

Representation of Female Agency in Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion*

Abstract

*This research examines the representation of female agency in Chitra Banerjee Devakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion*. It demonstrates the problems and issue of mythological time of Mahabharata, a great Hindu epic, which is even related today. This paper tries to find out the crucial role of Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusion* as a female agency. It also connects the issue of identity and gender role in order to establish the female as a role model neglecting orthodox ideas as a second sex. Divakaruni recounts the epic from Draupadi's point of view, claiming female agency in war between two families. Likewise, it highlights the issue of motherhood and conflict depicting Draupadi's struggle for identity in mythological context. In the novel, Draupadi has been presented as headstrong and female role model who provokes her husband to take revenge with Kauravas. Therefore, she is presented as revolutionary character that breaks down the traditional gender role but her contributions are neglected in Mahabharata. This paper critically analyzes Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion* from Third world feminist interpretation which raises the issues of nonwestern women. Especially, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Uma Narayan's perspectives on feminism have been used as a theoretical insights to support the hypothesis. In Mahabharata, Draupadi, has been presented as submissive, passive and inactive character. Contrary to it, in *The Palace of Illusion* Divakaruni shows Draupadi as role model as well as courageous who is able to establish her identity in the patriarchal domain.*

Key Words: Identity, Conflict, Revenge, Domination, Equality, History, Female Agency

This research paper studies the representation of female agency in *The Palace of Illusion* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In this novel, Divakaruni attempts to redefine the female's identity as an agency and revolutionary character challenging the traditional role of female presented in *Mahabharata*. In patriarchal society, females are leveled as second sex and regarded as a main cause of World's trouble. The role of women is devalued in male dominated society. Divakaruni rewrites the story of the Mahabharata from the Draupadi's perspective in order to foreground her subjectivity and individuality which is neglected by original epic- *Mahabharata*. The novel narrated by Panchaali, the wife of five Pandava, demonstrates the role of females in *Mahabharata* as important as male counter parts. If there was absence of females, Pandavas would not be able to defeat Kaurava, so that role of female and their contribution are very crucial. Among female characters the role of Draupadi is very important but in this novel her sacrifice is not prioritized by Pandava. The main character of this novel has been changed along with the different movement like feminism. There are many female characters such as Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, Sudeshna, Sikhandi, Sairindhri, Dhai Ma, Sulochana, Amba, Madri, Sorceress and Subhadra but are depicted as passive in *Mahabharata*. Patriarchal society has oppressed the women in many ways. For example, economically, politically, socially and psychologically they are oppressed. Patriarchy has made a trend to underestimate the contribution of women. Women who follow the norms and values made by patriarchy are leveled as good girl. Traditional gender roles attach women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive.

In the battle field of *Mahabharata*, some female have fought in Kurukshetra though the role of women and their contribution are given no priority. Through this novel, Divakaruni examines this crisis in mythology from a feminist perspective. She

tries to reinterpret or revisit the great epic of Mahabharata by establishing the role of female in the battle field. The novel describes the Panchaali's life and her birth from fire as a daughter of king. She takes oath on who has insulted her in the court of Hastinapur . She curses them who insult her as their wives may lose their husbands and children will be orphaned. Not this much, she predicts the whole of Hastinapur will become mausoleum. Therefore, she is depicted as rebellious because she opens her braid loose claiming to wash with the blood of Dussasan. Till then her hair will not be entwined. Panchaali's obstinate actions help to bring about the destruction of the royal family. Furthermore, other women characters have been portrayed as passive. For instance, Kunti, a widowed and mother of the Pandavas, who dedicates her life to make her sons kings of Hastinapur. Another female character Gandhari, wife of the sightless king Dhritarashtra, who chooses to blindfold her at marriage, relinquishes her power as queen and mother. But, they remain shadow figures in the novel and, their thoughts and motives are neglected. Their emotions get valued when they serve male heroes; their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons.

The novel unfolds the key point about patriarchal hegemony in the narrative. In the novel male characters always try to dominate women. However, women have always protected men in different ways. Soumyajyoti claims, "It is men (the norm) who in the representational system stand for both men (the "Same") and women (the "Other"). The woman, because she is 'the represented', has to give in to the definitions and interpretations of *her-self* by the subject. And "Thus one can say that man *and* woman" (18). The King Drupad has used his daughter, Draupadi, as a female agency to achieve his goals. He has enmity with immortal warrior Drona so that king Draupad plays politics on him. Hence, he constructs swayamvar of his daughter to attract

Arjun. He wants to tie Arjun in nuptial bond by using his daughter because only Arjun can defeat Drona. Arjun has defeated Drona in the war. It clearly reflects that with the support of female agency or role model Draupad has taken his revenge. In this novel, not only central character Draupadi has been used as female agency to accomplish male's ambition. Other female characters have also played crucial role to achieve the aim of male such as Sikhandi, Uttara, Kunti, Sudeshna, Sairindhri. Amba, Sulochana. Sikhandi actually in her past life, was princess but she was insulted by Bheeshma because he has escaped her during her marriage. However, she loves the king Salva. Panchaali is the central character of the novel which is born from sacrificial Yaga. She is daughter of king Drupad. She goes beyond the traditional role of women so that she breaks the shackles of household. She narrates the story of her life which is clear that she stands strongly. Soumyajyoti Banerjee in her Rupkatha Journal argues, "Never imagined that she would be the cause of a great Indian Civil war, *Mahabharata*. She is humiliated and stripped in court, in front of her husband's. She herself becomes the reason for the biggest war in Indian mythology where brothers bay for each other's blood" (188-194). As it is explicit in the above lines, female agency is main reason for the war between brothers. On the other hand, female is exploited and slandered by the males because they think themselves as a superior than women. They take women as an object nothing more than puppet. In the protagonist life of Draupadi three important instances will come if she is controlled herself. Then, perhaps the war between Pandava and Kaurava will be stopped. The three important instances are question, laughter and curse. She is warned by sage Vyasa, though she does not care his instruction. When Duryodhan fell in the water in the palace of her pond, she laughs at Duryodhan saying that the son of blind is also blind. Likewise, she gives curse that those who have stripped her, their wife and children would be

widowed and orphan. The catastrophe was avoided if she would not exhibit her unnatural behavior. The three instances are acts of rebellion which are qualities of revolutionary women.

