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Rewriting of Indian Mythology in works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Abstract: This research paper delves into the thematic exploration of rewriting Indian myths in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's seminal works, *The Forest of Enchantments* and *The Palace of Illusions*. Grounded in a deliberate narrative strategy, Divakaruni's reinterpretation of traditional myths becomes a captivating lens through which she not only revitalizes timeless narratives but also reshapes the cultural and gender dynamics embedded within them. This paper aims to uncover the subtle layers of Divakaruni's narrative approach, feminist dimensions and intertwine among tradition & modern consciousness.

The main objective of this paper is at highlighting the modes of reconstruction of female characters from Indian Mythology in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Devakaruni. Two of the novels which are kept at the focus for this study are *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantment*. Chitra Banerjee felt that woman figures in mythological stories are not appropriately presented. They stayed shadowed figure in the mythical telling. This study portrays the difficulties, struggles, challenges, conflicts, pains and inner feelings of Draupadi and Sita.

In the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni highlights Draupadi's voice and challenging male hegemony into the great Indian epic Mahabharata. This paper analyses how she subverts traditional perspectives, employing symbolism and character development to present a feminist reimagining of the epic. Similarly, in *The Forest of Enchantments* she focuses on Sita's autonomy within the Ramayana, promoting critical analysis of gender roles and societal expectations. The interplay between tradition and contemporary consciousness emerges as a central theme, urging readers to connect with these ancient tales in a manner that it becomes both familiar and refreshing novel.

Keywords: Indian mythology, mythological reinterpretation, feminist literature, cultural dynamics, contemporary consciousness, Sita, Draupadi, Identity.

A society's entire compilation of myths is referred to as its "mythology." Each culture possesses distinct myths that provide knowledge regarding its cultural norms and worldview. "Myth" is derived from the Greek word *mythos*, which means tale, or story. It is a tradition tale intended to represent natural events or the initial existence of an entire community of people. A myth is a genre of fiction called folklore. Every aspect of the human experience, destiny, inspiration, and concerns are all articulated through myth.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a notable Indian-American poet, novelist and educator, noted for her captivating storytelling, she has made significant contributions to contemporary Indian literature. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a renowned writer who was born in Kolkata, India, on July 29, 1956. She was the teacher of creative writing at the California University, Berkeley, where she has completed her own Master's and postdoctoral studies in English. Divakaruni's works often examines the complexities of the Indian emigrant, pointing themes of identity conflicts, cultural differences and the immigrant experience. Some of her well-known works are *Sister of My Heart*, *The Mistress of Spices*, and *The Palace of Illusions*-a retelling of the Mahabharata from Draupadi's point of view. Divakaruni's works apparently knit together contemporary story narration style and conventional Indian folklore, which attracts readers from whole world.

In the novel *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), she shows her capability of reinterpretation of traditional Indian mythology with a contemporary standpoint, by the rewriting the great Indian epic Mahabharata through Draupadi's eyes. For its feminist undertones and deep narrative strategies this work has been praised. Her influence extends outside the literary realm, making her one of the most important figure in contemporary Indian English literature.

Through intense engagement with the enduring storytelling of Indian mythology Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, has become an inspiration for writers in contemporary Indian literature. At her heart of literary pursuits resides the exploration that transcends conventional rewriting of ancient Indian mythical tales. Divakaruni's works, such as *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, put up the sections of cultural legacy into a vibrant tapestry of retelling.

The main objective in Divakaruni's works is to reveal an intentional and transformative storytelling techniques of Indian mythology. She not only sticks on the traditional reinterpretations, but also initiate on a literary journey that includes deconstructing, reconstructing and questioning the familiar tales of gods, goddesses, and

epic heroes. These thematic exploration acts as a dynamic framework through which Divakaruni negotiates between modernity and tradition, helping the readers to build their relation with age-old mythological tales. Through the frame of rewriting, Divakaruni not only provides voice to marginalized female characters within Indian mythology, but also she tried to inculcate these characters with modern understanding. The mode of rewriting has becomes a conscious practice in resuscitate the cultural importance of these narrations. The thematic exploration of rewriting has been developed as a literary bridge among the ancient and the modern tales, captivating readers to engage in a dialogue with their cultural legacy through a lens that is both familiar and refreshing. Through the examination of key works, the aim is to illuminate the profound impact of her retelling choices on the large scale of contemporary Indian English literature.

