

The Shift in Narration: Centralization of Draupadi's Perspective in Chitra Banerjee Devakurni's *The Palace of Illusion*

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Abstract:

A narration reveals the set of varied experiences comprising people with their different perspectives and roles but with a certain storyline. The other novels that revolve around the epic Mahabharata have mostly been focused on the distinction between vice and virtuous; there is no space for the honest thoughts residing in the in-between grey zone. Chitra Banerjee is an Indian-American author, her novel *The Palace of Illusion*, reveals Draupadi's honest thoughts, perspectives and experiences, by locating her in the center, unlike the other texts.

This abstract focuses on the events that imply that Draupadi has never been a much-admired princess brought up on flowers, but she is just like any other ordinary woman with burning desires, which can be unreal for others in a patriarchal society. She questions everything happening around her as blind acceptance imposed by society has always intimidated her and she never tries to hide it, which is very well emerged in this novel. This abstract further elaborates that the Mahabharata has never been just the story of Pandavas, Kauravas or Krishna, nor has been just the story of Draupadi's disrobing by Kauravas, this is a story of mutual wrangling, jealousy and vengeance of many people but the writer has succeeded in clearing the voice of Draupadi voice amongst the stereotypically dominated voices of others.

Keywords: Epic, Patriarchy, Vengeance, Stereotypes, Perspectives.

Chitra Banerjee Devakurni's *The Palace of Illusion* is a novel about a royal queen who offered her entire life to master love, anger, and desires. It deals with the multifaceted realities and provides us with a space to conceptualize our individualistic responses or judgments for them. Her novel is the amalgamation of varied narratives but has not constructed for showcasing the victory of virtuous over vices, and doesn't deal with the moral instructions of society. Draupadi is the most acclaimed mythological character, whose disrobing by the Kauravas has been considered as the root cause of the great war of Mahabharata. But Devakurni's characterization of Draupadi is entirely different. Just like any other woman of her age, Draupadi has been a demanding woman with desires, judgments and perspectives of her own. She has never been a princess only, but has much more to her personality, which gets reflected by the depth of her psyche, social relations and cultural positioning. Her response to gender discrimination has never been passive, and she actively rejects being submissive and polite for getting accepted by society. Gender discrimination is the unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual based on gender.

Evidently, she knows that her life has overburdened with the important role of sequencing the order of actions and to be a root cause of war, which will remain in history persistently. She knows that destiny is leading her to a point from where everything will start making sense and the puzzle of life will go to resolve on its own. She has been interested in a point that a significant future is waiting ahead for her instead of what it will be. Hence, she enjoys the power of the prophecy. It has given her a reason to be felt important, and she is using it to fulfill her relationship gaps with her father and the world. So, she demands a powerful name like her brother and states that "But Daughter of Drupad? Granted, he hadn't been expecting me, but couldn't my father have come up with something a little less egoistic? Something more suited to a girl who was supposed to change history?" (5)

Devakurni's Draupadi is rebellious, devoid of love and acceptance, and has forced to live life in an unconventional setup. Others have been treating her as a puppet in a drama since she is born whose strings are in the hands of everyone else but have no control of her own. King Drupad is a better king but never an idealized father. In a similar manner, Dhri loves his sister, but never supports her desires and choices. She will never forgive her father as aptly described by the writer, "In his harsh and obsessive way, he was generous, maybe even indulgent. But I couldn't forgive him that initial rejection" (6). Draupadi is a high-born princess, even that does not have liberated her from the coarser social, cultural and religious confines. She wants to live utmost instead of just breathing. Panchali retaliated on every level but has never succeeded. She demands her right to education by going against everyone, as Devakurni writes in her book:

Dhri, too, sometimes wondered if I wasn't learning the wrong things, ideas that would only confuse me as I took up a woman's life with its prescribed, restrictive laws. But I hungered to know about the amazing, mysterious world that extended past what I could imagine the world of the senses and of that which lay beyond them. And so, I refused to give up the lessons, no matter who disapproved. (23)

She has felt unwelcomed in her birth home at Kampilya, and in Hastinapur after her marriage. So, it has been necessary to have a palace of her own because power only lives in authoritative command entirely. Already she has been sharing the love of their husbands and family with other wives, as she mentions:

