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International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories (IJELLT) is a peer-reviewed, open-access academic journal dedicated to promoting research and scholarship in the fields of English language, literature, and literary theories. Published monthly, IJELLT provides a platform for academicians, scholars, educators, and researchers to present their original work to a global audience.The journal upholds the highest standards of editorial integrity and academic excellence through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process. We welcome a wide range of submissions—from theoretical and critical analyses to practical research, creative writing, and pedagogical studies related to English literature and language.

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The Feminist Voice of Draupadi in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion:* An Analysis

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Abstract:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning author whose novels portray women as strong characters in different dimensions. Her novel "The Palace of Illusions" was published in 2008. This novel retells the story of the epic "Mahabharata" through the voice of Draupadi. The original text does not give voice or identity to the character "Draupadi," but in "The Palace of Illusions," the author brings her to life from Draupadi's point of view. Throughout the text, Draupadi consistently challenges patriarchal norms and fights for justice.

Key Words: Self identity, discrimination, patriarchal society

Women's writings are an expression of their own experiences and emotions. They use their own narratives because they are not satisfied with male narrators. Most of the epic women characters are narrated by male writers, and this still has an impact on modern society. Very few women in literature have played a central role in society, but they are not aware of it. Therefore, every woman must take steps to rewrite their stories and encourage others to do the same. In Laugh of Medusa, Helene Cixous say

> I shall speak about women's writing: About what it will do. Women must write herself : Must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text-as into the world and into historyby her own movement (2)

Divakaruni chose Draupadi, who was born in fire, as her female narrator in the book "The Palace of Illusions." Through this character, the author depicts a stereoscopic view of the epic story "Mahabharatha." By doing this, readers have the opportunity to delve into Draupadi's mind. Through Draupadi's narration, the author portrays her entire life, from her magical birth to her afterlife.

From the beginning, she had boundaries. Throughout the novel, she tries to escape from them and search for her own identity. King Drupad named her brother "Dhristadyumna," the destroyer of enemies, and herself "Draupadi," the daughter of King Drupad. She condemned the name given by her father and felt that the name itself set gender boundaries.

> ….my attention veered to the meaning of the names our father chose. Dhristadyumna, Destroyer of enemies. Draupadi, daughter of Drupad.

Women of her time were not allowed to get an education. Draupadi's determination to receive an education led her to learn from her brother Dhri. Dhri received training for royal life and justice, while Draupadi was trained in womanly duties such as painting and sewing. Krishna emphasized the importance of Draupadi's education to her father, who then allowed her to learn from his brother. While receiving lessons from her tutor, she felt aggrieved by his declaration about women.

The tutor stated that women were the main cause of world trouble, but Draupadi objected to this. She felt unique because she did not accept this viewpoint like other women of her age did. According to Dhri's tutor's opinion about virtuous women, if they were lucky, they were directly sent to the next birth and reincarnated as men. However, Draupadi has a different opinion. She believes that if good women were lucky, they were sent to a world where men were not allowed. In this world, women were free from male demands.

Before Draupadi's Swayamvar, she was attracted to Karna's eyes in the portrait. Her attraction was not only rebellious, but it also showed the masculine ideology in society. Krishna read Draupadi's mind, so Dhri and he downplayed Karna due to his lower caste and untold parentage. However, Draupadi is unconvinced by their words.

> I didn't want to argue with Dhri, but I wasn't ready to turn against Karna, not even for the sake of family honor.(85)

A Swayamvar is a practice that permits the princess to choose her groom from a group of suitors. King Drupad has a secret wish of marrying his daughter to Arjun, and he cleverly planned the contest by knowing Arjun is the only person who can win it. It was merely a political setup. Draupadi was not even consulted; they call it a 'Swayamvar'. How ironic it was.

For the sake of obeying Kunti's words, Draupadi was forced to marry the other brothers of Arjun. Everyone stated their on benefits and harms in the marriage. Again and again , in this Patriarchal society, she was not given a single chance to express her opinion.

> But I was distressed by the coldness with which my father and my potential husband discussed my options, thinking only of how these acts would benefit---or harm---them.(118)

The circumstances and situations led Draupadi to marry the Pandavas. During their marriage, Vyasa gave her a boon that when she went from one brother to another, she would be a Virgin again. She said that this was mainly designed not for her, but for the benefit of her husbands only.

> Not was I particularly delighted by the virginity boon, which seemed designed more for my husbands' benefit than mine.(120)

The story moves on as the Pandavas build a palace and name it a s "the palace of illusion", which the people call Indraprastha. Draupadi feels a strong connection to the palace and considers it a s her identity.

Her governance in the palace is admired by her husbands many times. Yudhisthir asks for Draupadi's advice in some critical judgments, but only in private, not in front of others. The Pandavas also took other wives for political reasons and their own desires. Obviously, it's just a normal thing when it comes to men. As a practical women, she accepting this, and she knows she will always be superior to the Pandavas'.

Every version of the Mahabharata strongly perpetuates the myth that the world's troubles are always due to women. Divakaruni chose Draupadi as her narrator to show the suffering and downfall caused by men, and how women rise like a phoenix after enduring it all.

In Hastinapur, Yudhisthir, who had a weakness for gambling, was invited to play a dice game with Duryodhan. Yudhisthir was not an expert in the game, so he ended up losing his assets, his brothers, and his kingdom. In the patriarchal society, women are always considered as property, belonging to their fathers and husbands. Here, Draupadi is also considered as property, so when Yudhisthir lost everything he owned, she was also included in that loss. And the question is, who gave him the right to gamble his wife? Merely, the woman was being treated as an object.

> I'm a queen. Daughter of Drupad, sister of Dhristadyumna. Mistress of the great palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl.(190)

As an educated girl, Draupadi knows the rules and she thinks that the elders in the court have come to rescue her. But she has forgotten that the laws of men never favor women. Finally, Dussasan drags her to the sabha. Draupadi's superego controls her to ask for help from Karna because she doesn't want to lower herself. At last, Lord Krishna saves Draupadi from great disgrace.

History has always reserved a place for men only, but Draupadi's vengeance and determination earned her a significant place in history. Consequently, she learned how to navigate the male-dominated society and assert herself. Her persistence led her to sacrifice motherhood in order to focus on her goals. Draupadi did not conform to the role of a typical housewife; instead, she trained her husbands to help her achieve her life's purpose.

Vyasa knew that Draupadi was not an ordinary woman. During the war, he granted her a boon to witness the events. After the war, the widows of the fallen soldiers began to humiliate her. However, she faced the consequences bravely and created a court exclusively for women, where they could freely express their sorrows and sufferings.

Finally, Divakaruni portrayed Draupadi as an example to show the world that those who search for their identity and fight for it can create a remarkable legacy in history.

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