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Narrative of the muted selves: Reframing womanhood in Chitra Banerjee's select works

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Abstract---Chitra Banerjee represents the more new-fangled generation of writers' phase of Indian English fiction. The Palace of Illusions (2008) and The Forest of Enchantments (2019) depict the plight of two women belonging to two different eras who are forced to live in a patriarchal world, suffering from its clutches. The current study attempts to bring in the various aspects of feminism, the concept of a "New Woman", and sheds fresh light on a major Hindu epic, and attempts to question a woman's place in society and reflects on the idea of female autonomy in a patriarchal community. The paper attempts an all-inclusive discussion of the concept of feminism. It is important to trace the experiences of both the female characters and how they evolve as strong identities.

Keywords---Draupadi, epic, feminism, Sita, woman.

Introduction

Indian Writing in English is often defined as a body of work by Indian writers, on Indian experience in English. During the time of colonisation, English was introduced as a medium of appropriating colonial subjects. The colonisers started to translate the Indian texts into English. Translators like William Jones aimed at the purification of debased Indian texts. English education in India was later influenced by Macaulay's Minutes, which aimed at creating an Indian race with British tastes and values.

Feminism encompasses a variety of groups, ideologies, and concepts that are all engaged with women's rights, support equality for women, and demand for gender equity. Feminism is the theoretical study that explores the field of philosophical, sociological, and political attempts to ensure proper and equal rights for women. Feminism has reconstructed its own base and marks a new beginning. Feminism is a social movement that explores the betterment of women.

In Indian literature, many female writers have championed the cause of women's concerns. They have tried to question the tendency of men to relegate women to a secondary position. Anita Desai, Bharathi Mukharjee, Jhumpha Lahiri, Arundathi Roy, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni, and so on have written astonishingly beautiful accounts of female experiences. The epics have indeed become an integral part of the fabric of our social life. For centuries, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have shaped, nurtured, and influenced society, culture, and value systems in this country. When one delves deep into the epics, one finds that all these epics are presented from a male perspective. The female characters in all these works never occupied the central seats. They were always kept in the background, behind a veil, always suffering under the clutches of patriarchal society. Indian society is absolutely patriarchal, just like that of Greek society.

This discrimination is also prevalent in Indian literature. Men form the power structure, whereas women are always kept in the margins. Even the very title is heavily tilted towards male supremacy. The epic *Ramayana* is described as the story of Rama, and never as the story of Sita. Again, the *Mahabharata* tells the story of the clash between the two clans, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. It is evident that Ved Vyasa has never given importance to Draupadi like that of the Pandavas or Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni's novels *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) are two such attempts to retell the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* from a feminist perspective.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-American novelist. Her ideas are from a social and cultural perspective and have elements of diaspora. Her short story, "Arranged Marriage" (1995), took her to fame in the world of literature, and soon she continued her success with *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), which was later made into a film. Her way of creative writing and the questions raised against normative beliefs make her more unique. Chitra Banerjee's main motive is to figure out a protagonist who raises her voice for the womenfolk. She uses the elements of magic realism and also the stream of consciousness technique to convey the ideas. She gives a historical representation of ideas through myth and fantasy. The majority of Divakaruni's writings are largely anecdotal and are modelled on the experiences of Indian immigrants with whom she has worked. She feels that through breaking down outdated preconceptions, she may assist to connect people. Her works are littered with indigenous themes. Her innate ideas and senses were appropriately portrayed in her language inventiveness, which had an ideal ratio and chemistry of her interlinkages. Her stories are filled with recalls, illusions, symbolism, images, metaphysics, and mythology. Her literary environment forms, creates, and celebrates her ideal of cross-cultural tolerance.

Chitra Banarjee is always regarded as one of the most popular Indian writers who discusses the theme of deep and complicated female bonds. Her books have been