I didn't win all my battles. My husbands took other wives: Hidimba, Kali, Devika, Balandhara, Chitrangada, Ulupi, Karunamati. How naïve I'd been to think I could have prevented it! Sometimes there were political reasons, but mostly it was male desire. (151)

Draupadi can't share a dream of her own house, too. She has to create dominance first if she dreams about shaping the future of others. She states that "Krishna's palace in Dwarka was sandstone, the arches like the ocean waves that bordered it. It sounded lovely, but I knew mine would have to be different. It would have to be uniquely mine." (113) Hence, the constructed palace is an asset of pride for her and she orders the illusionist that, "This creation of yours that's going to be the envy of every king in Bharat- we'll call it the Palace of Illusions." (146)

Desires are comparable to clouds, sometimes result in a rain of joy and happiness, or struck your life with a heavy pour of tears and discontentment. One another time, it is like a melting candle, burning everything that touches it. Draupadi is a young woman with desires and has been dreaming about her future life partner, her own palace and charming romantic life. She has said that "I could smell the fragrance of the amaranths woven into it. It was beautiful, but it only made me dissatisfied. What use was all this dressing-up when there was no one to admire me." (36) She is a moth that has been burning by the bright flames of desires repeatedly but never has controlled herself. For a moment, a delusional idea has directed her toward a misconception that instead of rigid cultural rules, she is getting a fortune to pick her own husband. Soon, she realizes that it is deception and svayamvara has been organized to further enhance the power of her father's kingdom.

The rasping challenge has been organized for electing a sturdy king for the alliance, and not for an honorable son-in-law. Drupad is a power hungry king and always obsessed with a refinement of his kingly authority. She even questions her father's decision, "Why would our father, who delighted in control, allow me so much freedom" (55)? Not for the first time, she has thought his father's priority is always power. But the evidence of her father's unloved behavior for the family always has hurt like a fresh wound. She has said that:

Why won't you ever admit the truth?" I spoke bitterly. "We're nothing but pawns for king Drupad to sacrifice when it's most to his advantage. At least I'm just going to be married off. You—he's willing to push you to your death just so he can have the revenge. (58)

Despair results from the inability to gain that person about whom one desires about. Orthodoxy has been always the predominant factor causing such anguish, existing staunchly in our cultural norms. Society always has allowed laughing to gain an education, allowed to attend brothels, but

girls are banned from the things that even they deserve. Cultural hegemony is always there in different setups, like in the family by father or husbands. Draupadi may not speak precisely or efficiently and has been restricted from desired education. Also, she has been silent about the person she likes, “Though I would never confess this to Dhri (I sensed his unspoken jealousy), for me Arjuna was the most exciting part of the story” (19).

Beauty is innate; no one can allow you to be beautiful, and every human born with a unique charm. It could be a weapon to gain power in a circumstance, and nobody can snatch it from a person. Draupadi disliked the goal of her svayamvara, but knows that she has to deal with it. She flaunts her beauty as a magic web over her proposed husbands, as she said, “When I stepped into the wedding hall, there was complete, immediate silence. As though I were a sword that had severed, simultaneously, each vocal cord. Behind my veil, I smiled grimly. Savour this moment of power, I told myself. It may be your only one.” (91)

Initially, she marries to Arjuna only but later forced to marry other brothers also in a view of fact that Kunti has ordered it. Her father and brother oppose it, because what society will think about her and it is socially unacceptable. Even Arjuna doesn't speak against this unethical marriage arrangement because of his cultural responsibility toward her mother. No one speaks for her, and she has confined within the limits of being an asset only. A culture that berates woman on having sexual relationships with more than a one is supporting this marital setup. There is no command of her over own life; she is just the puppet in the hands of destiny. She remarks that:

Though Dhai Ma tried to console me by saying that finally, I had the freedom men had had for centuries, my situation differed from that of a man with several wives. Unlike him, I had no choice as to whom I slept with, and when. Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether or not I wanted it. Nor was I particularly delighted by the virginity boon, which seemed designed more for my husband's benefit than mine. (120)

