



Draupadi as a Spiritual Archetype: Insight from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

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This research paper explores Draupadi as a spiritual archetype, drawing insight from her journey in the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, which portrays her as a victim, warrior, and epitome of transformation. By close textual analysis of the text, the paper highlights the character of Draupadi as the timeless qualities of strength, wisdom, and justice. The exploration of myth, spirituality, and cultural symbolism is the primary goal in shaping Draupadi's character. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni illustrates the traditional Draupadi's transformation into a new modern woman by depicting her characters as bold and powerful enough to adapt to contemporary society. It showcases Draupadi's struggles, flexibility, and developing perception that represents her search for self and emancipation. This study analyses not only Draupadi's feminine strength and her archetypal changes but also her ultimatum to challenge the traditional notion of destiny and duty illuminating new insights into the universal search for meaning and justice.

Keywords- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Draupadi, Spiritual, society, patriarchy, challenges, suffering, humiliation.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a celebrated Indian-born American writer who has given outstanding contributions in the field of Indian Mythology, Mahabharata. Her reinterpretation of the feminine epic *The Palace of Illusions* brings insightful attention to the female persona. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni emphasizes the character of Draupadi, she underscores the journey of Draupadi from her birth to her death. Chitra has showcased how being an unwanted female child, she had to face many setbacks in her life. The patriarchal world has cursed her whole life and obstructed her from living a liberated and self-ruled lifestyle. The novel elaborates on gender inequality, racial issues, and the oppression of women in conventional society. It shows the protagonist's navigation with societal norms, gender discrimination, and pressure to follow the traditional rules of society.

In the comprehensive domains of Indian Mythology, Draupadi evolves as the most captivating and formidable heroine. As a prominent character in Mahabharata, her journey has a profound spiritual resonance that goes beyond simple epic dimensions. The character of Draupadi is considered a Spiritual Archetype for the reason of her ability to maintain her fortitude, justice, and resilience in the face of adversity. This resonates with spiritual lessons about perseverance and the quest for truth and justice. In a literal word, Archetype is a universal symbol, pattern, behavior, action, or subject that can be found in myths, stories, ideas, and religions from a broad variety of literary, cultural, and historical contexts. Since it depicts the experience of the human psyche, these patterns have a profound impact on people. The concept has been touched with two bases one is from *The Golden Bough* by James Fragers, who explores the idea and meaning of archetype, and the other is from Karl Jung, a Swiss psychoanalyst who expressed

his perspectives and prolonged this concept as Archetype is a repeated experience of our ancestor's that passed down through centuries. It is the collective unconscious of ideas and perceptions that all people possess. In the context of the text *The Palace of Illusion*, it can be found in a variety of ways, including the characters of Draupadi, femininity and patriarchal norms, the encouragement and support of Krishna, Draupadi's spiritual path, and the narrative structures these are the common archetype that has been perceived in the text.

Draupadi was born from fire, as a child. She was the daughter of King Draupad, the ruler of the Southern Panchala kingdom, one of the richest kingdoms on the continent of Bharat. The kingdom of Panchal has bestowed upon her titles such as 'Offspring of Vengeance' and 'The Unexpected Child'. The royal king Draupad arranged a 30-day fire ceremony called Yajna, and he fervently prayed for a male child, who would grant him the retribution he so desperately sought. After the successful fire ceremony, the god of fire offered him a son, a true Prince of Panchal, named Dhristadyumna, a destroyer of enemies. Right after her brother Draupadi came, sent by the god of fire to the king, and asked him to take good care of her as she was destined to change the course of history. Nevertheless, being an unwanted female child of the family she has to go through many challenges in the traditional patriarchal household. Despite being a princess of Panchal, she used to reside alone though, the entire hall of the Panchal mansion was crowded with kings, queens, servants, and commoners. She is looked after by his little, devoted family, which includes Dhai Ma, Dhri, and her best friend Krishna. Earlier, she was rejected by her father, but her brother Dhri saved her sister from her father's exclusion and stood as a shield for Draupadi. Dhai Ma was a significant figure in Draupadi's life and provided her excellent care and guidance as a mother. She informs Draupadi about Indian customs social behavior and the laws. In the kingdom of Panchal, she is encircled by loneliness and treated as a stranger because nobody is interested in residing with her, while she aspires to contribute to her realm and proudly identifies as the Princess of Panchal.

In the previous era, women had no authority to take any action for the nation and its citizens. All the heroic deeds have been set for the male authority and women need to support and pray for them in their hard times. However, Draupadi always anticipated her brother Dhri to remain by her side and never expected him to exhibit male egotism. However, being a male offspring of Draupad's dynasty, he began to believe and act under rigid male ideologies. She thinks that Dhri has already embraced the world of the court with open arms, and, I got farther away from them every day, into a dark solitude.

