

**CHITRA DIVAKARUNI'S PALACE OF ILLUSIONS**

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**Abstract**

This paper divulges into the female perspective of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* how it is narrated under female influence and the differences noticed based largely on gender and other sociolinguistic factors. Some major constituents of this paper would be understanding and critically analyzing the point of view how it is biased or influenced under many circumstances in which gender and sociolinguistic factors also contribute and have an adverse impact.

Divakaruni's work involve various impactful women in her work one of which is Palace of Illusions that indeed creates an impactful aura which creates an opportunity of discussion regarding biasness of gender in language. Through generations we have read the *Mahabharata* as narrated by entities of position who had men influence and that field is reformed by Chitra Divakaruni as she introduces a female perspective into this which this paper will be analyzing. This novel presents a feministic view point as well that can be considered to be a huge creative point that presents the chance to depict how gender is influencing language not only in the modern times but from the times of epic when the cultural and social scenarios were entirely different from as they are today's circumstance.

This paper is put forth that would critically examine these given aspects of sociolinguistic setting and determine the role of language how it is used and in what manner and degree that creates an impactful scenario which holds the power to create dominance and the way it is showcased. Such use of language holds the power to alter many circumstances and situations and not necessarily always for the better outcome of the situation which would be understood in a more clarified manner in further content of this paper.

**Keywords: Mahabharta, Sociolinguistics, Illusion, Feminism, Culture, Modernity, Dominance**

## **Introduction**

Acknowledging the fact that men and women are physiologically different leads us to identifying these instances in language usage as well which this paper does. Possessing human emotions is the nature of beings which would be clearly evident in any literary work even if it is a timeless epic for which this paper attempts at creating a stronger grasp how such emotions are displayed and portrayed in variations of circumstances through different genders and people belonging from separate places of position which creates a sense of superiority or authority.

This paper unravels how the language is being put to use differently by both the genders in different situations. There is no compulsion that the use of language has been restricted to a certain degree of moral use that language is only put to 'good' or 'bad' use. It is recognized and identified through this novel in many instances that the language has been manipulated, bent, underused or not used at all, used harshly, authoritatively, submissively and in many other contexts and not any of them can be particularly categorized under a specific moral compass that can be explanatory to the virtuous sense.

Heavy cultural influence plays its role in altering use of language as cultural elements constitute of many factors such as position of superiority, familial background etc. These factors heavily influence the instrumental use of language and can dominate many communications because of the same which this paper analyses further in this.

## **Literature Review**

*Portrayal of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage* by MINAL J. DAMOR: In this paper, Damor writes about the cultural differences that Divakaruni addresses in her works. This paper helped in shaping my paper in providing a more insightful view of the cultural subjugations many of Divakaruni's character faces as she writes. *Portrayal of Women as a Powerful Force in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Novels* by Ms. S. Monika: This paper talks about the various issues faced by women in the novels of Chitra Divakaruni in the aspects of social identity, being out casted, going through severe humiliation and much more and with reading and understanding this paper it helped shape and structure this one in understanding how the language used plays its vital role in the construction of illusion of power of women or the ways how they are expressing themselves.

### **A. Softer feelings are expressed differently by men and women**

As we divulge more into the novel by Divakaruni, *Palace of Illusions* we see various instances where again and again it is made visible how the mode of expression is gendered. Many incidents are described that took place in the great *Mahabharata* that makes its different characters feel a lot of emotions along the way but how it has been expressed differs from each one of them due to many factors that speak to age, gender, superiority, class etc.

“Arjun always managed to find enough game. Bheem dug up roots and shook ripe fruit from trees. Nakul and Sahadev brought me fawns to pet, and milk from wild goats. No matter where we went my husbands constructed me a cottage, airy and fragrant, lined with the softest rushes they could find, where in the early morning the sun winked through the leaf- woven roof. At times Yudhisthir sang—something he’d never done in the palace.” (p199)

All five husbands of the *Panchaali* queen made many efforts to ease the pain of *Draupadi* about the whole scenario of loss of their earlier way of life which has been the fault of the husbands only. As the para has been quoted we can see how *Arjun*, *Bheem*, the twins *Nakul* and *Sahadev* made efforts in hope that it would bring some degree of happiness, sense of relief or any form of comfort to their wife but all these are forms of physical efforts of actions. Throughout the novel as narrated by either *Vyasa* or *Draupadi* there is no mention if the *Queen Panchaali* ever received in any way the acceptance of their faults or consolation that meant communicating in a proper manner or being vocal about the situation in regards to any of their emotions. All that is evident is their preparation of the war that speaks towards their guilt of their action and that they want to avenge their opponents, the *Kauravas*. In this case, the *Pandavas* brothers did feel anger towards the *Kauravas*, pained to have brought down such an unspeakable downfall upon her, hurt upon their own actions and felt guilt within all of them for the responsibility of all these actions relied on their own shoulders due to their ego to win everything back.

