

Research Article

Struggle For Identity In Mythological Context: Third World Feminist Interpretation Of Female Agency In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Literary Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the representation of female agency in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion*. It demonstrates the problems and issues of the 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 to establish the female as a role model neglecting orthodox ideas as the second sex. Divakaruni recounts the epic from Draupadi's point of view, claiming female agency in the war between two families. Likewise, it highlights the issue of motherhood and conflict depicting Draupadi's struggle for identity in a mythological context. In the novel, Draupadi has been presented as a headstrong and female role model who provokes her husband to take revenge on Kauravas. Therefore, she is presented as a revolutionary character that breaks

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down the traditional gender role but her contributions are neglected in Mahabharata. This paper critically analyses Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion* from Third world feminist interpretation which raises the issues of non-western women. Especially, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Uma Narayan's perspectives on feminism have been used as theoretical insights to support the hypothesis. In Mahabharata, Draupadi has been presented as the submissive, passive, and inactive character. Contrary to it, in *The Palace of Illusion* Divakaruni shows Draupadi as a role model as well as courageous who can establish her identity in the patriarchal domain.

Keywords: Female Agency, Domination, Identity, Conflict, Equality, History.

INTRODUCTION

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 a patriarchal society, females are leveled as second sex and regarded as the main cause of the World's trouble. The role of women is devalued in a male-dominated society. Divakaruni rewrites the story of the Mahabharata from the Draupadi's perspective to foreground her subjectivity and individuality which is neglected by the original epic- *Mahabharata*. The novel narrated by Panchaali, the wife of five Pandavas, demonstrates the role of females in *Mahabharata* as important as male counterparts. If females were absent, Pandavas would not be able to defeat Kaurava, so the role of females 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 movements 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 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 girls. Traditional gender roles attach women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive.

On the battlefield of *Mahabharata*, some females have fought in Kurukshetra through the role of women and their contributions 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 the female on the battlefield. The novel describes the Panchaali's life and her birth from fire as a daughter of the king. She takes oath on who has insulted her in the court of Hastinapur. She curses those 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 a 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 widow, and mother of the Pandavas dedicates her life to make her sons kings of Hastinapur. Another female character Gandhari, wife of the sightless king Dhritrashtra, 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 are 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. Banerjee 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', haste gives in to the definitions and interpretations of *herself* by the subject. And "Thus one can say that man *and* woman" (Banerjee 2015, p.188). 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 the swayamvar of his daughter to attract Arjun. He wants to tie Arjun in a nuptial bond by using his daughter because only Arjun can defeat Drona. Arjun has defeated Drona in the war. It reflects that with the support of a female agency or role model Draupad has taken his revenge. In this novel, not only central character Draupadi has been used as a female agency to accomplish male's ambition. Other female characters have also played a crucial role to achieve the aim of males such as Sikhandi, Uttara, Kunti, Sudeshna, Sairindhri. Amba, Sulochana. Sikhandi actually in her past life, was a princess but she was insulted by Bheeshma because he has escaped her during her marriage. However, she loves king Salya.

Panchaali is the central character of the novel which is born from sacrificial Yaga. She is the daughter of King Drupad. She goes beyond the traditional role of women so that she breaks the shackles of the 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. She 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, the female agency is the 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 to women. They take women as an object nothing more than a puppet. In the protagonist's life of Draupadi, three important instances will come if she has 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 about his instruction. When Duryodhan fell in the water in the palace of her pond, she laughs at Duryodhan saying that the son of the blind is also blind. Likewise, she gives a curse that those who have stripped her, their wife, and children would be widowed and orphans. 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 late 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 the forest to do penance. She gets a boon to become the 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 by cutting grass so that Arjun has used Sikhandi as a female agency to get victory over Bheeshma. Arjun and Sikhandi are in the same chariot. When Bheesham 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

