Rewriting Mythology through the Palace of Illusion

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Abstract: Mythology is a theme which is always new though it is read time and again. The modern feminist writers often write on mythology and mythological characters rendering a modern flavor and savor on them which is a unique piece of literature and catches the attention of the readers. The present paper attempts to prove how Chitra Banerjee rewrites mythology twisting the story, characters and plots in her The Palace of Illusion. The paper focuses on the character of Draupadi who is portrayed like a modern woman and suffers fighting against the injustice.

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The Postmodern Age witnesses a large number of books on mythology. Mythology is a subject of antiquity past but it always catches the attention of the readers if it is put forth in a new way. Some of the Indian Postcolonial writers like Debadutt Patnaik, Amish Tripathy, Kavita Kane, Maheswata Devi and Chitra Banarjee Devikaruni write mythological stories in their own ways though they stick to the original Ramayana and Mahabar. These writers derive the subject matter of their stories from the Ramayana and Mahabar and write in their own style relating the mythological characters and the story to the modern context.

The past and present may be different from many contexts but the universal truth relating to man and women in the social perspectives is always same which these writers want to show. The social truth relating to human existence always finds its reflection in literature. So these writers portray the characters of different mythological characters in present context to prove the truth relating to life which has been always hunting women in all time than that of men. Even in the time of Ramayana and Mahabar women were suffering more than that of the men in home and outside of the home.

Kunti and the Nishadini by Maheswata Devi, Prativa Roy’s Jagyasen, Kavita Kane’s Karna’s Wife: The Outcaste Queen, Amish Tripathy’s Siba Trilogy and Chita Banarjee’s The Palace of Illusion are the attempts of rewriting the mythology in a new way. Here the mythological characters like Siva, Krishna, Parvati, Kunti, Draupadi and Karna are portrayed suffering from problems which the modern man still confronts in his day to day life. An individual will find his/her own problems in these mythological characters.

The paper attempts to analyze the mythological character of Draupadi in The Palace of Illusion written by Chitra Banerjee. The writers who are mentioned above have written about Draupadi in their mythological writing but Chitra Banarjee is something different from them as she tries to portray Draupadi like a modern woman who suffers due to socio-cultural taboos and superstitions. Society has framed all the rules and regulations for the ladies and these laws give a free hand to the man which is injustice in the eyes of Banerjee. She discovers that Draupadi suffers due to the society which considers women as the property of men. She is supposed to obey her father and brothers before marriage and husband after marriage and sons when becomes old. Throughout like Draupadi was under the control of men in different stage which Banerjee has portrayed in The Palace of Illusion. How a woman suffers even having everything with her. Her father was a king and brother was a warrior, five husbands were the super undefeated heroes and her five sons were also heroes like their fathers. Draupadi was the chief queen of Hastinapura but in every step of life she was suffering and was tortured ceaselessly and mercilessly which is beyond description. The pain and frustration of Draupadi could be felt only. So the feminist writers who rewrite mythology feel Draupadi’s problems in this vast palace which Chitra Banerjee terms it as an illusion. Draupadi was disillusioned in every step of life starting from her swayamvar to ascend the heaven.

Her suffering began in Swayamvar. She was not free to choose her liking partner rather she was compelled to put a very vexing question to Karna who she intended to wed. Her brother did not allow her to choose Karna whose race was certainly low. She suffered double in her Swayamvar: failing to get Karna and insulting him by putting a question which was like stabbing him among the thousand princes. So Draupadi was disillusioned in the palace of Panchal first, she puts questions to herself, “Why even call it a swayamvar then? Why make a spectacle of me before all those kings? Is it my father not I, who gets to decide whom shall I marry.”(The Palace of Illusion 56) Here Banerjee ventilated her anger on her brother and father who snatched her freedom to marry.

Few years before her marriage she was enrolled though it was elementary education which was given
to the entire princess. But Draupadi was given the lessons of dance, yoga and embroideries. Her education was changed from ordinary to extraordinary when Krishna professed that Draupadi was born to change the history of Aryabarta. Banerjee writes, “A girl was taught what a boy was supposed to learn? Such a thing had never been heard from the royal family of Panchal! Only when Krishna insisted that the prophecy at my birth required me to get an education beyond what women are usually given, and that was the kings duty to provide this to me, did he agree with reluctant?” (The Palace of Illusion, 23)

Banerjee portrays the character of Draupadi bringing a complaint against her family who was reluctant to provide her qualitative education. When Krishna intervened the King, Drupad, was also reluctant to provide extra education to his daughter, Draupadi. After her marriage extra education helped her to take the right decision to punish the offenders and wiping out the crime from the kingdom. She is the cause of destruction of the entire Kouraba race. She wanted to wash her fluted hair by the blood of Dushasana. The thigh of Duryodhana was broken off for her. She was asked to sit on the thigh of Duryodhana which was the cause of the Kauraba race’s destruction.

Some of the feminist writers portray Draupadi in a different way i.e. suffering like a modern woman who doomed to serve her man throughout their lives. Draupadi suffered more with her husbands who used her as they like and failed to save her from the clutches of Dusasana and Duryodhana won attempted unrobed her. The Pandabas, here, remained silent for dharma. They gave more stress to dharma than that of the honour of their wife. Banerjee says though Draupadi, “The wife is the property of husband and, no less than a cow or slaves” (The Palace of Illusion, 190). It indicates that Draupadi was not satisfied with her husband’s due to various reasons.

Chitra Banerjee stresses on the relation of Karna and Draupadi which is rewritten. Here the writer fictionalized the relationship of these characters more than that of the original story. Draupadi had some attraction for Karna but Banerjee twisted the story making Draupadi emotionally involved with the great warrior just like a modern girl who has to depart from her boyfriend after marriage and to mentally attach with him for ever being neglected by her husband. The writer portrays her going through certain traumas. Failure to get Karna is one of them but in the original Mahavarat the relationship between Karna and Draupadis limited within the frame work of religion sanctity. Chitra Banerjee colours it just like the Judai of a girl friend from her dream boy after marriage.

Again the writer rewrites the story twisting the relationship between Draupadi and Arjun. The relationship between Arjun and Draupadi painted just like the relationship of a modern couple which is little bit charmless due to the revelation of her past relationship with her lover. In the original Mahavarat Arjun did not know the relationship of Draupadi and Karna. Here the writer has soiled the relationship of Draupadi with Arjun due to Karna which is portrayed like the relationship of modern husband and wife who suspect each other.

Draupadí’s portrayal by different modern writers reveals the man woman relationship. There is difference between appearance and reality in husband wife relationship. They look close to each other but in reality the inner difference is much more than the appearance which sometime reflected through their behaviors. The wife is a prestige for husband who is ready to do everything for the honour but the man is rarely concerned for her happiness. The will and desire of a woman in the family is always neglected due to different reasons which is accurately portrayed by Chitra Banerjee though the character of Draupadi in her The Palace of Illusion.

References:


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