

# Voicing Draupadi: Feminist Reinterpretation in the Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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**Abstract**—Mythological narratives have historically been shaped by patriarchal perspectives that silence or marginalise female voices. Contemporary feminist writers often revisit these narratives to recover the experiences and agency of women characters who were previously portrayed as secondary figures. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) represents one such literary intervention. The novel retells the story of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* through the voice of Draupadi, offering a feminist reinterpretation of a traditionally male-centred narrative. By granting narrative authority to Draupadi, Divakaruni reconstructs her identity as an autonomous and reflective individual rather than a passive symbol within the epic. This research article examines how the novel reimagines Draupadi's voice and agency through feminist narrative strategies. Using feminist literary theory and myth criticism, the study analyses how the text challenges patriarchal representations of mythological women. It also explores themes of gender inequality, identity formation, emotional subjectivity and resistance. The article argues that Divakaruni's retelling not only transforms the characterisation of Draupadi but also contributes to broader feminist discourse by reinterpreting mythology from a woman-centred perspective.

**Index Terms**—Feminist reinterpretation, Draupadi, Mythology, Feminist narratology, Myth revision, Indian English literature, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mythological narratives play a significant role in shaping cultural identity and social values. Across civilisations, myths have functioned as narrative frameworks that transmit moral lessons, historical memories and ideological structures. However, many traditional myths are deeply embedded within patriarchal systems that privilege male voices while marginalising female perspectives. Feminist literary

criticism seeks to challenge these narratives by revisiting and reinterpreting myths from women-centred viewpoints. Feminist reinterpretations of mythology have become an important area of literary scholarship. Scholars argue that myths often reflect patriarchal power structures that restrict women's roles within narrative traditions. Feminist critics, therefore, attempt to uncover hidden female voices and reinterpret mythological figures from alternative perspectives. In Indian mythology, the *Mahabharata* remains one of the most influential epics. While the epic contains several powerful female characters, their stories are often narrated through male perspectives. Among these characters, Draupadi occupies a complex position as both a victim of injustice and a catalyst for the epic conflict. Traditional interpretations frequently portray her as a symbolic figure whose emotions and motivations remain largely unexplored.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) offers a significant departure from these traditional representations. By narrating the story from Draupadi's perspective, the novel reconstructs her voice and inner consciousness. This narrative shift transforms Draupadi from a mythological figure into a psychologically complex protagonist. The novel belongs to a broader literary trend in which authors reinterpret mythological narratives through feminist lenses. Such reinterpretations aim to recover suppressed voices and challenge patriarchal assumptions embedded within traditional stories.

Elaine Showalter's concept of gynocriticism emphasises the importance of analysing women's writing and female experiences within literature. According to Showalter, feminist criticism must focus on recovering women's narratives that have historically been overlooked. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for examining texts such as *The Palace of Illusions*, where a female voice

reshapes a traditional narrative. Simone de Beauvoir's ideas about gender construction also contribute to feminist interpretations of literature. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir argues that society often defines women as 'the Other', limiting their autonomy and individuality. This concept is particularly relevant when examining mythological narratives in which female characters are frequently portrayed in relation to male protagonists. Scholars studying Divakaruni's novel highlight its significance as a feminist retelling of the *Mahabharata*. Critics argue that the novel gives Draupadi a narrative agency that is largely absent in the original epic. Through first-person narration, the novel allows readers to experience the emotional and psychological dimensions of Draupadi's life.

Recent studies also emphasise the role of myth revision in contemporary literature. By rewriting traditional narratives, authors create space for alternative interpretations that reflect modern social concerns. Feminist retellings often challenge the authority of canonical texts by presenting marginalised perspectives. Within Indian English literature, mythological retellings have gained increasing popularity in recent decades. Writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kavita Kane, and Devdutt Pattanaik have explored new ways of interpreting classical myths. Among these works, *The Palace of Illusions* stands out for its emphasis on female subjectivity and psychological depth. The existing scholarship, therefore, suggests that Divakaruni's novel represents an important contribution to feminist literary discourse. However, further analysis is necessary to understand how the text reconstructs Draupadi's identity and challenges patriarchal narrative traditions.

This research article examines how Divakaruni's novel reimagines Draupadi as a feminist voice within the framework of mythological storytelling. The study explores how the narrative challenges patriarchal structures, reconstructs female identity, and emphasises Draupadi's agency within the epic context.

