

A COMPLIANT WIFE OR THE VALIANT QUEEN?- EXPLORING DRAUPADI THROUGH DIVAKARUNI'S EYES

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Abstract

Although the Indian heritage is immensely affected by the prime significant epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the paper endeavours to postulate the feminine consciousness and dynamic portrayal of the female self in society which digresses from the macho disquisition, by traversing through the conflicting parable of Mahabharata, by entwining, re-delineating and re-rendering it, in an intention to represent the female panorama. By obfuscating the channel amidst myth and the bygone era, modernizing it and retrieving the mythical aeon to the contemporaneous times, the interpretative approach is an effort to explore the acumen and disposition of female through an intense inquisition of The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni as the Indian feminist ventures to redraft mythology and emanate from the virile masculine penumbra, because it was the male who had formulated the mythical elements to regard women as sophomoric and eliminating them from the masculine expatiation. As the probe of women to proclaim their individuality is figuratively depicted by the vehement and ablaze personality of Draupadi, it is through her viewpoint that we are constrained to comprehend and construe the beliefs of momentous mythical aeon which observes the male invariably supervising the flux of civilization and deprecating the yearnings of the female through compulsion, and which have been metaphorically superseded through the pronouncement of desire in the narrative interpretation of the epic, Mahabharata which consociates the avant-garde civilization with the yonder extinct times. By employing the modus operandi of context exploration and disquisition, the paper aspires to examine Divakaruni's text which appertains to encompass women inside a macho-centric narrative convention and catechizes the work to be an emendating or impervious one.

Keywords: Female self, macho-centric narrative, mythology, epic, feminine consciousness

Chronicling the accounts of efficacious, puissant and valiant legends, the malefactor, the adherence and dismal quest of the queens, one can behold the undertone of Hindu

mythology and ardour in all facets of existence as through the considerable epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, one genuinely ascertain the impressions of convention, ethnology, customs and zest. The mythological sagas aids in keeping the traditional saintly entities animate and being the substratum of the numerous pieces of artistry such as contemporary Indian films constructed on mythical elements, various sacraments and conviviality and even the dramas founded on characters such as Ram or Krishna, they are the ones abaft the causation of the recognition of the real and veracious persona. Sanctified with the spiritually and eugenically vivid legacy of the prosperous mythology, India is adequately aggrandized and charismatic in contrast to the canonic myth of Roman and Greek culture which has been intrinsically ingrained by the West. Even though the narratives in the glorious epics centers around the retaliation of women, their salvage, passionate encounters, spot fixing, familial ethics, polity, immolation, both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* allocates no prospects to the female for their optimistic desires. Struggling from the traditional civic structure, Indian women pervades an expansive gamut in literature as they have been hedged with agony for a far stretch of time and have been the victim of her partner's cynicism which culminated in her banishment, parturition and child-rearing in isolation and even necessitating another male to shelter her from the examinations and validate her righteousness and piety, which is distinctly palpable in the sacred epic, *Ramayana*. A long way ahead the torments of Sita, *Ramayana* is an epic which incorporates the plight of Urmila, Lakshmana's wife, who endured to stay unescorted for elongated duration of time, got devastated but relinquished her entire connubial existence for fourteen long years as her husband wished to consort his elder brother in exile, although she had no indulgences in Ram's exile or the vows of Dusharatha, she continued to assist her partner's desire and sentiment. The inquisitions on the individual dispositions and integrity of the female emerges as a woman is traded inside the gamble house of the royal court, had to endure the onslaught for her idle protectors (husbands) and is compelled to be dispensed among the five brothers, in *Mahabharata*, which is an epic that hinges on the manipulation of emancipation and individuality of a lady and the immense embarrassment that she had to encounter.

Contradicting the mythological accounts from these epics and by regenerating the myths, the penetrating inquiry strives to outline the female consciousness and objectivity which is entirely divergent from the masculine confabulation and to diagnose the cordial transformations in the coeval pace by accentuating the vigorous performance of Indian women. Through the application of the mechanism of amending, rephrasing and recounting the mythological narratives, the artificial regulations and masculine discourse which intended to make the female inconspicuous and neglect them got vitiated and the mythological convention got remodeled and re-conceived which ultimately eventuated in the women liberation, and thus it emerged to be a conforming rejoinder to the archival record of the male drafted myths which operated to incapacitate women. Thus, by recomposing the myths pertaining to the masculine discourse and progressing from the obscurity, the Indian feminist

incepted the cycle of the eruption of myth in 1980s with the inaugural redacted mythical account, Ranganayakamma's *Ramayana Visha vrukhsya*, and Amit Banker's *Ramayana* series (2003) in the Indian context. By reviving and refurbishing the prototypal mythical tale of *Mahabharata*, the article attempts to contextualize the mythology to the au courant times by progressing way ahead from the masculine portrayals of the mythology and taking into heedfulness the dynamic, potent and enthralling character of Draupadi from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's retold mesmerizing account, *The Palace of Illusion*.

