against the oppressive structures. It means anti-normative actions

come to be taken as essentialism for the existence of autonomous women roles as subversion of biased normative gender roles.

The normative role established for the women traditionally is prejudiced whereas a woman has to play a very important role in each and every sector of the society. As Mohini Chatterjee writes, “As mother, sister, daughter, or wife the role begins personally in particular and growth and progress of society in general, can not be either denied or undervalued” (iv). It is the case that, for centuries men kept the women under their thumb allowing her own development to stagnant who treated her like property and she lived her life under the domination of her man even if she was ill-treated, abused or tortured. The roles given to them were inferior to that of males as females were treated as supplementary of males. In the normative roles of patriarchy women were treated as third grade citizen or non human beings without even the voting right. Even the great figures come to be seen biased and sexist while making critique from the feminist perspectives.

Feminists are fighting against the patriarchal normativity of gender roles imposed upon them with their full energies for change. They disagree about whether equality and freedom for women can occur in society as it is currently structured or whether a radical transformation of the social structure is required. They are in the mission of dismantling all forms of subjugation imposed by the patriarchal social norms and values. It is a commitment to eradicate the ideology of domination to establish as a healthy and equal society for both male and female, so feminism is a movement for women’s liberation. Feminism includes more than organized activities and movements. It also offers a way of viewing the world through a gendered lens, this way gaining a new understanding of just about anything we turn our attention to not just women’s lives but men’s too; not in political actions in which women are engaged but the whole arena of global politics; not just public activities but the private

everyday activities and relationships in which all participate. The feminist sense we can make will be the first step in naming and challenging cultural meanings and social structures that continue to limit our human potential for self-realizations.

According to Saunders, "While western feminists make equality between men and women as the subject of struggle, third world feminism stressed satisfaction of basic material needs as a pressing issue in the context of disadvantageous international economic order" (6). Unlike the western feminism, the perspective of third world feminism can be reflected in the agendas and desires and the principle struggle of Third World women are centered on the most basic needs and basic rights. All the researchers or activists of Third world feminism in general argue that women should attain freedom not only from gender related inequalities, but also from those related to race, class, castes, cultures, regions; national asymmetries at these categories are mutually intertwined in the concrete and real life of women. As Sen and Grown write, "For a vast majority of women in the Third World, injustice as a result of class, race and national divisions is closely related to the oppressive situations that they experience as women" (iii). So third world women critics and activists, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in particular, tend to reject the notion of a single and uniform feminist movement acknowledging the heterogeneity that derives from diverse sources of oppression. For them feminism is more widely defined as a struggle against all forms of injustice so that women's rights could be secured in totality. The western construct of feminism fails as the notion promoted as women as an autonomous and sovereign can not be applied in the Third-World women in particular. Instead of perceiving economic globalization as monolithic, dominant, and irreversible force, Third world feminism focuses on the issues of heterogeneous identity which is more than a politics of differences; it is, according to Kandiyoti, "a

powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts" (88).

Uma Narayan, in her book *Dislocating Cultures and Third World Feminism*, justifies the value of the third world females as the third world women's issues are completely distinct from the experiences of the western women as the third world women have faced the family violence; unmatched, unwanted and early marriages; cultural and traditional forms of oppressions. She says, "Third world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of the western agendas in one clear and simple sense" (13). Similarly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak raises problematic issues about subaltern. In her essay "Can Subaltern Speak?", Spivak has raised the issue of the subaltern women and their distinct history in the non-western context. Like Mohanty, Spivak argues that western feminist writing on women in the third world should be focused on whether the subaltern can speak or not.

While speaking in the context of the novel *The Palace of Illusions* by an Indian woman writer Chitra Banerjee, the novel represents the issues of the third world women in Hindu society, particularly in the Royal family, where the main character is conscious enough to revolt against the established gender roles and injustices imposed upon women by the patriarchal values. To show the feminist consciousness and female agency in the novel, Third-World feminism is taken as the theoretical tool to analyze the issue. But in doing so it hasn't crossed the frontier of the textual research. It is proved with the different writers and critics from the domain concerned. This study has been divided into three major chapters. Chapter first gives the overall introduction of the research. Chapter second analyzes the text which brings evidences to prove female subjectivity in the novel. And finally, the Third chapter concludes the whole dissertation showing the subversion of female stereotypes in the novel.

I. Female Subjectivity in *The Palace of Illusions*

The novel *The Palace of Illusions* takes us back to the time of the *Mahabharata*, that is half history and half myth. Through the narrator Draupadi, the writer gives us a rare feminist interpretation of the epic story. Here Draupadi is depicted as the protagonist of the story and the entire story of *Mahabharata* is related from her perspective. Her feelings, aspirations, wishes, desires and thought about the each event of *Mahabharata*, how she was able to cope up with extra ordinary challenges in her life are the core content and plot line of this novel.