## II. FEMINIST REINTERPRETATION OF MYTHOLOGY

The feminist reinterpretation of mythology has emerged as an important literary practice in contemporary literature, allowing writers to revisit traditional narratives and question the patriarchal

ideologies embedded within them. Mythological stories, particularly epic narratives, have historically been shaped by male perspectives that often marginalise female voices. In this context, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents a powerful example of feminist myth revision. The novel retells the ancient Indian epic *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Draupadi, one of its most significant yet traditionally misunderstood female characters. By placing Draupadi at the centre of the narrative and allowing her to narrate her own story, Divakaruni transforms the mythological narrative into a feminist exploration of identity, power and resistance. Through this retelling, the author not only challenges patriarchal interpretations of mythology but also restores the emotional depth, subjectivity and agency of a woman whose voice was largely overshadowed in the original epic tradition.

In traditional versions of the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is often portrayed as a symbolic figure whose role primarily serves the larger narrative of male heroism and warfare. Her character is frequently interpreted through the actions and perspectives of male protagonists such as the Pandavas, Krishna and other male figures who dominate the epic's narrative structure. As a result, her emotions, thoughts and inner conflicts remain largely unexplored. Divakaruni's novel challenges this conventional representation by reimagining Draupadi as a self-aware and introspective narrator. Through first-person narration, the novel allows readers to witness the events of the epic through Draupadi's consciousness, thereby transforming the narrative into a deeply personal story of a woman navigating the complexities of power, destiny and societal expectations. This narrative shift is central to the feminist reinterpretation of mythology because it relocates authority from the traditional patriarchal storyteller to the female protagonist herself.

One of the most significant aspects of Divakaruni's reinterpretation is the way it highlights the limitations imposed upon women in patriarchal societies. From her childhood, Draupadi is aware that her life is shaped by forces beyond her control. Despite her intelligence, ambition and curiosity, she is constantly reminded that her destiny lies in fulfilling roles determined by male authority. Her education, marriage and social responsibilities are all defined by patriarchal expectations. The novel emphasises the frustration and

emotional turmoil that arise from these restrictions. Draupadi's reflections reveal a woman who yearns for independence and recognition but must navigate a world that views women primarily as instruments of political alliances and family honour. By portraying these struggles, Divakaruni critiques the patriarchal structures that govern both mythological narratives and real-world social systems.

The feminist dimension of the novel becomes particularly evident in its portrayal of Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandava brothers. In the traditional epic, Draupadi's polyandrous marriage is often presented as a matter of divine destiny, with little emphasis on her personal feelings about the arrangement. In contrast, the novel explores Draupadi's emotional response to this unusual marriage. The narrative reveals her confusion, resentment and sense of loss as she grapples with the realisation that her life has been determined without her consent. By highlighting Draupadi's inner conflict, Divakaruni challenges the normalisation of patriarchal decisions that disregard women's autonomy. The novel presents marriage not merely as a social institution but as a site of power negotiation in which female voices are frequently suppressed.

Another crucial moment in the novel that illustrates feminist reinterpretation is the infamous dice game episode. In the *Mahabharata*, this event marks a turning point in the epic when Draupadi is publicly humiliated after being wagered and lost in a gambling match. Traditionally, this episode is portrayed primarily as a catalyst for the ensuing war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Divakaruni's retelling, however, shifts the focus toward Draupadi's emotional and moral outrage. Instead of remaining a silent victim, Draupadi questions the legitimacy of a system that allows a husband to gamble away his wife as property. Her voice becomes a powerful critique of patriarchal authority, exposing the injustice and hypocrisy embedded within social and political institutions. Through this reinterpretation, the novel transforms a mythological incident into a broader commentary on gender inequality and the objectification of women.