Furthermore, when Bheeshma escapes queen of Kasi to marriage with his brother but later he knows she loves to king Salya so that, he returns her to the Salya where he rejects her so that she offers Bheeshma to marry but he rejects her so that she goes to forest to do penance. She gets a boon to become cause of death of Bheeshma as well as she is born many times. Now she is born in king Drupad's family as Sikhandi. She is born as a daughter of king Drupad in the form of half male and half female. In the battle of Kurukshetra, it is very difficult to defeat Bheeshma. He has killed Pandavas army like cutting grass so that Arjun has used Sikhandi as female agency to get victory over Bheeshma. Arjun and Sikhandi are in the same chariot. When Bheeshma and Arjun are face to face for battle, suddenly Sikhandi appears so that Bheeshma put down his archery because she is female and then it is easy for Arjun to strike Bheeshma. Without the support of Sikhandi it is impossible to defeat him because Bheeshma has got wish death. In this way, the work which is impossible that can be possible with the help of female agency. Moreover, after the nuptial relation with Draupadi, Pandavas have got strength which helped them to beg their right from their blind king Dhritarashtra.

In this novel, there are many female agencies. They are active in any action such as in politics of how to drive kingdom. There are female characters; they support their husbands such as Gandhari, wife of the sightless Kaurava king, who chooses to blindfold her marriage. Thus, she relinquishes her power as queen and mother. The rivalry between two branches has culminated into the climax so they forward marriage relation to gain power from father-in-law, and make to fight them from their

side. Dwarka is a powerful kingdom where Krishna belongs. His loveable sister is Subhadra. Duryodhan goes to beg his sisters hand but Subhadra rejects to marry him. Duryodhan was already married however he wants to marry with the sister of Krishna. It indicates- Why he was interested in marriage with Subhadra? What is the reason behind it? The politics is that he wants to get support from Dwarka. If Duryodhan was successful to marry with Subhadra then it would definitely possible for them to fight Krishna, Balram as well as Dwarka from the side of Duryodhan. As a result, Duryodhan will win the war. It is clear that female agency is very essential thing whether in war or in any field. Females have helpful nature. They drive out men from the chaotic situation.

Under patriarchy, women are looked 'down' upon. They are thought to be inferior Simone de Beauvoir writes in male dominated society, "woman as other". The female character Draupadi is insulted by Duryodhan. He asks her to sit on her lap. Likewise, Duryodhan's best friend Karna has also humiliated her; he says the woman who lives with five husbands is a prostitute. From the side of Kaurava Draupadi has no value. Men are free to do whatever they want because they consider themselves naturally strong; no one can stop them and criticize them. In this novel, the husband of Draupadi has played a riddle game with the prince Duryodhan, they loses their property, brother and even their wife Draupadi. Who has given them right to bet their wife in a dice game? Wife is a long life partner, however, he has not asked her, and may I bet you. Wife is not a thing, material and commodity to bet in the game as well as to sell. This also shows that female has been taken as minor thing and valueless. On the other hand, if we take the dice game in hierarchial binary opposition as head/heart, father/mother, culture/nature, intelligible/palpable, from binary opposition also we can figure out that females are suppressed. If Draupadi or

any female has played game where she has lost the property, husband, and sister then, in fact, she will be criticized by everyone. Perhaps, she will be banished from the home. They take her as commodity and puppet. The prince Dussasan has also insulted her by dragging her hair; he has pulled her hair in the court. He argues her you are our servant. Eventually, Duryodhan gives order to Dussasan to disrobe her in the court, he does but god Krishna intervenes so that Draupadi is saved from naked. As a consequence, she is compelled to behave as revolutionary women. She vows to shatter her hair till Pandava bring the chest of blood for her hair. This much not only Vim does not tolerate her insult, so that he also takes oath to break the thigh of Duryodhan. The Kauravas have insulted her which invites them in the bloody battle field of Kurukshetra for 19 days.

Likewise, headstrong of many kings and queens have given the invitation for Kurukshetra as well as termination of Kaurava parentage. To some extent great warrior Karna is also responsible for the war because he has taken oath to finish supreme archery Arjun. Draupadi has insulted the prince Duryodhan arguing the son of blind is also blind so that he takes it seriously for revenge. In fact, Pandavas are the heir of the throne but they were kicked off from the throne as a result after the banishment of thirteenth years they demand their right but Duryodhan rejects them which brings them in the battlefield. The member of Drupad's family has crucial role to held war between Pandava and Kaurava. King Drupad has taken swear to destroy Drona because he has given order to defeat him in the battle field and captive him. Some female characters such as Gandhari, Kunti and so on are trying to stop the war. In addition, Patriarchal thinking believes that women are born to be passive. If a woman is not passive, she is not really a woman. If one is born with the biology of a

female one's place in society is accorded less right. The female characters are stereotyped as "good girl's (gentle, submissive, virginal, and angelic).