Being the agency of extirpation of vicious combatants and surfacing from the conflagration with a transcendental celestial revelation, Draupadi, disaffiliating from the existing inclinations, is a gallant and courageous imperial in the epic which stand on companionship, vengeance, conflict, deception, exasperation, emancipation and valorousness, *Mahabharata*, and is the one containing the extreme austere and sturdy fortitude even though she is the one who is continually denuded to fierceness, which can be observed through the enforced burden of a quintet nuptial amalgamation on her, her dissonant swayamvara, the egregious occurrence in the royal court, which are substantially conspicuous in her character portrayal done by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her text, *The Palace of Illusion*. Alternatively recognized as Panchali, the princess of Panchal kingdom, Draupadi, the lady with the essential fabric of significant entity and the ardent, enthusiastic and dignified protagonist of *Mahabharata*, have been bestowed with manifold cognomens. In reference to her abutting coalition with Krishna, she is endowed with the denomination Krishnaa, and also recognized as Parsali as she was the granddaughter of Prushata. In cognition to the veritable truth that she did not originate from a women's womb, she was appellated Ayonija and her birth from the blazing flames evolves to be the rationale abaft her eponym, Yagnyaseni. Surreptitiously yearning to imbibe civic knowledge and warfare dexterity which were the pursuit of the masculine gender and being adamant to master the activities that abides only within the confined cognition of the king, Draupadi was incapable to exist contentedly beneath the authority of her father as it is from him that she persistently underwent the compelling engrossment in womanly recreation and which she was unable to condone, being defiant and distinctive characteristically. Evolving from the sacred blaze and possessing a vigorous psychic bond with her brother Dhrishtadyumna who appeared in the identical way, Draupadi, impregnated with retribution, aspires to be the empress of her own dynasty. Though Karna's eyes suffused with venerable anguish made her fall adore him and be passionate about him, immediately when she viewed his portrait in the swayamvara, she got departed from him for her entire course of time on earth as she discerned her solecism of disparage Karna by questioning him about his descent, to rescue Dhrishtadyumna's life, and was left with no other option but to arrive at Hastinapur after attaching in the nuptial bond with the five Pandu brothers. Even though Draupadi was incriminated of being the exclusive cause responsible for the bloodshed and battle of Kurukshetra and was also delineated as the individual who is magnanimous in juxtaposition to Vyas, it can be apparently ascertained

from the reiteration that though Kauravas were directed to annihilation after disgracing Draupadi in the royal court, the integrated text had multifarious magnitude containing the individual administration of the execution of the Rajsuya sacrifice, and Draupadi was not the solitary cause behind it. Draupadi is yet being subdued by her own kinsfolk and sighted as the entity of exploitation by destiny, although she is not at all subordinate to Arjuna or Bheema, rooted on her intrepidity, inner self, rectitude and fervour in the contemporary recital of Mahabharata. Duryodhana devised to feign a sport of dice with the Pandavas and ascertained to gladly receive them even if there existed no purpose of involvement from the Kauravas part in the solemnization of the Pandavas, as he was tempestuous with resentment and covetousness after observing the comfort of the Pandavas and experienced deception and maltreatment as he got converted into the matter of laughter and mockery and particularly Draupadi's cachinnation when he erroneously perceived the pool of the newly constructed palace as a glistening ground and dropped into water and afterwards even misconstrued the exceedingly gleaming floor as a pool and began to collect his garments in the supposition of getting those moist. As a consequence of this insistent taunting and getting submerged with humiliation after encountering influx of ridicule directed to him, Duryodhana swore upon fulfilling his vengeance on the five Pandu brothers and their companion, who was the principal individual succouring the sarcastic retroversion of his fortune that particular day as she did not abstain from asserting that "son of a blind would be blind himself" (Divakaruni 173).

