Vol 8, Issue 11, 2025 **Impact Factor: 8.535** DOI: https://doi.org/10.31426/ijamsr.2025.8.11.8941

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

Myth and Women Empowerment in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni Novels

Shaestha Siddiqua [1]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

Dr. Soumya Tiwari [2]

[2] Supervisor, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

In her works on identity, mythology, feminism, and cultural displacement, the renowned Indo-American author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has significantly advanced the field of Indian English literature. She was born in Kolkata in 1956 and now holds the position of McDavid Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Houston; her work as a poet, writer, and researcher has garnered widespread renown. A number of her books reimagine traditional tales from a female perspective; they include The Palace of Illusions, Sister of My Heart, Oleander Girl, The Forest of Enchantments, and Oleander Girl. Her works are characterised by a reimagining of Indian mythology that features powerful female heroines with complex emotions and agency, such as Sita and Draupadi. Her feminist retelling of myth in her works challenges patriarchal structures and reimagines women's roles in society. In her writings, Divakaruni stresses the need of women's empowerment via self-awareness, resistance, and identity reconstruction; she is a notable character in contemporary diasporic and feminist literature.

Keywords: *Myth, Feminism, Empowerment, Memory, Subversion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The battle for women's equality and justice has endured for a long time, even if the particular obstacles that feminists face change every time. Women now have the agency in media that is rightfully theirs, thanks to great feminist initiatives. Mary Wollstonecraft founded feminism in England with her groundbreaking treatise, A Vindication of the Rights of Women, which advocated for women's equal access to education. In her book A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf introduces the idea of feminist speech for the first time. She contends that women should find their own literary spaces and stop presenting their experiences, subjugations, and subjectivities via a male-centric perspective. She claims that all she could achieve is an opinion on a minor issue, such as the fact that a woman need financial independence and a quiet environment to write fiction. Despite popular belief, oppression is a worldwide problem that unites feminists, not only in the West. Societal assumptions around gender roles are often influenced by the portrayal of female characters in myths. The ideals of dominating, subjugating, and manipulating women have evolved throughout history. According to Patni and Singhvi, one reason men and women in India continue to hold

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

uneven power dynamics is because mythical prototypes of masculinity and femininity, which are seen as idealised examples, are perpetuated. The patriarchal system then uses a wide variety of mechanisms to maintain the subordination of women. Specifically, Simone de Beauvoir argues in The Second Sex that women have always seen themselves through a male-centric lens, and that this has prevented them from establishing a mythology, religion, or poetry that would represent their mission and be uniquely theirs. Literature is like a mirror; it reflects society, its psychological affects, and the variations in how historical narratives are told. Writers convey their innermost ideas, emotions, and points of view via the fictitious worlds they construct. To reinterpret something is to see it through a new lens. So, to show their side of the story and destroy the usual mindset, we may reimagine and reinterpret those mythical women. A poet, creative writing instructor, and published novelist, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one example of an Indian American. A great deal of praise has been showered upon her for her outstanding work as a fiction writer.

Divakaruni writes about powerful women who aren't afraid to show the world their flaws. Writing novels that women will love is her ultimate ambition. In the words of Jasbir Jain, author of the essay "Reading Women's Writing," this is due to the fact that "Women's writing focuses attention both the manifestation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality."" Two of her pieces, The Palace of Illusions and The Forest of Enchantments, highlight the history and reinterpretation of feminism.

In The Forests of Enchantments, Divakaruni bestows to Sita newfound strength and understanding of the universe. She has highlighted various female characters and conveyed Sita's viewpoint and perspective, regardless of whether they are minor or major villains. Unlike other Ramayana adaptations that just glorify Ram, this one expertly presents Sita's viewpoint. According to her interview with Mansi Shah, the female characters were there but played a supporting role. It seemed as if no one cared about them or made an effort to grasp their subtleties. As a result, its importance to me increased. In my ideal world, they would be central characters who speak about what happened to them using their own words. The Palace of Illusions, Divakaruni's reimagining of Draupadi's role in the epic, offers complex parts of her journey through scorn and unyielding resolve, as well as to depict them as imperfect, multi-faceted women. We see a steadfast Draupadi throughout the "Mahabharata," and she never shows any signs of weakness. But Divakaruni gives her a voice and makes her a more likeable character who is full of emotion, bravery, and passion. She reinterprets mythology with modern relevance, shifting the spotlight from males to women.

II. CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Among contemporary Indian English literature, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands out as one of the most productive writers. She came into this world in 1956 in Kolkata, India. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was a co-founder and president of Maitri, a hotline for South Asian women coping with domestic violence. She received a Master's degree from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph.D. from the University of California in Berkeley, California. As the University of Houston's McDavid Professor of Creative Writing, she is responsible for directing the creative writing program. She calls Texas home.

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the author of several books, including: From 1997 to 2004, the following films have been released: The Mistress of Spices, Sister of My Heart, The Vine of Desire, Queen of Dreams, The Palace of Illusions, One Amazing Thing, Oleander Girl, The Forest of Enchantments, The Last Queen, Independence (2023), and The Mistress of Spices. Her works mostly deal with themes such as myth, cultural revolution, feminism, alienation, marital discord, and a loss of a feeling of place.

Culturally specific explanations for everyday occurrences are sometimes based on fantastical stories called myths. Presently, it is a story that explains how the world came to be. Mythos means "story," "discourse," "myth," "fiction," or "plot" in Greek. Mythology is the study of myths as a whole. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines it as "an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts" (2019). A person's social status may be revealed via myth, a kind of storytelling. Such is the symbolic representation of stories.

Myth provides an explanation for both the afterlife and the existence of a life beyond this one. Possibly, it teaches people right from wrong. To preserve Indian history, beliefs, culture, and civilisation, Indian writers writing in English have included mythology into their writings. As he was speaking to The Times of India. Whether it's Mistress of Spices or Palace of Illusions, epic stories have always been my inspiration. I also continue to be fascinated by timeless topics such as the mother-daughter bond, marital dissolution, alcoholism, homosexuality, and abortion. According to Divakaruni, "I've always interested in the lives of women but I think I'm more inclined to push the envelope now."

III. MYTH AS A FEMINIST REWRITING STRATEGY

Among contemporary Indian English literature, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands out as one of the most productive writers. She came into this world in 1956 in Kolkata, India. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was a co-founder and president of Maitri, a hotline for South Asian women coping with domestic violence. She received a Master's degree from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph.D. from the University of California in Berkeley, California. As the University of Houston's McDavid Professor of Creative Writing, she is responsible for directing the creative writing program. She calls Texas home.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the author of several books, including: From 1997 to 2004, the following films have been released: The Mistress of Spices, Sister of My Heart, The Vine of Desire, Queen of Dreams, The Palace of Illusions, One Amazing Thing, Oleander Girl, The Forest of Enchantments, The Last Queen, Independence (2023), and The Mistress of Spices. Her works mostly deal with themes such as myth, cultural revolution, feminism, alienation, marital discord, and a loss of a feeling of place.

Culturally specific explanations for everyday occurrences are sometimes based on fantastical stories called myths. Presently, it is a story that explains how the world came to be. Mythos means "story," "discourse," "myth," "fiction," or "plot" in Greek. Mythology is the study of myths as a whole. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines it as "an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts" (2019). A person's social status may be revealed via myth, a kind of storytelling. Such is the symbolic representation of stories.

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

Myth provides an explanation for both the afterlife and the existence of a life beyond this one. Possibly, it teaches people right from wrong. To preserve Indian history, beliefs, culture, and civilisation, Indian writers writing in English have included mythology into their writings. As he was speaking to The Times of India. Whether it's Mistress of Spices or Palace of Illusions, epic stories have always been my inspiration. I also continue to be fascinated by timeless topics such as the mother-daughter bond, marital dissolution, alcoholism, homosexuality, and abortion. According to Divakaruni, "I've always interested in the lives of women but I think I'm more inclined to push the envelope now."

Memory as Feminist Narrative Strategy:

The use of memory as a literary device is one aspect that distinguishes The Palace of Illusions. Draupadi recalls events that have been ethically resolved in the epic tradition and uses them as a foundation for her speech. Because of this, she is able to understand the patriarchal moral justifications for past judgements and behaviours. Rather of allowing epic history to be closed, the novel's memory acts as a feminist counter-archive. Draupadi uses her memories to reinterpret stories of shame, marriage, and battle, bringing attention to the hidden emotional and ethical costs of these experiences in heroic myths. In this setting, memory acts as a kind of feminist resistance by reclaiming marginalised experiences and moral perspectives.

