



Quest for Identity: A Study of Feminist Perspective in the Novel the Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in the Light of Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own.

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ABSTRACT:

The main focus of this paper is on the issues like women's quest for identity, her struggle to achieve a stable position in a male dominated society while fighting with the age-old conventions. This paper explores a new insight for a woman to fight against oppression, inequality and gender discrimination because these are dangerous social evils for the notion of equality and social justice. This thesis attempts to study the novel "The palace of illusions" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni from the feminist perspective where the story told by female protagonist of the novel Draupadi and how the views she expresses about the position of women in the society and their struggle for identity resembles the views of Virginia Woolf expressed in her essay "A Room of one's own".

objective: To highlight how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work "The palace of illusions" resonates Virginia Woolf's "A Room of one's own" in defining the role of women in society, history and gender identities.

Research methods: The study was conducted on contemporary Indian women writer and British women writer from two different races and countries. Data collected through comparative and critical- analysis, traditional review of data have been used in this article. Various resources like e books, journal articles, web materials have been searched and filtered to complete the given information in this proposal.

Literature review: Feminism is a general term covering a range of ideologies and theories which pay special attention to women's rights and position in culture and society. It's a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the gender difference, advocate equality for women and campaign for woman's rights and interest. The term "feminism" is a translation of feminism which was coined by the French utopian novelist "Charels Fourier" in 1873. Fourier challenged patriarchy and genuinely thought that differences between men and women prevent full equality and he argued strongly for freeing women from what he considered the 'slavery' of 19th century gender relations. Fourier's term was first translated and used in English in the 1890's. It was at this time that what you see referred to as the 'first wave' of the feminism developed. The central aim of this movement was a critique of what we call patriarchy. The system that hands power down through the male line from one male to another.

Feminism originated in the America and Europe later its spread in Asia, Africa and gradually in other continents, finally it is established worldwide. Feminists are united by the idea that woman's position in society is unequal to that of men and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men to the political, social, economic and detriment of women. However, feminists used different theories to explain these inequalities. Historically, feminists thought, and activity can be divided into different waves. It was largely concerned with gaining equal rights between men and women. Although the word "feminism" was not used until the end of the 19th century, the emergence of recognizably feminist ideologies fighting for the cause of women can be traced to the late the 19th century. They were labelled as "proto feminists". The earliest form of feminism was concerned with the equal rights for women and men. These ideas emerged in response to the French revolution and the American war of independence, both of which advocated values of liberty and equality. Feminists in France argued that revolutionary values of liberty, equality, fraternity should apply to all women activists in America called for an extension of the American declaration of independence to women, including right to citizenship and property.

First wave feminism originally focused on women' suffrage and the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to the chattel marriage and ownership of married women by their husbands. This wave is generally associated with liberal feminism which focuses on gender equality. They seek compromise rather than search for equality. This type of feminism appeared in the works of Virginia Woolf and Mary Wollstonecraft. How ever, by the end of 19th century activism primarily focused on gaining political power, particularly the rights of women suffrage. In Britain, the Suffrages campaigned for the woman's right to vote. In England, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "A vindication of rights for women" in which she demanded equality and better education for women and made the first sustained critique of social system which relegated woman to an inferior position. In the early 19th century, U.K began to call for better education improved legal rights employment opportunity and right to vote. Equal right feminism was given theoretical justification by John Stuart mill, who wrote 'subjection of women' which was partly influenced by his wife Harriet Tayler. From the 1850's

onward, the campaign for equal rights for women become focused on the winning the right to vote. In the 1928 all women above the age of 18 years were given the privilege of voting which marked the end of first wave of feminism.