As the Pandavas tied the connubial bond with various princesses from several empires, Arjuna to Lord Krishna's sister, Subhadra and also other princesses, Bhima to the demoness, Hidimba, Nakul and Sahadeva to the daughters of Sisupala and Jarasandha as an emblem of solidarity, Draupadi who had been endowed with the distinguished denomination of the arch queen consort, who was wedded to all the five Pandu brothers, was tackling with polygyny, sustaining in an iniquitous wedlock, but still she harmoniously handled the evasive correlation. *The Palace of Illusion* is the recital of *Mahabharata* which emulates the disinclination and aversion of Draupadi as she was directed to espouse all the five brothers because it was a situation that was not under any condition an auspicious one for her, and ultimately she voiced out of immense frustration as she was distressed and agonized with her husbands tying the knot again, "I finally began to see what the wily Kunti had in her mind when she insisted that I was to be married to all of them, and though they never made my heart beat widely, the way I'd hoped as a girl, I committed myself totally to the welfare of the Pandavas" (Divakaruni 152). The recounting of *Mahabharata* furnishes a detrimental innuendo over the corroboration of holy sacrament explicated in the ancient documents. As a dissention to the mores of the antediluvian conventionalist community which comprehends the concept of chastity to be the absolute one which must be highlighted considerably, Draupadi, who is bestowed with the reward of retrieving her virginity in advance of her stay with another companion every subsequent year, is optimistic to be admired and treasured by

Arjuna, while at the similar moment is hesitant towards the other brothers. Being an empress who should attain her immaculateness and remove all the inquisitions that encompasses it, Draupadi is anticipated to be the pertinent prototype of the vestal charmer which is solicited to be the emblem of virtuousness by the common people. Embarrassed with such a community that restores her physique, “Each time I went to a new brother, I’d be a virgin again.”, but flounders to refurbish her psyche and anima, Draupadi proclaims: “If the sage had cared to inquire, I’d have requested the gift of forgetting, so that when I went to each brother I’d have requisitioned that Arjuna be my first husband. He was the only one of the Pandavas I felt I could have fallen in love with. If he had loved me back, I might have been able to push aside my regrets about Karna and find some semblance of happiness” (Divakaruni 120). Even though through Draupadi’s vindication “Yes, I broke the first rule, the unwritten one, meant not just for warriors but all of us. I took love and used it as a balm to sooth my ego” (Divakaruni 230), Divakauni strives to portray the female greater than simply the mothers, daughters and companions of the valiant and dignified protagonists of the epic and attempts to provide them an commensurate stature in the community, the au courant Indian civilization proceeding at a great distance post three thousand years of the revelation of occurrences of *Mahabharata*, depicts the certitude that the omission of uniformity entirely counts on the conviction of male who yet reckon themselves as predominant and surpassing as compared to female and thus induces the transgressions that persists even if the females steadily strives to avouch their functions in the community. Being a female retaining the utmost intense moral principles in contrast to the rest and also as a lady blessed with the amalgamation of customs, conventions as well as innovation in the recounted adaptation of the epic, Draupadi did not desist from elevating a cutting-edge dispute on the virtuosity and ethics of the existent ruler of Hastinapur, King Dhritarastra, “Was he a saint, or merely lacking in common sense?” (Divakaruni 129), as she became absolutely astonished to observe the exhibition of acknowledgement and extreme modesty to the ruler who had at one point of time contrived to assassinate the Pandavas, by the utmost knowledgeable and honest brother amidst all the Pandavas, Yudhistira.

Possessing the genuine awareness regarding the manner to augment her individuality as a concubine, a princess and an empress of the considerably vast empire in the cosmos, Draupadi venerates and esteems her husbands by asserting, “I saw my husband too differently. They were a unit together, five finger that complemented each other to make up a powerful hand – a hand that would protect me if the need arose. A hand that had gifted me this beautiful palace. Wasn’t that sufficient to be thankful for?” (Divakaruni 148) as she appreciates their fortitude, vigour and proficiency and assists them and never grumbles about the comfort and grandeur that she got bereft of as it is the duty of the female companion to exhibit the absolute course of existence to her husband when he is debilitated which is displayed through the interrogation concerning Gandhari’s integral conscience to remain blindfolded which was initially deemed by Draupadi as inordinately conventional, compliant,