translated into many languages. Many of her books and short tales have been adapted for cinema and stage. Her writings have been converted into thirteen other languages, namely Dutch, Hebrew and Japanese. She was born in India and moved to America to further her studies, where she earned a master's degree from Masters Level in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado, Berkeley. She presently teaches in the nationally acclaimed Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston. She sits on the committees of Maitri in the San Francisco Bay Area and Daya in Houston, both non-profits that assist South Asians or South Asian Americans who are victims of abuse. She is also heavily active with Pratham, an institution that aids in the education of children in India. *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* are written from a woman's perspective, while deconstructing the stereotypical notions of Indian culture. *The Palace of Illusions* depicts the views of Draupadi (wife of the Pandavas). It can be interpreted as a bold and sensuous revisit as well as a retelling of the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. It is narrated from Draupadi's perspective, whose voice was muted in the original epic. *The Palace of Illusions* is a mythic tale brimming with warriors, magic, treachery, and unrequited love. The novel gives an insight into what has happened through the eyes of a strong feminist, Panchali, the woman who was the wife of the five Pandava brothers. In an author's note, she writes, "If I ever wrote a book, I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the man's exploits" (3). She constantly contradicts the construction of how a princess and woman would portray herself. The book throws light on different themes like love, dynamics of relationships, desire, jealousy, conspiracy, companionship, loyalty, mutual respect and so on. The narrative traces the transformation of Draupadi from a rebellious girl to a full-fledged queen. The perspective of Draupadi is very sharp and very much on point as depicted by the writer. On the other hand, *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) presents *The Ramayana* from the perspective of Sita, hailed as the queen of Ayodhya. Like the *Mahabharata*, the epic *Ramayana* too was written by a man. Hence, there are a lot of fissures intentionally or unintentionally left, and Chitra Banerjee attempts to fill these gaps. She also challenges the authenticity of the written document.

Defining the New Women

The age-old epics of Indian culture have always given an insight into the attitudes and ethos of society. Popular epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* show readers how the ruling class treated the oppressed. The women, too, never got ample space and were either marginalised, driven away or assimilated into the wave of the dominant class. Writers of the new generation have tried to place the original female characters of the epics with a voice and identity. They share the concerns of modern women, and thus one can consider them the "new women" (Shoemith 4).

The concept of the new woman investigates ideologies. The development of this concept is very important to proving the existence of women in society. This simply provides the idea of placing women in a new light. The construction of new women becomes a challenge to male-centred society. It is to prove that women are as important as men. From a male perspective, women are often considered under them. 'The New Woman' was a word used towards the late nineteenth century to

represent women who were challenging society's expectations of women. The new women's concept is possible only if women change their minds, stand up for their rights, and start believing in themselves that they have equal rights and opportunities. Be it personal, social, or economic, the new woman has control over her life. The concept indicates the changing gender norms and awareness of gender equality and discrimination. New women indicate a framework of equal access to economic opportunities, bring balance to decision-making, and power with purpose, creativity, and compassion. There are cultures where old people still believe girls and women are inferior to men and are supposed to be less educated, be more at home and be denied work. It is in the hands of women to break from their comfort zone to broaden their thoughts and minds. The creation of new women is possible only if women decide to be empowered to make their own decisions, go against social evils and believe in themselves that they are capable equally as men of creating changes all around them for the better. Only then does a new woman concept come out of a traditional story or a myth. Female safety and protection in public places, respect for women's education, and an equal view of women and men in society are still topics to discuss. Women symbolise strength, power, and a never-give-up attitude. Through the novels, Divakaruni introduces the notion and the concept of a new woman. Chitra Banerjee writes,

But actually, you're the one who decides what happens in Mithila. Aren't Mother smiled, 'let's say your father and I share the royal duties – just as I hope you will, with your husband. But in the eyes of the populace, he's the king. And I'd never do anything to upset their belief in him, for in that lies the stability of the kingdom (Divakaruni 14).

This context explains the ideal relationship between King Janak and his queen, Sunaina. A successful life is characterised by equal sharing and mutual respect. Sita always admires this quality of her parents, making her believe she will be like her mother one day. The characterization of Sunaina in the novel marks the ideal definition of a queen. She is the one who shares her husband's responsibility as well as performs as his dutiful wife. Divakaruni invests her with a strong and sharp mind. The role of Sunaina, mother of Sita, resembles the notion of the ideal character. "Endure!" advises Sita's mother as she embarks on her trip from the aristocratic Mithila palace to Ayodhya (13). The writer tries to focus on the new definition of women, where they get more importance and acceptance. Through the novel, one can appreciate the new values given to women. Women's existence in society needs to be more secure and free of restraints. The norms and conditions are for humanity's sake, not for men's sake. The conditioning in society should change by giving priority to women as well. It mainly reflects on female autonomy in patriarchal communities. Sita's life experiences and struggles highlight the patriarchal influence in our society. Patriarchal society is a social structure in which men dominate in capacities such as political leadership, moral high ground, special status, and property ownership. As fatherly figures, they also wield influence in the family sphere. Patriarchy has historically shown itself in the social, judicial, political, and economical framework of a variety of civilizations. Many initiatives have been done to enhance the lives of women, but many are yet to fulfil their objectives.