Gorvika Raoviews novel as the power is misused in order to dominate the women. He argues, "The phallogentric, patriarchal universe has consistently tried to denigrate women through scientific evidences, literature, law, politics, religion, culture and, in the contemporary times, through media" (390). As it is clearly stated in the above lines that power is used to dominate and stereotype the female. The whole process of strategy for battle is organized to lure Arjun so that, the king could take his revenge. She was used from both sides by king Drupad and by Pandavas who won her to obtain powerful ally against Kauravas. In these above line politics is played on female. Those king who strike in the fish eye. That king will marry her so that she cries; it's not justice to interfere in her life by her father. This is for the good of Panchaal and the honor of the house. She argues then, why even call it a swayamvar? She also believes that it is not her father whom she decided but it is her right whom she decides to marry. Why does her father want to marry her? Here is politics in her marriage. Once Arjun is married to you, Arjun can't fight against your father. He can never be Drona's ally again. Arjun is supreme archery no one can defeat him. However, Draupadi challenges that she could make Arun's heart beat faster. She could influence his thoughts. Likewise, in this novel, Sorceress is a female agency who is peasant fashion. Sorceress is similar to the woman who sells her wares in the market place, with the pleats of her blue sari tucked, former fashion, between her legs. She is not neat and clean. A faint smell of salted fish emitted from her body. She has a star tattooed onto her chin and muscle. She represents a typical traditional woman. She has such a personality that anyone can mouth agape at the woman's effrontery.

In the same way, one day Pandu, no longer able to resist, and embraces his second wife Madri as a consequence he died. Likewise, another, female character Draupdi has also played role to have war between two branches Pandu and Kaurava. There are many causes for such a gigantic event. Millions of women are widowed and in large number children have become orphan due to Draupadi. L.V. PadmaraniRao in his article writes, “Paanchaali, who some might argue, by her head strong actions helps to bring about the destruction of the third age of man” (2). The Pandav has heard the voices and thoughts of women so that there is fight between Pandava and Kaurava. Whenever someone analyzes world’s problem, the cause we get is women contribute world’s problems in a hundred insidious ways. Draupadi is more powerful than most, could wreak greater havoc. The sorceress taught her some better alternatives to stop the war. The sorceress has taught her to keep in mind rather than swept away by passion. However, Draupadi is intelligent as well as she knows enough to control passion. She visualizes herself as a great queen, dispensing wisdom and love. Panchaali the peace maker, people would call her.

Unfortunately, in the novel, there is conflict between royal family’s princess for the throne, power and land. Actually, Yudhisthir is the eldest son of Pandu so that he has birth right for the throne according to royal system of Hastinapur. However, another prince Duryodhan also claims, I am the right prince to sit on the throne as a consequence there is fight for the chair. L.V. PadmaraniRao explains,

At the core of the epic lies the fierce rivalry between two branches of the Kaurava dynasty, the Paandavas and the Kauravas. The life long struggle between the cousins for the throne of Hastinapur culminates in the bloody battle of Kurukshetra, in which most kings of the period participated and perished.

(2)

Gandhari is the mother of Duryodhan. When she hears that she is going to marry with blind king Dhritarashtra. She ties scarf over her eyes, declaring she does not want to enjoy the pleasures her husband has been deprived of. Two females Dhai Ma and Draupadi comment on her devotion, says Gandhari's sacrifice is not intelligent. Likewise, she argues if her husbands are blind she could never ties scarf over her eyes because she could report everything that is going on to him. She is trying to compensate for her lost sight. But she has made a vow and has trapped in the net of her own words. On the other hand, Gandhari's husband has taken one woman as mistress. He was not criticized and curse for such dual role. Likewise, Panchaali also plays double role. She marries to five Pandavas, though she loves Karna. Her heart rose to her face at the sudden mention of Karna's name. She argues that most people think that Adhiratha, chariot driver, is Karna's father. She remembers the other wordly expression on Karna's face in the portrait. Her disobedient heart kept going back to Karna, to that most unfortunate moment in his life. She also expresses sorrow because both are victims of parental rejection. He thinks again and again, the mother who has abandoned him. If a female plays dual role and make even single mistakes, she must be punished as well as scolded whereas male has wife and mistress but they are not punished rather than they are rewarded.

The revenge is a central issue of the novel. It depicts the battle between two families, which closely connected with two different sexes, whereas husband presented as fireless and powerful. Brodbeck/Black argues, "*Mahabharata* is one of the defining cultural narratives in the construction of masculine and feminine gender roles in ancient India, and its numerous telling's and retellings have helped shape Indian gender and social norms ever since". Women are considered as a contingent beings (dependent beings controlled by circumstances). Gandhari is a very good

queen because she put scarf on her eyes to blind herself arguing the world which my husband cannot see; I will also not see that world. She has sacrificed her eyes to support her husband. She is loyal to her husband as well as devoted wife. She is an ideal female character in the novel. From her deeds every woman can learn many things. Her character is impressive and remarkable. She is symbol of ideal woman. In this novel, she represents both traditional and at some extent sometimes only she advises her husband to give Pandava's right. She suggests her husband when her husband gives more focus on Duryodhan rather than Hastinapur. She also argues if Hastinapur is alive then only we will have value. In addition, while Dussasan is disrobing Draupadi in the court. Fortunately, Gandhari enter in the court and she stops Dussasan to disrobe Draupadi. Unfortunately, Draupadi attempts to give curse but Gandhari begs to excuse them. She also punishes them. She also tries to give curse but Bheeshma begs not to give curse. These activities also show that Gandhari is sometimes revolutionary to save others life. Hence, she is very good female character in the novel. This much not only she has lost stamp on everybody. Bheeshma is very loyal warrior because he takes oath to remain celibate to make his father Santanu happy arguing if a king is not happy then he cannot give satisfaction to the people. On the other hand, Duryodhan is in the path of vices by playing trick with Vim. Likewise, When Vim was child; he mixes poison in the food of Vim and throws him in the ocean. Duryodhan gives order to naked the Draupadi. He is the leader of vices because he has hurted many times to the Pandav. He has made mansion of lac to murder the Pandavas. Shakuni is also the symbol of vices and he is the plot maker as well as he has encouraged Duryodhan toward Pandav.

