

EXPLORING PANCHALI AS STRONG EXPONENT OF GYNOCONSCIOUSNESS IN PALACE OF ILLUSIONS BY CHITRA BANERJEE

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Abstract : Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has highlighted new perspectives in women writings in India and world with her qualitative writings such as *The Palace of Illusions*. She stands as the foremost exponent of Gynoconsciousness in Indian English Literature where she presents widespread and applied themes. Draupadi stands as a true exponent of Gynoconsciousness with her recognition of her inner desires. Draupadi is brave enough to admit her own mistakes and control her own feelings. Hence, she shows the extraordinary awareness of her sense of Gynoconsciousness.

Keywords: Gynoconsciousness, illusions, exponent desires.

Introduction: Chitra Banerjee has occupied an eminent place in the world of English Literature through her consistent efforts, struggle for excellence; strive for passion and haunt of dreams. Her success is the proof of her qualitative writings which expresses inner self of an Indian woman compiled of long journey of reformation. Her writings deal with the themes of spirituality, problems of women, immigration, the South Asian Experience, myth, magic, history etc where she stands as an author of excellence resulted in her awards.

This paper tries to reveal the features of Gynoconsciousness and portrays the character that stands as a rebellious creature who is aware of herself. It even attempts to trace out the discrimination concerning gender and effects on the overall development of the plot as well as characters. In this novel an effort has been made to depict the life of women under the patriarchal burdens and strives of women for the establishment of their own identities. Search for an identity is a significant theme of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels. Endowed with strong Indian sensibility, she depicts women's issues and problems very deeply in her novels. Her deep instinctive insight into women's problems and predicaments provides her strength and support to explore a realistic portrait of contemporary women. She has presented gynoconsciousness as a matter of deep concern.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has highlighted new perspectives in women writings in India and world with her qualitative writings such as *The Palace of Illusions*. She stands as the foremost exponent of Gynoconsciousness in Indian English Literature where she presents widespread and applied themes. She says on her personal web portal that she writes about, women, immigration, the South Asian experience, history, myth, magic and celebrating diversity. She explores varied areas of feminist writings, transnationalism and multiculturalism where her deep thinking about expulsion, post-colonialism, intermingling of myth and magic gets

explored. She has given the detailed discussion of women with themselves and others concerning her status in society and family where she questions on a women's existence and finds it 'real', 'supernatural', and 'imaginary'. She has written this novel in a catchy language where readers get enchanted with the story with an element of 'magical fantasy'. She has presented the story of Mahabharata through the character of Draupadi with the sense of mysticism. In this concern Gita Rajan states:

Divakaruni uses mysticism to achieve her goal of making the commonplace wondrous and the real extra-ordinary.

(Rajan 216)

Draupadi is also known as Panchali. It is striking fact that throughout this epic Draupadi stands as a rebellious woman who has lived her life with dignity and has influenced it in a greater extent. She is a typical contrast to women characters in general who survive in life as it comes to them. However, Draupadi shows her keen concern to war and the ins and outs of an empowering kingdom. Draupadi goes through a terrible voyage of life where she starts the journey of her life through divine flames, continues an unaccountable and alienated upbringing, falls within an oath leading to marry with five men and suffers in her life throughout an utter incredible suffering. Though she is a respectable wife, she becomes the victim of an irritating game of gambling where she loses her own liberty and dignity. She gets publically insulted which leads Pandavas and Kauravas to fight severe war of Mahabharata. Here, Chitra Banerjee has presented a story of male-domination where a woman has no value and then highlights women characters in an effective as well as convincing way. It is fact that women has survived in men centric world from centuries only as servants and have been victimized for men's purposes. In the same respect Nayantara Sahgal states:

Feminism in India is a tremendous impact with less noise and drama than in the west (Sahgal 3)

