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The Impact of Colonization in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

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Abstract

From the beginning of the colonial period till its end, the women are symbolized as the conquered land. During the Renaissance, the Europeans were often supplicants in front of powerful rulers in Asia and could hardly encode themselves as the male deflowerers of a feminized land.

Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere. They become more tyrannical at home. The women became the metaphor for indigenous culture. It was reinforced by colonial law, which sought to mould the public sphere according to the European ideals. New forms of patriarchal domination were introduced in colonized lands. European colonialism justified its “civilizing mission” by claiming that it was rescuing native women from oppressive patriarchal domination.

Divakaruni presents a woman who struggles against rapid discrimination deliberately meted out by the patriarchal power in the novel *The Palace of*

Illusions. This paper purports to analyze the role of Panchaali in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* in a feminist aspect and post-colonial dimension.

Keywords

Colonization; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni; *The Palace of Illusions*.

Post Colonization is a period of time after colonization and the post-colonial literature is characterized by its opposition to the colonization. The term 'Post Colonialism' is used to signify a position against imperialism and Eurocentrism. It explores the western ways of knowledge production and dissemination in the past and present and they become objects of study for those seeking alternative means of expression. The term post colonialism yokes a diverse range of experiences, cultures and problems; the resultant confusion is perhaps predictable.

The term 'post-colonial literature' would seem to label literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. Any literature may be defined as post-colonial, even if it is produced during a colonial period, due to its oppositional nature. The different geographical, historical, social, religious and economic concerns of the different ex-colonies dictate a wide variety in the nature and subject of most post-colonial writing. The notion of the 'post-colonial' as a literary genre and an academic construct may have meanings that are completely separate from a historical moment or time period.

Some woman colonial writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni draws a relationship between post colonialism and feminism. For the woman writers like Divakaruni, who lived in strong patriarchal cultures, language and the ability to write, communicate like her, have noted that since the language of British-ruled colonies was English, literatures written in English have often been used to marginalize and constrain female points of view. In the post colonial period, the

language has become an enabling tool for post-colonial authors to speak, write and publish.

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Helpless, voiceless, hopeless. Their helplessness appeals to the heart, in somewhat the same way in which helplessness and suffering of a dumb animal does, under the knife of a vivisector. Somewhere, halfway between the martyr saints and the tortured ‘friend of men’, the noble dog, stand it seems to me, these pitiful Indian women, girls, children, as many of them are. They have not even the small power of resistance which the western women may have ... (Burton 144)

Women participated with varying degrees of alienation and enthusiasm in imperial projects; their roles varied both structurally and ideologically. Colonized women also occupied contradictory positions vis-à-vis both indigenous and colonial social structures. Race, gender and sexuality do not just provide metaphors and images, but develop together in the colonial arena.

The anti-colonial nationalism all over Asia is defined as its difference from western notions of liberty, freedom and human dignity. The relationship of

women to national culture can obscure other vital aspects of their social existence.

Among the leading women Diasporic writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni raises her voice against the patriarchal system. New trends have been attributed not only to industrialization and modernization, but also changing attitudes towards traditional, family values, gender roles, marriage and parenthood.

Divakaruni presents a woman who struggles against rapid discrimination deliberately meted out by the patriarchal power in the novel *The Palace of Illusions*. This paper purports to analyze the role of Panchaali in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* in a feminist aspect and post-colonial dimension.

The novel *The Palace of Illusions* takes us back to a time that is half history, half myth, and wholly magical. The novel is narrated by Panchaali, the wife of the legendary Pandava brothers in *The Mahabharat*. The novel gives us a new interpretation of the ancient tale. Divakaruni tries to give feministic interpretation of the epic.

Divakaruni speaks about the stories from the Indian epics that her grandfather used to tell her and then she read these epics for herself. The novel traces Panchaali's life beginning with her magical birth in fire as the daughter of a king before following her spirited balancing act as a woman with five husbands who have been cheated out of their father's kingdom. Panchaali is swept into their quest to reclaim their birth right, remaining at the brothers' sides through years of exile and a terrible civil war. Panchaali is a fiery female voice in a world of warriors, gods and ever manipulating hands of fate.

Man sees woman as the human evidence of his own power and prowess. In patriarchy, men have direct power but women do not; in which women have been kept as children and men have assumed the responsibilities and the rewards of adulthood. The feminists see the men as agents of victimization.

Basically, the women are the ultimate victims of the Indian marriage. Because marriage is so damnably central to a woman's life. They have no strong

sense of self with which to demand and to give substantial love, and it will not curtail the free, full functioning of that self.

In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband; when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent...She who controls her thoughts, works and deeds, never slights her lord and will reside with her husband (in heaven) and will be called a virtuous wife. (*Manusmriti*)

But Divakaruni tries to picturise panchaali in post colonial and more feministic aspect. The rationalist panchaali raises slogans about her suppression not only in epic, but also in the novel *The Palace of Illusions*.

The status of woman in south Asia is related to the Hindu belief, that women are goddesses. In the guise of venerating them they are controlled. Panchaali becomes aware of her predicament, when she undergoes a unique marital arrangement:

Though Dhai ma tried to console me by saying that finally I had the freedom men had for centuries, my situation was very different from that of a man with several wives. Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it (or) not. (*The Palace of Illusions* 120).

She wants to take revenge against the kauravas for attempting to humiliate her once they have won possession of her. When Karna tried to strip of her royal clothing, she cursed them:

All of you will die in the battle that will be spawned from this day's work. Your mothers and wives will weep for more piteously than I've wept. This entire Kingdom will become a charnal house. Not one Kaurava heir will be left to offer prayers for the dead. (*The Palace of Illusions* 150).

Panchaali is ill-treated in front of everyone in the court. The war at Kurukshetra happened due to the curse, the exploitation and the abuse of womanhood. Divakaruni allows Panchaali's ironic distance regarding her own

feminine power. Divakaruni brings Panchaali's role as a powerful and pivotal one in the novel. Due to the impact of colonization, the author spells each word against Kauravas for her ill-treatment in the court.

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