Further, her fate took a different path, and she came in contact with great old sages of Panchal who prophesized about Draupadi's unfortunate skepticism that left her stunned. As he foretells, "You will be married five greatest heroes of your time. You will be the queen of queens, envied even by goddess. You will be a servant maid, you will be mistress of most magical palaces, and then lose it. You will be remembered for causing the great war of your time. You will bring about the death of evil kings- and your children and brother. A million of women of women will become widows because of you. Yes, indeed you will leave a mark on history" (39). The prophecy of sages was ingrained in her thoughts, and she seemed to grieve over her misfortune. The sages offered her a new strong-willed name "Panchali" which means the 'spirit of this land'. Draupadi deeply felt her name and made herself strong and fascinated to face all the challenges of the future. Draupadi's swayamvar day arrived and her father King Draupad arranged a grand ceremony to determine the physical and spiritual powers of the deserving prince for Draupadi. She loves Karna but after knowing about his account of being a Suta, she rejects him, and in the game of worthiness Arjun takes the victory for the position of marrying Draupadi. However, the unfortunate Draupadi becomes the wife of all the five Pandavas, with, Arjun, Bheem, Yudhishthir, Nakul, and Sahdev. Her life and hopes were shattered and her marriage with Pandvas became unprecedented and disreputable as she was subjected to polygamy. She utters about her situation, "Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it or not" (120). She was internally shattered, her body, emotion, and honor were looked at as objects as being shared with all the Pandavas without any possession. Though she was being loved and respected by all the Pandvas yet, her secret love for Karna and admiration of being only a wife of Arjun was devastated.

In the Myth Narratives of the Mahabharata, the most noteworthy incident in Draupadi's life was her disrobing scene, which occurred when she faced embarrassment and cruelty as she was stripped off by Dushasana, a Kaurava Prince, in their assembly after her husband, Yudhishtira, lost her in a game of dice. When others around her, including her husband, bent their heads in shame and helplessness, she sought spiritual assistance from Lord Krishna to preserve her honor. Dushasana grows weary from stripping her clothes and concedes defeat as Krishna extends the length of her saree. Krishna once said, "Nobody can

shame you if you don't allow it". This message invigorates her spirit and strengthens her belief in God's faith. Draupadi was profoundly affected by the brutality and injustice of Kauravas. She transforms her suffering, humiliation, and tears into fortitude, and is determined to strike at vengeance that her husbands were incompetent to provide. Sikhandi the eldest daughter of King Draupad taught her once, "Remember that little sister wait for a man to avenge your honor, and you will wait forever" (49). Throughout, her whole life she negotiates with the principles of conservative society, her role being a Panchal princess to becoming a Kshatriya woman alters her mindset to cease compromising with the outdated norms of society and supports her to live and fight for herself in the world of influence.

It has been asserted that the patriarchal tradition continues to control women. They have always been forced to comply with the men's orders. Draupadi becomes the target of the Kaurava party when Yudhishtira loses everything as she belongs to the property of her husband. She recollects, "The wife is the property of the husband, no less so than a cow or a slave" (190). The French philosopher Simon de Beauvoir's text 'The Second Sex' which is the pioneering work of feminist philosophy, is appropriately adequate to discuss here, as she argues that, women are subjected as second, or as other. Her role, respect, and occupation in society are treated as secondary. The text demonstrates how women have been historically defined and suppressed by a male-dominated society. She focuses on the idea that women are not born, but rather become one, as social expectation changes the role of women, it emphasizes that femininity is fundamentally the product of cultural and social anticipation. Draupadi was consistently seen as subordinate and feeble in the Panchal kingdom; her gender delegated her role and status within society to a secondary position. Although she is intelligent, patriarchal beliefs prevent her from realizing her full potential. She experienced feelings of dejection from both the priest and her father regarding her participation in skill classes, which led to her being obligated to undertake traditionally feminine household responsibilities, including sewing, decorative arts, singing, and dancing. Simultaneously, she faced discouragement in her pursuit of a passion for poetry writing. Yet, Draupadi had always hungered for knowledge of the mysterious world, but the situation and societal expectations left her dispassionate and detached from everyone.