injudicious and extraneous. Proffering Draupadi with a vociferation in the vigorously paternal macrocosm, Divakaruni contributes an integrated anecdotal account by conferring a substantial function to the female gender in her interpretation of the epic and depicting the stature of female in the community indistinguishable as compared to men by adducing an array of alternatives contrived by Draupadi and thus bequeathing all the characteristic essences that builds her as a substantially potent, efficacious and unconstrained individual, thwarting the servitude conceded to the female in the patriarchal civilization. Being abundantly vigilant regarding her accountability as a married companion, Draupadi comments on the notion of metempsychosis and boosts a acute conjecture on male-domination as she is not only gentle and placid but also the individual insisting her prerogatives as she proclaims while being deprived of her resilience and composure, “I’d played a crucial role in bringing them to their destiny. I’d share their hardship in Khandav. I’d helped them design this unique palace, which so many longed to see. If they were pear, I was the gold wire on which they were strung” (Divakaruni 151) and thus represents herself to be an unregimented woman in the social order, retaining the pride and dignity as a female and professing a sphere unrestrained of masculine dispositions and insistence and not as a ignominious, disregarded and impuissant female of her era. Divakaruni renders Draupadi as a female who despite being extremely desolate (as she received only the adoration and nurturance of Dhairya and her brother), obtains the definite acumen in her psyche that she is born for besides only being like the female community encompassing her who are wedded off to elderly rulers just after reaching the age of adolescence and are concealed from communal gaze while the royal court is undergoing its proceedings. Thus Draupadi tended the notion in her insight that she is the individual who has taken birth to cut ice and this is the manner in which her mind is being epitomized in Divakaruni’s impressive and compelling epic which narrates the intrinsic ruminations of a woman who consistently desired to be a male individual in the universe brimming with vengefulness, adoration and dignity, materializes to be a rationalization of the sizable and pivotal function of the female in the epic while remaining a dissention of the acclaimed stratified approaches.

In Divakaruni’s rendition of *Mahabharata*, Draupadi performs in a recalcitrant manner and wringers the opprobrium that she underwent in the royal court after she had been obligated by her husband, Yudhishthira while he began to succumb to Duryodhana in the sport of dice, and eventually turned out to be the minion of the Kaurava potentate. Even though Draupadi’s frenzy for her disgrace has not been stained and she is delineated as a maltreated female sovereign in *Mahabharata* by Vedvyasa, in the recounted narrative she is rendered as a tenacious female who vows to emanate the spark of vengeance in her husbands and is evidently not the individual who urges for her prerogatives. As Draupadi interrogates her husband whether he had plighted her earlier or later when he got defeated in the betting sport, the Pandu brothers bowed their heads out of sheer embarrassment, and Draupadi even claims the sport as illegitimate despite impassively supporting her husband as no single wife or

brother of the Kauravas were dragged into a perilous situation in the sport. As Draupadi is hauled into the royal court by Duryodhana, she is bewildered and even inquests her husband's privilege to pawn her as he is by then a thrall, having been defeated by the Kauravas. As the deep seated assertive intent of Draupadi vehemently interrogates her about her individuality, while she is incapable to analyze her circumstance in the royal court, "I'm a queen. Daughter of king Draupad, Sister of Dhritadyumna, Mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins or summoned to court like a dancing girl" (Divakaruni 190), it is conspicuous that the possession of the wife by the husband was not honoured in the community although the wife was hardly perceived to be a commodity responsible for the male contentment, as the congregation began to jeer emphatically, the very minute when Draupadi is pawned by Yushishthira. Draupadi proclaimed that a married woman is a self-reliant identity and not a single soul retains the prerogative to pursue her for their interests if the husband is lacking dominating command atop her, as she procured the emphasized innuendo in a divergent magnitude and even appealed the aged venerable sages of Hastinapur to attribute to the Nyaya Shastra, with a poignant overture, where she notified them "If perchance a man lost himself, He no longer had any jurisdiction over his wife". (Divakaruni 194). Not at all being remorseful of justifying her grandeur, Draupadi catechizes the tenability of Nyaya Shastra and the astringent conviction of the civilization inundated by the notion of female enslavement and masculine ascendancy.

Draupadi eventually lamented on her lack of success of being incapable to retaliate the absolute, magnanimous amorousness and protection of Bheema who assuaged and stayed beside her until her expiration, as she became cognizant of worthlessness of her inextinguishable inclination for her much-adored Arjuna and her meticulous motherly concern towards Sahadeva, when she was abandoned and neglected by her husbands and untended to descend off the Himalayan cliffs and welcome a vulnerable cessation, in the interim of their course to the immortal Promised land in the Mahaprasthana Parva. Draupadi continues to repent on her initial love and discerning her pathetic condition strives on implanting and reviving the seed of vengeance in her husbands' minds and thus projecting herself to be a mystic admirer, an unprotected wife disgraced in the Kuru royal court, a recalcitrant daughter-in-law, a distraught and inattentive mother and a glorious empress, comprehends her hardship and experiences anguish on account of her ineptitude of being adored by Karna to whom she bestowed her soul, Karna and also being incapable to exhibit her concern for Bheema, who adored her with utmost passion and desire. Draupadi continues to assist her husbands although they tied the knot with the other princesses, specifically Arjun who betrothed Subhadra and chose to contribute his considerable passionate ardour and fondness with her after being outraged on Draupadi's adherence to Kunti's command, and she is also the individual who persisted to be calm even meanwhile the discomfort and misfortunes when she got departed from her brothers and sons in the ferocious skirmish of Kurukshetra, but still emerged to be the lady who continued to be steadfast and recurred to

