

Rethinking Femininity: Tagore's Chitra and Divakaruni's Draupadi as Paradoxical Portrait of Traditional Submissiveness

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ABSTRACT

This Paper delves into the nuanced exploration of femininity as portrayed in two distinct literary works: Rabindranath Tagore's *Chitra* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. The paper critically examines the paradoxical nature of feminine roles depicted in these narratives, challenging conventional expectations and stereotypes. Tagore's *Chitra* and Divakaruni's *Draupadi* are analyzed as representations that subvert traditional notions of submissiveness, offering a multifaceted perspective on the complex nature of women's roles in society. The paper aims to provide insights into the authors' innovative approaches to rethinking femininity, inviting readers to reconsider preconceived ideas and fostering a deeper understanding of the diverse facets within the discourse of gender and identity.

KEYWORDS

Assertiveness; Empowerment; Existential Crisis; Feminist Retelling Stereotypes; Womanhood.

Introduction

Should I only stare at the emptiness?
Why should not I found the path to fulfillment?
Why should not I drive fast the chariot of my quest with the reins of the mighty horses firmly tied?
With indomitable expectation, even at the cost of my life, why should I not win the treasure of my quest from its impenetrable fortress?

(Rabindranath Tagore, *Indian Butter Tree*, 89)

The idea of femininity in the Indian context is diverse and impacted by many factors such as religious scriptures, cultural standards, social institutions, and literary representations. All of these have

led to the establishment of a highly entrenched patriarchal system that places stringent expectations and standards on women motivating them to personify idealised femininity. Such a concept of ideal womanhood expects a woman to embody selflessness, devotion, and sacrifice as intrinsic personality traits to fulfil her responsibilities as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife. However, such selective socio-cultural prejudices and representations have failed to acknowledge the various shades of women's resistance, strong displays of feminism, freedom to choose a life outside the four walls, and willingness to accept difficulties in the quest for new standards. Even popular literature has emphasised women's roles as subordinates to their male counterparts. They have been

portrayed as best suited to household responsibilities and less competent to don the roles traditionally preserved for men. Tennyson, for example, addresses the limits put on women in Victorian society:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the heart:

Man to command and woman to obey;

All else confusion.

(A. L. Tennyson, 5, ll. 437-39)

Gender discrimination has, thus been a prevalent subject in literature having roots in historical, theological, and cultural settings. Classical literature, including the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, establishes gender norms based on the concept of dharma, or moral obligation. According to it, men are leaders and warriors, while women are depicted as affectionate mothers and committed wives. These metaphors, influence social living standards, and reinforce predefined roles for women. However, these narratives also include strong, unconventional female characters who defy societal expectations, such as Sita, who challenges her banishment, and Draupadi, who pursues justice.

The struggle between tradition and changing social dynamics becomes more obvious as one moves to modern Indian literature. Authors such as Rabindranath Tagore, Ismat Chughtai, and Mulk Raj Anand have written extensively on the boundaries imposed on women by social expectations. In Tagore's works, for example, female heroes strongly negotiate their wants and needs with the male dominant society, reflecting their rejection of conventional gender roles. Post-independence literature further expands on the gender conversation. Writers such as Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy, and Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni explore patriarchy, female autonomy, and the search for a woman's identity. Their literary works break traditional narratives by depicting women who reject social norms and establish their uniqueness. One of the stronger instances comes from a well-known poem by the Indian poet Kamla Das. It appears in her first book *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), which includes one of her well-known confessional poems, *An Introduction*. The poem is famous for a woman's audacious self-disclosure:

Then ... I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers cut my hair
short, and ignored

My womanliness... It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play
pretending games.

Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly
loud when

Jilted in love... I met a man, loved
him. Call Him not by any name, he is
every man

Who wants. a woman, just as I am
every Woman who seeks love. In
him... the hungry haste

Of rivers, in me.