Man has always prioritized moral and religious beliefs over the need of actions according to a situation. If a man's moral and religious beliefs have been resulting in so cruel molestation for his own wife, then having wisdom is not fruitful. Yudhishtira has been the most idealistic in Draupadi's husbands, so he has the most crucial responsibility towards Draupadi's well-being. He has been most worshipped for his insight and he has an ability to distinguish wrong from right; he handles her awful insult in front of the entire clan. There is no advantage of Arjuna being a warrior, and neither of Bheema's strength, if they cannot defend the dignity of their wife. The Pandavas are more responsible for causing Draupadi's disrobing because their lives have been truly associated with the life of Draupadi. Yudhishtira could be more alert while involving the Kauravas in a gamble game. They shouldn't be concerned about what society will think about them. She was all alone; trying to defend herself, clearly depicted by the writer as she wrote, “I'm a queen. Daughter of Drupad, sister of Dhrishtadyumna, 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” (190). She has always prioritized her husbands over any moral or religious belief. A woman

always has much more patience and sensibility than a man, but our social structure and cultural patterns have created spaces for their dominance. She realizes this and states:

But now I saw that though they loved me- as much perhaps as any man can love- there were other things they loved more. Their notions of honor, of loyalty toward each other, of reputation, were more important to them than my suffering. They would avenge me later, yes, but only when they felt the circumstances would bring them heroic fame. A woman doesn't think that way. I would have thrown myself forward to save them if it had been in my power that day. (195)

Archetypes are the continuous repetitions of concealed patterns, which predominantly affect the actions of a person or the ability to decide in a social and cultural setup. These patterns have sustained as scattered images, symbols, motifs, replications of judgments from the past or the conventional response toward a situation. The concept of archetypes was first developed by and broadly used by a psychologist, Carl Jung. He discovered certain broad similarities among myths from all over the world. In particular, he noticed that all the texts having "hero" had similar elements, and all those cultural heroes had peculiar features in common. He tried to theorize this concept as a common thread shared by all human beings interconnected by the "collective unconscious," that is a set of strongly felt presumptions and preferences about situations. Similarly, he insists that there is a "universal grammar" carved in human minds from the birth which could be the underlying all human languages. So archetypes are the most significant component of the basic structure that makes a story interesting to others.

There has been ample of female archetypes in mythological texts and in history. Draupadi has been accredited as the archetype of a virtuous woman, very loyal to her husband and enormously patient. Draupadi is the most beautiful, brave and controversial heroine among all mythological female characters and she has carved her name forever in the stone of history. Carl Jung has said that "All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes" (153). Banerjee has tried to shatter the frameworks with which society has been categorizing women from the start of the time. She is questioning the core of our cultural and religious codes that mark the distinction between being sinful or promiscuous. Mythological or historical texts entirely focus on forking entirety of existence in between white and black zone. Devakurni's novel is emphasizing on the grey area, where nothing is wrong or right only. There have been many things beyond judgments. The writer has placed the entire journey of Draupadi in front of readers and provided the space to experience Mahabharata through her eyes. The journey is the passage of experiences, rather than the start or its termination only.

Jung has given the concept of a collective unconscious to define the universal collection of inherited patterns by a generation from their ancestral lineage. It is an innate psychological space embracing archetypes and refining our personality. It differs from the personal unconscious, which arises from the encounters of the individual. According to him, the collective unconscious contains archetypes, or universal primordial images and ideas. The Collins dictionary defines the concept of the collective unconscious as the basic ideas and images that all people are believed to share because they have inherited them.

The division of social or cultural roles and responsibilities of individuals based on gender has derived indirectly from the interpretations of archetypes. Jung has given four predominant forms of archetypes, which are Persona, the shadow, Anima or Animus and the self. In The Palace of illusions, some bits of Jungian archetypes have been reflected by the character of Draupadi.