Kendal Busse in *The International Journal of Hindu Studies* adds new perspective which is neglected in the original epic-*Mahabharata*. He says,

“Divakaruni’s version is nothing is notable among the other *Mahabharata* novelizations ofr trying to include more of the original stories, but also lack of a compelling protagonist” (86). In this sense, we have to revisit or rewrite the position of women. But Julia Hoydis in her article “A palace of her own: Feminine identity in the Great Indian Story” analyzes the novel in this way:

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)

To her, it raises the issue of gender, inequality, and identity that gives no priority in *Mahabharata*. Likewise, it also focuses on the issue of revenge and motherhood because her crucial role has been not valued than the role of male counterpart. Thus, it is another issue to be discussed. She has by force given lesson of singing, dancing, and playing music but she does not like these lessons. Her identity, courageous as well as consciousness has been focused on Donald E. Hall’s view. He remarks, “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). In this sense, her role in the novel can be a subject matter of her self-consciousness. She is neither musically inclined, nor deft on her feet. She is also taught to draw, paint, sew, and decorate the ground with age-old auspicious designs, for a special festival. Though unwilling she takes lessons as consequences her paintings are blotchy, and her designs full of improvisations that her teachers frowned at. On the other hand, she is perfect in composing and solving riddles, responding to witty remarks, and writing poetry, but

her heart is not in such frivolities. She is envied with the skill of war craft of her brother. Her father treats her as a traditional way so that he manages such lessons. However, she rejects these patriarchal values and norms. She is of an impulsive nature, a failing in many females. She does not close her mouth and to sureness her queries rather than she raises questions, for example , why did her father allow Krishna to visit her freely when king Drupad has kept her separate from other men and women? Likewise, she also wonders stories about the rest of Drupad's family? His queens and the other children whom she saw only on state occasions. What are they doing? Why didn't he invite us to join them?

This paper analyses Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* by connecting it with the Third World Feminism. It finds out the issue of gender, inequality, agency, conflict, consciousness and the role of agency from feministic point of view. The idea third world feminism firmly connects with the practice of nonwestern women. It shows point of departure from the western feminism because western feminism only talks about them but neglects the issue of non westerners. It concerns on developing countries from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and tries to find out issues and problems especially what they have faced in patriarchal society. And those feminist from third world has developed the feminism in their own way connecting their daily issues. One of the feminists Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes western feminism advocating the issue of nonwestern females. Her work *Feminism without Border Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, analyzes the belief system and power of female from their own perspective. She claims:

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).

She advocates not only border less feminism but analyzes the conflict, differences and fault. It also examines the sense of nationality, races, classes and religion. In the novel, Draupadi resented the tutor's declaration that women are the root of all the world's troubles. She counters the belief of patriarchal such as a kshatriya woman's highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in her life: her father, brother, husband, and sons. Who does decide the role of women is to support men? She herself plans on doing other things with her life. Furthermore, she is not born like a normal girl; her character is active rather than passive like, traditional women. Her brother is Dhristadyumna, they are very intimate. Though sometimes she spied on him when he returns late at night, his lips redden from lipstick, a garland around his neck. She spent hours imagining the woman who has placed if there. But no matter how much sura Draupadi's brother had drank or lotus fiber ate. The maid servants of Drupadi- even those who had been with her for years- kept their distance until summoned. She sometimes asks about their private relation about how their families are: for instance or when they are getting married- they grew tongue- tied and escaped from her presence as soon as they could. She is not born like a normal girl and if the prophecy is correct she wouldn't live a normal woman's life. Who could not see beyond their lives of mundane joys and sorrows? They suspected anything that fell outside the boundaries of custom. However, Draupadi is a woman who might bring change like the way a storm which brings the destruction of lightning. Perhaps, Draupadi whole life is shone by Sulochana. Females are not supposed to behave freely and

deliberately.

Another critic Uma Narayan claiming the value of Middle East women rejects the western feminism. To her, the issues related westerner is different than the issues related with developing countries. She also focuses on the social environment, norms and value which determines the role of women. So, role of women is different in one place to another. She says Third world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of the western agendas in one clear and simple sense” (13).Of course, the norms and values of patriarchal has set that in the society with the view that a kshatriya woman’s highest purpose in life to support the warriors in her life, for instance, her husband, brother and sons. But Draupadi does not respect these principles. She wants to be different from these notions so that she is modern girl rather than traditional.

Likewise, another activity also proves that she is rebellious girl as well as she plays dual role. In swayamvar, she falls in love at one glance with king of Anga, Karna. Though she has married with Pandavas and swears to forget Karna but still longed to see Karna again. She has played dual role. It is very well known that the relation between women to women is not good. They backbite each other. In this novel there is tussle between Kunti and Panchaali for the hold of Pandavas. Whether it is the baking of brinjal or shifting in a new palace of Illusions from Hastinapur, it is a cold war between ladies, in which Draupadi has won. In fact, it is the desire of Panchaali has a palace of her own.

The representation of Draupadi in the novel is strong, because at her marriage,she rejects ruler of Anga, Karna, arguing him, she will not marry with a low caste. She further, investigates about Karna, she wants to know about family background of Karna. Her interest on education and knowledge provides the mastery of law and regulation. Her knowledge is also crucial. She narrates:

I was trying to concentrate on a volume of Nyayashastra. 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 blandishment and battled with the book. (53-54).

She argues him before to attempt to win my hand, could Karna tell me your father's name, for surely a wife-to-be, and have life tie to her husband's line has the right to know this. In this way, she has humiliated Karna. She shows her arrogance. He can't forget this insult. Karna has bowed with shame; he left the marriage hall. Arjun wins the Draupadi in the swayamvar. They bring her in the home. Kunti gives order to share equally among sons whatever you have brought. In this way, Kunti has divided Draupadi among five Pandavas. This is cause of tussle between Kunti and Draupadi. From this moment there is clash between Kunti and Paanchali, is the major reason of all the events in the novel. The decision of Kunti has ruined the life of Draupadi.