withstand though her course was suffused with infirmity and fallibility while carrying out her responsibilities towards her husbands profoundly. And it is through the portrayal of her character in the epic that we ultimately rely on the prognostications articulated by the Sage: “You will marry the five greatest heroes of your time. You will be queen of queens, envied even by goddesses. You will be a servant maid. You will be mistress of the most magical of palaces and then lose it. You will be remembered for causing the greatest war of your time. You will bring about the deaths of evil kings - and your children’s, and your brother’s. A million women will become widows because of you. Yes, indeed, you will leave a mark on history.” (Divakaruni 39) Divakaruni’s Draupadi subsequently secures redemption after resolving her crudeness, bewilderment and turmoil through the sincere and selfless adoration and piety of Krishna, as it is the affection that is much remarkable and palpable in correlation to the passion dispensed by all the men during her course of existence who were sincerely committed to dharma more than to her, and thus evolves to be the common spokesperson for the narrative who is a greatly straightforward female protagonist in juxtaposition to the other recitals such as, *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector* by Saoli Mitra, *Yagnaseni* by Pratibha Ray, *Kurukshetra* by Amreeta Syam.

Being the bedrock of multiple civilizations and cultures, mythologies, which are the magnificent, dignified and protracted explications of ancient and celebrated gallant models inseminating the temporal embodiment of the omniscient being succour the community by discerning the methodologies of observing the macrocosmic sphere and the traditions of every civilization. As one glazes into the antiquity, one speculates over the vociferation of the women from the times gone by and their existence perpetuated within the utopian milieu which are bestowed upon them from a masculine vista by the male wordsmiths from their creation of the emblem of the paradigmatic and perfect companion depicted through Savitri, Sita and Draupadi, surviving in a patriarchal community where the female repression lingered to be the principal motif of scripting. Being a feminist inference of the Indian epic, *Mahabharata* which sustains to be an elemental draft for customs, sacred principles, *dharma*, convictions, gender portrayals and devout and didactic enlightenment, *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni provides conspicuousness to the introspection and articulation of the pivotal cynosure, Draupadi through the representation of her disposition which transpires to be unfathomable and valiant rather than compliant and obsequious. Divakaruni’s contemporary rendition inclines to be disconcerting as she forbids her paramount character from promoting an axiomatically newfangled vista, rather than relocating the regularized schema of the originating work and deforming the idiosyncratic account through the psyche of errant observers and thus flounders to reconnoitre the particular cognizance that could have been delivered by a pivotal woman’s perspective to the narrative. Being excessively involved with the story line, Divakaruni bestows Draupadi with the reward of impeccable consciousness through Vyasa, analogous to Dhritarastra, and thus by formulating ingenious methods to decipher the arena exterior to her involvement, cultivates the principal protagonist

out of the range of prognosis while narrating the schema specifically, despite envisaging the confined introspective involvement of the Kurukshetra catastrophe of Draupadi. Being a demonstration that is chiefly inclined to succor the Brahmanical dogma, the epic of *Mahabharata* includes a myriad of viewpoints through an extrinsic spectator and we gain the substitute perspectives through the recounting which donates to the knowledge of the inherent authentic chronicle conceivably. While exhibiting the delusive disposition of the peripheries of civilization dictated by gender and the distant past, the reinterpretation of the epic by Divakaruni surpasses the selvages and manifests the strife for individuality in the Indian mythical framework while accentuating a compelling accord betwixt retribution and femaleness, being the voice of the prima donna, Draupadi, who restores the feminine force while summing a feminist crux in a narrative discourse which centers round loyal female companions, virile protagonists and conflict amidst two lineages. Divakaruni's effort endures a exceptionally convoluted and contradictory altercation of gender-specific portrayals, taking into consideration the confabulated narrative adaptation and circumstance, heretofore discernible in the archaic epic of *Mahabharata*, and thus by contributing a precisely gender-specific and pivotal role to Draupadi, dispenses her with a divergent existence as she illustrates the speculations on her own sustenance through the medium of her expression, being the centerpiece of the state-of-the-art recital of the epic.

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