Origin of Second wave of feminism came from socialist and civil rights movement which emerged in the 1960's in the north and central America, Europe etc. The women's liberation movement which began in United States, liberal rights, based concerns for equality between men and women with demands for a woman's rights to determine her own identity and sexuality. In this wave feminists began to turn their attention from question of equality between women and men to issues which mainly concerned woman. These were equal pay, education, equal opportunity in work, financial and legal independence, free 24-hour nurseries, free contraception and abortion and demand for woman's rights to define her own sexuality. This wave was greatly influenced by the writings of Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Elaine Showalter who drew attention to ways in which women were oppressed by the very structure of western society.

Second wave feminism also emphasized the physical and psychological difference between Woman and Man. Some feminists criticized psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud for assuming that all people should be like Men. They became concerned with ways in which women perceptions were determined by the nature of the female body and the female roles in the reproduction and childbearing. In France, the feminist theorists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray explored the ways of making new knowledge from the viewpoint of the female body, including the idea of women writing. This strand of feminism became known as radical feminism. Radical feminism focuses on patriarchy and believes that main rival of women is patriarchy, which guarantees male supremacy and subordination of women at work and home.

The third wave of feminism began in the 1990s and was primarily influenced by the post-Modern movement in its challenge of one essential truth or grand narrative. Feminists in this period were focused on questioning and redefining ideas about gender and sexuality particularly focusing on the role media and cultural works have played in ascribing gender roles. Here, new schools of theoretical thought emerged such as Eco feminism and Marxist feminism. Eco feminism links ecology with feminism. Ecofeminists connects exploitation and domination of women with that of environment. It believes that there is a relation between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal western society. Another variety of feminist thought, particularly strong in U.K is Marxist feminism. It examines the economic and material exploitation of women the sexual division of labor especially in domestic work and childcare and workplace.

Fourth wave that is the current feminism began in 2012 with an increased focus on sexual harassment, rape culture, Body shaming and misogynistic micro aggressions. The widespread of social media in the 21st century has significantly influenced feminist issues. The #Me too movement which is about sexual harassment demonstrated the priorities of fourth wave feminism and how social media was now playing a huge role in women seeking justice.

The modern women are conscious about themselves and aware of the fact that they are not an object of possession and are able to define their secular identity and realize their own claims and rights in the 21st century. To accomplish this, many writers have been giving vent to the concept of modern girl or new woman and other feministic aspects minutely and appropriately. Writers like Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, Bharathi Mukherjee, Anjana Appachana, Shuana Singh Baldwin, Jhumpa Lahari, Anita Rao Badami, Kamala Markandeya, Meena Kandaswamy, K R Meera, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Manju Kapoor, Kavita Kane to represent the modern woman's struggle to define and reach to autonomous self. Literature being the true reflection of society represented the male domination, women protests, the subaltern condition of women and their anger for their helpless condition. If the first generation women writers like Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala have merely expressed their predicament through silent protests, the second generation of women writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shashi Deshpande have challenged the male culture that prevails in the country. But the early protests gradually turned into an explicit annoyance and finally took shape into an open rebellion. Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, are modern women writers who recognize the displacement and marginalization of women and attempt to change this system through their works. Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Rao Badami reacted to changed psychological and emotional realities of Indian women's life. Thus, feminism, free sex, self-assertion, quest for identity is some of the major thematic concerns of these novelists. These novelists shatter the myth that women find fulfillment in marriage and portray an honest picture of women who strive to be themselves. They move from submission to assertion in order to acquire an identity and to fit into the mainstream of society.

Literature is considered a powerful medium of social change. Lots of social changes happen in society with the help of literature. It always has been a threat to establish rules and social order to the world. Women have faced gender discrimination, and they are rejected from the society because of male chauvinism. Inequality prevails among the sexes and culture discourages women from expressing themselves. So the modern women writers present women as far more assertive, domineering and bold in comparison to their male counterparts. They are neither submissive nor guilty of their attitudes.

Virginia Woolf and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni both want every woman to be her self-sufficient and economically independent so that they will get courage and strength to transform themselves from commodities to identities. They want a real change in the condition of women from being a toy in the hands of men in becoming equal partners in life with equal rights and dignity.