The opening chapters of the novel present Draupadi's obsession with her origins and introduce rebellious character as well as her struggle for identity of her own making. Indeed, listening to the story of her birth from Dhai Ma, a typical grandmother figure, seems to signify as the only meaningful activity for her, which actually would bring her to the forefront and make her feel special. She dreams of leaving her father's palace, a suffocating place for her which she says, "seems to tighten its grip around me until I couldn't breathe" (1). Draupadi makes it clear that king Drupad, as a father, acted according to the dictates of Manu by protecting and taking care of her. This protective care, Draupadi finds suffocating.

She considers her name 'Draupadi', which means daughter of Drupad, to affirm patriarchal dependency and to be unsuitably at odds with the divine prophecy made at her birth: "She will change the course of history" (5). From the start, the narrative highlights the important relation between names, gender, and identity. Draupadi is seen critically analyzing the names that were given to her brother and to herself. Her resentment towards her father for not choosing her name suitable to her extra-ordinary birth, her lifelong role, and her power shows her feminist consciousness and female subjectivity since her early ages. She says:

Dhri's name fell within the bounds of acceptability though if I were his parent I might have picked a more cheerful appellation, like Celestial Victor, or Light of the Universe. But Daughter of Drupad? Granted, he hadn't been expecting me, but couldn't my father have come up with something a little less egoistic? Something more suited to a girl who was supposed to change history? I answered to Draupadi for the moment because I had no choice. But in the long run, it would not do. I needed a more heroic name. (5)

Draupadi shows her dissatisfaction in her own name chosen from her father that relates her identity only to her father who represents a patriarchal figure. Though king Drupad doesn't envision Draupadi's importance in the events to come, Draupadi considers herself specially chosen. It is supremely ironic that the role of Dhristadyumna, whose birth is celebrated by king Drupad because he is born with a mission to destroy the king's enemy Drona, is rendered almost insignificant when compared to that of Draupadi. It is Draupadi who will bring about changes in the lives of people who will associate with her in the future. For Draupadi, the only way to put an end to the dreadful monotony of her existence is to listen to the tale of her life and to believe that her birth is as significant as that of her brother's. This interest of her life later matures into a desire to be the controller of her own destiny. She wants to be an agent of action because she wishes to redefine the role of women in the context of her life. She says: "And who decided that a woman's highest purpose was to support men? ...A man I would wager myself, I plan on doing other things with my life" (26). Being the agent of action, she not only decides the course of action but also forces others to face the consequences of her actions. In the novel Draupadi presents herself as one who happily takes over the reins of her life.

Draupadi's childhood is not a regular childhood of any little girl since it follows a different route. Draupadi who was raised by her fond Dhai Ma, had a different view of the world such that, she always opposed the ritual of women who weren't allowed to enter the Royal courtroom, women weren't supposed to study after a certain point, they had no choice of their own while selecting their grooms etc. She always objects the patriarchal rule, custom and culture and the manner assigned for women to perform. She logically questions such traditional and biased rituals with the notion to subvert them which none of the women in her era dares. Unlike other women in the palace, Draupadi was allowed to have education along with her brother. Drupad had engaged learned Brahmins for the education of Dri, with whom Draupadi too joined and this is how she became expert in Political Science. And whatever she remains untold for being a woman, she learns by eavesdropping. She says, "Early in my life, I learned to eavesdrop. I was driven to this ignoble practice because people seldom told me anything worth knowing. I was amazed at all the things I learned in this manner" (34). Such an obsession to education suggests her feminist consciousness which was allowed only to males.

Draupadi's strength and courage were the result of her education. Unlike other women in the palace, she was interested in composing and solving riddles, responding witty remarks, reading lots of books and writing poetry. She was taught the feminine arts and skills like drawing, painting, sewing, and decorating. She was given lesson on dancing, singing, and playing music. But her heart was not in such frivolities. As she says, "With each lesson, I felt the world of women tightening its noose around me. I had a destiny to fulfill that was no less momentous than Dhri's. Why was none concerned about preparing me for it" (29)? She further says, "I hungered to know about the amazing, mysterious world that extended past what I could imagine, the

world of the senses and of that which lay beyond them. And so I refused to give up the lessons, no matter who disapproved” (24).

She fights for education and joins lessons with Dhri and her education lent her a sense of confidence unfamiliar to the most women of her time. She was a quick learner and always was in pursuit of knowledge; she had a sharp memory and a deeply insightful knowledge of many subjects. Bhawalkar, in his *Eminent Women in the Mahabharata*, comments on the success of Draupadi as a student as, “She became known as Pandita (learned and wise) and grew up a charming maiden admired by all” (4). Her words and opinions were well respected and supported by her family due to her vast knowledge didn’t however cause her to be vain and arrogant or to be an impediment in her striving to be a dutiful wife.

Draupadi, who experiences mixed feelings with regard to the prophecy, with yearning and fear, like a modern feminist, wishes to position herself as a subject who desires and not as an object of desire. But her only worry is how the spotlight of history would fall on her when she was leading a cloistered existence in the palace. She doesn’t want her life to be recorded in the annals of history as a mere victim of circumstances. It is significant to note that in most constructions of Draupadi, in both literary and non-literary texts, she is seen as a victim of patriarchy which is perpetuated by the dominant discourses of the time. In Divakaruni’s version Draupadi wants to be the maker of her own history. She questions the terms of the myth which regards her existence, by bringing out what it represses or excludes. In other words, she wishes to give an authentic account of her life which would radically question and consistently undermine the previous construction of her life. All that she requires is an account of history which will represent her truly and will articulate her real life.