Sikhandi is another important female character. She represents modern women and bold character because she vows to kill great warrior Bheeshma who is never defeated in his life. Actually, Sikhandi in her former life is queen of Kasi and her name is Amba. She loves the king Salya. At the auspicious day of marriage of Amba, Bheeshma has escaped her for his younger brother. Later, Amba reveals that she loves to the king Salya, so that Bheeshma agrees to return her to the king Salya but he rejects her by arguing Bheeshma has taken you by the hand. You have been contaminated by his touch. Eventually, she begs to marry with Bheeshma but he disapproves because he has given promise in youth to his father to remain celibate. Amba is abandoned from both side from Bheeshma and the king Salya. She went to

court, seeking a champion who would battle Bheeshma, but all were afraid of him. She went to the Himalays in her despair and performed austerities so that the gods would help her. Years passed, her youth fell finally, the child-god Kartikeya took pity and appeared before her with garland. He said, if you can find someone to wear it, he will defeat Bheeshma. Fortunately, the palace is in turmoil because Sikhandi is returned. But who is Sikhandi? And why is everyone afraid of her? She is the eldest daughter of the king Draupad. She has done something terrible and king Drupad sent her away. She has been for the twelve years in the forest performing the strictest austerities- eating only leaves of the holy bel trees, standing neck deep in freezing water all winter that kind of thing- so that now she has been turned into a great and dangerous warrior. She is a woman who is a dangerous warrior as well as she has survived in the forest she is just a girl when she left the palace because she has committed terrible crime so that her father has banished her at her tender age.

Actually, Sikhandi, is born as woman, she is clothed only in a white cotton dhoti. She wants to be a man because only a man can do what she must accomplish- kill the greatest warrior of their time. Yes, someone greater even than Drona. His name is Bheeshma the terrible. She has worn the garland from twelve years. The age difference between them is like father and child. They both live for vengeance. First she remembers her death upon a pyre: flesh melting, eyelids burnt away, the skull bursting. And through it all: her impatience to be gone. Because without death there is no rebirth, and without rebirth she could not kill Beeshma. She does severe penance so that the god Shiva himself has promised her that in her next life she would kill him whom no man had defeated before. Actually, in the body of Sikhandi is Amba, the princess of Kasi, the rejected one. But when she went to him, Salya said, Bheeshma has taken you by the hand. You are contaminated by his touch.

The life of women exists without soil or water. Amba tells Bheeshma, my happiness has crumbled into dust because of you. Marry me so that at least my honor can be saved. She is not going to defeat him but she is going to kill him.

Dhristadyumna has given him his favorite horse and the best spear in the armory which helps to kill Bheeshma. The power of a woman moves aslant, like a serpent seeking its prey. Another female agency Draupadi has also role to help Sikhandi to kill Drona. In this way female agency has played essential role to take revenge of her and her father. Of course, the female agency is used for the good of Panchaal and the honor of house. King Drupad has stopped Draupadi's lessons with his tutor, declaring that she needed to focus on more feminine interest. She is determined to learn what the king is supposed to know.

It is necessary at the outset itself to make explicit the meaning and importance of the word 'female agency'. Feminism as a theory in the evaluation of literature is well under way by the late 1960s. It is an attempt to explain and interpret female's experience as depicted in different kinds of literature. It questions the long standing, dominant, man, phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal opinion and man interpretations in literature. It rebuttal man principles of value in literature – by offering critiques of man writers and representations of male in literature and also by focusing women authors. In addition, it challenges traditional values and accepts man's ideas about the instinct of women and about how female feel, response and ideology, or are supposed to feel, response and think, and how in normal they act to life and feeling. Thus, it questions too many prejudices and assumptions about female made by man authors, especially the trend to represent female in wholesale character roles. The status of women in the novel is not good and not satisfying as women like Satyavati, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, have influences in the family circles. Likewise, queen

Satyavati has changed the destinies of her husband. She is beautiful so that once King Santanu goes to wander near a river where he sees her. He fell in love with her. He goes to her home to beg her hand. Her father says to him if you agree that the son of Satyavati's son will be king then only he will give you her hand. King Santanu becomes very anxious. He is dissatisfied so that he is unable to rule the kingdom properly. Therefore female agency plays an essential role. God has created women for the purpose of procreation and for the purpose of pleasure. Women and jewels are common property, Jayadrata says to Draupadi:

A woman is to have one husband, a man many wives. This is the Dharma ordained by the Pitrs. A woman may have a second husband through *Niyoga* for Progeny in case of difficulty. A woman having a third one has to undergo expiation, if she has a fourth one she becomes an outcaste and one having a fifth one is a harlot. (3)

The given lines prove that women's liberty is usurpation by male. Male has made her condition like a drinking cup. She would pass from hand to hand. Likewise, she does not know with whom she has to sleep. On the other hand, she has a crucial and substantial role in the novel. The author of the novel portrays Draupadi as a strong, independent woman, an equal to men rather than subservient. The novel reveals pride, love and revenge, the hidden thoughts of a girl's mind who considers herself as a man which is the cause of conflict between two clans. While Kunti was young and unmarried, God had given her one son. She was afraid of society so that she abandoned the son in the river. Fortunately, the son was raised by Adhiratha. She also plays a double role. She is the cause of suffering of Karna. When there is a skill test tournament for the prince, after completing education. Suddenly, Karna also appears in the tournament of the prince.

Karna challenges Arjun for fight. Kunti is sitting in the pavilion. She sees Karna but she does not acknowledge him so that she is the main cause of suffering of Karna and acting double role. She lives with her sons but she also sometimes talks about Karna. Moreover, when Karna encounters Arjun in the tournament. Karna is teased by Bheem saying son of driver, son of Sutaputra. Not only this, Bheem says drop your bow, pretender. Go get yourself a whip from the royal stables instead. It is the supreme insult. Drona also rejects Karna to teach arguing, you are not prince. Karna is disappointed. Kunti is responsible for the agony of Karna. Female agency has important role either to lift the progress of man or make their down fall. Female are responsible to make the condition worse and worth. Karna is renowned for his skill.