Chitra Banerjee has exposed Draupadi as a happy, liberal but uncontrolled person rather than a person who has caused a great war and in a way she appreciates her with her versatile personality. Draupadi is a blistering woman who retells the story of a great war, warriors, gods, and the impact of destiny on human beings in her own point of view. However, she gets the charge of being responsible for the Great War which led to utter destruction and killing of a huge number of innocent people. She gets this charge for her own sense of retribution for her insult. Hence, she stands as the exponent of Gynoconsciousness who may not bear the insult of her own. Draupadi's relation with her five husbands locates as the shallow one. It is apparently obedient due to the constraints of familial norms. Her feelings towards all of her husbands too are not equal. The amount of feelings which she feels about Arjun, Yudhishthira and Bheem are somewhat greater than her feelings about Nakul and Sahadev. In short, she is not closely associated with Nakul and Sahadev. These sorts of feelings are too proving that she has her own choices too besides the burdens of norms. Hence, she stands as the exponent of Gynoconsciousness. It is quite pathetic that she has been scattered like an inanimate object and thrown to be a wife of five husbands by her own mother-in-law. Her husbands proved as unsympathetic towards her as they opted to bet her in a game of dice in front of their rivals. Consequently, they lose Draupadi with their defeat in the game of dice. Draupadi here is worthy of special recognition as she has faced adversities in her life with an extraordinary courage and her feeling of revenge has caused the Great War of Mahabharata. Thus, Chitra Banerjee has interwoven a mysterious legend which exhibit human beings entrapped with the feelings of love, passion, honour, humiliation, power and weakness. In this regard, Picador has rightly states:

Mahabharata is a fascinating story. It continues to inspire the creative writing. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who teaches creative writing at the University of Houston, USA explores the mind of epic heroine Draupadi through her retelling of the epic, The Palace of Illusion. (Picador 203)

This novel gives us a detailed account of Draupadi who remains in conflict between her inner yearning for Karna and her responsibility towards her five husbands. Here, her sense of inert love reflects her awareness about Gynoconsciousness. However, she is mature enough that she is thinking about her duty towards her husbands too. Thus, she becomes successful in overcoming her inner desire with her sense of responsibility. Draupadi has a sense of annoyance towards her husband, Yudhishthira and his extreme decency. She even acknowledges that she takes an undue advantage of Bhima's love for her and

she loves not that much as he loves to her. However, her feelings towards her husband Arjuna are enticing and she expects love from him. In this way she has her own choices of love which makes her personality Gynoconscious.

Draupadi even frankly accepts that she employed Bhima's love as a healing medicine for her injured feelings and is sure about Bhima's ability to destroy her oppressors at the war of Kurukshetra despite the norms of virtuous war. She even believes that he will fight that war not for triumph or magnificence but for his love towards Draupadi. Draupadi becomes the wife of Arjuna authentically and comes to the house of Pandavas where her mother-in-law instructs all the Pandava brothers to marry with Draupadi. This seems to be shocking decision for Draupadi as she has to survive her life with five brothers as their one wife. Therefore, her image of a Gynoconscious person gets shattered. However, this is perhaps the most envious decision for Draupadi as it is the question of her identity. Thus, she expresses her contempt about it and expresses her variance about it. The wise Vyasa involves in between and he settles the issue with his tricky mind. He finds out the way that Draupadi will continue with each brother for a time of one year and when she would go to the new brother she would be virgin again. Still, it is the pathetic condition of Draupadi and Dai Ma, her elderly maid attempts to comfort her wounded heart. She says that Draupadi has got liberation like men who have several wives for centuries. However, Draupadi recognizes that her condition is distinct than Dai Ma's opinion. Unlike a man with a number of wives, she has no option of her own choice while selecting with whom to sleep and when to sleep. On the contrary, she feels agitated as her place will be like a communal drinking cup, which would be passed from hand to hand whether she wants it or not. In this way, Draupadi gets a feeling that her sense of Gynoconsciousness is disturbing somewhere.

Neither Draupadi gets particularly delighted at the boon of getting her virginity back whenever she goes to a new brother. She feels that it is designed more for her husband's benefit than her. Draupadi even expresses her desire that it would have been better if Vyasa had given her a boon of forgetting, so that when she will go to each brother, she would be free of the memory of the previous one. Thus, Draupadi stands as a true exponent of Gynoconsciousness with her recognition of her inner desires. Draupadi is brave enough to admit her own mistakes and control her own feelings. Hence, she shows the extraordinary awareness of her sense of Gynoconsciousness. Here, Draupadi, as like any human being is portrayed as fluctuating between good and bad. Her mind is continuously giving a recall about the norms of society. At the same time, she shows human qualities

where immoral things creep around in human mind. This battle of feelings has been expressed by Draupadi.

In Short, we can say that Chitra Banerjee explores the distress and pain of Women very boldly. She has keen interests in issues and conditions of women and would like to change their pitiable condition.

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