The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a retelling of the famous Hindu epic Mahabharata. She has reconstructed the epic from the perspective of Panchaali era. Although everyone thinks that Draupadi was the sole trigger of the Kurukshetra war, Divakaruni renders a distinct perspective on the conflict. Divakaruni depicts the story from Draupadi's perspective, her marital problems, her desire for vengeance, and her relations with her husbands are all discussed. By following her emotional journey as a woman in a male-dominated culture, Divakaruni also delves into the reasons for her urge for revenge against the Kauravas. Draupadi lacks a voice, autonomy, and individuality in Vyasa's Mahabharata. Divakaruni represents Draupadi as a person who possesses the unwavering courage and strength to persist in any circumstance. Draupadi acts as a reminder to males about the inequity and rejection of women. In this novel, Draupadi not only stays in the epic as a submissive character but also emerges as a symbol of contemporary women who are searching for their own identities and uniqueness.

In *The Forest of Enchantment* Divakaruni retells epic *Ramayana* according to point of view of Sita. She clearly portrays Sita's characteristics as that of a modern woman. One of the main characters in the *Ramayana* is Sita. In the dominant culture of Indian society, Sita is portrayed as calm, meek, tolerant, compassionate, and delicate; nevertheless, Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantment* presents Sita in an alternate viewpoint. The author uses Sita's narrational voice to approach the reader of the present day in order to show Sita in a new ideological aspect. It is impossible to avoid self-identity or self-revelation in modern Indian fiction. Contemporary authors have obtained a path away from the representation of conventional

women who are still searching for their identity. Banerjee has shown Sita to be a resilient person who faced her challenges straight away with a great sense of urgency and foresight. She has changed the image of Sita from one of a submissive person to one of a warrior and rebel. Despite being a deity and an incarnation of Lakshmi, Sita's appearance has been portrayed as human, complete with human flaws, making it approachable. In addition to retelling the story of Sita, the novel also features other female characters from the epic that were either ignored or neglected in the original epic. Divakaruni has presented those female characters from a different point of view and demonstrated how greatly their expectations and sentiments were misinterpreted or conveyed inappropriately.

Not only Sita dwell on her own hardships and despair, but she also described the stories of other female characters who had been misunderstood, misinterpreted, frequently ignored, or falsely accused, or who had never received much attention. Specifically, Sunaina, Urmila, Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, Ahalya, and Mandodari are those female characters.

When Ram was going on exile he asked Sita to stay with her mother-in-law's, she stated: "I said, very gently, I'm sorry. That's not something I can do. You see, I'm accompanying you to the forest. He wrinkled his brows. What foolishness is this? There's no way you could accompany me. You're a female. It's too risky. I will not permit it. I wanted to let you know that not all women are as weak and defenseless as you may believe; I might be able to help." Everyone in the royal palace became numb after listening to her statement, this decision she took without consulting anybody in the castle. She goes to the Forest with her husband. By portraying this reality Divakaruni breaks the stereotype and shows the energetic tone of Sita.

Summaries of some literature reviews that have contributed to this paper on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's thematic approach to rewriting Indian myths are:

- "Narrative Subversions: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*" by Amit Ranjan: Ranjan's analysis critically examines Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, emphasizing on author's strategic subversion of traditional patriarchal perspectives. Ranjan explores how Divakaruni foregrounds Draupadi's voice, offering a feminist reinterpretation of the Mahabharata. This review contributes insights into the narrative strategies employed by Divakaruni in reshaping the epic.