Karna has Brahmaastra, the weapon that no one can withstand. In the swayamvar of Draupadi, Dhristadyumna attempts to stop him to pierce in the eye of fish. Not only this, he argues you are low born so you are unable to hold my sister hand. He insults Karna. Karna becomes angry so that he goes to strike Dhristadyumna by his archery. Eventually, Draupadi interrupts Karna arguing she will not marry with you because you are low caste. Furthermore, she argues 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 her to her husband's line, has the right to know this. In the face of that question, Karna was silenced. Defeated, head bowed in shame, he left the marriage hall. In this way Draupadi has saved her brother from Karna. On the other hand, Karna would never forget the humiliation of those women in full sight of all the kings of Bharat. And when the time came for him to repay the haughty princes of Panchaali, he did so a hundredfold. This shows that she is arrogant and caste-obsessed. The question of her has hurted Karna as well as only question that

would make him lay down his bow. In another word, Panchaali is married with five Pandavas and she is living conjugal life with all five of them.

In another word, Draupadi is an object of awe. It is not justice to marry one woman by five men. Such suppression is done on female though they are not criticized and punished from any sector. This much not only, five husbands are not able to give her peace and solace which her soul needs. Their husbands are failure to provide their wife, what she wants. Though they are flopped but they are not blamed by anyone. If women do even single mistakes then immediately she could be criticized for life long. In the novel, the protagonist Draupadi plays double role because she desires to see Karna and Krishna. She talks to Karna many times. Unfortunately, when she rejects him to marry, simultaneously, she regrets, she has done wrong with him. Soumyajoti Banerjee writes in her Rupkatha Journal: “She feels free to hold the hands of the two men she really in life, namely Krishna and Karna. She likes the name Krishna given to her by her friend and guide Krishna” (194). Unfortunately, Draupadi is stripped publicly in the court of Hastinapur. She is expert in governance. Her husband’s ask her advice, when tricky judgment is to flow. Even in her own palace her administrative capacity is not accepted which proves the domination of women and traditional hegemonic ascendancy over woman.

Draupadi is a female agency where she wants her own palace that is also cause of conflict between two parentages. She wants to build a palace of her instruction that is far distance from norms and values of male representation. It would reflect her ‘self’. Unfortunately, there is division between Pandava and Kaurava. Khandavprastha is given to the Pandavas which is totally sand and salt. This much not only it is arid land. Arjun by his agni archery burns the forest but he saves popular architect demon Maya. They offer Maya to construct the palace in the advice

of Panchaali. Maya constructs very beautiful palace which attract the attention of the king of Bharat as a result king Duryodhan wants this beautiful palace. The palace which is built that makes her elation. Maya instructs her not to show the palace because it is very beautiful. But she does not care his advice, she has to show masculine demands with her superior edifice. Arjun is the winner in the swayamvar. They become late for home. Bheem said, let's go, otherwise mother will be serious. He also argues Pandav know how mother worries.

Bheemwinkes at Arjun. Pandavas play a trick with their mother Kunti. Before the other brothers could stop him, he called out to her to come and see what we have brought home. Bheem said we have brought beautiful alms. They consider women as object and material rather than wife. Patriarchal domination is exhibited on Panchaali. Male supposes themselves superior than female which is used on their wife Draupadi. Likewise females are also cause for trouble of female. In this novel, Kunti without looking and understanding gave decree to divide Draupadi among five Pandavas. Son said a woman's voice in a patrician accent. Kunti can't come right now or the food will burn. But as always whatever you brought should be shared equally amongst all my sons. All five of you must marry this woman. She does not trust her words. This made Draupadi outrage. Arjun blurted out, Mother, how can you ask us to do this? It's contrary to dharma. I waited for him to stand up for me, to tell his mother that he ends we are already husband and wife, committed to each other. She has no right to destroy that. She stares at her, her brain trying to take in what she has said. Was she joking? When she said they might marry to me? She wanted to shout, five husbands? Are you mad? She wanted to say, I am already married to Arjun. Injustice is done by Pandavas and Kunti. However,

Draupadi rejects Kunti's decision to marry with five Pandavas. Panchaali defends herself. She acts as a revolutionary character.

In the novel there is a clash between Draupadi and her mother-in-law Kunti. Her mother-in-law burdens her with household work such as to manage the kitchen. One day Kunti handed her a pulpy brinjal, along with a lump of salt and a minute amount of oil, and told her to prepare it for lunch. She asked Kunti if she might have a bit of turmeric and some chilies. Perhaps some cumin. She replied that was all there. This was not your father's palace. Kunti does not help her to bake food; rather she imposes her authority by giving answers directly. Their relation is not good. Kunti's response on her food. She argues saying you have burnt the brinjal. Also you have putted in too much salt. Kunti blames her; you don't have any experience in cooking. Draupadi gave a patient sight. You can scrub the pots while I repair the curry. Unfortunately, when at meal time the brothers praised the brinjal for its distinctive taste and asked for more, Draupadi remained in the kitchen and let Kunti serve her sons. Actually, brinjal was not cooked tasty; however, Pandavas falsely praise the brinjal to encourage her.

Once upon a time, King Dasaratha was fighting with demons where his charioteer was Kaikeyi. Unfortunately, King Dasaratha was hurt as well as unconscious but Kaikeyi makes him run away from the battlefield. She has saved the life of King Dasaratha. It shows that female agency has a vital role to the wellbeing of human. They are the creator of the Earth. Without female, earth does not exist because they continue the race and line of man. Though females are represented negatively. Female's oblations are not counted as male.

