

Cultural Displacement and Self-Discovery in The Place of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

***Dr. Vinod Kumar**

Abstract

The movement or migration of a group of people who are separated from their established or ancestral homeland but share a shared national and ethnic identity is known as diaspora. The term "diaspora" originally referred to the Jewish people's exile and those who lived outside of ancient or contemporary Israel. In reference to Irish famine refugees, the word "diaspora" was first used in the English language in 1876. In recent years, the Indian diaspora has emerged from the shadows. Despite being a relatively recent development in postcolonial literature, diaspora continues to be a popular subject for literary investigations. Numerous individuals leave India for various foreign countries, lured by the prospect of a fresh start. A few of them have established themselves in the writing community. Both their sense of devotion to their homeland and their sense of alienation and rootlessness in their new country are reflected in these immigrant writers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a writer, has a strong connection to her native India and its rich cultural legacy, which she has frequently referenced in her writing. She writes in a variety of genres under her primary focus of creative writing, including magic realism. From *The Mistress of Spices* to *The Palace of Illusions*, she has used magic realism to outline how myths function in Indian society. The characters' diasporic viewpoints and their journey to their objective are the main topics of this research study.

Keywords: diaspora, migration, identity, exile, cultural displacement, home, alienation, self-discovery, assimilation, cultural legacy

Introduction

The term "diaspora" refers to the historical phenomenon of a community moving collectively from one place to another. People used to move from one geographical area to another in the pre-civilized era. They may have migrated for a variety of causes, but the most common ones include natural calamities and deadly diseases. A natural tragedy, such as a war, or an external force may have caused these previous beings to migrate in order to possess that valuable piece of land. Following the arrival of numerous civilizations, the migratory process accelerated and became considerably simpler. Some left their home to seek employment, while others did so in order to overrun and subjugate the indigenous population. One instance of this type of exile is the Jewish migration. This word is equally appropriate to events from the past, even though it gained popularity much later and can be considered a twentieth-century phenomena with the cross-country movement. We may readily locate examples of diasporic events if we look at the histories of different cultures and nations. There are

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about twenty-five languages spoken in our nation, but only Hindi and English are still spoken and understood. Despite having 29 states, we only have one government. Despite our cultural differences, we nevertheless enthusiastically and collaboratively celebrate every festival. Despite the wide variety of religions in our nation, it remains secular and religiously tolerant. In the current era, people move around in order to fulfil their dreams and reach their goals. Economic needs are present now. Many people travel to other nations in an attempt to improve their financial circumstances. They deal with a lot of issues in these situations because they leave their family, their culture, their identity, and everything else behind in their home nations. They are carrying bags and a cultural bag. When they arrive at that completely new place, they miss the atmosphere, but they also make an effort to fit in by attending to their requirements. In the process of assimilation, the immigrant must eliminate a part of his previous self and develop a new one. The term "Diaspora" will be used to examine all of the issues that these individuals encounter. However, one statement might capture all the complexities associated with this term: quest for identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Diaspora Literature

In their works, authors from the Indian Diaspora have discussed a variety of issues they have encountered. The author Chitra Divakaruni is Indian-American. She moved to America after being born in India and became a professor of creative writing there. Though she has dabbled with a number of genres, including fantasy and magic realism, she primarily works with a diasporic tone. The alien culture is seen with curiosity, strangeness, and apprehension in all of her novels. Alternatively, she examines her own nation and culture in order to explore, delve into, decipher, and reveal some of its unexplored or obscure areas of thought. Her most well-known pieces are *The Vine of Desire* (2003), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), and *The Palace of Illusions* (2009). Although she deals with magic realism in the majority of her books, *The Mistress of Spices* is the only one that fully fits into this genre.

The Palace of Illusions: Rewriting the Mahabharata

She attempted to address a new genre in *The Palace of Illusions* by recreating the epic Mahabharata solely from Panchaali's point of view. She has referred to it as "PANCHAALI'S MAHABHARAT." She has made only Draupadi speak in this novel, while other characters speak only casually. She has done much research to write this epic from an altogether new perspective of a female. The main objective of this paper would be to record and analyse this novel from a diasporic perspective.

