About Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/about/

Archive: http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/

Contact Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/

Editorial Board: http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/

Submission: http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/

FAQ: http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/

De-orientalizing the 'Self' in the South Asian (Con) texts: A Study of Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

Dr. Shyam Babu
Asst Professor
Dept of Indian & World Literatures
The EFL University
Hyderabad

Abstract:

In the contemporary postmodern/postcolonial debate the idea of 'loss' of the 'self' and the 'reconfiguration of humanity' is well articulated in the literary and cultural (co)texts. Intellectual sites such, as university, museum, texts and multimedia etc., are actually the source of well cultivated 'self'. The contemporary discourse is thus hijacked by the discourse of 'self-'other', 'centre and periphery' etc. The idea of 'self' and 'other' howsoever, hackneyed may be, the very thinking of 'loss of self' is relevant to study the 'image making processes by the hegemonic Euro-American scholarship. As the South Asian literature springs from the experience of colonialism and its dominance, on the one hand it undermines the Eurocentric monopoly in literary discourse and on the other it explicates the tension within the south Asian (con)texts. Indian (con) texts are marked by the dominance of caste, sexuality and majority/minority discourse. As the South Asian literatures build their argument in the very backdrop of the loss, dislocation and decentralization; it is hugely significant to relocate the 'self' afresh in the south Asian (con) texts.

The paper proposes that the model of 'self' can be reconstituted through the process of re-historisization, de-orientalizing, provincializing and non-normative behaviorism against the Euro American, capitalist, patriarchcal normativity. For the study I have taken up *The Palace of Illusions* to figure out the different contesting views of the self. Draupadi in her new *avatar* has developed a complex, esoteric (love) desire for her husband's arch rival Karna. This discovery of self (consciousness) is quite debilitating and deconstrive to the mythical past and as well as modern (patriarchal) system. The paper will throw light on the cultural and historical formation of the self at length.

Keywords: Self, identity, orientalism, patriarchy, other, caste, violence, ideology, image, myth

Introduction

Contemporary south Asian literature howsoever heterogeneous it may be; is underlined by the experience of colonialism and its dominance. As a literary/cultural text it seeks to debunk

the Eurocentric monopoly on the one hand, and on the other, it projects a tension within the South Asian (con) texts in terms of gender and caste. Hence, the experience of exclusion and marginalization is yet another indispensable dimension of south Asian region. This constitutes the social and cultural fabric in south regions. South Asian literature (SAL) thus envisages the discourse as diverse as self, identity, community, caste etc., against the European culture of the dominance and homogeneity. Pual Brain rightly observes that, "south Asian literature is a colorful kaleidoscope of fragmented views, colored by the perceptions of its authors, reflecting myriad realities—and fantasies" (*Modern South Asian Lit in English,* 6). South Asian literatures especially in Indian context are marked by the dominance of caste and gender and majority/minority discourse. As contemporary Asian literary discourse builds its argument in the very backdrop of the *loss, dislocation* and *decentralization;* it is hugely significant to relocate the 'self' as the south Asian (con) texts.

My proposition is that the model of 'self' (used alternatively with 'subject') can be reconstituted through the process of re-historisization, de-orientalizing and debunking the normative behavior. Kamla Das's famous lines, "I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar/ I speak three languages/ write in /Two, dream in one" (www.poemhunter.com/poem/an-introduction-2) very aptly describes the model of de-orientalization of the 'self' by accepting the alien tongue as her own. So that she can write back the Colonial masters and as well as the interpellation of women in Hindu patriarchal code of behavior. To study the 'self' or subject in the south Asian contexts, I have taken up mythical character Draupadi as portrayed in *'The Palace of Illusions'* and try to establish the fact that the 'image of women in Indian scenario created by *Varna* system is yet another instance of 'orientalizing' the woman-self by Hindu (male) code of morality in the mythical system of interpellation. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni projects contesting views of Draupadi's self and highlights her ceaseless effort to de-orientalize (reconstitute) her- 'self' form the (Hindu) dominant, male gaze/perception (both Pandava-Kaurava). She provides her chance to re-inscribe the epic in her own image.

Appropriations and reinterpretation of the Indian epics such as, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been a marked trend in the history of Indian writings/literature in general. Right from the Asiatic Society initiatives till date we have hundred of versions of Indian epics and classical plays floating world over. The question arises why epics? A number of answers come up. These are also some texts which are primarily anti-feminist and inimical to the women's freedom in their forms and narratives, for example *Manusmriti* . But there is also no denying the fact that they provide with a discourse of narrative which is premised on the potentiality of the women' space and counter hegemonic discourse.