Draupadi was not only tortured by patriarchal dominance or external influences, but she was also tormented by internal skirmishes of love and self-esteem in a world, where she was treated as the calamity of fate and an unfortunate guest. Her struggle to adjust was painful, weighty, and insupportable, calling for righteousness, vengeance, and shifting the direction of historical events. Her desire to take revenge for the misdeed committed in the assembly, as well as her anguish, and sense of self-respect were all intensifying her soul. She warns the entire Kuru Party about her offenses against her, and says, "All of you will die in the battle that will be spawned from this day's work. Your mothers and wives will weep far more piteously than I've wept. This entire kingdom will become a charnel house. Not one Kaurava heir will be left to offer prayers for the dead. She made vows to herself that she will not comb or tie up her hair, until the day I bathe it in Kaurava blood" (194).

Likewise, Draupadi is not only disgraced by Kaurava's but she also encounters the worst situation after being exiled from Hastinapur. She was seduced by Keechak while incognito in Virat Palace where she worked as queen's maid servant. Draupadi was threatened to rape by Keechak, resultant Panchali with her husband Bheem murdered Keechak. Her agonies make her more hard and dangerous to treat her future problems. Throughout, her journey of exile she faces numerous kinds of gender discrimination, while she negotiates the gender norms that society imposes on her to preserve her individuality and dignity in the face of hardship. Draupadi's satisfaction was ultimately demonstrated when the Pandavas won the Kurukshetra battle, but as fate anticipated, she lost her father, brother, and son in the succeeding war.

In the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni presents Draupadi not as a conventional submissive woman, but instead gives voice to a modern Draupadi who endeavors to fight for herself rather than being subjected as a passive and exploited character. She navigates and challenges the old laws of society and raises her strong voice to get it heard and accomplish her desire. Divakaruni chose the contemporary Draupadi instead of the mythical Draupadi from the Mahabharata, the conventional Draupadi calls for justice after suffering and humiliation but does so within the bounds of duty and society whereas, the modern Draupadi shows the capability of the woman persona, her fourth challenge to her fate, patriarchal expectations, and emotions have the potential to transform society. A researcher Priyanka Srivastava writes in "Reinterpretations of Myth: Draupadi in Chitra Banerjee The Palace of Illusions", that, despite being trapped under patriarchal tyranny, Draupadi is seen as a liberating force. Many contemporary women can be compared to Draupadi's trial in the Mahabharata. This presents an opportunity to reconsider our cultural

framework, societal norms, beliefs, and the role of women in modern life. Draupadi acknowledges the reality of the prevailing culture as “she contemplates, and laments that men don’t care about a woman’s respect and dignity; for them, their notion of honor, loyalty, and reputation is more significant than our pain”.

The article focuses on the Draupadi’s spiritual journey from a suppressed lifestyle. She begins to move from her life after losing every precious person in her life. The war of Kurukshetra not only satisfies the soul of harassment and humiliation of Draupadi but also gives her strength, and resilience to fight for her despairs. She expresses, “The more dissuaded me, the more determined I became”. She seeks a solace that transcends life’s fleeting grief by forging a bond with the eternal or the divine. The connection between Draupadi and Lord Krishna has been seen as a fascinating relationship in the text. He was a sacred soulmate of Draupadi, appearing both as a human as well as God. Krishna assists her in turning despair into inner strength, encouraging her to look past the suffering of loss. In the novel, Krishna’s departure casts her into a profound emotional emptiness, where grief and self-reflection merge. She experienced the sensation that her wellspring of inner strength and authentic divine direction had been snuffed out. In the end, by embracing the realities of the world, along with her ego, fears, and resentments, she finds salvation and decides to dedicate the remainder of her life to living in the Himalayas. By acknowledging the truth of the world, she ascends towards mountains and transitions into a saintly woman. Manju Kumari writes in her article, “Refinement of Draupadi into a New Woman”, that Draupadi recognizes that death is emancipation and that her connection to the ground is detached by the knot that separates life and death. Draupadi was no longer the mother of her sons or the wife of Pandavas. When Draupadi realized the truth, she extended her hand to Karna, who gladly received it. In the end, Draupadi reunites with her beloved Karna in heaven, restoring her long-lost soul, by embracing her desire for love and acceptance, she completes her spiritual journey and fulfills her heartfelt longings.

Consequently, the research findings portray Draupadi's character as a representation of a spiritual archetype. She is regarded as an embodiment of strength, confidence, and determination in women. Her quest for justice, vengeance, and authenticity leads to her inner satisfaction and personal growth. She questions the established authority regarding women’s roles and challenges it by giving a voice to those women who have suffered under a strict patriarchal society. She empowers an entire generation of women to strive and fight for themselves because no one else will fight for them. She is a timeless and potent archetype because of her journey, which symbolizes the universal fight for justice, identity, and self-transcendence.

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