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Bheeshma has got wish death. In this way, the impossible work can be possible with the help of the 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.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To highlight the struggle for identity in a mythological context.
- To present the traditional gender roles.
- To analyze the subject of female agency.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How has Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presented the female agency in her novel *The Palace of Illusions*?
2. How has the writer highlighted the issues of gender and identity in her novel *The Palace of Illusions*?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. This paper critically analyses Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion* from Third world feminist interpretation which raises the issues of non-western women. Especially, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Uma Narayan's perspectives on feminism have been used as theoretical insights to support the hypothesis. In Mahabharata, Draupadi has been presented as a submissive, passive, and inactive character. Contrary to it, in *The Palace of Illusion* Divakaruni shows Draupadi as a role model as well as courageous who can establish her identity in the patriarchal domain.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In this novel, there are many female agencies. They are active in any activities 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 the 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 sister's hand but Subhadra rejects to marry him. Duryodhan was already married however he wants to marry 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 Subhadra then it would possible for them to fight Krishna, Balram as well as Dwarka from the side of Duryodhan. As a result, Duryodhan will win the war. 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 a 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 lose their property, brother, and even their wife Draupadi. Who has been given the 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 a minor thing and valueless. On the other hand, if we take the dice game in hierarchical 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 a 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 a commodity and puppet. 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 the 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 a revolutionary woman. She vows to shatter her hair till Pandava brings the chest of blood for her hair. This much not only Vim does not tolerate her insult so that he also takes an oath to break the thigh of Duryodhan. The Kauravas have insulted her which invites them to the bloody battlefield of Kurukshetra for 19 days.

Likewise, the headstrong of many kings and queens have given the invitation for Kurukshetra as well as the termination of Kaurava parentage. To some extent great warrior Karna is also responsible for the war because he has taken an oath to finish supreme archery Arjun. Draupadi has insulted prince Duryodhan arguing the son of the blind is also blind so that he takes it seriously for revenge. Pandavas are the heir of the throne but they were kicked off from the throne as a result after the banishment of the thirteenth year they demand their right but Duryodhan rejects them which brings them to the battlefield. The member of Drupad's family has a crucial role to held war between Pandava and Kaurava. King Drupad has taken swear to destroy Drona because he has given the order to defeat him on the battlefield 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 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 Rao views the novel as the power is misused to dominate the women. He argues, "The phallogocentric, patriarchal universe has consistently tried to denigrate women through scientific evidence, literature, law, politics, religion, culture and, in the contemporary times, through media" (Rao, 2015, p.390). 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 Draupadi has also played a role to have a war between two branches Pandu and Kaurava. There are many causes for such a gigantic event. Millions of women are widowed and a large number of children have become orphans due to Draupadi. L.V. Padmarani Rao in his article writes, "Paanchaali, who some might argue, by her headstrong actions helps to bring about the destruction of the third age of man" (Rao 2010, p.2). The Pandav has heard the voices and thoughts of women so that there is a fight between Pandava and Kaurava. Whenever someone analyzes the world's problem, the cause we get is women contribute to the 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 be 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 peacemaker, people would

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call her.

Unfortunately, in the novel, there is a conflict between the royal family's princess for the throne, power, and land. Yudhisthir is the eldest son of Pandu so that he has the birthright for the throne according to the 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 a fight for the chair. Vijayaraghavan explains,

“At the core of the epic lies the fierce rivalry between two branches of the Kaurava dynasty, the Pandavas 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.”

(Vijayaraghavan 2015, p.2)

Revenge is a central issue of the novel. It depicts the battle between two families, which is closely connected with two different sexes, whereas the husband is 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" (Black 2012, p.53). Women are considered contingent beings (dependent beings controlled by circumstances). Gandhari is a very good queen because she put a 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 a 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 a symbol of the ideal woman.

Kendal Busse in *The International Journal of Hindu Studies* adds a new perspective that is neglected in the original epic-*Mahabharata*. He says, "Divakaruni's version is nothing is notable among the other *Mahabharata* novelizations for trying to include more of the original stories, but also lack of a compelling protagonist" (Busse 2008, p.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.” (Hoydis 2012, p.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 her male counterpart. Thus, it is another issue to be discussed. She has by force been given lessons 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" (Hall 1960, p.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 consequence 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 warcraft of her brother. Her father traditionally treats her so that he manages such lessons.

This research analyses Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* by connecting it with Third World Feminism. It finds out the issue of gender, inequality, agency, conflict, consciousness, and the role of agency from a feministic point of view. The idea of third-world feminism firmly connects with the practice of nonwestern women. It shows the point of departure from western feminism because western feminism only talks about them but neglects the issue of non westerners. It concerns developing countries from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and tries to find out issues and problems especially what they have faced in a patriarchal society. And those feminist from the third world has developed the feminism in their 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 females from their 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 feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division.” (Mohanty 2003, p.2).