The case of Draupadi and Sita among others is the two dominant narrative lines for the writers to critique the male centered hegemony of the mythical past. These mythical figures have been employed for social as well as political ends. If Sita as a *patibrata* woman (a male

construct syndrome though) is worshipped as the pure, iconic, divine womanhood for the millions of the (Indian) women, in political movement too, she was recast by MK Gandhi to persuade women to join the struggle for Indian independence against British raj (See Lal and Gokhale 2009 cited by Luthra in "Clearing Sacred Ground"). *Mahabharata* has had a deep creative influence over the writers of South Asian region, because of its numerous interpolations, many folk versions and flexible patterns. Hence, all writers of vernaculars and English in India are equally nostalgic and fascinated towards them and try to employ myths to locate their indigenous roots and as well critique the mythical past. They display an exhaustive exuberance to trace out their (original) self with a (un)certain degree of compliancy/authenticity. This renewed interest in them, I propose is basically is to relocate 'the loss of the self' from the Colonial experience. Hence the use and the function of myth in the contemporary writings gains renewed significance. Peter Calvecorossi observes that the myth justifies "a particular view of a particular society" (cited by Satchidanandan in *Myth in Contemporary Indian Literature*, 20).

The myth based writings have thus critically undermined the different forms of subjugation of the marginalized community, for example, of women, dalits, tribes and non-dominant community as non-Aryan, to re-locate the structure of power and hegemony. While using 'myth as metaphor' in their writings many a writers seem to have pointed out the coercive practices of India's mythical past and hence, eventfully foreground that within the fabric of Indian social set-up there is so much of 'violence' and 'coercion' along the lines of 'caste and gender' that it is unfair to assume that the European Colonialism is *the only* source of hegemonic interpellation and 'orientalize' the south Asian cultures, community and at the micro level the 'self'. The non-Western power-structures in the form of caste/gender in India are yet another example of 'Colonialism' (hegemonic practice) which potentially subjugates these subjects. It also denies the rights and identity of the 'weaker community' from within the indigenous spaces. So the very search of 'original self' form the Colonial experience' is unwarranted and hence a counterproductive enterprise.

Discourse of 'self' and 'other'

In the contemporary postmodern/postcolonial debate the idea of 'loss of self, 'crisis in humanity' and 'rupture in disciplinary boundary' etc. have been well articulated in the literary and cultural con (texts). Every intellectual site such as university, museum, texts, multimedia, films and Televisions etc., are engaged with the configuration of the ideas of 'self, or subject. The present literary scenario is thus overtaken by the discourse of 'self- 'other', 'centre and periphery', dominant-subalterns etc but the truth of such discourse comes from the fact that the perimeter determines the legitimacy of the post-modern theme of the "other" on the international scene (see Richard in "Postmodern Disalignment", 4). The idea of 'self or subject' is thus still relevant in the analysis of literary and cultural texts. It is the subject through which the idea of

alienation, identity, citizenship, cosmopolitans and migration can be realized. The self/subject is the epicenter of all such conditions and debates.