(Das, *An Introduction* 7)

This kind of fearless and outspoken feminine disposition can be noticed dominating the Indian literary horizon throughout. This paper, particularly, explores the contradictory shades of conventional submissiveness as shown in the works *Chitra* by Rabindranath Tagore and *The Palace of Illusion* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Despite their difference in time and cultural setting, these works are united by a common thread that confronts and examines the expectations society has of women. This paper studies the multiple shades and changing nature of Indian feminism as reflected by Tagore's *Chitra* and Divakaruni's *Draupadi*. Both the writers

have questioned conventional assumptions of womanliness, creating diverse female heroes who transcend stereotypes while breaking through societal barriers. Tagore depicts Chitra's inner conflict between her acquired superficial charm and her search for her true self. Her audacious refusal of God's favours and brave resolve to face the consequences challenge the traditional image of women as objects of beauty and passive recipients of fate. Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* reimagines the celebrated text *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective, giving a detailed portrait of the mythological queen. Draupadi's bravery, her endurance, and brilliance disrupt the traditional image of a modest woman, yet her journey also represents the traditional constraints that women had to endure in ancient India.

Chitra and Draupadi, despite being rooted in a complex patriarchal environment, superbly reflect the shades of womanhood beyond popular social codes commemorating love, compassion, commitment, and dedication, as innate feminine virtues, along with bold denials, justified claims, empowering essence, and demand for co-existence as inseparable attributes.

Tagore's Feminine Liberation and Sociocultural Perspectives

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) lived in an Indian environment that was defined by conventional patriarchal standards and separate gender roles. Tagore, a notable poet, philosopher, and Nobel laureate in literature, lived under the British colonial control. His writings reflect the cultural ethos and social standards of the period. The majority of Indian cultural practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century followed patriarchal arrangements, in which males hold authoritative positions and women were expected to comply with the duties instructed. Women were traditionally

limited to domestic domains devoid of free will for education and career; and were supposed to prioritise home responsibilities above personal ambitions. However, the need for social changes by this time was becoming more widely recognised. The period is also known for the vibrant socio-cultural shift that took place owing to various social reforms affected during the period. Tagore's works vigorously questioned pre-existing paradigms by showcasing women's intellectual and artistic abilities, and questioning social norms that restrict their agency as free individuals. Tagore's literary creations thus heralded the emancipation of women, with inspiring portrayals of their discovery of their true potential and real selves. As he quoted in his work *Emancipation*:

For the first time in my life after twenty-two years, the spring has come into my room. Looking at the sky through the window I feel, in every moment, sheer delight springing in my heart...I am a woman, I am glorious. My mood pulsates in the moonbeams of the sleepless moon. Without me, vain would be the burst of the evening stars, and vain too would be the blooming of flowers.

Redefining Femininity in *Chitra*

Tagore has ardently defended his beliefs by portraying his widely acclaimed female figure Chitra, the princess of Manipur. Being the only child, she was raised as a boy by her parents. She takes charge of the field specially reserved for the male members and uses bows and arrows with great ease. She also becomes an expert in all kinds of martial skills that a Kshatriya king is expected to possess:

Like a watchful lioness, she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is

restless, fair one, like a serpent reviving from his long winters sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses' side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumberous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath. (*Chitra*,71)

Despite being a woman, she is aware of her duties to her state and fulfils them all with diligence. She is very strong physically and takes great pride in this. She may not have the feminine sensibility and beauty that the world finds appealing, but it doesn't matter to her. Chitra is oblivious to these erroneous societal conventions until she encounters Arjuna, the Pandavas prince, who meets her during his days in exile. The princess experiences an abrupt emotional change and wants to become more feminine to attract Arjuna's attention and love. Chitra makes great efforts to bring her need for love and attention to reality and is prepared to bring heaven and earth together. As she informs Madana:

...next morning, I laid aside my man like clothing. I donned bracelets, anklets, waist-chain, and a gown of purple red-silk. The unaccustomed dress clung about my shrinking shame; but I hastened on my quest, and found Arjuna in the forest temple of Shiva. (*Chitra*, 19)

All of her hard work, however, is undone by Arjuna's callous rejection. This rejection serves as the theme of the central topic. Chitra is faced with the harsh realities of the physical world, where outward beauty is valued more than inner compassion and virtues. All of her innocent desires and sweet feelings are broken by the world's dualism, which only showers heavy praise for inner virtue and soul beauty, but physical beauty remains the chief attribute. Now she is determined to manifest her desire with the help of God. She receives an enchanting and magnetic

personality through divine bliss and is momentarily changed into the most beautiful woman on earth. As Arjuna expresses: "Was I dreaming or was what I saw by the lake truly there?" (*Chitra* 25)