They point out that if every woman in the society questions the validity of the accepted set of age-old values and rebels against the existing moral codes and social norms which imprisons them from becoming independent that can lead to their empowerment, self-realization, assertion to bring the transformation in the identities of their lives.

Introduction: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indo-American writer. Though she didn't call herself a feminist there is a strong feminist thrust in all her writings. Women are placed at the center of all her novels. Her works deal with contemporary issues of modern women's struggle for identity. Her novel "The Palace of Illusions" is rather different from her works. It's an attempt of translating voice of modern woman through Draupadi the timeless character of the great epic of India Mahabharata and portraying her as the first feminist of India.

Similarly, even though Virginia Woolf is largely regarded as a feminist writer and thinker, she didn't identify herself as a feminist throughout her lifetime, her works and ideas had a significant impact on feministic thought and movement. Her essay "A Room of one's own" considered as one of the most significant works of feminist literary criticism. she questions gender-stereotypes and addressed themes of gender inequality and women's oppression also emphasizes the importance of personal space, financial freedom and the ability for women to follow their own decisions to create their own identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Virginia Woolf believes that radical change can be achieved not by blaming the male centered society, but by changing oneself. That changes should takes place in every individual woman. Both writers do not want woman to be like men, they actually want to be in charge of their own life and to create their own identity. According to them the future of women depends on how they continue to redefine their life goals, unless they believe in themselves and reject the unjust rules of the society; women in their works, questions the discrimination they experience at different stages of life like education, financial status and marriage also their own space to grow.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel "The Palace of Illusions" presented the epic Mahabharat from the perspective of woman. Draupadi is represented as a woman who wants to be a maker of her own history and destiny. The author has rightly given "Panchali's Mahabharata" as another title for this novel. She is portrayed as a model of female empowerment and courage, trying to break free from the shackles of patriarchal hegemony. Similarly, Virginia Woolf in her essay "A Room of one's own" presents the basic premise of allowing the woman to live her femininity and learning to let others alone. she expects women to raise their consciousness and removes the obstacles she finds in the way of creating their own identity, such as their lack of education, the lack of privacy and the constant distractions upon them.

History in favor of men: Throughout the history, the balance of power between men and women has never been equal. Not only in Indian society but also throughout the world women are expected to focus on domestic pursuits and activities that encouraged the betterment of their families and especially their husbands. women just seen as the part of the draft but not as a real member of the society. Women in the Indian society has always been based on the ancient religious texts like Vedas, Puranas, and social texts like Manu Smriti and Grihsutras. In these texts only male characters are hailed as a great hero but the women characters are not given importance. Not only giving importance but also imposed restrictions on women and presumed that men are physically strong whereas women are passive and fixed women's role as mother, wife, objects of male desires. Even though women play important role in Indian epics like Mahabharata, Ramayana their roles were romanticized only as a submissive Sita or Savitri by giving them a fitting image of "Pavitra Nari" in a society. As a matter of fact, some women are the root cause for many significant events like Kurukshetra battle in Mahabharata. But these texts portrayed women as subordinates and inferior to men. Virginia Woolf in her essay "A Room of one's own" when searching for the information about women and their conditions, she went to the British Museum, but she couldn't find books that were written by women. All the books that were written by men are full of prejudice and contradiction against women. For, example Professor openly claims women to be inferior as men concerned with being superior. Woolf insists that the enlargement of Napoleon and Mussolini purely because women allowed to be dimmed by male domination. she saddened and disgusted by the fact that history and literature represented women so poorly in the past refusing to offer woman as being anything more than a lover or daughter to a great man. Although women were given idle place in literature a mere reciting of names like Cleopatra, Hellen, Macbeth they merely treated as an object in hands of men.

Woolf argues that women's experience and struggles can never be properly interpreted by male writers even though they are sympathetic towards woman-based issues. The female perspective expressed through various women's writings is of utmost importance. This is the reason Woolf argues from the beginning of the essay by making a statement that is "Women must have money and room of their own if she is to write fiction".