Draupadi's Exile: A Symbol of Displacement

In *The Palace of Illusions*, we can find this pattern of Diaspora easily. In this novel, Draupadi's birth from fire is the example of her unusual or rather we can call it an enforced exile from heaven to earth. She, before her birth, resided in Devalok with her brother, but on the call of King Drupad, they were forced to come. But after entering the earth, she was always treated as an unwanted child. Her father, Drupad, performed a yagna to have a son who may avenge the insult done to him by Drona. He got a son with a daughter from the sacred fire but remained an enforced child with a special responsibility because she was professed as being able to "change the course of history" (Divakaruni 5). Her nurse

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tells her the story of her birth from fire many times on her insistence, "...Dhai Ma puffed out her cheeks at my tendency to drama, calling me the Girl Who Wasn't Invited" (Divakaruni 1). Draupadi, like an immigrant who has left her home at first, got rejected by her new home and its members. Though she doesn't have the nostalgic feelings regarding her lost homeland, she is very astonishingly fascinated by her new home. Her displacement from heaven and rehabilitation in King Drupad's palace, both events, have put some influence on her attitudes towards her life. Now she is a grown-up girl, but during her childhood, she tried hard to assimilate with the ways of living in the palace. She tries to copy queens who look elegant to her, especially Queen Sulochana. When she meets other princesses, she feels like a stranger and becomes uncomfortable. "If someone addressed me—a guest or a newcomer, usually, who didn't know who I was—I tended to blush and stammer and (yes, even at this age) trip over the edge of my sari" (Divakaruni 9).

Displacement and Alienation: The Struggle for Belonging

She found herself attached only to her brother and to Krishna. She tried to assimilate with this new society by relating her own qualities with others. She relates her brother with herself on the basis that both of them were born from fire and had a mutual affection for each other. But she has a special friendship with Krishna too due to their similarity of complexion. Where Draupadi felt a tinge of shamefulness due to her dark complexion, for Krishna, his dark complexion works as a magnet. Slowly, she starts becoming the centre of attraction due to her beauty. Now, her charm and the prophecy started making her an alien in the world of normal or, we can say, ordinary human beings. She feels:

But I started to notice things. Even my maidservants, who had served me for years, remained at a distance until called upon. When I asked them personal questions, like how their families were doing or when they were getting married, they became unable to speak and quickly left my company. When he came to see me, even my father was uncomfortable and hardly ever looked me in the eyes. I started to question if my attractiveness was a more flattering factor than Dhri's tutor's anxiety at my intrusions. (Divakaruni 32)

While her siarindhri was doing her hair one day, another maid talked about a sage who predicts the future. She has an interest in testing the prophecies given by the priests at the time of her birth. In some way, she persuaded Dhai Ma after pleading with her. She wishes to delve into the most sinister facets of her future. She regrets the impending harm she will bring and is shunned as the spirits reveal her future. The thought of her sons and her brother Dhri being destroyed and killed makes her fearful. She regrets these spirits' predictions that she would acquire one of the magnificent palaces but would soon have to give it up. Because she doesn't want to be the reason for such widespread human destruction, she wishes to alter her fate. She was given a new name, Panchaali, by the guru, who advised her to use this name going forward. Although she initially feels anxious and perplexed by the thought of having five spouses and a magical palace, she eventually reflects on the latter most of the time. She dreams of her new house and thinks about it constantly: "I also thought of the palace the spirits had promised me." They had dubbed it most amazing. I questioned how I would ever have

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a palace like that (Divakaruni 42). Since her nurse told her that every girl must leave her father's home and go to her husband's, she has begun to fantasize about her future kingdom. In her father's palace, she discovers a number of unsatisfactory items. She ponders:

When I closed my eyes, I saw a riot of colour and sound, butterflies fluttering among jasmines, birds chirping in mango and custard apple orchards, and in the middle of it all... Would it be as sophisticated as crystal? As solidly precious as a goblet adorned with jewels? Like gold filigree, delicate and complex? All I knew was that it would reflect my innermost self. I would at last be at home there. (Divakaruni 7)

The Palace of Illusions: A Dream of Belonging

Her true home would be her own palace. She became intrigued upon learning that a swayamvar will be held in her honour, during which she would have the opportunity to select her spouse. She was ecstatic at the prospect of falling in love with any of the great warriors and choosing to marry him. When she was asked to pick Arjun from the team of warriors to be her husband, however, all of her hopes and fantasies were dashed. "My mouth filled with ashes," she says now. How stupid I had been to hope for love when all I was a worm hanging from a fishing pole (Divakaruni 57). Because her marriage ceremony would be a means of bolstering her father's political position, she feels betrayed. The only way Drupad could defeat Drona would be if she married Arjun. Based on their peculiar births, she has discovered certain commonalities between herself and Karna. She finds him more fascinating than anyone else, including Arjun. She ached for him, but she abused Karna in front of the monarchs because she was enchanted by Krishna's words. She later felt guilt for what she had done. She began her journey with Arjuna by putting the garland around his neck. "An insidious voice inside me said, Karna would never have let you suffer like this," she realizes while traveling to his jungle house (Divakaruni 99). Therefore, it makes no difference if she wanted her second relocation to happen or not. And this one caused her issues to multiply significantly.

Her mother-in-law, she has been unable to find love for herself in Arjuna alone because of Kunti. She upset everything when she told her son that they should divide her between the brothers. "A woman like her would never tolerate anyone who might lure her sons away," she thinks of Kunti (Divakaruni 108). She has, in a sense, prevented her from splitting up her sons. One by one, her men marry her and share her in a way that makes it impossible to doubt her chastity. She now constantly yearned for her ideal palace. "I often dreamed of my own palace, which I would construct in the future," she muses (Divakaruni 113). She reflects, "I couldn't quite believe what a transformation my life had undergone—or that I had helped to bring about this new destiny we were living," after marrying and feeling that her life had completely transformed with her five marriages (Divakaruni 139). She had previously believed that she would be married and lead a happy life, but as time went on and she found no fulfilment in her marriages, all of her aspirations were dashed. Because the Pandavas didn't share their suffering with her or their mother before her, she continued to be an outsider even after marrying five men. She wondered, "Did the massacre at Khandav Forest torment him?" because of their peculiar behaviour. Never would I know. Even though they must have occasionally clashed, my

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husbands never let anyone know about their disagreements. (And I remained an outsider in this situation.) They had received good training from Kunti (Divakaruni 143). Her interest in husbands thus shifted to three other areas. Karna, Krishna, and her imagined mansion are the first. She rejects Krishna's advice not to associate herself with the palace. "After all," he muses, "don't be so devoted to what is. Nothing more than asura sleight of hand, stone, and metal. Everything in this world changes and eventually dies, some in a matter of years, some all at once. By all means, enjoy the Palace of Illusions. However, you expose yourself to sadness if you identify with it so strongly (Divakaruni 149). She yearns for Karna and his appearance on her in addition to her Palace of Illusions. However, he only shows her the respect she deserves.