Arjuna abandons his penance vow and surrenders to Chitra, the Goddess of beauty and love, as a 'love-hungered' man. However, a series of changes have started to occur from the point of her sensual experience to the final realisation of her true love. Chitra suffers from an unusual pang of immense regret now that she has captured Arjuna's heart. Despite her joy and satisfaction, she is plagued by an insatiable thirst, which has been worsened by Arjuna's surrendered manhood and shattered pride. Though she is prepared to give up her gift, she is forced to endure the joy for a whole year, which causes her to ache deeply from regret and a sense of diminished dignity. She decides to assess Arjuna's liking for a woman who has a fearsome and valiant demeanour:

Her every qualities are as prison walls, shutting her woman's heart in a bare cell. She is obscured, she is unfulfilled. Beauty is denied to her. She is like a spirit of cheerless morning, sitting upon the strong mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds. (*Chitra*,70)

He wants to know about her: "They say that in valour she is a man, and a woman in tenderness." (*Chitra*, 67). Chitra, the personification of beauty, honesty, and love sheds her falsehood in front of Arjuna. This devout touch of genuine beauty astounds Arjuna: "Beloved, my life is full". This is undoubtedly a woman's real triumph for her sacrifice. Tagore has elevated Chitra to an unexpected level of femininity, portraying her as an epitome of genuine beauty and unwavering virtue. By using Chitra as a model for contemporary Indian women, the playwright appears to be advocating for gender equality across all domains. She is a wonderful example of a contemporary Indian woman. Tagore has

amazingly captured the essence of femininity, while encouraging a heightened psychological and spiritual awareness. Chitra shapes and creates her future while refusing to be a puppet in the hands of fate. According to Chitra, love is the primary source of life since it promotes self-awareness, selflessness, purity, and immortality. Chitra represents the changing gender roles, implying that a woman may be both powerful and caring, traditional and modern. Tagore uses Chitra to investigate the notion that women might forge a path that combines the finest of both traditional and contemporary cultures. As quoted by R.N. Tagore:

...in the future civilization the women, the feeble creatures, — feeble at least in their outer aspects, — who are less muscular, and who have been behind hand, always left under the shadow of those huge creatures, the men, — they will have their place, and those bigger creatures will have to give way. (Sisir Kumar Das, 416)

Divakaruni's Mythological Tales and Their Contemporary Resonance

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956), a renowned contemporary author writes about the interaction of the Indian and American cultures, delving into the intricacies of identity, and the immigrant experience. Her stories feature characters trapped between tradition and modernity, balancing their cultural history with the challenges of adjusting to a new environment. Her mythological stories dig into the rich tapestry of ancient myths and legends, skilfully weaving them into the fabric of modern narratives. Divakaruni's unique description gives fresh life to age-old tales, that transcend time and infusing her narratives with relevance for today's readers. Her work is known for emphasising the female empowerment by using a mythical setting. She challenges established gender norms by giving a voice

to typically marginalised female figures, providing a new perspective on their role, strength, and resilience. Divakaruni sets new standards with her reinterpretations, exploring questions of identity, patriarchy, and the desire for self-discovery in modern situations.

Rethinking of Womanhood in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

Divakaruni celebrates women's presence in mythology. She brings to life the customs, rites, and beliefs that have defined the Indian identity by exploring myths and tales. Drawing her characters and stories from Indian mythology, Divakaruni deftly incorporates global themes into them. In her works, Divakaruni usually concentrates on the way women have been traditionally projected. She stands in complete contrast to the cultural and social perspectives as she opines:

Like many Indian children, I grew up listening to vast, varied, and fascinating tales of the *Mahabharata*... listening to the stories of the *Mahabharata* as a young girl..., I was left unsatisfied by the portrayals of the women. It wasn't as though the epic didn't have powerful, complex women characters that affected the action in major ways.... But in some way, they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts, and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If I ever wrote a book ... I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits. (Divakaruni, 14)

In her writings, Divakaruni presents powerful female characters who

rebel and negotiate social norms and conventional gender roles. She illuminates women's challenges and victories in many cultural settings through her narrative, highlighting their tenacity and methods of opposing or subverting patriarchal systems. She may examine and question conventional gender norms and societal expectations by introducing mythical aspects, giving female characters a voice and a platform to express their autonomy.