Generally speaking, the configuration of self/personhood in the modern times is located in the Eurocentric intellectual tradition. It was well articulated in the 18th century enlightenment project when Descartes postulates his neologism 'cogito, ergo sum' (I think therefore, I am). For Descartes, the very act of thinking or experiencing implies the existence of a psychological subject, which he subsequently identifies with an immaterial mind. The act of reflection presupposes the existence of the "I' who thinks. Hence thinking got prioritized over the phenomenon or existence. Here 'self-hood' the thinking being is projected as 'subjectivity'. In literary writings the sense of selfhood/subject has been present since the earliest times and literary pieces were recognized on the basis of individual authors. Above all, the subject was in the centre to validate the meaning of the text, exerting authorial intention from outside as God/author would do in modernism. However, there was also a growing tendency to sublimate the 'author's self' through the special power of artistic negation what is commonly known as 'self-effacement'; John Keats refers to it as "negative capability" in Shakespeare. In the sixteenth century subject was under the state of turmoil or under the threat of 'erasure' (Derrida's term). The classical example being Shakespearean soliloquy of Hamlet, "to be or not to be that is the question". Here 'subject' (prince hamlet) presence is thwarted with the presence of (political) power in the guise of Claudius. Claudius is 'Other' for Hamlet and at the same time, a powerful 'signifier' in the construction of the latter's subject-position. In the 19th century 'subject' and 'self' in the form of sublime 'ego' got special artistic dimension in the Romantic poetry. The Nature was but the manifestation of the transcendental Soul or the sublime Ego which produced objects or phenomena. In a sense subject was more stable, unified and holistic unlike the Renaissance time. The twentieth century literatures in its massive experiments such as, Stream-of Consciousness, Imagism, Symbolism and Dadaism etc. projects 'complete subject' though alienated. TS Eliot's prediction that humanity reduced to "a heap of broken images" (*The Waste Land,* 1892) and 'the son of man' could not know anything except "stony rubbish" (1892) is the testament of modernist anguished subject position. Literary/cultural text no longer would project an inherent value and cohesion in them. The cause and effect model, or singularity in meaning was no longer tenable. The 'authorial intention' was rendered invalid in the reception and consumption of literary artifacts. In structuralism Roland Barthes, following Saussurean model(that meaning is generated out of 'sign system' of a language') proclaims that meaning is not contingent upon the individual author's cognitive, instead it is a product of organizational pattern of' signs'. 'Autonomy of self, meaning, truth, and epistemology thus becomes polemical. Our world-view undergoes a drastic change. In the poststructuralist theoretical maneuvering Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze among others played a key role in this anti-establishment discourse and reconstituting of the self (which appears in the form of subject more as a linguistic entity than biological self). Hence post structuralism looks at the 'self' or subject but not as a category fixed but beyond the intuitional and sensory experience. Thus it sunders our intimate sense of perception of the self (See Introduction by William James in *Understanding Post structuralism*

7-8) so it shows the limit of the thinking and problems of humanism and rationalism of the enlightenment project. 1

To be precise, Derrida views that self and centre are not either fixed entity nor are they self-reliant. They are rather constituted on the hinges of slippage or postponement. So they are not the product of consciousness, instead byproduct of the 'differance'(Derrida's term), the play making nature of the sign. Hence self happens in the deconstruction of the limit and boundary. For Foucault it is the 'political power' which institutionalizes the self in the form of subject. And power has horizontal relations with the oppressor and oppressed subject. Deleuze distinguishes between the subject and experience. He observes unlike Kant that experience does not form 'a singular system' but there are multiple systems of experience and they arise from within experience. So he concludes that there is no subject that is self identical. if in Kantian philosophy subject can't know itself as it is but only as it is given to itself, Deleuze's subject though also can't know itself, it nonetheless becomes different from itself and gets transformed into different thing when it undertakes new field of experience.

Orientalism, Self and Indian philosophy

The image of orient as 'other' is produced by the Euro-American scholarship; and this practice of image making functions par with the hegemonic power-structure occident, thus claims Edward Said. The subjugation of the orients without knowing their culture and tradition is a form of 'violence' indeed; it may be also called an 'epistemic violence'. The image of third world country/ nations/ people as 'other' is the crux of the postcolonial debate, which was critically rejected by the postcolonial thinker, Edward Said. Said in his monumental *Orientalism* underlines the very theoretical bases on which the Occident constructs the identity of Orients as 'other' by way of subjugating their literature, writing and subjectivity at the secondary position. He asserts that the imperialists hold cultural privileges over the orient because of their central position. An image is mechanically created by the occident without knowing the fact about the orients. Later on the debate was extended by the critics such as Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri C Spivak. Bhabha, however, observes that in subjugation the colonized or others also enjoy the sense of mimicking the masters and hence it is counterproductive. Spivak however, maintains that the colonized people or nationals cannot speak for themselves, and hence they need to be represented/spoken by the educated, elite. All three key postcolonial thinkers I suppose moves along the same line that there is some special hegemonic practices to subjugate the colonized as 'others' no matter what the ground reality may be. Postcolonial self or subject thus demands its own strategy of representation and reception value. The discourse itself tends to display thus biased Eurocentric dominance over the configuration of the 'oriental self' and its identity politics. As Dipesh Chakrabarti has critically maintained that Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call, Chinese, Kenyan, and so on" ("The Public Life of History" cited by EV Ramakrishnan in *Locating Indian Literature,* 48).