The Forest of Enchantments explains the female perspective, mainly focusing on Sita's life and also other women in the epic. The representation of female characters in the epics is serene and composed and without voice. Both novels explore how women's identity should be redefined. Sita and Draupadi are the iconic characters of the epics. "Naari shakti," or women's power, has been given great importance in Indian culture (Schneider 11). Sita was the principal female figure in the *Ramayana*, while Draupadi was her *Mahabharata* parallel. However, these two ladies have been presented as completely different, the fact stands that the two great epics focused on these two amazingly strong women.

This is stated that the world's most horrific battles have all been waged for one rationale: to win a woman's affection. This is especially true of Sita and Draupadi, who were accountable for the epic wars depicted in both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They were, indirectly, the cause of the very existence of these two epics. Devi Sita is sometimes misrepresented as a "abala naari" - a vulnerable lady who is always meek and subservient (Srinivasan para. 5). Out of a feminist standpoint, Sita is an illustration of female obedience since she fully supports male domination and succumbs to his every desire and pleasure, even if it irreparably wounds her. Feminists claim that a woman's mindset increases domestic violence and the enslavement of women in India. In reality, she embodies the mentality of the modern Indian lady, who is intelligent, capable, and self-assured. Despite her appearance, she delivered several stunning comments during the *Ramayana*.

Right conduct was clearly important to him, as was his word – more important than anything. Again, the question came to me: what of his wife? Would he ever consider her to be as important as his dharma? What would his dharma say about the importance of his loving wife? (Divakaruni 40) She questions her position as a wife compared to Rama's dharma. Ram has always been heard of in his role as a king. He claims to be a better king than his husband. The drastic change from a subtle Sita to a vociferous one is depicted in the novel. She keeps on pointing out what is wrong. Also, the character is more aggressive in nature. Without any fear of consequences, she places her argument. Sita, the incarnation of Lakshmi, is comprised of immense beauty and a thoughtful mind. The voice given to Sita in the novels probably highlights the concept of a new woman. We can now admire Sita more as a representative of a new woman rather than the "ideal woman" ('Concepts of Ideal Woman and Ideal Man' para. 5). This notion of fearless and courageous character is more needed in today's society. Women should always be active and fearless to prove their existence in life. Chitra Banerjee writes, "I bit back my words, but I promised myself that once I was settled in Ayodhya, I'd make sure that King Dasharath didn't dictate my life" (Divakaruni 54). This quote resembles Sita's power to make decisions and also shows how her life should not be controlled by any patriarchal system. Sita herself is capable enough to decide what is right for her and how to lead her life. She makes it clear that she is King Dasharatha's daughter-in-law and not his slave. The respect and love she shares with her father-in-law are the same as with her father. She also fights against the ignorance and injustice done towards Kausalya, her mother-in-law.

Draupadi (Panchali) is also a strong and sharp woman. Draupadi's mystique, heavenly characteristics, fiery nature, drive to administer and enforce at whatever cost, and moral character strength are all expressed in her entire personality, during her existence. Despite her fiery personality, Draupadi still had a sympathetic side. She inspired everyone to confront life with the inner fortitude she possessed. Sita is typically represented as meek and docile, but Draupadi is always painted as more combative and volatile. She despises all conceptions of princesses. Even now, she is held in high regard and is regarded as a real trendsetter among the modern scenario of Indian women:

I, too, am beautiful, I told myself, holding Krishna's words in mind. I tried the same gestures and found them surprisingly easy. When noblewomen came up and complimented me on my looks, I thanked them as though I was used to such praise. People stood back, deferential, as I passed. I raised my chin proudly and showed off the line of my neck as young courtiers where I'd been secreted all these years. A visiting bard stared at me admiringly. Later, he would make up a song about my unique comeliness. The song caught public fancy; other songs followed; word travelled to many kingdoms about the amazing princess of Panchaal, as mesmerising as the ceremonial flames she was born from. Overnight, I who had been shunned for my strangeness became a celebrated beauty! (Divakaruni 10)