Her well-known work *The Palace of Illusions* is a feminist retelling of the *Mahabharata*. This is particularly the tale of Draupadi rather than of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Draupadi, in her depiction is not a weak creature but a formidable queen who yearns for sovereignty, independence, wisdom, and power. The tale is told in the first person, offering a female viewpoint on the events of the *Mahabharata*. Draupadi describes her life, beginning with her miraculous birth to King Drupada, continuing with her marriage to the five Pandava brothers, and ending with the complicated relationships within the royal family. Draupadi's emotions, desires, and difficulties are explored throughout the story highlighting the themes of love, ambition, and destiny. It portrays the epic's characters with subtlety, particularly Krishna, who plays an important role in Draupadi's life. The story spans across significant events from the *Mahabharata*, such as the dice game, the Pandava exile, and the Kurukshetra battle. Divakaruni's retelling adds depth to the characters and explores the themes of the well-known story, while revealing the psychological and emotional elements underlying their actions. Overall, *The Palace of Illusions* is a gripping and inventive reworking of a great Indian epic, which gives voice to one of its most mysterious and appealing characters, Draupadi. The narrative begins with Draupadi who is adamant about understanding her status in her father's place. From the very beginning of the story,

we see her expressing the will to possess her palace. The fact that Draupadi aspires to have her palace is significant because it illustrates her quest to establish her identity through control over her life, as well as her need to have her authoritative position. Draupadi's wish is not an individual aspiration, but rather a universal phenomenon. She reflects the sense of insecurity all women have. As she expressed:

Being mistress of the Palace of Illusions had transformed me in ways I hadn't realized....I was equal to or better off than- his peers. In Indra Prashtha my husband had listened carefully to my opinions concerning the kingdom, and though some argued, they followed many of my suggestions. (Divakaruni, 180).

Draupadi does not want his father's identity to overshadow hers. "But Daughter of Drupad? ... Couldn't my father have come up with something a little less egoistic?" (5) This contempt for her name, Draupadi, as the daughter of King Drupad, which she believed validated patriarchal dependency and stands a sheer contradiction to the prophecy "...she will change the course of history", prepares the landscape emphasising upon the names, gender, and identity from the outset. Draupadi, though she loves her brother dedicatedly, yet raises her objection against the choices made in terms of their names. Her brother's name Dhristadyumna, "Destroyer of Enemies", identifies his authoritative position and is associated with the aim of his life to destroy the Guru Dronacharya, while her name only represents patriarchy. As the narrative progresses, Draupadi marries the five Pandava brothers - Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva - in the Swayamvara ceremony. She joins a new realm of power politics to deal with the Pandava dynamics and the difficulty of keeping peace among them. There comes

the historical moment when Yudhishtira gambles away the kingdom and Draupadi in a rigged dice game, leading to Draupadi's public humiliation in the Kaurava court, her vow of vengeance, and the beginning of the Pandavas' exile. In the days of exile, her relationship with Krishna becomes stronger, and she takes consolation in it during difficult times. We also witness Draupadi's complicated relation to Karna, the continued rivalry between the Kauravas and Pandavas, and the Kurukshetra war preparations. Draupadi journeys through the impending war, her conflicted feelings, and her part in the great struggle for victory and defeat. The war ends symbolising gain and loss for all. Draupadi rethinks about her life, relationships, and the deceptive nature of reality. The drama, set against the backdrop of a timeless Indian epic, explores themes of love, sacrifice, and the intricacies of human relationships in general and women in particular giving a new viewpoint through Draupadi's eyes.