Position of women in the society: "A Room of one's own" considered as one of the significant works of feminist literary criticism. In this essay Woolf emphasizes the importance of personal space, financial freedom and the ability for women to follow their own decisions to create their identity. She portrays the role of women in her time where women couldn't express their opinions in public and education was restricted. Neither could they live their sexuality openly because this would be like treason for the pure and decorous life of values. Society was full of prejudices about women, and these were mainly by strong religious beliefs of the age. Woolf wanted to break away from these values and defended the basic rights of women. She was almost concentrated on the intellectual life of women. Woolf's essay examines the educational, social and financial disadvantages women have faced throughout the history. When Woolf want to know about the position of women who live in the age of Elizabethan-period she found that Elizabethan women were subservient to men; they were dependent on the male relatives to support them. They couldn't even be heirs to their father's title. All titles and property would have passed from father to son or brother depending on the circumstances. In Patriarchal society women were powerless by not allowing them to use her husband's and father's property. A woman can't spend a single penny on her own will; she can't even use her own money without her husband's or father's consent. A woman does in her whole life: she begets children, looks after them and the house, pleases her husband. She is compelled to sacrifice her interests for the wellbeing of her male relatives. She is considered as a voiceless and identity less creature. She used to be treated as the property of her father who chose husband for her and after marriage her husband became her new controller. So, a woman had to depend on her father and husband for everything. Therefore, Woolf says "she is completely insignificant. She is all but absent from history.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni begins "The palace illusions" with the question of the origin Draupadi who was a "gift beyond what was asked for for she will change the course of history. Even listening to this prophecy, she was treated as girl who was never desired first place. Right after Draupadi and her brother were born her father welcomed only her brother with wide open arms. This act of choosing a male child over a female child depicts how a girl child made to feel unwanted. Hence, the society didn't create any better position for woman. We can witness Draupadi's thrust to have her own identity when her father named her Draupadi which merely means the Princess of Drupad kingdom. But her brother named as "Dhrishtadyumna" means destroyer of enemies where he has his own identity. Drupad expected that his son would take revenge for him. Even though vengeance his son brings will break his life in two. Priests acclaimed that Draupadi will change the course of history, but he didn't even care for Draupadi. Here we can witness

how fathers or society view women as nothing but daughter to a great man and considers that only men in their family can uphold their pride and prestige in the society.

Like Woolf, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives a new definition of woman who has her own identity and has nothing to do with the gender assigned to her at the time of their birth. If a woman wanted to achieve something professional in her life she can do like men. She should be acknowledged, recognized and treated like men.

Education for women: Education liberates us, opens us and shows new paths to explore. Therefore, when it liberates us then why women are not allowed to educate. This question of the modern woman is the central argument of both Virginia Woolf and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In Woolf's times women were not given freedom of intellectual equality because education was not considered necessary thing for women. Women need to be inside the four walls and do the household work. It is male dominated society, so they didn't get education like men.

"Only the gold and silver flowed now, not from the coffers of the king but the purses of men who had made, say a fortune from industry and returned in their wills a bounteous share of it to endow more chairs, lectureships and fellowships in the university where they had learnt their craft".

This is quote from Woolf's essay "A Room of one's own". Here she is making a point about universities and the funding that they received from men that had gone to school there. Woolf's essay takes place during early 1900's when most women did not attend a university. There was great inequality of those who attended school because men had control over all the money. Women can also create colleges to take an interest in the education of their daughters and sisters. However, women are unable to do so because they typically lack the necessary independent means. Here, Seton says about her mother that,

"Whatever she earns it is not a matter, but she is so greatly leave it to her husband".

She thinks of her mother and says that nothing is there is to leave for us. Woolf compare two imaginary meals at the women's and men's college and tells that difference between the educational opportunities that have existed for men and women. Formal education is almost always the possession of women but for the most of history women were excluded from most formal education.