Divakaruni also deepens Draupadi's character by exploring her emotional complexity and personal desires. Unlike the idealised and often one-dimensional portrayal of mythological women, Draupadi in the novel is depicted as a multifaceted

individual who experiences a wide range of emotions. She is ambitious, passionate and at times conflicted about her own choices and circumstances. One of the most striking elements of the novel is Draupadi's unspoken attraction to Karna, a character traditionally depicted as one of her adversaries. By including this emotional dimension, Divakaruni humanises Draupadi and challenges the rigid moral frameworks often associated with mythological characters. The portrayal of Draupadi's internal struggles emphasises that women in mythology, like women in real life, possess complex emotional lives that cannot be reduced to simplistic archetypes. The narrative structure of the novel also plays a significant role in its feminist reinterpretation of mythology. By using first-person narration, the novel allows Draupadi to reinterpret the events of the epic according to her own understanding. This narrative technique disrupts the authority of traditional epic storytelling, which typically presents events from an omniscient and often male-centred perspective. Draupadi's voice becomes a medium through which the past is re-examined and reinterpreted. She reflects on the motivations of the characters around her, questions the fairness of social norms, and expresses her own aspirations and regrets. Through this process, the novel demonstrates how storytelling itself can become a form of resistance against dominant narratives.

Furthermore, Divakaruni's reinterpretation of Draupadi reflects broader trends within contemporary feminist literature. Across different cultural contexts, many writers have begun revisiting classical myths and legends to reclaim the voices of female characters who were marginalised or silenced in traditional narratives. These reinterpretations challenge the idea that mythological stories are fixed or immutable. Instead, they emphasise that myths are dynamic cultural narratives that can be reshaped to reflect changing social values and perspectives. In this sense, the novel represents not only a reinterpretation of the *Mahabharata* but also a broader attempt to reimagine mythology as a space where women's experiences and voices are acknowledged and valued.

Another important dimension of the novel is its exploration of female solidarity and resilience. Throughout her life, Draupadi encounters other women who face similar struggles within patriarchal structures. The relationships she forms with characters such as Kunti and other women in the royal household

reveal the shared challenges experienced by women in a society dominated by male authority. These interactions highlight the ways in which women support one another in navigating oppressive systems. At the same time, the novel acknowledges the complexities and tensions that can arise within these relationships, illustrating that female solidarity is not always straightforward but remains an important source of strength and resistance.

Thus, the feminist reinterpretation of mythology in *The Palace of Illusions* lies in its ability to transform a well-known epic narrative into a story centred on female experience and agency. By giving Draupadi a voice, Divakaruni challenges the patriarchal traditions that have historically defined mythological storytelling. The novel encourages readers to reconsider the cultural narratives they inherit and to recognise the importance of multiple perspectives in understanding history and mythology. Draupadi's journey from a marginalised figure in the epic to a powerful narrator of her own story symbolises the broader feminist effort to reclaim women's voices within literature and cultural discourse. The novel represents a significant contribution to feminist literary reinterpretations of mythology. Through its reimagining of Draupadi's story, the novel exposes the patriarchal assumptions embedded within traditional narratives and offers a more nuanced and empowering portrayal of a mythological heroine. Divakaruni's retelling demonstrates that mythology is not merely a relic of the past but a living narrative tradition that can be reinterpreted to reflect contemporary concerns about gender, power and identity. By voicing Draupadi's experiences, the novel not only revisits an ancient epic but also contributes to the ongoing conversation about the representation of women in literature and cultural history.

### III. DRAUPADI'S VOICE AND NARRATIVE AUTHORITY

One of the most striking features of *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the way it grants narrative authority to Draupadi, transforming her from a peripheral figure in the epic tradition into the central voice of the story. In the traditional narrative of the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is an important character whose fate is closely tied to the epic's central conflict, yet her inner thoughts, desires

and reflections are rarely explored in depth. The epic primarily focuses on the actions of male heroes such as the Pandavas, Krishna and the Kauravas, and the story is largely told from a male-centred perspective. Divakaruni's novel disrupts this narrative pattern by allowing Draupadi herself to narrate the story in the first person. Through this narrative shift, Draupadi is no longer simply an object within the epic's events but becomes the subject who interprets and questions those events. Her voice becomes the lens through which readers encounter the epic world, thereby redefining the authority of storytelling and placing a woman's perspective at the centre of a traditionally patriarchal narrative.