On the other hand, female agencies are the ruin of the world. For example, in the epic *Ramayana*, there are many female characters such as Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, Sita. These females have also been a part to create war between Ram and Ravana, war

between Ravan and Bibhishana. Unfortunately, there was war between king Dasaratha and demon where his charioteer was Kaikeyi. While battle with demons king Dasaratha was badly hurted and he was unconscious. However, queen Kaikeyi was able to escape him from the battle. She has saved the life of King Dasaratha. The king was pleased with her service. He has given her two boons. At the time of coronation of Ram, she uses two boons to beg throne for his son Bharat and the exile of Ram for fourteen years in forest: Valmiki in his epic *Ramayana* writes,

Beholding the provisions for the installation, that lady the king's consort, Kaikeyi, who had previously been promised two boons, even asked for these, the evil of Ram, and the installation of Bharat. Bound by the ties of duty in consequences of that promise of his, king Dasaratha banished his favorite son Ram. (3)

Similarly, the above line explains that women are the main cause of the trouble of the man not only this, but they have such an ability that rich king can be immediately become beggar as well as neither of home nor of seashore or bank. For example, due to her queen Kaikeyi, the king Dasarath gives illegal order to banish his son which is prowess and righteous. While Ram, Laxaman and Sita were living in the forest. Laxaman was very attractive and handsome. Surpanakha was the sister of Ravan. She was wandering in the forest. Fortunately, she reaches in the hut of them where she looks at Laxaman as a result she was fell in love with him. She offers her to marry but Laxaman rejects her as well as he cuts the nose of her so that she goes to her brother Ravan. She weeps and tells that Laxaman has deformed your sister not only this, he scolds you and challenges you for war. In this epic, Surpanakha has told her brother in flattery which takes the form of war so that female has such ability to make war. Likewise, Ram has slew in the Rakshasas Khara and Tricira and Dushana

together with their followers, who all had been stimulated the words of Surpanakha as well as fourteen thousand demons in the battle of Janasthana.

Bheeshma has picked up Amba from her swayamvar. Amba is a princess though she has no value. She is not material rather than girl. She was insulted by Bheeshma so that she vows to become cause of death of Bheeshma. She does severe penance as a result god gave her boon as well as she takes form of Sikhandi. She dedicates her life for the destruction of Bheeshma. She has pioneer role to kill him. Kunti smiles being satisfied because her sons are safe and wealthier than they had ever been, with powerful relatives. Females have catalyst role. They are source of power and wealth. However, women's deeds are underrepresented by male hegemony. The protagonist of the novel Draupadi is active rather than passive. She is rational than irrational. She longs his husband to be a king so that she could advise him wisely. She hungered for someone with whom I could have and intelligent and frank conversation. On the other hand, some females are not active in the novel, this much not only in Hastinapur a wife were not allowed to meet with men except in the company of her husband's. In the novel there was a blindfolded Gandhari, about whose wifely virtue so many songs had been composed. She is docile and overly traditional. At the women's gatherings she expressed no opinions at the family banquets; she focused her entire attention on her blind husband is deed. She was dangerous with more power than most people realized and one of these days she just might decide to use it. Gandhari's devotion to her husband so that god has pleased and has granted her a boon. If she ever took her blindfold and looked at someone, she could heal him or burn him to cinders. Panchaali plays a double role. She is married with Pandavas, however, she confesses in spite of the vows. She made each day to forget Karna, to be a better wife to the Pandavas. She longed to see him again. She

could not stop herself – hoping he is there. She eavesdropped on the maids, trying to discover his whereabouts. When the war was fixed between Kaurava and Pandav. Gandhari proves her boon to Duryodhan so that his body became steel body. Female have power they protected man also. The questions arose by male prove that they are superior to female but in this novel females have influencing role. To become winner or loser is caused by the role of female.

In this novel there are some characteristics of female which affect the incidents. Ganga, for example is mother of great warrior Bheeshma. She is bold character because she has thrown seven children in the river for the purification of the children. She ascertains her husband Santanu will marry with you only whatever she does never question her. She does not accept the proposal to leave the son rather she argues I will leave you, your son when there is right time. Many years passes, fortunately one day her husband Santanu wanders in regret near the bank of Ganga river. She also appears with her son Bheeshma. She has given best education to his son as well as no one can defeat him. Females make male strong. Without them it is very hard to gain goal. There is an interesting story about Ganga. The story is that she has been about to drown him, too, when his father the king has stopped her. She has left them then, her husband and her new born, and disappeared in the water. Women are the two wheel of one chariot.

On the other hand, woman is the downfall of every successful man. In this novel, another female character Satayvati made downfall of King Santanu and Bheeshma to remain celibate. King Santanu loves her. He wants to marry with her but the woman could not marry him unless he could assure her that Bheeshma's son would not dispute her children's claim to the throne. The obstinate nature of her makes to take vow to remain bachelor in the young age. The life of Bheeshma is

damaged by her stand. Though, another female character is different from Satyawatitha is Kunti. She begs given Pandav her entire steely devotion, but not tenderness. She goes to Draupadi sometimes, if she has a really serious problem or need her opinion. Draupadi is intelligent female character. She can know people's opinion of his/her stomach. The palace of Hastinapur made her uneasy because too many people hate her husband. Moreover, Draupadi's husbands took other wives also: Hidimba, Kali, Devika, Balandhara, Chitrangada, Ulupi, Karunamati. Why do they take too many wives? What is the reason behind it?