Identifying her father's palace with a prison house, she expresses her wish to create an alternative reality which will cancel out the misery of her real existence. She says:

Staring down from the rooms at the bare compound stretching below,
I'd feel dejection settle on my shoulders like a shawl of iron. When I
had my own palace, I promised myself, it would be totally different. I
closed my eyes and imagined a riot of colour and sound, birds singing
in mango and custard apple orchards, butterflies fleeting among
jasmines, and in the midst of it but I couldn't imagine yet the shape
that my future home would take. Would it be elegant as crystal?
Solidly precious, like a jewel-studded goblet? Delicate and intricate,
like gold filigree? I only knew that it would mirror my deepest being.
There I would finally be at home. (7)

At this point, Draupadi's desire to have a palace of her own can be seen as her desire to have a story of her own, a story of her life which doesn't typecast her and make her life a cliché. She doesn't want to play a role in someone's script which will cripple her movement and diminish her impact. She doesn't want to be a mere character in someone's script. She considers the prophecy, Vyasa had made, as scripts that denied her freedom and progress. So in the new palace that she envisions, 'birds will sing in apple and mango orchards and butterflies will flit among jasmines' to suggest the freedom she yearns for.

Draupadi, in the novel by narrating her own story actually seeks to wrest back to the initiative to action. At this point female agency takes shift to her. The concept of female agency is an important one in current sociological and feminist studies. McNay claims that "a revised understanding has long been the explicit or implicit concern of feminist research devoted to the uncovering of the marginalized

experiences of women” (10). Draupadi , being a woman, so marginalized, transforms herself into the leading actor.

Within the structures of patriarchy, the roles of women are nothing more than that of a servant or supplementary to males whenever the men, like a king or master, demand their roles. So the women remain unknown, inferior, submissive, docile, dominated, and subordinated for centuries and that paved the way for the origin of feminism with the growing consciousness of women. Draupadi is the challenge of womanhood. She has faced insult, mental and emotional dilemma even in the presence of wise, qualified, and the honourable men, not only this but also in the presence of her five husbands for the sake of her own *dharma*. The *Mahabharata*'s Draupadi had no reaction to that. But Divakaruni's Draupadi is not mute. If required, she opens her mouth. She doesn't believe that husband is god to the wife and she should always obey him. She is full women consciousness. As a daughter or as a wife she asks so many questions and declares doubts even regarding the *dharma* of a female on this Earth to the scholars until they fall speechless and answerless. She says, "I resented the tutor's declaration that women were the root of all the world's troubles. Perhaps that was why, when he gathered up his palm leaf manuscripts and rose to leave..." (24).

She rebels against an education of typically female skills which she perceives as useless in comparison to the knowledge taught to her brother which are the lessons about royal rule, justice, power etc. She says "with each lesson I felt the world of women tightening its noose around me" (29). She further says, "These were the lessons I most envied him, the lessons that conferred power" (27).

After she gets allowance by her father to partake in Dhri's classes, in spite of other's objection to her further education, she finds it increasingly harder to resign

herself to the restriction of royal womanhood. In resentment to the tutor's idea that "woman's highest purpose in life is to support the men in her life" (26), she realizes that her ambitions make her an outsider of her own sex. She says, "Each day I thought less and less like the women around me. Each day, I moved further from them into a dusky solitude" (26). The plot action as well as the heroine's identity is developed through narration, which appears to some extent as a process of self-interpretation. It also reflects her crucial reliance on outward influences for her happiness and identity; continually she struggles to construct a self to be set against the patriarchal construction of her self. Her notion of destructing patriarchal ethos is seen in the following lines when she says, "Dhri's tutor was of the opinion that virtuous woman were sent directly into their next birth, where if they were lucky, they reincarnated as men. But I thought that if lokas existed at all, good women would surely go to one where men were not allowed so that they could be finally free of male demands" (155).

She could argue to win her point with the apt quotations and illustrations from her fund of knowledge on various subjects of *Dharma* and *Nyayashastra*. Although she was desperate for revenge on those who harmed her, her distinction between right and wrong was rarely clouded and she was often in pursuit of justice. Her hunger for education enabled her to gain such a vast knowledge and the mastery on law, which signifies female awareness and empowerment in the novel. She narrates it as:

I was trying to concentrate on a volume of *Nyaya Shastra*. It was a large and laborious book that set out the laws of the land. The book, which described in diligent, morose detail complicated laws concerning household property, including servants and wives, caused my eyelid droop. But I was determined to learn what a king was

supposed to know. So I ignored summer's blandishments and battled with the book. (53-54)

Challenging all troubles and facing any obstacles against her education, Draupadi keeps on studying that finally enables her to win her arguments with apt quotations and illustrations from the manuscripts of law and righteousness.