Another critic Uma Narayan claiming the value of Middle East women rejects western feminism. To her, the issues related to a westerner are different from the issues related to developing countries. She also focuses on the social environment, norms, and value which determines the role of women. So, the role of women is different from one place to another. She says Third-world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of the western agendas in one clear and simple sense" (Narayan 1997, p.13). The representation of Draupadi in the novel is strong, because, in her marriage, she rejects the ruler of Anga, Karna, arguing with him, she will not marry with a low caste. She further, investigates Karna, she wants to know about the family background of Karna. Her interest in education and knowledge provide 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.” (TPI 53-54).

She argues him before attempting 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 to the home. Kunti gives the order to share equally among sons whatever you have brought. In this way, Kunti has divided Draupadi among five Pandavas. This is the cause of the tussle between Kunti and Draupadi. From this moment there

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is a clash between Kunti and Paanchali, which is the major reason for all the events in the novel. The decision of Kunti has ruined the life of Draupadi.

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 a role to help Sikhandi to kill Drona. In this way, the female agency has played an essential role to take revenge on her and her father. Of course, the female agency is used for the good of Panchaal and the honor of the house. King Drupad has stopped Draupadi's lessons with his tutor, declaring that she needed to focus on more feminine interests. 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 underway by the late 1960s. It is an attempt to explain and interpret female's experiences 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 on women authors. In addition, it challenges traditional values and accepts man's ideas about the instinct of women and about how females feel, responds 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 females made by man authors, especially the trend to represent females 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 the river where he sees her. He fell in love with her. He goes her home to beg hand of her. Her father says to him if you agree that the son of Satyavat's son will be king then only he will give you a hand of his daughter. 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 sons and 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 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 outcast and one having a fifth one is a harlot.” (*TPI 3*)

The given lines prove that women's liberty is usurpation by the 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 consider 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 the 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.

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 females though they are not criticized and punished from any sector. This much not only, but five husbands also 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 flop they are not blamed by anyone. If a woman do even a single mistake then immediately she could be criticized for life long. In the novel, the protagonist Draupadi plays a 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 Rупkatha 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” (Banerjee 2015, p.194). Unfortunately, Draupadi is stripped publicly in the court of Hastinapur. She is an expert in governance. Her husband asks her advice when tricky judgment is to flow. Even in her palace, her administrative capacity is not accepted which proves the domination of women and traditional hegemonic ascendancy over a woman.

In the novel, there is a clash between Draupadi and her mother-in-law Kunti. Her mother-in-law burdens her household work such as managing the kitchen. One day Kunti handed her 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 I 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 response to her food. She argues saying you have burnt the brinjal. Also, you have put 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 mealtime the brothers praised the brinjal for its distinctive taste and asked for more, Draupadi remained in the kitchen and let Kunti serve her sons. 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 in the well-being of humans. They are the creator of the Earth. Without females, the earth does not exist because they continue the race and line of man. Though females are represented negatively. Female oblations are not counted as male. On the other hand, female agencies are the ruin of the world. For example, in the epic *Ramayan*, there are many female characters such as Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, Sita. These females have also been a part to create a war between Ram and Ravan, the war between Ravan and Bibhishana. Unfortunately, there was war between king Dasaratha and the demon where his charioteer was Kaikeyi. While the battle with demons king Dasaratha was badly hurt 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 the coronation of Ram, she uses two boons to beg throne for his son Bharat and the exile of Ram for fourteen years in the 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

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Ram.” (Balakandam 1891, p.3)

Bheeshma has picked up Amba from her swayamvar. Amba is a princess though she has no value. She is not material rather than a girl. She was insulted by Bheeshma so that she vows to become the cause of the death of Bheeshma. She does severe penance as a result god gave her a boon as well as she takes the form of Sikhandi. She dedicates her life to the destruction of Bheeshma. She has a pioneering 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 a catalyst role. They are a 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 an 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's 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 to Pandavas, however, she confesses despite the vows. She made each day 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 a steel body. Females have the power they protected men also. The questions arose by males prove that they are superior to females but in this novel females have an influencing role. To become a winner or loser is caused by the role of the female.