The use of first-person narration is a crucial literary strategy that enables Draupadi to assert control over her own story. Rather than being described or interpreted by others, she articulates her experiences directly to the reader. This narrative structure allows her to express emotions and reflections that remain absent in the original epic. Draupadi's voice reveals her intelligence, curiosity and awareness of the social constraints that shape her life. From her childhood in the kingdom of Panchala, she reflects on the expectations placed upon her as a royal daughter and later as a queen. Her narration exposes the contradictions of a society that celebrates heroic ideals yet denies women the freedom to determine their own destinies. Through these reflections, Draupadi's voice becomes a powerful medium of critique, challenging the cultural norms and gender hierarchies that define her world. By granting Draupadi the authority to narrate her own life, Divakaruni transforms the epic narrative into a personal journey of self-discovery and resistance.

Draupadi's narrative authority is also evident in the way she interprets and re-evaluates the actions of other characters. In traditional versions of the *Mahabharata*, events are often presented as part of a grand cosmic order or divine destiny. However, in the novel, Draupadi frequently questions these interpretations and offers alternative perspectives. She reflects critically on the motivations of the men around her, including her husbands, her father and the powerful political figures who shape her life. This questioning attitude highlights her intellectual independence and underscores the novel's feminist dimension. Rather than accepting the inevitability of her circumstances, Draupadi analyses and interrogates the systems of

power that govern her existence. Through this process, she reclaims interpretive authority over the epic narrative and exposes the patriarchal assumptions embedded within it.

Another significant aspect of Draupadi's voice is its emotional depth and psychological complexity. Divakaruni portrays her not merely as a mythological symbol but as a multidimensional human being whose thoughts and feelings evolve throughout the narrative. Draupadi openly expresses her hopes, fears, frustrations and desires, revealing a rich inner life that contrasts sharply with her often-stereotyped portrayal in traditional retellings. Her narration allows readers to witness her struggles as she attempts to reconcile her personal ambitions with the responsibilities imposed upon her as a queen and wife. These emotional reflections humanise Draupadi and challenge the idealised representations of mythological women who are often depicted as passive embodiments of virtue. By presenting Draupadi as a thinking and feeling individual, the novel emphasises the importance of acknowledging women's subjective experiences within mythological narratives. Draupadi's narrative authority is particularly evident in the way she recounts pivotal moments of humiliation and injustice. The infamous dice game episode, in which she is publicly disrobed and treated as property, becomes a powerful moment of resistance in Divakaruni's retelling. Instead of remaining silent or accepting her fate, Draupadi questions the legitimacy of a system that allows men to gamble away a woman's dignity. Her voice becomes an instrument of moral challenge, exposing the hypocrisy and cruelty of patriarchal authority. By articulating her outrage and demanding accountability, Draupadi transforms a moment of victimisation into an act of defiance. The authority of her voice disrupts the silence traditionally imposed upon women in such circumstances and asserts the right of women to speak against injustice.

Furthermore, Draupadi's narration reshapes the thematic focus of the epic. While the traditional *Mahabharata* emphasises heroic battles, political alliances and divine interventions, the novel foregrounds the personal experiences and emotional struggles of its protagonist. Through Draupadi's voice, the narrative explores themes such as identity, autonomy, love, jealousy and regret. Her reflections on her complex relationships with the Pandava brothers, as well as her unspoken attraction to Karna, add layers

of psychological nuance to the story. These personal dimensions shift the emphasis of the narrative from grand historical events to the inner life of a woman navigating a world shaped by patriarchal expectations. As a result, the epic becomes not only a story of war and destiny but also a deeply intimate account of female experience.

The authority of Draupadi's voice also highlights the transformative power of storytelling itself. By reclaiming the role of narrator, she challenges the dominance of traditional narratives that have historically marginalised women's perspectives. Her story becomes a form of narrative resistance that redefines the meaning of the epic. In telling her own story, Draupadi reinterprets events that have long been accepted as part of a fixed mythological tradition. This act of reinterpretation demonstrates that myths are not static but can be reshaped through new voices and perspectives. Through Draupadi's narration, Divakaruni invites readers to reconsider the cultural narratives they have inherited and to recognise the importance of including women's voices in the retelling of history and mythology.

Therefore, Draupadi's voice and narrative authority in *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) represent a powerful feminist intervention in mythological storytelling. By allowing Draupadi to speak for herself, Divakaruni restores the agency and subjectivity that were largely absent in traditional versions of the epic. Draupadi's narration transforms her from a symbolic figure within a patriarchal narrative into a complex protagonist who reflects critically on her own experiences and the society in which she lives. Through her voice, the novel not only reimagines the story of the *Mahabharata* but also contributes to a broader literary movement that seeks to reclaim the voices of women who have been historically silenced in myth and literature.