She critically thinks any of the events that happen to her life. When her father decides to arrange the *Awayamvar* for her, she says, "Why even call it a swayamvar, then? Why make a spectacle of me before all those kings? It's my father, not I, who gets to decide whom I marry?" (56). She further says:

Father designed the test to lure Arjun to Panchaal because he'd been defeated by Arjun, he couldn't send a marriage proposal directly to him without losing face. But Swayamvar, it's the perfect opportunity! He knew a warrior like Arjun wouldn't be able to resist such a challenge. Power, that all he cares about, not his children... We are nothing but pawns for king Drupad to sacrifice when it's most to his advantage. (57-58)

This fury and complain against her father clearly shows Draupadi's critical thinking and subjectivity which Dhri, blind follower of father, completely lacks. Draupadi's fearlessness in confronting those who harmed her or her family displays her subjectivity in the novel. Draupadi existed in a traditional Hindu society of a time when a woman's role was to meekly serve her husband. In her era there was no question of women's equality with men. She claims, "I am not so easily frightened" (102). Draupadi, after won by Arjun in Swayamvar and brought home, was supposed to be divided among all the five Pandavas as a common wife. Draupadi silently accepts this stance of multiple husbanding in spite of her father's and the brother's

grave protest. Draupadi's such kind of silent submission to polyandry suggests that she wants to subvert the societal rule i.e. censor in polyandry, constructed by patriarchy and to live a unique life with most famous heroes of her time and leave a mark in history. She was already foretold her fortune by Vyasa as she would marry five husbands and perhaps thus she doesn't choose to protest against this decision. She says, "Ever since the prophecy I had thought intermittently of marriage, at times with excitement at times with dread. I sensed that it was a great opportunity" (54).

Draupadi was witty enough to reject the decision made for her against her will as she had once rejected Karna from taking part in the archery contest to win her in her Swayamvar. When Kunti orders her sons to marry Draupadi, she wants to protest but soon she remembers the prophecy made long before and falls silent. She says, "Vyasa's prophecy recoiled upon me, robbing me of my protests" (108). This silence also signifies the lower position of a woman in the male-centered society in the Third-World country.

Draupadi's father, brother and the Pandavas come to discuss about her marriage to the five brothers and the possible consequences if king Drupad doesn't agree on this proposal. The consequence they were guessing was Draupadi's self-immolation. But her response to this was: "I didn't fear the fate they imagined for me. I had no intention of committing honorable self-immolation; I had other plans for my life" (118). She doesn't consider Kunti's every order to her sons needs to be kept however the situation is. She says, "I didn't believe her claim that everything she said had to come true, or her honor would be lost" (119).

Kunti, in the novel, stands for the patriarchal figure who always tries to deny Draupadi's freedom and power only because she is a daughter-in-law. But Draupadi standing against her resists the patriarchal laws imposed upon her. Earlier, When

Kunti tortures newly wedded Draupadi with domestic households as a daughter-in-law needs to bear in the Indian culture, she refuses to surrender upon her. She says, "I would no longer waste time on regret. I would turn my face to the future and carve it into the shape I wanted. I would satisfy myself with duty.... I wasn't going to give my mother-in-law the satisfaction of thinking that she'd reduced me to tears, though in fact I was in the verge of weeping with frustration" (104-105) . Later, after being able to put Kunti aside from her life in her best times and after holding power over Pandavas, Draupadi explains her happiness of holding power as:

She saw that in this palace, I was mistress. Where my husbands had once relied on her, they now depended on me. She couldn't disrupt this state of affairs without causing her sons serious unhappiness. Had we remained in Hastinapur, in her husband's palace, I am sure she would have fought me fiercely for control. But the Palace of Illusions was my domain, and she accepted this. (150)

This victory of Draupadi over Kunti indicates her victory over patriarchy represented by a female figure in the Third world country. Whenever provoked, she challenged the male ego without the typical cause and effect analysis that stopped the women of her time in raising their voices against male atrocities. She states, "I never acted like Subhadra, though sometimes I wished I could. But I had been with my husbands too long. I knew them too intimately. I was too critical. My eyes had bored into their deepest recesses, illumining every weakness" (251).

Earlier in the dice game Draupadi shocks everyone by challenging the Kuru elders' very concept of righteousness. Instead of meekly obeying her husband's summons, she sends back a query which none can answer. "It is not true that once Yudhisthir is Duryodhan's property, he has no right to wager me?"(191). When she

succeeds in winning back freedom for her enslaved husbands, Karna pays her a remarkable tribute, saying that none of the world's renowned beautiful women has accomplished such a feat. Like a boat she has rescued her husbands who were drowning in a sea of sorrow. She has got such a power to handle the situation. No twenty-first century feminist woman can surpass her in being in charge of herself.