Hence, it is becomes imperative to understand that postcolonial scholars try to retrieve the glory of the lost history (through Subaltern historiography) to recuperate the decimated locus of the postcolonial, indigenous self. But the question arises as to what extent they succeed in their endeavor? Leela Gandhi observes that the textual mapping of (post)colonial encounter relies upon the narrative of contesting textualities in which all colonial texts are repressive and all postcolonial are having subversive strategy against the powerful colonial masters. She however, contends that it (postcolonial binary) overstates the colonial investment. All texts thus have the imprint of configuration of self and its legitimacy. Hence, the postcolonial 'self' is the byproduct of the encounters between centre and periphery, between orient and occident. However, in Indian scenario the vector gets overturned. The power center is upper castes/powerful, hence the encounter is between upper caste and lower caste/impoverished and between female and patriarchy (in the case of Draupadi). Scholars such as, Ellike Boehmer, Aijaz Ahmad among others draw our attention towards the fact that Colonial texts betrayed the uncertainties and anxieties of empire. In Boehmer's opinion, colonialist writing, "was never as invasively confident or as pompously dismissive of indigenous cultures as its oppositional pairing with *postcolonial writing might suggest'* (cited by Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory,* 154 emphasis added). Hence, it is quite untenable to claim that Colonial discourse represent the orient as the universal 'other' for their subject/central position.

In this connection let us locate the ideas of self/subject form the Indian tradition. In Indian theology 'Self' is the cosmic agent or *hetu* for every happening. *Ekoaham bahusyamah*, thus the maxim goes highlighting the transcendental nature of the self. One cosmic 'Self' and His myriad forms in different manifestations have been espoused in the Hindu scripts. Hence the priority is not given on the glorification of the individuals' self but the divine Self or transcendental Being. All individual is self destined to eventually get united with the cosmic, 'self', thus mandates *Bhagvat Geeta* and *Upanishad*. He, that is '*purush*/male' pervades everywhere and overpowers animate and inanimate objects alike. *God himself is male to all* (see Coomarswamy's *Hinduism & Buddhism* 13, emphasis added). Hence God, male, Brahmins are locus of transcendental power, of norms and order. All Sanskrit and Hindus holy texts are eulogy of their being 'male', hence impeccable and unquestionable. Their hegemonic authority is beyond the human suspicion and hence unquestionable. It is also a structural irony of sort that is the exclusive nature of the Indian male psychology believes in the dignity of womanhood (as popular Sanskrit maxim resounds '*yatra naryasta pujanyte, ramante tatra devtah*), but it has hardly recognized the latter's freedom on the social front.

The Palace of Illusions (2008) as Draupadi's *Mahabharata*

Indian epic *Mahabharata* has been read and interpreted form the postcolonial, feminist, and post modernist perspectives over the years. It is because of the polyphonic nature of the text. Draupadi has caught the imagination of a wide array of scholars and artists and especially

feminist writers. If Sita's story has been widely accepted and rewritten by the Indian writers and feminist, it is Draupadi's case which has been used mostly to puncture the hegemony of Indian patriarchy. It can also be used to show the critical humanity in the present scenarios. The case of Draupadi has been recast to champion the case of not only women, but to critique the very nature of self, identity and cultural ideology of Indian humanity. The recent female writers such Irawati Karve, Sara Joseph, Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni many others have proved that myths can be used as a formidable example of resistance and as well as for the reconfiguration of identity and at large of humanity. With Draupadi's character Indian womanhood feels more connected because of her assertiveness and indomitable voice against women oppressions. She is the only woman practicing polygamy in the Indian patriarchal system. Thus she provides a perfect locus for women to claim their rights and constitute their identity devoid of traditional, male pattern. Gayatri Spivak observes "Unlike the Ramayana, for example, the Mahabharata contains cases of various kinds of kinship structure and various styles of marriage. And in fact it is Draupadi who provides the only example of polyandry, not a common system of marriage in India" (*Critical Enquiry 8.2.,* 387). However, Draupadi like that of Sita is worshiped as a cult goddess, in South India (Hiltebeitel *The Cult of Draupadī,* 26). So the centrality of these characters in the Indian cultural context makes them 'site of contestation/reconfiguration of new individuality/personhood' in more than one way.

