

# RECONNOITRING THE MULTIFARIOUSNESS OF WOMENFOLK'S EVOLUTION FROM GREEN TO RIPENESS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

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*Abstract-* This paper reserves the criteria of enabling the fallible women with whims and fancy rise towards defining their success and happiness via cracking their shells of desire, limitations, and ignorance. Even in the prevailing scenario of voicing the unvoiced dimensions, the expected results are still limping due to the cavalier deportment of human beings. In such cases, most of the women play the master role; their ignorance about their needs, the desire of being cherished and protected between the comfort zone, and their readiness in accepting and embracing the limitations. Their imperceptibility becomes the essence of their function. Among the many modes of tracing the inadequateness, the good writer never fails to point out the importance of equipping an individual as well their soul searching before placing the situations and others as excuses or hindrance. By posing self-actualization as the utmost acquisition of every human being to mark their uniqueness, this paper untangles the multifariousness of the blemished protagonists' empiricism in due accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory in the select novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indo-American author and the winner of American Book Award.

**Keywords:** hierarchy of needs, shortcomings, introspection, aspiration, opportuneness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every human being is bounded by a set of doctrines in the beginning but they have been recited with many modifications lately as well added with immense subdivisions based on wealth, gender, community, and power. Literature is one of the schemas of inculcation; recording those events and evolutions, rehabilitating the atmosphere, express and expose the defects, and to reform. One of the famous women writers Mary Wollstonecraft rightly pointed out in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) as, "I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves" (78). Similarly, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni molds her protagonists to hold and use their power to claim their rights in many of her novels. Among her various works of art, this paper culminates two of her novels which are followed as, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *Oleander Girl* (2013) to enunciate the above-mentioned idea of women's power. The protagonists of those novels are Draupadi and Korobi. For them the meaning of success, happiness, and purpose differ; yet they enable their strength and weakness to penetrate their hardships and to achieve uniqueness.

## 2. NEED OF THE RESEARCH

This research furnishes the glimpses of one of those evolutions in the women sector and its remarkable participation in bringing development

to the race of humans. Though there are many doors for women, knowing themselves will alone help them to knock the right door of prosperity. But that understanding demands the courage of doing experiments and willpower to regulate their behavior throughout the process. Thus the author speaks about enervation as well as the remedies to convalesce the mind and body. Making choices should not fall under the aspect of declaring decrees of one particular gender or group. The skill of decision making should be encouraged among women through imbibing the positive liberty within them. It will provide control over their lives as well as cognize their fundamental aim of life.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To break the monotony of women's life, literature provides a lot of freedom to women writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir and so many. Each of their purposes may be varied in outlining the priorities, still, every single contribution possesses its specialty in being the predecessor of restructuring women's lifestyle. In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft suggests education as the only way to bring equality between men and women. She has strongly believed that if both sexes embrace the change together, it will bring harmony in society. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of one's Own* (1929) surpasses the importance of how about economic independence and having a purpose will groom women along with society.

Elaine Showalter, the American critic and the representative of gynocriticism initiates the three major phases of women's writing in her book *A Literature of Their Own* (1997). The notion of gynocritics does fall neither for protesting nor for eradicating the differences between the male and female writings. Yet it aims at bringing out the

specialty of female reality. Her seminal analyses the fact that the maximum themes of women's writing are in a limited range as prescribed by the opinions of male literary concepts. Elaine Showalter deeply advocates the works of women writers should have the voice of their own. According to her three doctrines of subcultures include black, Jewish, and Anglo-Indian, the writings of women in those backgrounds should evolve from adherence to searching one's identity.

The first phase is called 'feminine' (1840-1880). This phase elaborates on the mode of imitating the past assimilated ideas and ends with explaining the role of women within their family. The second phase is called the "feminist" (1880-1890). This phase explains women's changing attitudes towards their participation and rights in society. Their work takes the form of protestation as well as fierce demand for equal authority and freedom. The third phase is called as "female" (20<sup>th</sup> Century). It stresses acknowledging the needs and unique identity of every individual woman which eventually encourages self-discovery. The concept of dependency is overhauled as interdependence. The above-mentioned novels have strongly conveyed the same practicability.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, feminism takes another form called "new feminism" (1920). It recommends both men and women not to place the difference as a calibration but learn to accept those differences as the gift. In 2006, Linda Hirschman, an American lawyer coined the term called "choice feminism" which regards that women are mentally and physically capable of taking their own choices like fixing their wage and their relationship. Though it has received enormous feedbacks by stating its pros and cons as many other theories do, it becomes a remarkable perception in the recent tendency. It provokes the

thread between duty and desire. These references present the diachronic social functioning of the rational image of women.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