The unbearable sexual harassment by Kauravas in the open court before own husbands, sitting paralyzed as Duryodhana's slaves, Panchaali comes to recognize the limits of her husbands' feelings for her. Despite the image of victimization, the event presents a clear assertion of female strength and agency. She says:

Their notions of honour, of loyalty, toward each other, of reputation were more important to them than my sufferings. They would avenge me later; yes, but only when they felt the circumstances would bring them heroic fame. The choice they made in the moment of my need changed something in our relationship. I no longer depended on them so completely in the future. And when I took care to guard myself from hurt, it was as much from them as from our enemies. (195)

It can also be easily noticed how she had been consumed by passionate anger, in contrast to her husbands who stoically suffered the humiliation and controlled their desires for revenge by submitting to the expected protocol, patiently waiting for the circumstances to turn in their favour. The situation triggers an act of emancipation for Draupadi who protects herself as men fail to do.

She never wanted to live in someone's mercy. She would rather be happy to die than to fall in knees to ask for one's pity to save her honour. When she was all helpless at the moment of her harassment in the court, only Karna could stop the

shameful action of Kauravas. But he would do that only if Draupadi pleaded with tears for his help. But she states:

For men, the softer emotions are always intertwined with power and pride. That was why Karna waited for me to plead with him though he could have stopped my suffering with a single word. That was why he turned on me when I refused to ask for his pity. I knew what he wanted: for me to fall on my knees and beg him for mercy. He would have protected me then. He had the reputation of helping the destitute. But I wouldn't lower myself to that, not if I died. (192)

The scene of Draupadi's disrobing is obvious how her humiliation is rendered as a distinctly gendered shame. She appears furious at her mistreatment. She narrates it as "the worst shame a woman could imagine was about to befall me" (193). Her feminist consciousness is clearly visible at this moment when she says, "Let them stare at my nakedness. I thought. Why should I care? They and not I should be ashamed for shattering the bounds of decency" (193). What furthers her rage is her husbands' silenced and paralyzed glances at her as well as the elders' lowered head failing to answer her question if Yudhisthir actually still had the right to lose her after he had already lost himself. Consumed by her anger and the desire to restore her dignity, Draupadi utters the dreadful curse of the battle which would destroy the Kuru clan and vows not to comb her hair till she bathes it in Kaurava blood. She, by lifting up her long hair, utters her vow as, "I will not comb it until the day I bathe it in Kaurava blood" (194). Only a learned, courageous, and right-conscious woman can take such type of vow without taking the permission of her husband. She never felt it necessary/compulsory to take permission of her husbands to do something which reveals her feminist consciousness.

Significantly, she chooses to give up part of her traditional femininity for revenge as particularly in India, shiny fragrant hair symbolizes female beauty. Her subjectivity is displayed in her fearless and dreadful vow that she takes without even caring for her husbands' response and gets it fulfilled at her best at the end. She says that "vengeance encoded into my blood. When the moment came I couldn't resist it. I would use them over the long years of exile to gain what I wanted, no matter what its price" (195-196). Through the thirteen years of exile, she never allows her husbands and her friend Krishna to forget how she was outraged and they were deceitfully deprived of their kingdom. With the help of her unbound hair she makes them determined to avenge for her honor.

She argues that women need to fight for themselves to restore their dignity because she says, "wait for a man to avenge your honour, and you will wait forever" (49). Earlier, inspired by Sikhandi's sex transformation as the ultimate liberation from the restriction of womanhood, Panchaali is aware from the start that she says, "I too, would cross the bounds of what was allowed to women" (51). Draupadi's feminist concern is seen in the following lines when she says, "The more people dissuaded me, the more determined I became. Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the boundaries society has prescribed for women" (343). Moreover, she refuses to display a strong attachment to her children valuing her independence higher than motherhood. To be at the side of her husbands, she leaves them behind; and again to achieve her goal of life, she doesn't fully devote herself to her husbands. She says, "I didn't love any of my husbands in that way. I supported them through good times and bad; I followed them into the forest and forced them to become heroes. But my heart, even during the best of our years, I never gave it fully to them" (213).

When she finds all her husbands in favour of suing for peace, she brings to bear all her feminine charm to turn the course of events inexorably towards war. Pouring out a litany of her injuries, she rakes up her serpent like thick glossy hair and with tearful eyes she urges Krishna to recall those tresses when he sues for peace. She narrates her action of event as:

I refused all that my husbands did to bring me comfort. I stitched discontent onto my features and let my hair fall, matted and wrathful, around my face. Each day as I served their meals I reminded the Pandavas of how they'd failed me, and what I'd suffered as a result in Duryodhan's sabha. Each night I recited the taunts of the Kauravas so that they stayed fresh in their minds... Thus I won the war with insidious time, which otherwise might have softened the edge of our vengefulness or perhaps eroded it altogether. (199-200)

In the Third world Indian society only men are supposed to take participate in the war. This is why Draupadi has to put all her effort to convince her men to bring back her honour and justice through the war called *Dharmayuddha*. For her, they are the weapons to have victory over the injustices, humiliation and, taunts made to her and her husbands by Kauravas.