A Cross-Cultural Assessment in Chitra's Assertiveness and Draupadi's Defiance

These two female protagonists, from separate cultural and chronological backgrounds, question society's standards, representing the changing roles of women in their respective tales. Chitra's assertiveness arises as a reaction to evolving gender relations during a moment of societal transition, set against the background of early twentieth-century Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore's examination of individual empowerment through the portrayal of Chitra sheds light on shifting perspectives of women's roles and rejection of conventional expectations. Draupadi's resistance, on the other hand, is anchored in the rich tapestry of ancient Indian mythology. Her acts take place inside a complicated socio-political framework, challenging not just gender standards but also the dominant social order. Her resistance is inextricably linked

to her quest for justice and commitment to dharma, demonstrating a distinct cultural viewpoint on resistance.

Reviewing Draupadi in Divakaruni's Narrative

Divakaruni's Draupadi defies the stereotype that a woman is often a silent victim. She brings forth the intelligence, fortitude, and uniqueness of Draupadi, showing her as a complex and powerful woman. Her utmost desire was to "cross the bounds of what was allowed to women" (Divakaruni 51). Even after marriage, she did not forget her dreams. She devoted her life to her husband but also proved her ability as a true queen after the war. Divakaruni incorporates elements of intersectional feminism in her portrayal of Draupadi by addressing issues of gender, class, and caste. The struggles of Draupadi emphasise the interconnectedness of many forms of oppression and underscore the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. She said, "If my husband couldn't see, I'd doubly sure to keep my own eyes open so that I could report everything that was going on to him" (Divakaruni 76). Panchaali was seeking an opportunity to prove her ability.

By reconstructing Draupadi's tale through the prism of female experiences and struggles, Divakaruni's rendition of the *Mahabharata* gives a feminist viewpoint. She has contributed a new dimension to the development of Indian English novels by raising modern feminist themes using mythical narratives. Draupadi's interest in Ved, Puran, Nyayshastra, battle, archery, riding, dice, and other disciplines distinguishes her from the rest of her peers. Draupadi questions her teacher's insistence on women being subordinates to men saying: "And who decided that a woman's highest purpose was to support men?" (Divakaruni, 26). She was not the kind of girl who could be satisfied with a feminine education that would lead to

being engulfed in the world that awaited her: “With each lesson, I felt the world of women tightening its noose around me” (Divakaruni, 29). As she puts forward: “hungered to know about the amazing, mysterious world that extended the past what I could imagine, the world of the senses and of that which lay beyond them” (Divakaruni, 24).

In her work *Tales of Women's Suffering: Draupadi and other Amman Goddesses as Role Models for Women*, Alleyn Diesel relates Draupadi to Goddess Kali and Durga, who both battle injustice:

Throughout the attempted disrobing as well as at other moments in the narrative, Draupadi's actions and responses are reminiscent of other fierce Goddesses: of Kali, in her victorious stance on the battlefield, and of Durga, a female figure recognising and condemning patriarchal forces—represented by male demons—for their denial and destruction of the moral order (*dharma*) of society (*Devi Mahatmyam*). Draupadi's interest in *dharma* and justice challenges women to initiate the critique of male violence and to work for the healing of society. (Diesel, 10)

In addition to portraying the agony endured by women in our patriarchal society, Draupadi serves as an inspiration for strong-willed, self-assured women who struggle for economic, social, and educational equality. Divakaruni's reimagining of Draupadi in a contemporary context offers a fresh perspective on traditional femininity.

Parallels and Divergences between the Two Strong Faces of Femininity

While both Chitra's assertiveness and Draupadi's defiance are indicative of female power, they appear in different ways owing to the contrasting cultural settings in which their tales develop. The

study of Chitra and Draupadi provides a lens for understanding the dynamic interaction between individual choices and cultural factors in generating narratives of empowerment and resistance. Chitra undergoes a change from a shy and hesitant woman to a bold and aggressive one, propelled by her yearning for love and self-realization. Draupadi is presented as a powerful and independent lady from the beginning of *The Palace of Illusions*, with a distinct reflection of individuality in her acts and choices.

Chitra's character endures a significant transformation as a result of her love for Arjuna. Her resolve to modify herself to gain his love is a significant topic in Tagore's story. Draupadi's connections are complicated and nuanced. Her passion for Arjuna and the other Pandavas is explored against the background of the political and family complexities of the *Mahabharata*. Chitra defies typical gender stereotypes by actively attempting to create her fate and defying society's expectations. Draupadi, on the other hand, navigates a society full of political intrigue and patriarchal standards, often questioning these norms in her unique manner.