Desire, Interior Conflict, and Female Subjectivity:

The manner in which Divakaruni has portrayed the idea of female desire is one of the most daring departures from the traditional wisdom surrounding epics. Female desire is either not mentioned at all or is shown as something very hazardous in ancient tales. Because the novel presents a paradigm in which desire causes insecurity rather than pride, The Palace of Illusions flips this convention on its head. The diverse mentalities of powerful women are shown in Draupadi's desires for Karna, her mixed feelings about polyandry, and her dissatisfaction with her assigned duties. Sexual desire does not romanticise defiance but rather exposes the friction that arises when gender norms force women to conform despite their preferences. The ideological ramifications of the female mind are driven home throughout the book.

The Palace as Metaphor of Illusory Power:

There are powerful gendered metaphors involving the palace in Divakaruni's work. The fact that Draupadi built the palace herself makes the metaphor an expression of her strength and wisdom. It is also shown that this power is dependant, existing via the masculine system. A patriarchal society makes it easy to ruin women's freedom, and the collapse of the palace is a metaphor for Draupadi's dreams. The palace symbolises a lack of power and authority but also prominence and empowerment.

Questioning Dharma and Epic Violence:

In the epic tradition, dharma is often portrayed as an unchangeable and, at times, even glorified principle, with violence even being lauded as a means to achieve dharma. By giving the heroine, Draupadi, an opportunity to reflect about the battle and its harmful effects, the author has attempted

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

to add moral complexity to these themes. Despite its glorification as "dharma," the Kurukshetra conflict represents tragedy and loss throughout the narrative. This moral dilemma brings the book into line with the feminist criticism of violence, which prioritises the feeling of pain above the concept of fairness. Draupadi shifts from being the mythical villain to an ethical witness to the story's sexism and the cost of the battle.

IV. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Empowerment refers to the increasing spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered individuals developing confidence in their own capacities. It is the process of creating an environment for a person to be able to achieve the desired results. It is the process or act of improving the lives of people through knowledge and skills. It is to boost the emotional capacity of a person and to claim the rights in society. In short, to empower a person, is to give power, ability, resources to a person, to be able to do something and achieve something.

Women's empowerment can be defined as the changing perception of how women feel about themselves. It can also be viewed as a force which gives women the courage to shed off the feeling of inferiority. Women are empowered to such an extent that they take charge of the environment in which they live. Empowerment points out to woman the need to fight for her rights and privileges in order to lead a comfortable life. It means something that can enable her to create a new atmosphere and to face challenges as a woman. It also means to give women the power, ability and resources to move beyond cultural, economic, social, religious and political restrictions, so that they can be more assertive.

South Asian fiction by women has given expression to their experiences that reflect their liberated condition. The women authors incorporate their experience in the eastern and western worlds in an attempt to make new, empowering image for women where the two experiences meet there lies a revelation, and a story. The stories of the recent writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiren Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and many other women writers, realize both the diverse role of woman and the heterogeneity within each woman. Rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal, they push the paradigm towards the comprehensive expression of each woman's potential. These writers are working on the cultural set-backs that determine the women's life. Their works analyzed much on woman's alternative identities as wife, mother, daughter, beloved etc.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the acclaimed contemporary Indian women novelists in English deals with the feminine sensibility of the Indian women as well as the immigrant women in her works. She highlights diasporic women protagonists, living in two cultures, their delineation, isolation, exile, mental trauma, dispersion, dislocation at the level of diasporic consciousness particularly. Her themes include women, immigration, the South-Asian experience, history, myth, magical realism and diversity. Divakaruni's Oleander Girl (2013) is a novel suspenseful, coming of age tale about young women living in India but search for identity leads her to America which is transforming her life.