- "Empowering Sita: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*" by Priyanka Tripathi: Tripathi's review focuses on Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, emphasizing on the Sita's empowerment within the narrative of Ramayana epic. The review dives into Divakaruni's subtle depiction of Sita, furnishing a comprehensive analysis of the feminist perspective in the text. Tripathi's insights enhance the understanding of Divakaruni's viewpoint in reimagining the female figures represented in Indian mythology.
- "Mythology Reimagined: Contemporary Indian Women Writers" by Meera Shukla: Shukla's literature review gives a broader view on contemporary Indian women writers, considering Divakaruni, grip in the revisiting of mythology. The review provides the recurring motifs and narrative strategies engrossed by these writers, placing Divakaruni's works in the broader context of mythological reinterpretation by Indian women writers.

These reviews of literature cumulatively offer diverse angles on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's mythological retellings.

The Palace of Illusions: Rediscovering Epic Narratives - In *The Palace of Illusions*, through the point of view of Draupadi, Divakaruni negotiates the epic Mahabharata, a character often demote to a secondary role in traditional rewritings. She not only revives Draupadi's voice, but also intricately brings out her inner world, feeling, emotions, and power. By centralizing the narrative on Draupadi, Divakaruni offers a feminist representation of the epic which overturns the traditional patriarchal roles. Moreover, the novel blends the elements of magic and illusion masterfully, transporting readers to a domain where myth and reality flawlessly intertwine. Divakaruni puts new life into ancient tales, through different storytelling style and character development style, which promotes a renewed admiration for the enduring relevance of the great Indian epic Mahabharata.

The Forest of Enchantments: Revealing Sita's shadowed characterization in myth - In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni shifts her narrative lens towards the other great epic Ramayana, she focuses on Sita, a female character traditionally demoted to the margins. Divakaruni's representation of Sita surpasses the archetype of the silent brave sufferer, nurturing her with power, complexity, and a voice. By dealing with Sita's viewpoint, the novel challenges deep-rooted gender roles and offers a subtle inspection of love,

fondness, sacrifice, and resilience. A central motif in the Ramayana is the forest which becomes an allegorical space for self-exploration, self-discovery and empowerment in Divakaruni's reinterpretation of mythological tale. Divakaruni reconstructs and dismantles the traditional narrative, allowing readers to question and rethinks on the roles given to women figure in ancient mythology.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* both are drawn from the Mahabharata and Ramayana myth. Through the standpoint of Draupadi, Divakaruni rewrites the Mahabharata in the novel *The Palace of Illusions*. Particular myths, such as the game of dice and the incident of disrobing, are vibrantly explored in the novel, which empowers the readers to perceive these incidents from personal experience of Draupadi. The novel precisely negotiates through the tangled relationships among the Kauravas and Pandavas.

Similarly, in novel *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni centres on the epic Ramayana, with Sita as the main character. The myths rewritten in this novel are Sita's birth, her swayamvara, and her later exile to the forest. Here, her narration diverges from the traditional representation of Sita as a submissive figure, offering power to her character and challenging the traditional narratives of her part in *the Ramayana*.

Divakaruni's Draupadi is different from traditional one, an empowered character who boldly builds her own destiny. Writer challenges the patriarchal role deep-rooted in the Mahabharata, by instilling Draupadi's opinion into the narrative. Divakaruni rewrites the epic *Ramayana* in *The Forest of Enchantments* by offering authority, supremacy and resiliency to Sita. Her representation subverts the submissive picture of Sita, generally casted in traditional storytelling. Divakaruni's Sita employs self-discovery, she reconstructs Sita's character into a sign of boldness and strength rather than slavish.

A repeated theme in both of her novels is the exploration of feminist viewpoint in the male-centric epic narratives. Divakaruni employs these novels with various imagery and sensory details to intrigue readers in the emotional observation of Draupadi and Sita, which gives a fresh outlook to these age-old tales.

Narrative technique involved in the novels is first-person narration, providing readers instant access to the inner monologue, thoughts, feelings and emotions of the women protagonists. Divakaruni's storytelling

techniques make a deep connection among the characters and the audience, which cultivates empathy and understanding. Divakaruni's narrative technique reflects the India's cultural and social panorama. *The Forest of Enchantments* and *The Palace of Illusions* are instilled with Indian traditions, cultures, and rituals. The portrayal of royal courts, religious rituals, and social hierarchies reflects the complexity of Indian culture.