In any case, it would have been possible that the lack of vocal expression was caused due to their realization of their faults within and that did not allow them to speak their mind freely to the woman who was hurt because of them but also their gender played an not so unnecessary role that held back their complete ability of communication of those variation of feelings.

*“Each day as I served their meals, I reminded the Pandavas of how they’d failed me, and what I’d suffered as a result in Duryodhan’s sabha. Each night I recited the taunts of the Kauravas so that they stayed fresh in their minds.”* (p199)

On the other hand, *Draupadi* has been shown to be immensely vocal with her thoughts even if it was to show her feelings or express her dismay towards certain situations. One couldn’t fault the *Panchaali* on her personality trait of being vocal and maybe even more so than some other women but it was to her right for no one else hadn’t been in Duryodhan’s sabha that dismembered her dignity, royalty and everything that made her *THE QUEEN PANCHALI* was stripped off of her.

Being a woman in the era when a separate time existed where a woman is only as good being a property of a man and considered lucky if that man is to be her husband is a factor that definitely challenged *Panchaali* as she becomes the women around whom the history gathers itself that screams for the avenge on the Kauravas. If language hadn’t been her friend who was to be the armor that protected for it hadn’t been her husbands.

But we further understand how language could not always be instrumental in good sense only and can be used in many other manners in which yes, gender surely plays a role and this paper provides some insight on the same.

*“But when we were alone, he told me things he’d never told anyone, acting out with gestures events for which he could not find expressions. His enemies, who knew him only as a whirlwind, single-minded and destructive, would have been astonished to see it.”* (p211)

In this abstract *Draupadi* is telling about the hidden softer side, if one could say that, when *Bheem* showed that side to her wife in the years when they get to be the husband and wife. During this time, he would tell her things or confess deep emotions to her that he couldn’t in front of anyone else. This side showed *Draupadi* a different side of *Bheem* whom she already considered to be more attached to her as compared to her other husbands.

This part proves to be essential to this research paper as it helps state in what way language is being used by the different genders plays role in constructing their personality. Men don’t often use such language easily that showcases their sensitive side of humanity but when they do a different

perspective is created of the same men who can be once thought of as closed and limited interactive people. Some sort of embarrassment, shyness or even hesitation can be clearly identified when men display their feelings which aren't necessarily 'man-ly' according to them which are constructed by the societal norms and people are expected to follow them or embark upon them accordingly.

Therefore, ending this chapter we can understand that softer emotions are displayed and expressed differently by men and women and also there is a factor that if the receiving person is a man or a woman. Pain, sadness, guilt and / or hurt can be expressed in a more closed-off manner or maybe not expressed at all only shown through actions. While some other feelings like happiness, anger and / or excitement maybe showcased quite easily as compared to the other emotions since these feelings are considered to be stronger and not shameful feelings to be had by men in particular and not termed as 'woman-ly'.

## **B. Language and Desire**

*As stated by John Kulick "the foundational psychoanalytic concepts of desire, or repression - the "pushing away" of thoughts from conscious awareness - have not been theorized within linguistics."* (P119 L&G)

In the novel, there are many occurrences of such instances where it can be seen that *Draupadi* desired *Karna* and that has been clarified very prominently. This desire was not limited to a onside longing for love but rather this feeling was mutual which was never quite fulfilled between the two of them. This concept of desire that is being the topic of attention does not necessarily limit itself to the thematic idea of desire that is 'sexual'. It can be positively agreed that sexual desires often lack the helping hand of the language that could help with expressing those feelings of libido. Building on the same matter of contention, desire is not to be always classified as sexual given that there are further contributions of human emotions that variate the conceptualization of desire more than sexual and can be furthermore described in a more humanitarian aspect. Hence, desire can be also studied in terms of craving a certain type of affection from a specific social relationship or desiring acceptance of some relationships in particular within the social community one belongs from.

*“Subhadra nodded as Arjun spoke, listening carefully. Her face was alight with admiration.*

*Arjun’s eyes softened as he looked at her, and he reached out and tucked a stray hair behind her ear. How was it he never behaved with such tenderness toward me?”*

This excerpt from *Palace of Illusions* stands to be in agreement with the statements as provided above that a person can have desires more than just sexual desires. In this given extract of very few lines it is evident that *Draupadi* longs for the affectionate intimacy from her own husband for which the recipient is *Arjun’s* another wife *Subhadra*. To also state the reason behind quoting this specific excerpt is that this is stated from the point of view of *Draupadi* that she felt within herself but this desire could not be expressed upfront for which lack of linguistic elements can also be considered a factor but more than that the social boundary of their relationship and the gender division became more of a factor for this lacking in expression.