Because of her conceit, she falls into a huge trap. When Duryodhana falls in the illusory pond, which appears to him to be a carpet, she makes fun of him. She made fun of him by referring to him as "Blind's son is blind" and laughed at this incident. This adamant statement fuels Duryodhan's desire for vengeance. This incident set the stage for all of the subsequent mishaps with Draupadi. Unaware of the events that would influence her future, she travelled to Inderprastha with her husbands and mother-in-law. Because her husband defeated them and their wife as slaves, she is stripped in front of the entire group. They were compelled to live in exile in the wilderness following her disgrace. For the duration of her exile, she kept a journal of all the humiliations she experienced. She never forgot that shame while she was in exile, and she made sure her husbands did too. She constantly sparked thoughts of retaliation in them by reminding the Pandavas of their failures and the suffering I endured during Duryodhan's sabha every day as I served them meals. To keep the Kauravas' taunts fresh in their thoughts, I recited them every night. I tossed and turned on my bed when we blew out our lamps, remembering Karna's face as the rushes became as rigid as sticks. I imagined our retaliation every morning when I woke up, sweating from restlessness: a battlefield engulfed in flames, the air soiled with vultures, the mutilated carcasses of the Kauravas and their allies—the way I would change the course of history. (Divakaruni, 199).

The Cost of Retaliation: A Hollow Victory

She ultimately got the retribution she had long desired during the Battle of Kurukshetra, which resulted in a great deal of bloodshed. She would undoubtedly be held accountable, but only this retaliation could make her feel good. However, the feelings of satisfaction began to fade following Karna's passing. "Part was relieved that my husband had won, that he was safe," she began to realize, a feeling she had given up. Although that didn't satisfy me, Part recognized that we were now extremely near to getting the retribution I'd sought (Divakaruni 297). She had not been as engaged in the fight after his death as she had been before this one. She now awaits the moment when it will end. She finally held herself accountable for the devastation her wrath created after the deaths of her brother and all of her boys. Even after winning a fight, Pandavas still feels deceived. Since only Krishna and Draupadi are left in their household to celebrate their victory, they feel as though everything has been stolen and consumed. No one can occupy the place they have created, even though their successor Parikshit will continue to wear their names. Even though they had won the battle, they still felt like losers. Finally, Panchaali expressed sadness for her death, saying, "I think

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about my life." What was it I was happy about? Why did I feel at peace? ... Over the years, I had experienced both joy and sadness when riding. If I were to tell the truth, I doubt that any of the men or women I had known had ever made me feel that way. In the end, nothing except sadness had come from my palace, which had given me odd and lovely illusions, and which I had somehow loved more than any of my spouses. (Divakaruni 352)

Final Realization: Love and Fulfillment Beyond Materialism

She has always yearned for permanent love in her relationships and even in financial possessions, but she has never been able to find it. She always associated being at home with being really in love and affectionate with someone, which she was never able to achieve. She was mistaken in her belief that possessing the passions, things, or companions of one's choosing might lead to fulfilment. Even her passions for Karna eventually subsided, and she began to perceive them as ephemeral and fleeting. However, she learned on her deathbed that her love for Krishna was and still is eternal. She connected deeply with him and experienced a kind of relaxation when he touched her. Through her imagination, she recognizes that despite my most unloved behaviour, he still loved me. Additionally, his love was completely distinct from all the others in my life. It didn't require me to act a certain way as they did. If I didn't cooperate, it didn't turn into annoyance, rage, or even hatred. I was healed by it. Krishna's love was a balm, moonlight over a dry landscape, if my feelings for Karna were a flaming fire. How oblivious I had been to see it for the priceless present it was! (Divakaruni 356).

The Search for Belonging and True Home

She repeatedly asks whether he is divine and doubts his existence. She has always considered herself to be a pretty ordinary person who lacks any divinity, so how can she be in love with a divine personality if he is? She feels like a divine entity after having lived her earthly body, and as a result, she is finally in love with Krishna. She also discovers that she is a true Panchaali and that she has found her true love, Karna, in him. Krishna touches my hand, she replies. These pinpricks of light that are only now coming together to form fingers and palms, if you can call them that. Something snaps when he touches it, and a chain attached to the woman-shape crumples on the snow. I have always been effervescent, expansive, and uncontainable, but I was unaware of it! Name, gender, and the ego's shackling patterns are not who I am. I'm actually Panchaali for the first time, though. I grab Karna with my other hand—his clasp is really sturdy! The only palace I've ever needed is waiting above us. Its core is everywhere, its floor is the sky, and its walls are space. We rise, and the shapes gather about us in welcome, forming, fading, and re-forming like summer evening fireflies. (Divakaruni 360)