In the same way Chitra's Draupadi doesn't accept the argument that boy's education is different from girl's education. When Dhri's tutor told her the women's code of conduct that is "A kshatriya woman's highest purpose in life is to support the warrior in her life: her brother, father, husband and sons. Then she argues that who decided that woman's highest purpose was to support men? Draupadi's hunger for knowledge is seen from her childhood. Her relationship with her brother ad Krishna gave her insight in to the world concealed for women. However, Draupadi, with her own curiosity for learning, made herself fluent in different shastras. Her father, seeing her interest in the so_ called masculine things, terminated her lessons and declared that she needs to focus on more feminine things. Her father told her that "A girl being taught what a boy was supposed learn? such a thing had never been heard in the royal family of Panchal. Even Dhai maa complained that these lessons were making her hardheaded and argumentative too manlike in her speech. Draupadi was told by Dhai maa how to be behave, talk and dress up like a girl. In education she has given lessons on feminine things like sewing, paintings, music and drawing. Her brother given education in governance, war and politics. The culture and institutions are designed in a way that women do not have access to the best of knowledge.

Woolf argues that same point in "A Room of one's own" by creating fictional character Judith Shakespeare who possessed her brother's genius but not his educational opportunities. She isn't sent to school or encouraged to read at home. Like Draupadi she isn't allowed to experience the world and there is no outlet for her talent to train. Woolf argues that women of genius have always existed but unlike men women don't have opportunities to develop their talent. When Dhri tells that all girls are cursed with short memory and impulsive nature Draupadi argues like Woolf that Women are clever, genius and creative as men and they aren't a path to ruin and have short memory or impulsive nature. When Yudhistir loses her in the game of dice, she is thankful that she is not "an unlettered girl or ignorant of the law. She argues that "I'm a queen. Daughter of Drupad; sister of Dhrishtadyumna, mistress of the greatest palace on the earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins or summoned to court like a dancing girl". Then she tries to remember that what she read long ago in a book and quotes from "Nyaya shastra" that is "If a perchance a man lost himself, he no longer had jurisdiction over his wife" and she thought that elders would know the rule she referred, and they would out an end to Duryodhana's effrontery.

Chitra and Woolf promote the freedom mind of women and argues that women are not merely an object for pleasure but have their own identity and play multiple roles and are able to en- shoulder various responsibilities at one time.

Marriage: Marriage is a system where women are systematically suppressed. It is used as a weapon to silence women by giving them secondary status. In the essay "A Room of one's own" Woolf talks about oppressive nature of marriage and Families obligation by creating a fictional character called "Judith Shakespeare" who was gifted with intelligence. She had the quickest fancy, a gift of her brothers for the tune of words. Like him she had a taste for theatre and wanted to act. But her father wants her to be betrothed to the son of neighboring wool stapler. She cried out that marriage was hateful to her and for that she was severely beaten by her father. He begged her not to shame him in the matter of her marriage. At night she escaped from the house to London to become successful like her brother. Here, Woolf argues that.... "A woman was liable, as she was in the 15th century to be beaten and flung about the room if she didn't marry the man of her parent's choice".

In the same way in Chitra's novel "The palace illusions" she reveals the oppressive and dictatorship of king Drupad when it comes to Draupadi's Swayam Wara. Draupadi felt happy for a second when she thought she could make her own choice in choosing her husband in Swayam Wara. But her happiness shatters when she comes to know that her marriage is pre-planned by her father. Also, she imagines that if some king wins me, I have to go with him as mute and compliant as the purse of a gold winner carries away at the end of a wrestling match without complaint.

In both cases women portrayed as merely as object not having their own identity nor freedom to make their own decisions. Draupadi and Judith Shakespeare both are like modern woman who aspires to find freedom, love, and sense of identity through their marriage. Rather than accepting or surrendering to the man for his pleasures they try to make their own independent identity in the heartless society.