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, Soali Mitra play, *Nathabati Anathabat,* Mahasweta Devi story 'dopdi'/Drapadi(she used both alternatively) etc. all exhibit the fiery side of her persona, and her strong protest against the cruelty of patriarchal system and women subjugation therein. They all provide multiple ways of subversion and configuration of womanhood irrespective of caste. Mahasweta Devi's 'dopdi mahagen' is tribe and display resistance against all stereotypes of women and Hindu code of womanhood. Mahasweta Devi has juxtaposed her 'dopdi' against traditional character of Mahabharata to highlight the coercive power of the state and as well as Hindu, patriarchal morality. As Rashmi Luthra rightly observes, "Indian feminist politics that is conscious of the way that multiple vectors, such as class, caste, and religion, interlock to create the grounds for the oppression and exploitation of women. Devi's longstanding commitment to tribal and *dalit* people's struggles is what gives her ironic use of the Draupadi figure its sharp edge. Her Draupadi is the tribal dissident Dopdi Mehjen, a fiercely outrageous woman whose husband has been her comrade in the Naxalite struggle against the landed castes/classes—a struggle that was at its peak in the 1970s, during which the story is set" ("Clearing Scared Ground", 18).

The Palace of Illusions subtitled as 'Panchali'*s Mahabharata,* has been interpreted both from the postcolonial, feminist perspective and as well as in Indian philosophical perspective. Devakaruni not only explores gender violence and agency but seems to explore the alternative *Mahabharata* from a women perspective. Its new initiative to inscribe the women's glory and abate the identity loss happened in the mythical past. She projects Draupadi as a narcissistic

character and self-obsessed, in other words a self-cantered person. By projecting her as a self centered, possessive woman, Devakaruni tries to liberate the womanhood form the cultural shackle of patriarchy and male superiority syndrome. The novel much like the sage writer Vyas's epic, Draupadi begins her inner story of Mahabharata. Devakaruni is highly acclaimed for re-telling the women's suffering in the most assuming way. The Publishers Weekly eulogize her as follows, "Vivid and inventive.... Divakaruni's rich, action-filled narrative contrasts well with the complex psychological portrait of a mythic princess." Thus she portrays Draupadi with subtletyand utmost woman pride. She unfolds the events, and yet one doesn't delve into the psyche of the characters and analyze their thoughts or actions with detachments. *The Palace of Illusions* in this way is remarkable piece of narrative. As story progresses we see that Draupadi is always a rebel even in storytelling. The novel comprises 42 chapters. In every chapter the novelist traces out the genealogy of Draupadi and her subjugation right from the birth to her final departure to the heaven. It is a completely different sort of discourse of woman subject; her love and longing and sexual desire. The narrative unfolds itself on the most personal note where she is in constant dialogue with her maid-*dhai ma* and intermittently with her brother, Dhri. She wants to hear about her origin with more attention and pride than her father's boyhood friendship with Princess Guru Dronachraya. Story begins with the fire ceremony performed by her father <u>Drupada</u>, King of Panchala to appease the Fire god. Unlike the traditional way of storytelling where story is narrated by Sage or male character, Divakaruni follows *Kissa*-style of storytelling in first person, and in between the narrative becomes objective for reflection. This new *Mahabharata* tale of Draupadi is told by her in bits and parts. The story highlights her impeccable personality and her (forbidden) love and sympathy for Karna, who is considered a *suta*/ outcaste man (however, he happens to a royal family member).

The central themes of *The Palace of Illusions* are: the enmity between a Brahmin teacher Dron and the King Drupad; retaliation and avenge, and women subjugation and interpellation, male egos; women struggle to have their own individual self and identity; rejection of male code and morality, desire for free choice in love and longing among others. The suffering of Draupadi(woman) is attached, like any other Indian woman, with her father- King Drupad(father-male) and his friend Dronachary(male). As both were fast friends in their ashram days they depart on a very emotional note. As a prince assures that once he becomes the crown prince, the later can come over and share his kingdom. Having heard Dhrupad promise, Brahmin Dron presumes that he will really share in his kingdom. When Dron approaches the king Drupad to ease out his chill penury, the later insults him saying that a friendship can happen only between the two equals and a poor Brahmin can't be a kings' friend. Humiliated and tormented Dron takes a vow to avenge Dhrupad. With his disciple and great archer Arjuna he defeats the king and takes away his half kingdom. As a result of which Drupad swears to revenge on Drona. Eventually he performed a *yagna* called *Putrakameshti* (a ritual designed to get a baby boy) to obtain a means of besting him. From the sacrificial fire, Draupadi emerged as a beautiful dark-skinned young woman after her sibling Dristdhumyya. When she emerged from the fire, a