FINDINGS

In this novel, there are some characteristics of the female which affect the incidents. Ganga, for example, is the mother of the great warrior Bheeshma. She is a 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 the right time. Many years pass, fortunately, one day her husband Santanu wanders in regret near the bank of the Ganga River. She also appears with her son Bheeshma. She has given the best education to his son as well as no one can defeat him. Females make males strong. Without them, it is very hard to gain a 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 newborn, and disappeared in the water. Women are the two-wheel of one chariot.

On the other hand, a woman is the downfall of every successful man. In this novel, another female character Satayvati made the downfall of King Santanu and Bheeshma to remain celibate. King Santanu loves her. He wants to marry 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 she makes to take a vow to remain a bachelor at a young age. The life of Bheeshma is damaged by her stand. Though,

another female character who 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 needs her opinion. Draupadi is an 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 the sister of Krishna. The purpose of marrying her is also political. Arjun wants a good and powerful ally which he has got after marrying Subhadra. Females are used as objects everywhere either as wives or sisters, mothers. Male is free and no one can ask questions whatever they do. They have the liberty to do countless marry. They are not criticized. On the other hand, if a woman escapes with some male, immediately she will be criticized. Likewise, they have limited liberty. Draupadi cannot tolerate having the 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 the sister of Krishna. Arjun has usurpation her away in a wildly romantic chariot race. She argues for this act to Arjun, he was quite unabashed. Surprisingly, Subhadra became her favorite. Subhadra visits 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 a gentle and good woman because she takes Draupadi's sons into her home, treating them no differently from her child, deftly balancing affection and discipline.

Ideally, women are creators and protectors in the novel, Sisupal was protected by his mother. When he was born something stain was on his head and the prophecy 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 a double role. She is married to 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 the main cause to get victory upon anybody. Pandavas have used females to defeat their rivalry and enemy. They have married Panchaali therefore; they have to strong ally and wealthier support from Kampaly. Without the support of Draupadi's father, it is impossible to get victory on Kauravas. Likewise, Arjun also marries Subhadra. She is the sister of Krishna. The purpose of marrying her is also political because she belongs to the strong kingdom which helps them to destroy Duryodhan. Thus, females are very important everywhere either in war or at any place. Furthermore, Bheem marries Hidimba to get help from the demon also. At the great war of Kurushetra demons have also fought from the side of Pandavas. The son of Hidimba has shown his bravery in the war. He has killed

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many warriors and an army of Duryodhan. Kurus armies are unable to fight with him. They are escaping from him. Therefore, without the help of demons, it was impossible to defeat Duryodhan's army. The contributions of females are unforgettable. Their sacrifice is not less than a male warrior. Bheeshma was undefeated in his life and was an immortal warrior.

Bheeshma is near to defeat Pandavas army on the battlefield. Pandavas armies are afraid of him. Fortunately, Arjun takes the help of Sikhandi to defeat him. Sikhandi is a woman in a 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 females Arjun has defeat Bheeshma. Therefore, females presented in the novel are the 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 a very important role to make males successful. Likewise, females have made the work possible which is impossible for males thus males should not have to underestimate the female. On the other hand, the male should have cautious about females because they are responsible for the conflict between two branches Pandav and Kauravas. In the novel war is held due to women so that after listening to talks of females, the male should think detail then he has to take action. On contrary, males 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 a voice to the voiceless. She finds out Draupadi's role in *Mahabharata* in analyzing from a 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 the female in a different way from nonwestern background rejecting western viewpoint. In this regard, the feminist perspective asks a new question about the old text and conservative norms and values. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has raised new questions about the famous epic *Mahabharata*. She tries to understand the crisis of *Mahabharata* from a 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. In the novel, *Palace of Illusions* Draupadi narrates the story from her perspective; it recalls the important events in the battlefield 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 a female perspective. So, it can be defined as an important feminist text which redefines the role of women in epic.

CONCLUSION

In essence, Divakaruni exhibits Draupadi as a role model, strong and revolutionary character who dismantles the norms and values created by patriarchal society. He looks at her role as Draupadi from a different perspective by giving her an important role. But original *Mahabharata* always neglects the contribution of Draupadi. On contrary, Draupadi has been portrayed as the 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 issues that have been 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 the absence of Draupadi. Therefore, this novel tries to revisit the epic from a feminist perspective. In one word, *The Palace of Illusion* is a good example of feminist work.

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