The quote describes how inner beauty matters. One should focus on one's personality rather than physical appearance. It passes away through time. The modern concept sees beyond physicality. Here, Draupadi sets her own beauty as a statement for this. The main reason for her dark complexion is to instil fear in people. Defines one's quality and society have to accept this for the betterment of women. Draupadi was a woman, yet her resolve helped her become as famous as the brave Pandavas. Her attitude was characterised by thunder and lightning. In terms of power and spirit, heroism and virtue, this remarkable lady is no less than Bheema or Arjuna. Her story is one of shame and dishonour, yet she took it all in stride and defeated the perpetrators of her humiliation and anguish. Draupadi and Lord Krishna had a very intimate bond. As fans of the ancient epic poem *Mahabharata* are aware, Draupadi always regarded Lord Krishna as her Sakha, or loving friend, and Krishna called her as Sakhi. She was a brave queen with a vibrant personality. Draupadi is the most complicated and contentious female figure in Hindu mythology. She could be womanly, compassionate, and generous on the one hand, and wreak havoc on those who had wronged her on the other. She was never willing to give up her privileges as a daughter-in-law or the Pandavas' liberties, and she was always willing to take up arms or revenge the injustice dished out to her chastity. If the *Mahabharata* is a tightly woven saga of hostility and love, death and destruction and noble feelings, courage and timidity, splendour and meekness, victory and defeat, then Draupadi is its bright hidden gem, invoking the epic poem and the all-destroying war it defines in the darkness of her towering public persona. Draupadi was a stunningly beautiful, educated, and pious woman, with a body that smelled like a freshly bloomed lotus. There are a few feisty women in Hindu mythology who voiced their thoughts in a world dominated by males. Draupadi was among them. Many believe her to be the first feminist in Indian mythology. A divine voice announced her birth at the moment: "This unparalleled beauty has taken birth to uproot the Kauravas and establish

the rule of religion” (13). The character of Draupadi is unpredictable and consistent:

I confess: in spite of the vows, I made each day to forget Karna, to be a better wife to the Pandavas, I longed to see him again. I couldn't stop myself from looking up under my veil every time I entered a room, hoping he was there. (It was foolish. (If he'd been present, surely, he'd have turned away, my insult still a fresh gash in his mind.) I eavesdropped shamelessly on the maids, hoping to find out where he was. On the verge of asking Dhai Ma to find out where he'd disappeared to (for she had her own ways of unearthing secrets), I bit my tongue a hundred times. If she'd heard me pronounce his name, she would have known how I felt. And even to her, who loved me as she loved no one else, I didn't dare reveal this dark flower that refused to be uprooted from my heart. (Divakaruni 130)

Draupadi tries hard to fight her feelings. She always rejects the notion of social structure. This social construction and status made her sacrifice her undying love for Karna. This love story of Karna and Draupadi is not at all mentioned in the Epic. The modern and practical thoughts of women emerge as a way to get rid of this unethical system of restriction. She is compelled to choose status over love. Draupadi insulted Karna many times, many events marking the disrupted relationship between them. The exploration of such dynamics in certain relationships highlights the importance of love, pride, dignity, etc. The relationship between Draupadi and her husband's wives is also fascinating. A loving wife is prone to jealousy and possessiveness. She wants her husband to give her importance in life. Here, Draupadi resembles the common character of the wife, who shares the same feelings as her. The aspect of love is described as a complex one in the novel. The world-destroying war of Kurukshetra reveals how both winners and losers have lost their beloved ones.

Chitra Banerjee has successfully portrayed the lives of society's weaker genders in these novels by giving them all the characteristics of a 'New Woman'. She has tried to give voice to the marginalised and also to narrate the story of them from their side. The readers are able to understand the characters whose lives never get any primary attention in the epics. As Paul O'Flinn says, "... history demonstrates clearly the futility of a search for the 'real', or 'true' meaning of a work" (19). The religious sensibility of the times of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* is being unearthed and restructured in accordance with the construct of a class, caste or gender-oriented society. The author has presented the problems women suffer even in modern times through two strong female characters from the early Indian epics – Sita Devi and Draupadi. Chitra Banerjee herself has stated the reason for selecting these two characters. She says:

Because of the numerous challenges they had to face, these two ladies appeared to me to be the most complicated and intriguing. They influenced me. Their pleasures, sufferings, and problems seemed ageless to me, and we have so much to learn from them now. In addition, we had previously heard stories from the men's perspectives. It was time to make a change! (Mukherjee par. 4)

Chitra Banerjee, as a writer, has always attempted to make readers aware of how women feel and think. She has done the same thing in these two novels too. The

parallel reading of the epic has thus given a new meaning that is relevant in the modern era too.