Pedaling a little bit outside the arena of language and understanding a branch of linguistics – verbs - here to create a deeper grasp at the next point to be made. According to the Glossary of the Linguistic terms, verbs belong as a member of the syntactic class of words that are mainly concerned with signaling events and actions. This will prove to be vital in creating in-depth understanding of a statement to be made further.

Adding more to this what constitutes the meaning of a transitive verb, it means a transitive verb is specifically used when a direct object is being referred to. This form of verb is followed by a noun or pronoun which indicates the person who is at the receiving end of the action directly.

This statement by John Kulick *“An advantage with the concept of desire is that it is definitionally transitive – one can certainly be said to “have” desire, but that desire is always for something, directed toward something.”* Becomes an indispensable material in this point as it provides backbone to the point made. (p124 L&G)

When understanding language use in context of desire it plays an essential role that the abstract concept of desire is understood completely and carefully. Thus desire is always transitive since it will always be directed towards someone or something in particular. Desire is fundamentally unable to exist in abstractness and on its own and a direct reference to a person or an object will always be made.

Language that is being used to put forward the desire and the nature of desire will without exception at every instance consist of a transitive verb and it will be irrespective of gender. Therefore, gendered language can exist simply even in desire but the expression of those desires will consist of some sort of similar ground and that will be the linguistical approach to language.

### **C. Cultural Influence in Personality**

After carefully anatomizing *Chitra Divakaruni's* work *Palace of Illusions*, it can be harmlessly stated that the character of *Draupadi* has been analyzed under utmost scrutiny to come to an explanatory understanding of its character. Because of the same, this paper can now state that *Draupadi* has not been presented in this novel, in any way to be an acquiescent personality from the beginning. Any character traits that define the social construction of women like timid, meek or passive weren't displayed by *Draupadi*. Yet, the shift in that specific area would be evident when we critically examine the novel in that aspect and it would be discovered that the absence of such a subduing nature in her and when such a behavior surfaced to some extent it was because of contributing cultural factors which will be discussed further.

*"I'm a queen. Daughter of Drupad, sister of Dhristadyumna. Mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a hag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl"* (p190)

This excerpt shows a content of authority in the language of *Draupadi* that portrays shock and anger on the actions of her husbands. And also, such strong reactions in her language can be easily traced to her origin which belonged to a place of power that is before her marriage when she was related to her father's kingdom. But since she has been married off to the *Pandavas* her stature now longer exists in the connection of her paternal life but only with her husbands. In such circumstance it is evident how her language may not completely alter but it does change to a degree which is no longer authoritative.

*"The wife is the property of the husband, no less so than a cow or a slave."* (p190)

And with this line mentioned by *Draupadi* as she mentions a quote from *Nyaya Shastra* it can be comprehended without fault how the alteration in her marital status affected her in her having an authoritative stand when it was needed the most. While understanding the contrast in behavior and attitude through the language of *Draupadi*, this notion can be absolutely without any hitch be

conceived that the role and position of *Draupadi* changed with respect to her relationship with men. Earlier when she was considered the daughter of King Drupad, her phrases being used were quite different, the shade of which was evidently visible in her later language also but when her roles changed according to her the wife of the *Pandavas* she was in comparison more compliant in nature though with a hint of rebellion.

*“Panchaali is presented as a fiery female voice in a rare world of warriors, gods and constantly manipulating fate.”* (S. Monika 2016). This paper mentions *Draupadi* as one of the powerful women forces which plays into agreement with this paper.

Thereby, *Draupadi* has been depicted as a mighty personality whose portrayal influenced the plot of *Mahabharata* a lot. Yet, even such a character can be victimized to social and cultural factors which in this case also, affected *Draupadi*.

## **Conclusion**

This paper deals in-depth with the sociolinguistic factors with respect to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Palace of Illusions*. After meticulously analyzing and comprehending various aspects of the novel we have come to understand various new findings and how those deliberations may have had an effect on separate circumstances. Certain aspects of sociolinguistics are culture, society, variety of language use etc.

As Divakaruni revolutionarizes our Indian epic *Mahabharata* by providing a female narration and point of view to it, this step should be considered to be remarkable as we come to understand so many different aspects that could not have been uncovered from the *Mahabharata* as narrated by men of those centuries. Sacrifices made by these women, the women who changed because their cultural position changed and so did their authoritative stature in regard to their relationship with men of their lives.

Language proved to be the one of the most powerful tools that helped in coming to agreement or disagreement to various theories made to reach conclusions. The tool of language happened to be the most instrumental in analyzing various factors such as the way desired expressed by both the genders differed.



Thus, after careful analysis we conclude this paper stating that language and gender play an intertwined role with other participating factors as well that are categorized under sociolinguistic factors. Hence, reaching to these explicit statements it can be concluded that the language use is biased due to gender and it may have positive and/or negative effects equally. Language can be manipulated by women for their gain even if it selfless and the same instrument of language can be underused by men when required to protect themselves from shame and guilt.

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