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

Oleander Girl revolves around the theme of quest for the lost self by the protagonist, Korobi, an eighteen years old orphan who is taken good care by her grandparents, stern and strict Bimal Roy, tender and sensible Sarojini and her entire studies has taken place in a boarding school. Throughout her childhood Korobi has longed for her parent's love whom she has never seen even. The only knowledge she had gathered about her parents (informed by her grandparents) was that her mother Anu Roy died while giving birth to her and her father who was a lawyer died in a car accident before three months to her mother's death. Though Korobi wanted to know much about her parents she could not explore as it would be painful to her grandparents. Korobi is engaged to Rajat Bose who belonged to one affluent Bengali family. He loved Korobi very much and her arrival in his life changed him into a responsible man taking interest in family business. So, Rajat's parents were happy to accept her though she did not match with their modern way of living. Uncertainty and mystery surround Korobi's history, which is made more opaque by her grandfather's unexpected death on her engagement night, her grandmother's relative quiet, and the startling news that her father may be alive. When Korobi's grandma Sarojini tells her that her father was not an Indian, not a foreigner, not a lawyer, and not killed in a car accident, it comes as a huge shock to Korobi. Despite the man's undying love for Anu, her father Bimal Roy forbade her from marrying him. Even though Anu was already pregnant Korobi when she returned, she hoped to earn her father's approval. She used every available avenue in her attempt to persuade her conservative, inflexible father, but to no avail. She began bleeding after falling off the stairs while in the midst of an argument. And that is how Korobi was born—in a hospital. It was a devastating loss for Bimal Roy and Sarojini, who had just given birth to a baby girl named Korobi, who would have been their sole chance for survival in the face of the impending loss of their only child, Anu. While they were at the temple, Sarojini had Bimal Roy swear that he would not tell anyone—not even Korobi when she gets older—or cause her to permanently abandon him.

V. CONCLUSION

Through a strong feminist perspective, the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reimagine Indian mythology in a way that puts women's experiences, emotions, and agency front and center. The Palace of Illusions and The Forest of Enchantments are examples of her work that retells epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, challenging patriarchal narratives that have marginalised women for a long time. Draupadi and Sita, the heroines, aren't just representations of perfect femininity anymore; they're multi-faceted characters with desires, rage, introspection, and defiance. Reconstructing female identity and exposing the gendered prejudices ingrained within cultural and literary traditions, Divakaruni employs myth as a storytelling method. Feminists use the female protagonists' memories, emotions, and internal lives to rescue their tales from patriarchal narratives. The shifting nature of storytelling in modern literature is shown by this myth's transition into a site of resistance and self-expression. At its core, Divakaruni's literature is about recovering one's narrative voice and being self-aware; it's also about revolt. Her writings have a substantial impact on feminist literary discussions by reimagining myth as a fluid tool for reclaiming and celebrating women's agency, autonomy, and individuality.

IJAMSR

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research (IJAMSR) ISSN:2581-4281

REFERENCES

1. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel*. Picador India, 2018.
2. Ghosh, T. "Mahabharata Today: Tradition and Modernity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife*." *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2020, pp. 115–119.
3. Nayar, Pramod K. *Reading Indian Narratives: Feminism and the Mythology of Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Retellings*. Orient Blackswan, 2015.
4. Patel, Vibhuti. "Reimagining Myth and Gender: Feminist Perspectives in *The Forest of Enchantments*." *Journal of Mythology and Gender Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2020, pp. 112–130.
5. Rathore, Geetanjali. "Sita: The Justly Emancipated Woman in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*." *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*, vol. 9, no. 09, 2021, pp. 1878–1880.
6. Ray, Suranjana. *Feminist Retellings of Indian Mythology: Draupadi and Sita in Modern Literature*. Routledge, 2021.
7. Saharan, Shikha. "Draupadi's Quest for Identity and Selfhood in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*." *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, 2022, pp. 37–42.
8. Shukla, Reshu. "Unveiling the Untold: A Retelling of Sita in Modern Literature with a Special Focus on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Feminist Rendition in *The Forest of Enchantments*." *Creative Saplings*, vol. 2, no. 11, 2024, pp. 41–54.
9. Sinha, Archana. "Feminine Identity and Resistance in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*." *Journal of South Asian Literature Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2019, pp. 47–63.
10. Soundarya, S. S. "Magical Realism and Myth in Divakaruni's Novels." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2018, pp. 266–219.
11. Sumathi, P. N. "Diaspora and its Impact in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2013.