By doing a comparative study with other renowned writers in this genre we can shed light on the unique qualities of characterisation in Divakaruni's mythological reinterpretations. On comparing her with Devdutt Pattanaik, both Divakaruni and Devdutt Pattanaik reworks on the Indian myths to offer their own point of view, Pattanaik's works often tries to do analytical and philosophical explorations, whereas, Divakaruni's power resides in her narrative techniques of giving authority to female mythical character. Divakaruni interweave her narratives with feminist opinions, which fosters a more emotionally resonant rewritings.

On comparing her with Kavita Kane, Divakaruni and Kavita Kane both have focused on giving voice to the marginalized female characters from the myths in their rewritings of myths. Kavita Kane often put focus on lesser-known characters from mythologies, whereas Divakaruni centres on well-known figures of mythological stories. Distinctive approach in Divakaruni's novels is that, they represent a subtle investigation of the psychological and emotional dimensions of Draupadi and Sita, providing them authority, agency and complexity.

On comparing her with Amish Tripathi, Divakaruni and Amish Tripathi both are engage in exploring the mythological rewritings but diverge in style; Amish Tripathi often blends mythology with historical fiction, while Divakaruni centres on modern reimagining rooted in the mythic past. Distinctive approach in Divakaruni's works is that Divakaruni's narrative style focuses on emotional resonance and character building, imparting a more self-examining and deep connection to the mythological stories.

By comparing Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's mythological rewritings with the works of these contemporary Indian authors, it becomes clear that her distinguish approach recline in the emotional depth of her narratives, foregrounding of women characters with complexity and authority within a contemporary circumstances. This separates her as a story-narrator who not only reshapes ancient mythical stories but also captivates readers into a more intimate and emotionally engaged with these ageless mythical tales.

Divakaruni's mythological retellings have engaged a large quantity of readers, which can be evidenced by glowing reviews on her works, discussions on virtual platforms and reader forums. The use of emotional intensity and narration of familiar characters has helped in building strong connections with audiences. Commercial success of her novels reflects admiration for her novels worldwide. *The Forest of Enchantments* and *The Palace of Illusions* have gained high number of sales, and Divakaruni's contributions to Indian English literature can be acknowledged by gain of prestigious awards.

Divakaruni's mythological rewritings have gained various critical appreciations for unique narration and innovative style. One of such critical praise is by Priyanka Tripathi, in "Empowering Sita: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*," which praises Divakaruni's nuanced portrayal of Sita, recognizing the feminist dimensions in her reinterpretation of the Ramayana. Vivid scholars have given their diverse standpoints, which enhances the discourse around Divakaruni's works. These critical praises not only forecast the thematic complexities but they also put focus on the large implications of her storytelling choices.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's mythological rewritings, particularly through her two novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, have uncovered a deep inclusion of Indian mythology within the cultural and social circumstances of contemporary India. Brilliance of narration of Divakaruni lies in her capability to inculcate new life into ancient myths, foregrounding them as lively, vibrant, relevant, significant and transformative tales. These ancient myths resonate with the readers through time, space and history. In order to bring out a lucid depiction of the plot and how myth permeates every aspect of their lives, she involves myth in her novels. She uses mythology as a means of enlightening people how to live life, how to sustain real culture and traditions over boundaries, what is role played by women in men's lives, and how to regard women with respect, prestige, dignity and honour. In the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, she explores the women's role in both ancient and modern culture by rewriting the Mahabharata, the treasure trove of Indian Hindu mythology, from a feminist point of view. Her works are ethical discourses meant to help people live successful lives by following the narrow path of honesty.

Through a diligent evaluation of particular myths, analysis of reinterpretations, and discussion of recurring themes, this research paper has revealed Divakaruni's unique narrative style. By emphasizing marginalized

voices, challenging gender roles, and negotiating the difficulties of tradition and modernity, her works become more than literary productions, they acts as catalysts for cultural reflection and evolution. Her works not only enhance our interpretation of ancient stories but also tackle readers to challenge and examine their cultural legacy. As the literary panorama pursue to expand, Divakaruni's mythological rewritings stand as enduring monuments, inviting readers to question, reflect, and embrace the transformative power of storytelling.

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