Chitra's character development is influenced by her internal journey, in which she struggles with her identity and changes herself for love. However, external circumstances and the complicated fabric of relations and politics in the *Mahabharata* shape Draupadi's endeavour. Chitra's narrative delves into the conflict between fate and free will as she makes decisions that affect her fate. Draupadi's character, on the other hand, demonstrates perseverance and a willingness to forge her fate within the limits of the epic despite confronting a predetermined path in the *Mahabharata*. Chitra's narrative has a melancholy undercurrent, emphasising the personal sacrifices made in the pursuit of love and self-realization. Draupadi's story is intertwined with aspects of both sorrow

and victory on a far bigger scale. While Chitra and Draupadi are both powerful female characters, their actions are influenced by a variety of cultural settings, storytelling styles, and themes. Chitra's journey is a moving examination of human development in the pursuit of love, but Draupadi's figure reflects the complexity of power, politics, and personal action.

Research Findings: Chitra and Draupadi Breaking Stereotypes

Both Chitra and Draupadi are examples that resonate with modern women as they show strong, self-reliant female characters who have the courage to challenge injustice. The findings of this research help contemporary woman to affirm their choices in the face of difficulties. Chitra and Draupadi both question established gender norms and assumptions, proposing alternative female narratives. Their resistance to adhering to conventional expectations and insistence on asserting their roles and identities might inspire modern women. Draupadi, in particular, speaks up against injustice, refusing to tolerate oppression passively. She can be seen by modern women as a symbol of courage, who by speaking out against prejudice, campaigns for her rights. However, Chitra's portrayal as a devoted beloved, and dignified individual helps us understand the true nature of femininity. The life experiences of Chitra and Draupadi provide timeless lessons about self-discovery, perseverance, and autonomy to all women.

Chitra's Self-Discovery and Draupadi's Resilience

Chitra's journey of discovering her own identity and breaking free from cultural ideals that impede personal progress is relatable to modern women. Her assertion and rejection based on her aspirations and individualistic approach inspire women to challenge cultural

standards and follow a life that resonates with their beliefs and dreams.

Throughout the Mahabharata, Draupadi confronts countless hardships and injustices, yet she remains resilient. Draupadi's capacity to overcome hardship, stand up to injustice, and persevere in the face of social pressure may inspire modern women. Draupadi actively engages in political and social dynamics, shaping events with her wisdom and influence. Draupadi's independence and participation in decision-making processes might motivate modern women to take an active role in their own lives and societies.

Conclusion

The paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of rethinking femininity through the paradoxical portraits presented in *Chitra* and *Draupadi*. It encourages readers to reconsider the complexities of traditional submissiveness by challenging preconceived notions of women's roles in society.

If I stand up straight and strong with the strength of a daring heart spurning the wiles and art of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fir, no longer trailing in the dust like liana, shall I then appeal to man's eye? (*Chitra*, 72)

This forceful declaration expresses the unyielding unwillingness to submit to patriarchy. The courageous rejection of a woman to surrender to the traditional norms in the name of conventions, tradition, and culture reflects the modern Indian woman. She is finally ready to take charge of her life and let go of her forbidden love.

Draupadi, on the other hand, did not lose her determination in the face of adversity and chose Mahaprasthan a journey that "no woman had ever attempted". She asserts:

Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the

boundaries society has prescribed for women. But what was the alternative? To sit among bent grandmothers, gossiping and complaining, chewing on mashed betel leaves with toothless gums as I waited for death? Intolerable! I would rather perish on the mountain ... my last victory over the other wives How could I resist it? (Divakaruni 343-44).

These exemplary images of womanhood strongly oppose the assumption that women must be

subservient. Rather, they embrace their complicated status as dignified individuals and their aggressive presence in society with confidence. In the end, Chitra's question would justify the conclusion of this research paper: "Would it please your heroic soul if the playmate of the night aspired to be helpmate of the day, if the left arm learnt to share the burden of the proud right arm?" (*Chitra*, 72) As a woman, let me conclude by saying that a woman is capable of preserving her wonderful subjectivity and should not be treated as an object.

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