There are political reasons, but mostly it is male desire. Arjun has also married with next wife Subhadra. She is sister of Krishna. The purpose of marrying her is also political. Arjun want's good and powerful ally which he has got after marrying Subhadra. Female are used as object everywhere either as wife or sister, mother. Male are free and no one can ask question whatever they do. They have liberty to do countless marry. They are not criticized. On the other hand, if women escape with some male, immediately she will be criticized. Likewise, they have limited liberty. Draupadi cannot tolerate having next wife of her husband so that she retaliated by locking herself up in her quarters, refusing food, and throwing expensive objects at her husband's if they dared to approach her. She is a practical woman. Marriage to her has protected them from the murderous wrath of Duryodhan. She has played a crucial role in bringing them to their destiny. Along with Pandav, she has also shared hardship in Khandav. She has helped them to design this unique palace, which so many longed to see. She is really in agony when Arjun has taken Subhadra as a wife. She is sister of Krishna. Arjun has usurpation her away in a wildly romantic chariot race. She argues for this act to Aryun, he was quite unabashed. Surprisingly, Subhadra became her favorite. Subhadra visits to Draupadi where Subhadra put with

Draupadi's pretty tyrannies without complaint – bringing water for Draupadi, combing her hair even fanning her on hot afternoons. Moreover, Subhadra is gentle and good woman because she takes Draupadi's sons into her home, treating them no differently from her own child, deftly balancing affection and discipline.

Ideally, women are creator and protector in the novel, Sisupal was protected by his mother. When he was born something stain was on his head and the prophesy was that when this stain will drop on the lap of man that man will kill him. Krishna and Sisupal's mother are close relatives when he visits her. Krishna wants to take Sisupal on his lap, unfortunately, that stain falls. After knowing this Sisupal's mother cries and says cousin you will kill my son. She begs to protect her child with Krishna. Krishna commits her I will excuse his hundred mistakes. On the other hand, another female character Panchaali plays double role. She is married with five Pandavas. Though she loves Karna. She longs to see Karna. She is both feared and desires for about to happen in the Rajasuya – that Karna would be part of Duryodhan's party. She goes into the small private courtyard that her bedroom opened onto, and sat among the ashwagandha plants with her back against the warm stone wall. She thought it said that Karna's coming is her chance for reparation. Karna arrives, she put away passion and folly and the awkwardness that goes with it. She stands by her husband's and welcomed him the same way she welcomed the rest of the Kaurava party.

Women are main cause to get victory upon anybody. Pandavas have used female to defeat their rivalry and enemy. They have married with Panchaali therefore; they have to strong ally and wealthier support from Kampaly. Without support of Draupadi's father it is impossible to get victory on Kauravas. Likewise, Arjun also marries with Subhadra. She is sister of Krishna. The purpose of marrying her is also political because she belongs to strong and powerful kingdom which helps them to

destroy Duryodhan. Thus, females are very important everywhere either in war or at any place. Furthermore, Bheem also marries with Hidimba to get help from demon also. At the great war of Kurushetra demon have also fought from the side of Pandavas. The son of Hidimba has shown his bravery in the war. He has killed many warrior and armys of Duryodhan. Kurus armies are unable to fight with him. They are escaping from him. Therefore, without help of demons it was impossible to defeat Duryodhan's army. The contributions of females are unforgettable. Their sacrifice is not less than male warrior. Bheeshma was undefeated in his life and was immortal warrior.

Bheeshma is near to defeat Pandavas army in the battle field. Pandavas armies are afraid of him. Fortunately, Arjun takes help of Sikhandi to defeat him. Sikhandi is a woman in former life. For Bheeshma she is a woman. Arjun has carried Sikhandi in his chariot in the war to get victory on Bheeshma tries to strike suddenly Sikhandi appears so that Bheeshma had put down his archery then Arjun strike him. In this way, by taking support from female Arjun has defeat Bheeshma. Therefore, females presented in the novel are main hero. Females are the hero behind the stage. Male should have to take support and suggestion of female than it is better to have achievement. In the novel, it has been proved that females are also very important role to make male successful. Likewise, females have made the work possible which are impossible for male thus males should not have to underestimate to the female. On the other hand, male should have cautious about female because they are responsible for conflict between two branches Pandav and Kauravas. In the novel war is held due to woman so that after listening talks of female, male should think detail then he has to take action. In contrary, male are only something but female are everything. To make successful or unsuccessful it is depended on females.

Finally, this paper has examined the role of female agency and conflict based on the main female character, Draupadi by using third world feminism as theoretical insights. The novel is Divakaruni's attempt to rewrite the famous epic-*Mahabharata*. Through this novel, she tries to give the voice for voice less. She finds out Draupadi's role in *Mahabharata* analyzing from new perspective. She mainly talks about the issue of identity, consciousness, inequality, domination, and exploitation in the great epic. Third world feminism is one of the important tools or methodology which advocates the role of female in different way from nonwestern background rejecting western view point. In this regard, feminist perspective asks new question about the old text and conservative norms and value. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has raised new questions about the famous epic-*Mahabharata*. She tries to understand the crisis of *Mahabharata* from feminist perspective by using Draupadi as a female protagonist and by choosing Panchaali to be the narrator of the novel. We can see the world through Draupadi's eyes. The novel, *Palace of Illusions* Draupadi narrates the story from her perspective; it recalls the important events in the battle field of *Mahabharata*. This research tries to redefine the role of Draupadi as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, lover and role model character. Thus, it attempts to understand *Mahabharata* from female perspective. So, it can be defined as an important feminist text which redefines the role of the women in epic.

In essence, Divakaruni exhibits Draupadi as a role model, strong and revolutionary character who dismantle the norms and value created by patriarchal society. He looks at her role of Draupadi in different perspective by giving her important role. But original *Mahabharata* always neglects contribution of Draupadi. On contrary, Draupadi has been portrayed as passive, inactive and main cause of war. The epic-*Mahabharata* places her in shadow. Her passion for education and

knowledge, protest against the male dominated society, her voice for equality and justice, her struggle for identity are the new issue which have beautifully highlighted in *The Palace of Illusions*. Divakaruni shows Draupadi as a model of female empowerment and strength. She has been presented as an agency to accomplish the goal of the *Mahabharata*. She tries to define her new contribution that victory is impossible if there is absence of Draupadi. Therefore, this novel tries to revisit the epic form feminist perspective. In one word, *The Palace of Illusion* is good example of feminist work.

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