Room (space) for women: From the beginning of the essay, Woolf asserts that “a woman must have room of her if she is to write fiction”. This sentence reflects that women at that time didn’t have a space of their own or privacy or even money to control their own lives. This is the reason women always kept down by the conventions and patriarchal rules of the society. The room is a symbol of freedom and investment in intellect. It symbolizes space away from the obligation of wife and motherhood placed upon women in the society. Only by claiming this space can women achieve freedom. Therefore, she connects the sense of belongingness to the space and identity of women.

This idea resonates in “The palace illusions” when Draupadi couldn’t forget how her father hesitated to pick her up over his brother. She turned this resentment that couldn’t express towards her father onto his palace. She hated the palace with the thick grey slab walls, narrow windows, dimly lit corridors, uneven floors that had neither trees nor flowers. Her father removed everything from the palace which he didn’t find useful. Draupadi dreams of having her own palace with orchards, birds and butterflies to have among jasmines. Draupadi often imagines her own palace which materializes the question of space which women belong to. The palace which renders to the title of the novel “The palace illusions” is an allegory of her life as well as the lives of countless women who have illusions. It represents women’s position, the room of one’s own according to Woolf; a female space that constantly recreated so that it can’t be destroyed in the fight against repressive masculinity.

From the beginning of her childhood Chitra’s Draupadi has been rebellious by nature. She never liked her father’s too much control and annoyed for having no privacy. Because of this disparity in gender, she always dreamt of her own palace one day. And when she got the palace as her own space after her marriage, she gives her opinion on the architecture and interior design of the palace. This new palace or space gave her identity where she could control her life. This new space of her own gave her strength and was reflected in her actions.

In “A Room of one’s own” Woolf talks about the importance of women having room of her own. Similarly, Chitra in “The palace of illusions” talks about a place of equality for women. When Draupadi discovers that Drupad’s disrespect for her birth is only due to her being a female, her aspirations to possess a special palace grows. Throughout her life Draupadi has struggled to maintain her position of authority as a woman, whether as a wife of the great king Drupad. Every woman experienced this in her life when the patriarchal society refuses to treat her equally from the moment of her birth, which becomes the main reason for wanting her own space and their quest for identity and recognition. At certain point of time when life becomes meaningless women get an urge to find space for themselves to grow as one’s own.

Sexual victimization: Unlike Judith Shakespeare in A Room of one’s own who shared the genius of her brother William Shakespeare had to commit suicide when she was sexually harassed in the hands of Nick Greene, the actor-manager who took pity on her. Draupadi like a new woman doesn’t surrender to the odds of life when Keechak tries to humiliate, abuse and harass her. Instead, she becomes more thoughtful on her role as a strong woman by plotting with Bheema. She is able to cause the death of Keechak with the help of her husbands.

When Yudhistir lost her in the game of dice she didn’t comply with everything she told and questions Yudhistir that “when you lost me, of whom were you master? did you first lose yourself or me”? When Duryodhana and Dushasana sexually harassed her in king’s court she doesn’t lose her hope rather she takes a vow to never tie her hair until and unless she dips her hair in the blood of those opponents. It was a challenge for the male dominated society where a female was supposed to be a weak character rather, she becomes the cause for Kurukshetra battle.

Conclusion: Virginia Woolf in “A Room of one’s own” and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in “The palace illusions” respectively raise their voices for women’s education, space, equality. Like Woolf’s Mary of Room of one’s own, Draupadi of the “The palace of illusions” unlike the other woman of her times, rebels against the rules and customs of patriarchal society. In this way, Draupadi portrayed as a forerunner of modern woman who advocates the freedom of mind.

Both Woolf and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni attempts to show the way to see the world through the eyes of women because form many past years of the world has been looked at through men’s eyes only. Throughout history patriarchy has been defining religion, politics, economy, law only through men’s perspective. Chitra connected a contemporary 21st century women to her Draupadi turning her into new woman.

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