According to Jung, the animus represents the masculine aspect in women, which one can see in the attitude and characteristic features of Draupadi. Generally, masculinity has been entitled to comprise certain specific notions, like having an outspoken attitude, being strong-headed in harsh situations or having great will power and passion. We can witness these traits in Draupadi and she herself thinks when she gets a dull reply from Dhri on the matter of svayamvara, "Sometimes I told him that the gods must have got mixed up when they pushed us out from the fire. He should have been the girl, and I the boy." (55)

Her hidden intense love for Karana is a mirroring of the shadow archetype. It reflects the darkest side of an individual's psyche. She has been married to Pandavas, but still, she has been dreaming about Karana all the time. It is against the social and cultural setup, but her heart urges for the presence of Karana. She tries to suppress it in her unconscious mind so that no other person can be able to find it. Her loyalty is directed toward family and her brother, but paradoxical thought has been intimidating her mind. Draupadi states that "Through the long nights, out of love for Dhri, I tried harder than ever before to bar Karna from my mind. But can a sieve block the wind." (88)

In reality, every person has been wearing different masks to deal with different people. Every action has been confined by an outline which gets regularized by ego. A person's ego builds a persona according to social demands. Persona is the most common type of Jungian archetype to get analyzed. Draupadi has seen as a mother, wife, daughter, mother-in-law, a friend and in many other roles. Throughout her life, she has worn multiple masks to maintain her relationships:

The princess who longed for acceptance, the guilty girl whose heart wouldn't listen, the wife who balanced her fivefold role precariously, the rebellious daughter-in-law, the queen who ruled in the most magical of palaces, the distracted mother, the beloved companion of Krishna, who refused to learn the lessons he offered, the woman obsessed with a vengeance- none of them were the true Panchali. If not, who was I? (229)

According to Jung, the ego is the center of consciousness, but individualization is the center of personality. This individualization is the reflection of self. Draupadi also perceived the discernment of her true self when she can do nothing about it. Therefore, individualization does not imply that it is a free logic of action, shuffling in a space which is virtually empty; neither does it mean just 'subjectivity' but an attitude which ignores to witness that beneath the surface of life is a highly self-efficient and densely interlocked institutional society. In her novel, she states that:

I consider my life. What was it that made me joyful? What made me experience peace for, I guess, that's the happiness Krishna means, not the wild up-and-down of the wheel of passion. I'd ridden all these years, delighted one moment, distraught the next. Certainly, none of the men or women I'd been close to had given me that type of joy- nor I them, if I were to admit the truth. (352)

Devakurni's novel has rejected John Locke's idea of tabula rasa or the notion that the human mind is a blank slate from the birth and everything is thought to be written on solely by experience. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, tabula rasa refers toward the situation in which the mind is in its hypothetical primary blank or empty state before receiving outside impressions.

Conclusively, it is a text which familiarize us with the life of princess Panchali, from her birth in fire, leading to her vibrant but composed act as a woman with five husbands who have been shunned out of their father's kingdom. Panchali is passively forced into their pursuit to reclaim their birthright, standing at their side through the years of banishment and a horrific civil war involving all the prominent Indian kings. Meanwhile, we witness repetitive incidents of her tactical duels with her mother-in-law, her tangled friendship with the enigmatic Krishna, or her unrevealed desirability of a mysterious man who is her husband's most crucial rival. She is a spirited female redefining for us, the world of warriors, gods, and the canny course of actions of destiny.

It is the collection of Raindrops that always results in the disastrous hazard like the flood, and not only by a single droplet. Likewise, Mahabharata is not the battle of Draupadi's revenge only; it has been the victory of many other figures. This Great War is a conclusive deed of prophecy concerning Draupadi's fate, but also the fruition of Shikhandi and Dhri's vow of revenge. Therefore, losing irreplaceable "Palace of Illusion" is notably significant in comparison with an act of her disrobing, which conjunctively resulted in a tragic outburst and she has pledged for the end of Kauravas clan. She has vowed, "I lifted my long hair for all to see. My voice was calm now because I knew that everything I said would come to pass. "I will not comb it, I said, until the day I bathe it in Kaurava blood" (194). She never has been honored as a wife, but granted the status of a queen with an empty crown. Such had been the life of Draupadi—the ever-shining jewel of an intricately woven saga of hatred and love. She has been through everything like misconceptions, misinterpretations, insults and humiliations, to a vast extent, all her life. However noble a man can be to a certain extent, there always are certain limitations to his understanding of women. He can never understand how to cross that borderline and how much courage they need to get cordially familiar with that. This novel is a journey that indeed recounts the significance of acknowledging and celebrating our heroes and she-roes as well.

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