Conclusion

Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* are retellings of the Indian epics *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* from the perspective of the female protagonists. In *The Palace of Illusions*, it is Draupadi's version of the epic, while in *The Forest of Enchantments*, it is the narrative of Sita Devi. The entire story is seen through the eyes of these two female characters, which provides a touch of feminism. According to Merriam-Webster, feminism is the theory of political, social, and economic equality of the sexes. It advocates rights for all, to bring everyone to a level where they enjoy equal rights, leaving no room for privilege for others. Today's urban woman is so skilled and self-sufficient that she can simply be dubbed a superwoman, balancing many tasks on her own. Women nowadays are extremely capable, showing themselves not just at home but also in their different careers. Women in India are maturing in many aspects of life. The way a country treats its women may be used to gauge its economic growth. There is a growing understanding of the need of giving women their due and not mistreating them as objects of ownership. Notwithstanding advancements, the fact that women are expected to be achievers while simultaneously fulfilling their duties as spouses or mothers elevates home above all else. Many critics argue that because men and women have distinct life experiences, male and female authors' work will diverge.

Numerous critics argue that male authors cannot authentically write from a female viewpoint or portray feminist principles since they have not lived as women. The bulk of the time, female authors depict life from the feminine point of view in literature, however male authors have indeed taken on the female stance. When writing about women, novelists may portray them significantly based on their gender, nationality, and region. Of course, there have been some measures in the country, particularly since independence, to improve the position of women. However, there is still a long way to go until we achieve gender equality. An epic is a lengthy narrative poem developed from ancient oral tradition that recounts the heroic acts of legendary heroes who reflect the ideals of a certain civilisation. A myth is an old narrative, generally including supernatural entities, that concerns and explains the early history of a community of individuals or natural occurrences and facts. Yet, epic and myth stories are told often to explain why it might be the way it really is. Whilst also challenging social rules, rewritings in the twentieth century by authors from India and abroad that took a novel outlook to the Indian epics and their multiple mythical personalities like Draupadi, Sita, Yudhishtir, Ravana, Kunti, Karna, Bheema, etc have inspired viewers to rethink the sagas.

Indeed, Indian myth has piqued the literary and analytical interests of many modern writers. A few instances of such various possibilities are Alf Hiltebeitel's *The Cult of Draupadi: Mythologies From Gingee to Kurukshetra* (1988), Shivaji Savant's *Mrityunjaya, The Death Conqueror: The Story of Karna* (1989), Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* (1995), M.T. Vasudevan Nair's *Second Turn* (1997), Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's essay "The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing Meanings for Our

Times" (2001), Mahasweta Devi's *After Kurukshetra: Three Stories* (2005), Iravati Karve's *Yuganta* (2008), Bibudhendra Narayan Patnaik's *Introducing Saaraalaa Mahaabhaarata* (2012), Aditi Kotwal Draupadi in *High Heels* (2013), Karthika Nair's *Until The Lions: Echoes From the Mahabharata* (2015), Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017), and many more. After all, it is evident that epics and myths have a significant role in defining social actions in the Indian cultural context.

In Chitra Banerjee's novels, Sita and Draupadi challenge the line dividing what is morally right and wrong in a male-dominated culture that sets a specific norm on women's behaviour and assesses their acts based on that restricted reasoning. *The Forest of Enchantments* utilises Sita's story to explore the gendered false ideal and when women must resist rather than accept their destiny. The only difference is one's point of view. Throughout the narrative, there is an uncomfortable focus on Sita's need to persevere in the face of adversity. She must be willing to make sacrifices and tolerate other people's follies and faults. Despite her dissatisfaction with her circumstances, she never sought to depict herself as a victim. When her spouse faced adversity, she stuck by him unwaveringly. She happily gave up all the comforts of the palace to accompany her husband on his Vanvaas. Sita was also a master of persuasion. Though Rama was originally unwilling to pursue and catch Mareecha, Sita was powerful enough in her desire to make her husband give in. Sita was fully aware of her own power, which is why she accepted to the Agni Pariksha. She might have declined to put out the flames, but she was confident in her own spiritual and social fortitude. She was finally victorious. She remained strong despite living at Valmiki's ashram (chateau) and raising two boys as a single mother. She has not once let them miss their father and raised them to be intelligent, valiant young men. Finally, she demonstrated her real free spirit when she decided to divorce her husband after leaving her boys in his care. Despite her pain, she was kind enough to go with her dignity and head raised aloft.