When Jayadratha seizes her, there is neither Sita-like lamentation nor shrill outcries for rescue. Fully conscious of beauty and power, she uses it in getting her way with Bhim in Virat's kitchen and with Krishna in turning the peace embassy into a declaration of war. The manner in which Draupadi manipulates Bhima to destroy Kichaka is a fascinating lesson in the art and craft of sexual power. When Kichaka has been pounded to death, instead of hiding in safety, she recklessly flaunts the corpse before his kin, revealing in her revenge.

We can see the oppression faced by Draupadi at various levels throughout the novel. The first lesson of patriarchy is learned in the family where the head of the family is a man/father. Man is considered the head of the family and controls women's sexuality, labour of production, reproduction, and mobility. Men see women as other of himself. The social construct of women is such that she should be subordinate to men. The exploitation is supposed to continue as long as women allow it and subjugate themselves. Florence E Babb argues, "Feminism takes no single form and that we need to ground our understanding of specific women's movements in the social and historical contexts in which they have emerged" (4).

Here in the novel, Draupadi as per her socio-historical belonging and typical situation has tried to subvert the portrayal of women from a man's perspective. The novel is the portrayal of struggle by Draupadi to achieve equality, dignity, rights, justice, and freedom from the patriarchal boundaries. Draupadi is portrayed as a brave and courageous character in the novel. The novel traces Draupadi's life beginning with her magical birth in fire as the daughter of a king before following her spirited balancing act as a woman with five husbands who have been cheated out of their father's kingdom. Draupadi is swept into their quest to reclaim their birthright, remaining at the husbands' side through the years of exile and a terrible civil war. Meanwhile, we can't lose sight of her stratagems to take control over her household and husbands, her own life, and her secret attraction towards Karna, her husbands' dangerous enemy.

She manages to handle the love of five brothers with great pride and deftness. Draupadi wasn't a dumb follower of her husbands. She had her own individuality. Through soft speaking she used harsh words to her husbands and others when necessary. She says: It's never a good idea to let one's husbands grow too complacent.

My displays of temper ensured that the Pandavas continued to regard me with a healthy respect. When I finally forgave them, they were appropriately penitent. It kept the number of their wives to a minimum" (152).

She clarifies her role to bring fortunes and happiness to the lives of Pandavas and to herself, and the satisfaction of marrying all the five brothers together in the following lines:

I knew also that I was special to them in a way that none of the syrupy beauties they married later could ever be. I had been at their side when they were young and in danger. Marriage to me had protected them from the murderous wrath of Duryodhan. I'd played a crucial role in bringing them to their destiny. I'd shared their hardship in Khandav. I'd helped them design this unique palace, which so many longed to see. If they were pearls, I was the gold wire on which they were strung. Alone, they would have scattered, each to his dusty corner. They would have pursued separate interests, deposited their loyalties with different women. But together we formed something precious and unique. I finally began to see what Kunti had in mind when she had insisted that I was to be married to all of them. (151-152)

This boldness is what sets her apart from other women of her time. The Pandavas often looked to Draupadi for guidance and approval which undoubtedly suggests her agency and power. The following lines further clarify this:

My husbands learned to appreciate my strengths. We were all surprised to discover that I had good eye for matters of governance. More and more Yudhishthir began to ask my advice when a tricky judgment had to be delivered. And I having learned more of the workings of women's

power was careful to offer my opinion in private deferring to him
always in front of others. (148)

Draupadi holds a vision. She thinks any of the situations critically and analytically. If she has doubt on something or someone, she would warn her husbands effectively. Earlier she doubted on Bheeshma Pitamah if he would support Pandavas in their need in the future. She knew that despite the fact that he loved them since their childhood so dearly, they shouldn't rely on him blindly. She says:

I wanted to warn my husbands that one couldn't depend on a man who plucked frailty and desire so easily out of his heart. How could he have compassion for the faults of others, or understand their need? Keeping his word was more important to him than a human life. That's why he'd sent Amba away without a moment's hesitation. There might come a day when he'd do the same to us. (132-33)

This view of her finally comes true at the time of war when Bheeshma gives his full support to Duryodhan and fights against Pandavas knowing that Pandavas were in favour of truth and justice. It clearly shows that Draupadi is a woman who holds a long run vision and awareness.

Uma Narayan in *Dislocating Cultures* takes aim at the related notion of nation, identity, and tradition to show how western and third world scholars have misrepresented Third world cultures and feminist genders. She says, "Third World Feminism is not a mindless mimicking of "Western agendas" in one clear and simple sense that, for instance, Indian Feminism is clearly a response to issue specifically confronting many *Indian* women" (13).