To support the taken objective, the novels have been related and discussed with the theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs which is proposed by Abraham Maslow in his research paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943). He divides the needs of humans into five levels which follows a hierarchy. Every human being is moved to the next level after accomplishing their needs. His theory of needs includes physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and the final phase is self-actualization need.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *The Palace of Illusions* explains how the protagonist, Draupadi has been exploited morally and physically by her people. Though it is a reimagining of the famous Indian epic, *The Mahabharat*, the author recasts it from the feminine perspective. Draupadi explains her struggles to protect her identity and the pain of being exploited by society and its gender issues. This novel puts a strong emphasis on the wilful woman Draupadi and her unpleasant experiences of life. The author advocates woman's rights on the ground of equality as an important and universal theme of this novel and it helps to understand female folk and to study the female psyche by discovering her inner story from a truer perspective. Unlike the concept of Maslow, Draupadi has got the awareness and desire to obtain the final set of needs like achieving the full potentials by changing the history due to the prophecy which is said during her birth. "Behold, we give you this girl, a gift beyond what you asked for. Take good care of her, for she will change the course of history" (Divakaruni 5). But later, the author skilfully shows how Draupadi longs for the

other needs like relationships, self-esteem, and identity apart from being heroic.

Unfortunately, Draupadi can enjoy neither the sophistication of being a divine birth nor the rights of being born as a princess of the kingdom Panchaal. She is dismayed after discovering the reason for their rejection is gender. They don't foresee women's role more than a wife and a supporter, especially a woman like Draupadi who was born of a boon as her brother Dhri did. Draupadi is also affected by shadeism, is a form of prejudice in which people are treated differently based on the social meanings attached to skin color. Draupadi feels uneasy to mingle with society due to her dark skin. She says, "In a society that looked down in patrician nose on anything except milk-and-almond hues, this was considered most unfortunate, especially for a girl" (Divakaruni 8).

Though Draupadi's marriage life has started with an unexpected fate of having five husbands, she is still managed to stand up by dreaming her part in changing the history. But that dream is shattered as well her vigor of developing her potentials on the day of her disrobing. And it is replaced with anger and retaliation. While brooding over her husbands' silence, she thinks, "The choice they made in the moment of my need changed something in our relationship. I no longer depended on them so completely in the future. And when I took care to guard myself from hurt, it was as much from them as from our enemies" (Divakaruni 195). Due to the tricky dice game, Draupadi along with her five husbands has exiled to the forest and lived there for thirteen years and an added year of disguise. Like earlier, she is managed to bear the pain and humiliation, but her mind and soul are nurtured to take revenge on the race of Kauravas.

In the second novel *Oleander Girl*, Korobi, seventeen years old is the apple of her

grand-parents eye. Her grand-parents Bimal Prasad Roy, a retired barrister of Calcutta, and Sarojini give everything to make Korobi happy. They bring her up according to their family tradition. As she doesn't know about her parents, who died before she opens her eyes, she has badly wanted to replicate her mother. That is how she gets interested in Rajat, a good man from the well-reputed Mr& Mrs. Bose family who holds different businesses in and around the country. She falls in love with Rajat when she senses the meaning of her mother's love letter to her father. "And I—I feel complete in his arms, Mother, just like you'd written in your letter. Why, I love him so much, I could die for him" (Divakaruni, 4). With the consent and blessings of the family members, Korobi and Rajat's engagement takes place. Korobi feels complete and blissful about her life until her grandfather dies in a heart attack on the evening of their engagement.

Before Korobi gets out of the shock, Sarojini has revealed the secrets of her grandfather who hid all the details of Korobi's father. Sarojini has shared the painful past as she realizes that is a right of Korobi. Korobi's mother Anu Roy had fallen in love with a foreigner named Rob against the wish and demand of her father while doing her studies in America. So he decided to cut off her relationship with the family. Despite her father's disapproval and anger, Anu visited them when she was bearing Korobi. Having seen his daughter's face, Bimal's anger had melted away and decided not to miss her for the second time. After some months, Anu expressed her wish on returning to America which again created a cold war between the father and the daughter. At the end of their heated argument, the exhausted Anu got slipped in the steps and gave premature birth to Korobi and died.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Draupadi and Korobi are deeply affected by the betrayal of their beloved ones. Both of them have obtained the safety needs alone even that lasted for a while. They have a deep wound about finding their emptiness in their biological needs. When it comes to social and self-esteem needs of finding love and feeling the accomplishments, Draupadi is left with humiliations and disappointments. Their desperateness makes them to lose their control and to take fierce decisions. For the first time, they start to be self-centered. Apart from playing the role of a daughter, lover, wife, and queen, they need their hard-earned success and identity to fill the emptiness in their heart. As a rookie of new adventure and purpose, both of them have screwed up and became the victims of situations. For instance, in Indraprastha, Draupadi has yielded the wrath of Duryodhan for laughing at him when he misapprehends the magical pond as ground and slips into it. Similarly, in America, Korobi is almost despoiled in the search of her father when she has gone to find a man's identity. They are stubborn as well as determined.