The Palace of Illusions is a retelling of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* through the eyes of Panchali, the lady betrothed to the five Pandava siblings, the finest heroes of their day. The work is told in the first person, allowing Panchali to reflect under her own life. Even as Divakaruni provides women equal position in society, showcasing them to be more than just the daughters, mothers, and wives of the epic *Mahabharata*'s terrific heroes, the inequities endured by the female protagonists keep reminding the reader that no matter just how women affirm their positions in society, equality will not take precedence if men assume they are supreme to women. The ancient epic told the story of gods, demi-gods, kings, princes, warriors, and other great men. Divakaruni's version, on the other hand, adds a humanist element to the epic, making it more genuine, relevant, and intimate. What distinguishes Divakaruni's work from others is that she presents the tales of all these women as purposeful decisions made by them, rather than roles assigned to them by culture or the men in their life. These ladies choose their lives rather than being thrust into them. Giving ancient Indian women such power and independence is incredible. Divakaruni portrays Panchali as a powerful, robust, and powerful woman who is equivalent to, rather than subject to, the males around them. She portrays Panchali's existence as a sequence of decisions made by Panchali rather than by those around her, giving her a voice in

an extremely patriarchal culture. It has several allusions to nature and natural items. Characters in the story symbolise several types of narration.

Both novels give importance to women's perspectives. The voices of both Sita and Draupadi are very convincing and portray the concept of a new woman very well. The writer attempts to make us realise the importance of women. In earlier times, there were events that led women to think of themselves as a burden. Through Sita and Draupadi, the novelist presents the realness of women – to redefine and strive for self-identity, courage, and self-respect. Draupadi was the Goddess Shree incarnate, brought in this earth to bear her Karma, to convey joy to everyone she met, and, most significantly, to teach women about their own inner power, to claim and obtain justice as and when it was required.

But none of these women was born normally. Sita was discovered in a furrow, but Draupadi was created in a fire. Perhaps this is why Sita was more patient in her attitude to life, whilst Draupadi was fiery. Both Sita and Draupadi had enormous hardships and tribulations throughout their lives, yet they emerged undamaged and stronger in the end. Both caused horrible conflicts and were the inspiration for the epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Both of them were also responsible for the downfall of major kingdoms, the Pulastya Vansha (for Sita) and the Kuru Vansha (for Draupadi) (Leenerts 18, 44).

The books either attain the conventional heights of fiction writing or only touch them before falling down to the level of ridiculousness with overstrung sensitive narrative notes. The Palace of Illusions is a novel that concentrates on non-issues that its author, the novelist, believes are more significant than her main story, the *Mahabharata*. The writer presents the first-hand experiences of Draupadi's life. She focuses on the life of Draupadi, more of a fantasy version. The *Mahabharata*, the epic, is full of rivalry and vengeance. The love story between Draupadi and Karna is depicted in the novel. It has no connection with the original context. She questions why she cannot do more to change the course of life and why saying no or following her heart's desire is out of the question, even for a royal like her.

The Forest of Enchantments retells the *Ramayana* story through Sita's viewpoint. It tries to challenge a woman's role in society and ponders the concept of female autonomy in a misogynistic culture. One of most obvious proof is that, while the story is given from a female perspective, it essentially caters to masculine narratives, with a few exclusions. The account of Sita's journey appears to be focused on Ram. She had dedicated her life to him. Divakaruni does not reimagine any of the legend's aspects, hence there are no surprise surprises along the way, and the plot is predictable. Banerjee's *Ramayana* is genuinely approachable in a manner that the original book is not: it humanises those we were raised to revere as Gods. Her exploration of familial relationships and ordinary annoyances makes the novel distinctively accessible since it becomes clear that the complexities of human interactions perplex even the divine - they encounter the same difficulties we do, they experience the same emotions we do. A reinterpretation has enormous potential to empower individuals who would not otherwise have it and to recast a tale in a different light, transforming the fundamental framework in which acts are viewed, changing their meaning and grounding.

Chitra Banerjee possesses a unique writing style. She uses many techniques, such as the stream of consciousness, to establish her mission through the characters of Draupadi and Sita Devi. When the writer unpacks the ancient product, the need to reconstruct the new past is being preyed upon. The novels turn out in every sense as an attempt to recreate the past as well as the epic, giving voice to the muted. It is a narrative of the 'others' who are usually sidelined, insulted, and deprived of believing in the justice of their cause. The two novels thus turn out to be a wonderful treat for the readers, with every instance taken from the familiar epic and presented from a fresh perspective. The issues presented are relevant and they add the element of universality which makes the text more acceptable.

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