heavenly voice said that she would bring about the destruction of the Kuru line. Draupadi is described in the *Mahabharata* as a very beautiful woman of that time. Thus the story of Drapadi begins here. It is when Yudhishthira, put her at stake in a game of dice, she questions his act instead of submitting to what he wanted. She also lashes out at the court as to why is it that when Yudhishthira had bet himself including her and lost the game, he has the right to still bet her against her desire. Her questioning spirit and critical engagements with males, be it her father, husband, friend foes is quite radical and empowering for the point of women and as well human agency.

In the traditional Mahabharata narrative Draupadi tied the nuptial knot with the five brothers- Pandavas and she would follow the (patriarch cal) tradition without much trepidation. She would not express her independent desires under the duress of her mother-in law's words to share everything among the Pandavas, be it a wife. She thus hesitantly obliged to marry all five and in the *Swyamber* (loosely marriage contest) she remained moot spectator of her own humiliation (see -Draupadi's Swayamvara 68-73 in *Mahabharata* by C Rajagopalchari)

In the *Swyamber,* in the marriage hall entitled as "Song" in the novel, she expresses her independent desire. She unpacks herself as to why she doesn't choose Karna as her spouse; though she had great admiration for him. The reason is perplexing, as she unravels her esoteric desire. She could have thought otherwise had she not been influenced by the Krishna and the all social ego of high caste and clan. Here a pure womanly love seems contaminated by the patriarchy based upon *Varna (caste/color)* system, a tightly classified category of Indian society. As a person Indian woman is expected to follow the religiously categorized system of classification she was born in. Draupadi as a result of which is feeling brain wished. She is disillusioned by her own premature decision not to choose Karna as her husband. She is perplexed after having interrogated Karna in the full assembly:

> "Something did change in the moment when I asked Karna the question that I knew would hurt him the most, the only question that would make him lay down his bow. When I'd stepped forward and looked into his face, there had been a light in it- call it admiration, or desire, or the wistful beginnings of love. *If I had been wiser, might have been able to call forth that love and, in that way, deflected the danger of the moment-a moment that would turn out to be far more important than I imagined.* But I was young and afraid, and my ill-chosen words (words I would regret all my life) quenched that light forever" (*The Palace of Illusions*, 96-97 emphasis added).

Reshmi Luthra has very aptly remarked, "Draupadi is conflicted between her desire to avenge the wrong done to women on the one hand, and the utter desolation brought about by war on the other. Here, a feminist consciousness grapples with the complex intersections among gender, violence, and ecological devastation" (18).

The climax of her suffering reaches at the zenith when she is forcefully dragged against her will and molested in her own palace by (her won relatives) Kauravas. This is the time when she appears both most powerful and most helpless. This is the darkest phase of women subjugation in mythical past where Draupadi is just a sheer symbol of protest. But that protest has change the perception and discourse of womanhood since then. In the chapter 25 –'Sari' she reveals herself as a powerful rebellion against all norms and rectitude's which binds women. She accounts her harrowing experience when she was put on stake by Yuddhisthir as thus:

> "Dhai ma nodded then covered her face and burst into fresh weeping. My mouth went dry. Denials collided with each other inside me. *I am a queen. Daughter of Drupad, sister of Dhrisdymna. Mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl.* …..But then I remembered what I had read long ago in a book…*The wife is the property of the husband, no less so than a cow or a slave.'* (190 emphasis original)

Then further when Draupadi feels helpless and seeks rescue form the husband and courts:

> "I found myself in court. A hundred male eyes burring through me. Gathering my disordered sari around me, I demanded help from my husbands. They went me tortured glances but sat paralyses. I could see that in their minds they were already Duryodhan's vassals….That same word had made me Duryodhan's property …."