Draupadi's anger has brought the war at Kurukshetra. But the sight of bloodshed and pain starts to torment her gradually. "I lay on the hill under the great wheeling stars. I had no energy left for raging, I to whom rage had come so easily all my life...I wept on remorse for the part I'd played in pushing the Pandavas into war, for now I'd begun to realize its full horror" (Divakaruni 290). She understands the deviation in her purpose and starts to manage it by eradicating her anger, jealousy, guilt, and revengeful thoughts. Soon she is enlightened by the idea of cleansing the human race and reforming it with new hope and values. She slowly understands her role as an instrument in

the purification and the remarkable changes that she has brought on the history too. Consequently, her self-actualization takes place when she decides to take care of her citizens despite her loss and pain.

Now Hastinapur city is covered with widows and children. Draupadi readily encounters the consequences of her choice. "I admitted my guilt about the part I'd played in bringing this war about and asked for their forgiveness. When I spoke of the children, my voice broke and I had to pause. I told them that unlike me...they had a responsibility toward the sons and daughters they had left at home" (Divakaruni 313). She becomes a righteous queen to the people and finds the prospective side of her identity. She obtains the self-actualization need where one gets their best version.

For Korobi, her priorities change suddenly. She proposes to break the engagement with Rajat to find her father in America. She becomes strong-headed, so no one including Sarojini, Rajat, and his mother has succeeded in persuading her. She wants to do her duty to her mother and seek the past life of her mother. Thus, boldly she boards to America with the support of Rajat and his family. As soon as, Korobi is stepped out of her comfort zone, she gets exposed to all kinds of chaos and sufferings. The need of knowing her origin becomes her sole purpose. "But I can't. It would be cowardly, for the sake of security, to relinquish this chance to find and to know the man my mother loved so deeply that she couldn't give him up though it tore her heart in two" (Divakaruni 73). She learns to adapt and comprehend to the new land.

During the search, she has been forced physically and prejudiced severely as a beguiler.

Those experiences deteriorate her moral power, but still, Korobi manages to hold on there and finally finds out her father Rob Lacey, an African-American. Her success in the pursuit brings out the bitter secrets too. Rob Lacey has revealed to Korobi that her parents never got married legally which probably intends Korobi's illegitimacy. "I can't come to terms with this new, shameful me. I feel a great, dizzying anger towards my parents, that they should have marked me like this" (Divakaruni 245). The newly founded identity doesn't bring her happiness but wrapped her with completeness and satisfaction.

Korobi's experiences help her to see the goodness in the bitter things. She gets into the needs of self-actualization by renaming her identity and fulfilling her mother's desire. Her potentials make her a woman of uniqueness. Subsequently, Draupadi doesn't stop just becoming a queen. As soon as she acquires the remedy and strengthens her moral power, she has started the journey to Mahaprasthan with her husband's even though it is not recommended to women. Similarly, Korobi's love life takes a turn due to her pursuit of searching for her father. When Rajat and his mother hesitate to accept her confessions about her true identity, she has walked away after giving back her engagement ring. Soon, she overcomes her depression, loss, and pain and has started to concentrate on her educational carrier from where she left. Her determination about not to act as a charity case works out and gets her back with Rajat.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Thus the research paper finely engrafts the journey of the protagonists towards their hard-earned identity and freedom. They have learned to

master their emotions and stipulate their needs as well. Though their path to prove themselves may differ or easily influential, yet they become successful in the main agenda of establishing themselves as winners of their struggles. They have learned the art of living and knowing oneself. The scope of the paper is letting the woman to acknowledge their imperfections and

to fathom their perfections instead of aggrieving and struggling to perfect themselves. They don't want to be dolls which possess perfection in physique as well in accepting the decrees. They claim the idea of functioning one among the human race which exists on knowledge, freedom, and choice.

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