Draupadi as an Indian woman has gone through different experiences and faced different type of sufferings specific to the typical Third world Hindu culture so

that she has dealt with them in different ways as Uma Narayan claims "Indian feminism is clearly a response to issue specifically confronting many Indian women" (13). Narayan argues that both her mother and many others in the specific caste and middle-class Indian context in which she was raised saw education as a good thing that wise learned to master tasks in areas of life that had been closed to women of her mother's generations. At the same time, they were critical of the effects of the very things they encouraged. They were nervous about their daughters' intoxication with ideas and the insistence on using ideas acquired from books to question social rules and norms of life. Narayan further argues:

Both our mothers and our mother cultures give us all sorts of contradictory messages, encouraging their daughters to be confident, impudent, and self assertive even as they attempt to instill conformity, decorum, and silence, seemingly oblivious to these contradictions. They were anxious about the fact that our independence and self-assertiveness seemed to be making us into women who lacked the compliance, deference, and submissiveness deemed essential in good "Indian" wives.(3)

This type of contradictory message is seen earlier in the novel too when Draupadi gets education and as a result grows as a questioning and argumentative girl each day against the biased laws of the male-centered society. She says:

Even Dhai Ma, my accomplice in so many other areas of my life, regarded the lessons with misgiving. She complained that they were making me too hardheaded and argumentative, too manlike in my speech. Dhri, too, sometimes wondered if I wasn't learning the wrong

things, ideas that would only confuse me as I took up a woman's life with its prescribed, restrictive laws. (23)

Uma Narayan argues that telling the story of a person whose life is intertwined with one's own, in terms different from her own, is often a morally delicate project, requiring accommodation and tact and an ability to leave room for her account even as one claims room for one's own. She asserts, "Retelling the story of a mother-culture in feminist terms is a political enterprise. It is an attempt to, publicly and in concert with others, challenge and revise an account that is neither the account of an individual nor an account of the culture as a whole, but an account of *some* who have power within the culture" (9-10).

She further argues that to retell that story in a feminist critique is to move the private and hidden into the public sphere, subverting cultures of silence and shame. In the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, the retold story of *Mahabharata*, Divakaruni has given the voice to the voiceless Draupadi while narrating her own story from her own perspective. Her will to power is seen in the following lines: "Wasn't power singular and simple? In the world that I knew, men just happened to have more of it. I hoped to change this" (52). This clearly shows Divakaruni, in the novel, has well portrayed Draupadi as a powerful and anti-normative woman who wants to redraw the boundary of patriarchal society.

Her bold words of rejection of Karna to win her hands in Swayamvar reflect her subjectivity and mastery over her self. She rejects Karna saying, "Before you attempt to win my hand, king of Anga, tell me your father's name. For surely a wife-to-be, who must sever herself from her family and attach herself to her husband's line, has the right to know this" (95). This rejection of Karna by Draupadi was indeed nothing other than the prevention of the enormous death of her dearest brother, Dhri.

She says, "But I did it only because I couldn't bear to see my brother die" (96). Her hot protest in public against what she doesn't want suggests her agency on her life which no woman of her time could hold throughout her life.

Living in disguise, when Draupadi was treated with evil intention by Keechaka, she realizes that how the helpless women of lower class are behaved in the Royal palace and in the male's world. After this realization, she makes sure that when she holds power in the future, she wouldn't allow such misbehaves to the ordinary women in her kingdom. She says, "When I became queen again, I thought, I would make sure common women were treated differently" (228).

At the time of the war she stands as the psychological support for her husbands motivating them to have control over the hesitation and fear they were undergoing and to derive strength and courage to fight in the battle. She says, "When my husbands hesitantly mentioned their nightmares, I laughed" (239). Moreover she taunts them saying, "I didn't expect such superstition from the foremost heroes of Bharat! Of course there will be blood. Of course there will be death. As kshatriyas, isn't that what you have trained for all your lives? Are you afraid now?"(239). Unlike the other grieved women terrified by the war, she appears as strong as the great warrior who is directly taking part in the war. She shows her fearless and brave heart when she puts her view as:

Truly, whether we won or lost, lived or died, there was no cause for grief. The core of my Self was burnished like a new sword. Sorrow couldn't touch it any more than rust could inhabit pure steel. Bouyancy filled me, a sense that the great drama of life was unfolding exactly as it was meant to. And wasn't I fortunate to be a participant in it? (258)

When everyone seems scared and drowning in the sea of sorrow, Draupadi appears as the one who thinks differently and remains unafraid of the consequences the war was about to bring. After the grand destruction of the terrible war, Hastinapur becomes largely a city of women, widows, poor and the helpless. At this terrible situation, Draupadi feels heavy responsibility towards the people, especially women for their protection. She says, "It was time I shook-off my self-pity and did something. I resolved to form a separate court, a place where women could speak their sorrows to other women" (323).

In the novel, after the challenging effort of Draupadi along with other women in the palace, the condition of women in Hastinapur improves drastically. Their collective effort allows setting up the destitute in homes of their own and buying merchandise to start business for them. In the novel, Draupadi with the help and sharing of other women contributes to bring changes in the destructed, disordered, and ruined condition of Hastinapur. She says:

In time the women's market became a flourishing center of trade in the city, for the new proprietors took pride in their goods and were canny but fair in their dealings. We trained those who showed interest to become tutors for girls and young boys. And even in the later years, Hastinapur remained one of the few cities where women could go their daily lives without harassment. (324-25)

Divakaruni's feminist agenda underlines this almost utopian vision of a new city rising from the ruins, now a haven of safety and respect, and a place of equality for women.