#### IV. GENDER, POWER AND PATRIARCHY

The themes of gender, power and patriarchy play a central role in *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The novel revisits the narrative of the *Mahabharata* through the voice of Draupadi and exposes the deeply embedded patriarchal structures that govern the lives of women in the epic world. In traditional mythological narratives, women often exist within systems where their identities and roles are

defined primarily by male authority; fathers, husbands and kings. Divakaruni's retelling critically examines these structures by portraying Draupadi as a woman who is keenly aware of the limitations imposed upon her because of her gender. Through Draupadi's reflections and experiences, the novel reveals how power operates within patriarchal societies and how women must navigate systems that deny them autonomy and decision-making authority. Rather than presenting Draupadi as a passive participant in these structures, Divakaruni depicts her as someone who questions, resists and critically reflects upon the patriarchal norms that shape her life.

From the very beginning of the narrative, Draupadi becomes aware that her life is shaped by expectations rooted in gender hierarchy. Although she is a princess born into a powerful royal family, her identity is defined primarily by her future role as a wife and political asset. The education she receives, the guidance offered by her elders, and the expectations placed upon her all emphasise the importance of obedience, modesty and loyalty to male authority. Despite her intelligence and strong personality, Draupadi realises that her ambitions and desires carry little significance in a society where men control political power and social decision-making. This early awareness creates a sense of frustration and rebellion within her character. Divakaruni uses Draupadi's reflections to reveal how patriarchal societies limit women's opportunities while simultaneously expecting them to uphold family honour and social stability. By highlighting these contradictions, the novel critiques the gendered power structures that operate both within mythological narratives and in broader cultural traditions.

One of the most significant manifestations of patriarchal power in the novel appears in Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandava brothers. In the traditional epic, Draupadi's polyandrous marriage is often presented as a result of divine destiny or a misunderstanding that becomes accepted as fate. However, in the novel, this event is portrayed from Draupadi's perspective, revealing the emotional and psychological turmoil she experiences when she is told that she must marry all five brothers rather than the one she initially chose. This moment highlights the absence of female agency in decisions that profoundly shape women's lives. Draupadi's desires and expectations are disregarded as male authority figures

determine her future without her consent. Through this portrayal, Divakaruni exposes how patriarchal power operates through familial and cultural institutions, transforming women into instruments of political and social arrangements. Draupadi's internal conflict during this episode underscores the emotional cost of a system that prioritises male interests over female autonomy.

The novel further explores the dynamics of gender and power through Draupadi's relationships with the men around her. Although she becomes queen and holds a prominent position within the royal household, her authority remains limited within the patriarchal structure of the kingdom. The Pandava brothers, despite their respect and affection for her, continue to exercise ultimate control over political decisions and social norms. Draupadi frequently reflects on the contradictions of her status as a queen who possesses wealth and influence yet lacks true independence. Her position illustrates how patriarchal systems often grant women symbolic power while denying them genuine agency. Even within the palace, where she is admired for her intelligence and strength, Draupadi must constantly negotiate the expectations imposed upon her as a wife, daughter-in-law and queen. Divakaruni uses these experiences to reveal the subtle ways in which patriarchal power operates, shaping women's lives even when they appear to hold positions of privilege.

The most powerful critique of patriarchy in the novel occurs during the infamous dice game episode. In this moment, Draupadi is treated as property when Yudhishtira gambles and loses her in a game of dice. The humiliation she experiences in the royal court exposes the extreme vulnerability of women within patriarchal systems. Despite her royal status and her role as queen, Draupadi's dignity is disregarded by the male figures who dominate the court. In Divakaruni's retelling, Draupadi's voice becomes a powerful instrument of resistance as she questions the legitimacy of a system that allows a man to stake his wife as though she were an object. Her bold interrogation of the assembly challenges the moral authority of the men who claim to uphold justice and dharma. This moment represents a turning point in the narrative, demonstrating how patriarchal structures not only oppress women but also reveal their own ethical contradictions when confronted by female resistance. Draupadi's defiance transforms her from a victim of

humiliation into a powerful critic of patriarchal injustice.