And finally when she could be saved only by savior Krishna, her friend and Pandavas' well wisher , she understands that man loves a woman but he loves more his reputations, loyalty and ego. But as a woman, Draupadi, "doesn't think that way. I would have thrown myself forward to save them if ithad in my power that day….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 car to guard myself from hurt, it was as much from them as from our enemies* (195, emphases added)

Chitra Banerjee Devakaruni has seriously cast the character persona of Draupadi as a powerful, narcissistic, and assertive and a complex woman of esoteric desires. She has all the extra ordinary qualities, as she was fiery, assertive and black skinned. She has a deep friendship with equally dark skinned or swarthier Krishna, one of the popular gods in the Indian Hindu pantheons. So her longs and relations with Karna and Krishna are quiet assuming and complex. The sort of self or subject of Draupadi we see in *The Palace of Illusions* and a sort of woman we have in the mythical *Mahabharata* is totally different. Here, the discourse of self percolates down from Draupadi, as a mythical/past subjugated self to the Draupadi as present, independent subject; against any homogenizing nature of the (postcolonial) discourse itself. Her case refutes

the fake narrative prevalent in the Indian epistemology which presumes that all oppression is meted out only by the European Colonial subjects.

Conclusion

To conclude, Devakaruni through the persona of Draupadi is mimicking the smugness of a patriarchal and class-based system and its emissaries who would ask subaltern people to just grin and bear the injustices wrought upon them' (Luhtra, 150) and she also deconstructs the power structures of Indian hegemonic patriarchy which I consider coterminous with the imperial Colonialism. The manner in which the postcolonial self or subject seeks to reconstitute their identity from the Colonial loss, Draupadi character too, spurs to deconstruct the subjugation of woman self and subject hood within the Indian mythical framework.

Note

1. Taken from my paper "Brechtian Conceptualization of the 'Dual Subject' and Karnad's *Hayavadana:* Reflection on Self and Identity" forthcoming in *Literary Oracles*, edited by Shruti Das for the Author press, New Delhi, June 2017

Works Cited:

Abstarct Admission Online. The Palace of Illusions. 10March 2012. http://abstractadmissions.blogspot.in/2012/03/palace-of-illusions.html., Accessed on 22 March 2017.

Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nation, Literatures.* Verso, 1992. Rept. 2008.

An Introduction –Poem by Kamla Das. www.poemhunter.com/poem/an-introduction-2 Accessed 30 March 2017.

Boehmer, E. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature.* Oxford University Press, 2006.

Boehmer, E. *Empire Writing: An Anthology* of *Colonial Literature 1870-1918.* Oxford University Press, 2009.

Boehmer, E. & Rosinka Chaudhuri. Eds. *The Indian Postcolonial.* Rutledge, 2011

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphor.* Second Edition.OUP, 2006.

Brians, Paul. *Modern South Asian Literature in English.* Greenwood Press, 2003.

Coomarswamy, Anand K. *Hinduism and Buddhism*. Munshiram Manoharlal, 2007.

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Palace of Illusions: Panchali Mahabharata.* Picador, 2008.

Eliot, TS. *The Norton Anthology of American Literatures.* General Editor, Nina Baym. Shorter Sixth Edition. WW Norton & Company, 2003.

Gandhi, MK. *Hind Swaraj.* Centenary Edition. Rajpal, 2010, Rpt. 2014.

Harrison, N. *Postcolonial Criticism*. Polity Press, 2006.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. *The Cult of Draupad's Mythologies*: from Gingee to Kurukṣetra. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

James, William. *Understanding Poststructuralsim.* Acumen, 2005.

Luthra, Rashmi. "Clearing Sacred Ground: Women-Centered Interpretations of the Indian Epics*" Feminist Formations*. Vol.26, no. 2. 2014, pp. 135-161. www.jstor.org. Accessed 25 March 2017.

Rajagopalachari, C. *Mahabharata*. 56th Edition . Bharati Vidhya Bhawan, 2011.

Ramakrishnan. EV. *Locating Indian Literature. Texts, Tradition, Translation.* Orient BlackSwan, 2011

Richard, Nelly. "Postmodern Disalignment and Realignments of the Centre/Periphery". *Arts Journal* Vo. 51, No.4. Latin American Art. 1992. pp. 57-59.

Sahni, Bhisham. *Madhavi.* Trans by Alok Bhalla. Seagull Books, 2002.

Said, EdwardW. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* Penguin Books, 2001.

Satchidanandan, K. *Indian Literature: Paradigms and Praxis*. Pencarft International, 2008.

Satchidanandan, K. Ed. *Myth in Contemporary Indian Literature.* Sahitya Akademi, 2010.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravarti. Trans. "Draupadi" by Mahasweta Devi. "Writing and Sexual Difference" in *Critical Enquiry*. Vol.8, no. 2. 1981. pp.381-402. www.jstor.org. Accessed 28 March 2017.