Draupadi's Journey to Inner Peace

She so eventually finds her home with Krishna in the form of Karna and a palace composed of infinite and eternal things, much like a person traveling in quest of his house. Diaspora, as William Safran has coined three fundamental words to define the entire process, is a comparable blending of processes. According to him, there are three primary steps that a person who can be considered to be in exile from his country goes through: being displaced, becoming homeless, and then returning to his

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country. Dislocation and distance have given Divakaruni a fresh perspective on the core of the culture she left behind, and the epic is repeated with a fresh perspective, extending the cultural and national boundaries through memory.

As she grapples with life's realities, her need for acceptance intensifies. Her sense of dislocation is exacerbated by her tense relationships with her spouses and the alienation she experiences even though she is married. She seems to be moving farther away from the perfect future she had once imagined with each choice she makes. Even with her newfound income, influence, and prestige, the emotional gap still exists.

Draupadi is unable to avoid thinking about her previous wishes as the years pass. She occasionally wonders whether the spirits' predictions were all a dream, as she once had in her palace. Despite having everything, she is unhappy and dissatisfied. Her attachment to the palace, which was once a representation of her dreams, turns into a burden for her; she constantly longs for it, which is heartbreaking to see.

The futility of retaliation adds even more complexity to her emotional path. She suffers even more as blood is spilled on the battlefield of the Kurukshetra conflict. Her need for retribution, which she believed would fill the void inside of her, actually causes her more pain and suffering. It was a hollow victory that left her feeling achingly empty, rather than the justice she had imagined.

Draupadi is against her heart, even after she and her family have won the battle. The concepts of pleasure, safety, and love that she always believed to be on her side suddenly appear to be as far as a mirage. She had abandoned her life of grandeur and expectation for something far simpler: a place where she actually belonged, a sense of calm, and a connection to her true self.

Draupadi had a stunning epiphany as she rests on her deathbed in the last moments of her life. Through her relationship with Krishna, whose love surpasses everything she previously understood, she has at last realized the genuine meaning of love and fulfilment—not via material possessions, social standing, or other factors. In the presence of Krishna's unending love, her identity crisis, love crisis, and belonging crisis all vanish, providing her with a sense of calm that no material relationship or property could ever provide. At the end of her trip, which started with a desire for love and a home but ultimately led to a greater awareness of both herself and the world around her, she comes to a bittersweet discovery.

Through this spiritual enlightenment, Draupadi ultimately discovers a sense of belonging—not in the people or the palace of her dreams, but in Krishna's heavenly presence. In addition to marking the end of her trip, this ending marks the start of a fresh perspective on love, grief, and the transience of worldly aspirations. Draupadi is free from the constraints of the world in the hereafter; she is able to be herself, a soul that has transcended all limitations of human existence and is reunited with the eternal.

Conclusion

Draupadi's convoluted path through exile and displacement frequently reveals the suffering of the

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self-discovery process, as demonstrated by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's portrayal of the diasporic identity in *The Palace of Illusions*. The emotional and psychological torment of being a culturally displaced person is exemplified by her life narrative. She is constantly ejected from heaven and keeps searching for acceptance in a world that never fully welcomes her. As she navigates relationships, power battles, and personal tragedies, Draupadi's longing for her "palace" symbolizes the need for a physical and emotional home.

She eventually realizes that worldly belongings and social approval are not as important as she formerly thought, particularly in her relationship with Krishna. Draupadi only realizes what true fulfilment is via Krishna's unwavering love; life need not be completed on an externalized level but rather on an interior one of acceptance and serenity. From a desire for vengeance and assertiveness to a profound connection with the holy, this represents the ultimate culmination of her quest for identity. Draupadi embodies the new diasporic experience through this metamorphosis: the quest for identification and a place not in a physical location but rather within oneself and the intangible ties that constitute one's identity.

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