Another aspect of gender and patriarchy in the novel is the emotional and psychological burden placed upon women. Draupadi is expected to embody ideals of patience, sacrifice and loyalty even in situations where she experiences deep personal suffering. The expectations imposed upon her reflect the broader cultural norms that demand women suppress their desires and emotions for the sake of family honour and social harmony. Divakaruni's portrayal of Draupadi challenges these ideals by emphasising her emotional complexity. She expresses anger, jealousy, ambition and longing—emotions that traditional narratives often discourage in female characters. By allowing Draupadi to articulate these feelings openly, the novel disrupts the idealised image of the obedient and self-sacrificing woman. Instead, Draupadi emerges as a human figure whose experiences reflect the struggles faced by women navigating patriarchal systems. Divakaruni also highlights how patriarchal power affects relationships among women themselves. The novel depicts interactions between Draupadi and other female characters, such as Kunti and the women of the royal household, revealing how women often internalise and reproduce patriarchal norms. These relationships illustrate the complex ways in which gender hierarchies shape social dynamics. While women sometimes support and empathise with one another, they also participate in maintaining the very structures that limit their freedom. Through these portrayals, the novel demonstrates that patriarchy operates not only through direct male authority but also through cultural traditions and expectations that influence women's behaviour and relationships.

So, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) presents a profound exploration of gender, power, and patriarchy by placing Draupadi's experiences at the centre of the narrative. Through her voice, the novel exposes the injustices embedded within traditional social systems while also celebrating the resilience and strength of women who challenge these structures. Draupadi's journey illustrates the ways in which women negotiate power within patriarchal societies, finding moments of resistance and self-expression even in the face of oppression. By reimagining the story of the *Mahabharata* from a feminist perspective, Divakaruni not only revisits an ancient myth but also invites readers to reconsider the cultural narratives that

continue to shape understandings of gender and power in contemporary society.

## V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni demonstrates how the novel offers a powerful feminist reinterpretation of the epic narrative of the *Mahabharata*. By retelling the story through the voice of Draupadi, Divakaruni challenges the patriarchal framework that traditionally shapes mythological storytelling. The novel reclaims Draupadi's voice and transforms her from a marginal figure within the epic into a central narrator who interprets her own experiences and questions the cultural norms surrounding her life. This narrative shift is significant because it allows readers to understand the epic not merely as a tale of heroic battles and political conflicts but as a deeply personal story of a woman navigating the constraints of a patriarchal society. The discussion of Draupadi's voice and narrative authority highlights how the use of first-person narration enables her to assert control over the narrative of her life. Through her reflections, readers gain insight into her thoughts, emotions and inner conflicts, which are largely absent in traditional versions of the epic. By granting Draupadi the authority to tell her own story, Divakaruni disrupts the dominance of male perspectives in mythological narratives. Draupadi becomes an active interpreter of events rather than a passive figure whose story is told by others. This narrative strategy not only humanises her character but also emphasises the importance of female subjectivity in literature.

Furthermore, the exploration of gender, power and patriarchy in the novel reveals how deeply patriarchal structures shape the lives of women within the epic world. Draupadi's experiences illustrate the ways in which women are often denied autonomy and treated as instruments of political alliances or family honour. Events such as her polyandrous marriage and the humiliation she faces in the dice game expose the inequalities embedded within the social and political systems of the time. However, Divakaruni's portrayal also emphasises Draupadi's resilience and resistance. Through her questions, reflections, and emotional responses, she challenges the legitimacy of the patriarchal norms that attempt to silence her voice. Ultimately, *The Palace of Illusions* demonstrates how

mythological narratives can be reinterpreted to reflect contemporary concerns about gender and identity. By foregrounding Draupadi's perspective, Divakaruni reimagines the epic as a narrative that acknowledges women's experiences, struggles, and aspirations. The novel illustrates that mythology is not a fixed or unchanging tradition but a dynamic cultural narrative that can be reshaped through new perspectives and voices. Draupadi's story, as retold in this novel, becomes a powerful symbol of female agency and the enduring struggle for equality and recognition.

In conclusion, Divakaruni's feminist retelling of the *Mahabharata* not only restores the voice of a marginalised mythological figure but also invites readers to reconsider the cultural narratives that shape perceptions of gender and power. Through the reclamation of Draupadi's voice and the critique of patriarchal structures, the novel contributes significantly to feminist literary discourse and to the ongoing reinterpretation of myth in contemporary literature.

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