Her destiny that was foretold when she was born, her insistence on doing what no other women around her were doing, her unique situation- being married to five

great heroes of her time, and her role of catalyst to bring them fortune has made her the perfect choice. She says, "I was elated, more so for having been the catalyst for our good fortune. I planned to make sure that my husbands learned of the part I'd played in it" (137). Her satisfaction on her life at her best time that she played crucial role to bring is reflected when she says, "It was as close to immortality as I could imagine, and enough to satisfy me" (149). She was conscious enough to handle things deftly as the situation demands. She says, "I was a woman; I had to use my power differently" (99).

Divakaruni, in the novel, has given Draupadi the power and agency that unlike in the original epic, others too come to appreciate her as a woman having subjectivity and awareness that would enable her to have a freedom from societal norms. After being queen of Indra Prastha and emancipating freedom, she well develops her personality and confidence which she realizes when she visits Hastinapur and has conversation with elders without hesitation. She says, "Being mistress of the Palace of Illusions had transformed me in ways I hadn't realized. I was no longer intimidated by the Kaurava court, nor do the elders intimidate me" (180). She further says, "I hungered for someone with whom I could have an intelligent and frank conversation" (128).

Pitamaha's words of appreciation regarding Panchali's confidence is shown in their conversation in which he says, "Why, you become a true queen now, equal to the best of us! You no longer care what people think of you, and that has given you a great freedom" (180). Vyasa's compliment on Draupadi also helps to claim her strength. In their conversation he says, "I've always known you to be stronger than your husbands" (329). She expresses her opinion in such appreciation as: "He was right in this: In some matters, I was equal to or better off than his peers. In Indra

Prastha my husbands had listened carefully to my opinions concerning the kingdom, and though we sometimes argued, they followed many of my suggestions. In Hastinapur, Duryodhan was the one who wielded power" (181).

To wrap up, in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions*, the woman protagonist Draupadi, who is conscious about her roles, rights, and the duties towards family, society and the nation, sets herself free and establishes her own identity by violating the existing norms of patriarchy specific to the Third-World Hindu country. The novel is significant for Third World feminist studies. Third-World Feminism is such challenging domain, which criticizes the dominating, coercive, and denigrating ethos of Western Feminism and Third-World male culture. Third-World Feminism tries to explore female's ego and consciousness towards self by opposing any specific forms of exploitation propagated by patriarchy. Hence, it can be concluded that the Third-World women are bent upon exploring and asserting their egos not by uprooting the tradition of culture but by respecting, resurrecting, and reconstructing it.

III. Subversion of Female Stereotypes in *The Palace of Illusions*

This dissertation has examined to explore female subjectivity based on the female protagonist Draupadi in the novel *The Palace of Illusions* written by an Indian author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The novel is the rewriting of the famous ancient epic *Mahabharata* in which Divakaruni has uncovered Draupadi's female consciousness, agency, and power giving her the voice of her own and which has been overshadowed by Ved Vyasa in the original epic. This project has foregrounded female subjectivity in the novel going through the narration of Draupadi's own life story. Divakaruni's novel manages to convey the great psychological depth of the *Mahabharata* and reflects the main character's individual perspective towards each and every event of it which Vyasa has ignored or excluded in the original one.

The Third World Feminism has been taken as the methodological tool to analyze the text that has enabled the researcher to find out female agency in the novel. For this, mainly, Third-World feminists Uma Narayan and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's ideas are implemented as a support to develop the argument. The Third World Feminism designates the experiences and politics of identity imbedded in the women of non-western countries like India. Third world feminism is one of the important critical tools for representing the women's issues of the third world developing countries because the western feminism can't represent the distinct experiences and problems of the non-western women like Draupadi who existed in the patriarchal Third world Hindu society. The issues of the South Asian women are much distinct from the issues of the so called first world women. Divakaruni's novel represents the issues of the third world women, on one hand, and tries to subvert the existing women's position as stereotypes in the third world Hindu society and culture on the other.

Divakaruni's version portrays Draupadi's rebellious nature; passion for education and intellectual interaction; protest against the male dominated Indian society and gender biased laws; fight for truth, justice, and rights; struggle for identity of her own; longing for freedom and independence; ability to have mastery over herself; her fearlessness and the brave heart in this novel which signify her subjectivity. She has been exemplified as a feminist in the Third world country. Brought up amidst affluence and luxury, educated, and well brought up, Draupadi, as a princess of Panchaal, grows up to be an independent woman who speaks her mind in a world where women would silently suffer than speak.

In most constructions of Draupadi both in literary and non-literary texts, as in the original epic, she is seen as only a victim of patriarchy and a passive sufferer. But Divakaruni modifies this view and makes the question of female agency a more complex one. She portrays her as a model of female empowerment and courage. This analysis has shown that Draupadi is far from a univocal representation of the ideal Indian female. Traditionally, Indian society is firmly patriarchal-oriented with an established segregation of the sexes and the family is of crucial importance. This very issue and the suppression of women and its subversion are represented by the novel *The Palace of Illusions*.

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