

Women's Struggle Reflected in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*: A Feminist Approach

Senly Darryl Augie^{*, a,1}, Siti Hanifa^{b,2}

^{a,b} Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Bangkalan, Indonesia

¹ senlydrgie@gmail.com*, ² hanifa@trunojoyo.ac.id

Abstract

Gender equality between men and women has been attained in plenty of countries during the past few centuries as the battle for women's rights has progressed. This research concentrates on the female characters, specifically Draupadi and Amba. The objective of this research is to discover how female characters fight for equality in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. This research evaluates the data using qualitative methods and Naomi Wolf's power feminism. The findings indicate that Draupadi strives for equality by wielding power, collaborating with a man, respecting another woman's beauty choice, being able to voice her opinions, and making significant decision-making. Meanwhile, Amba decides to utilize her power, gain advantage of male strength, and take responsibility to fulfill her own needs.

Keywords: Equality, Power Feminism, *The Palace of Illusions*, Women's Struggle

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality involving men and women has gradually been achieved in various nations over the last several centuries as the women's rights movement has progressed. For decades, women have fought for equality and against the patriarchal system that has oppressed them. Women confront problems in decision-making and leadership duties, a gender pay gap in which men in equivalent occupations earn more, and a disincentive to pursue careers in areas due to established gender stereotypes. A stereotyped perspective is a preconceived image of a person or group that contradicts current factual reality [1]. Negative labeling typically leads to gender disparity. This makes women more difficult to acquire equal rights as men, and they are usually barred from engaging in certain activities.

Indian civilization, like many other 'traditional' societies, is still patriarchal [2]. Women in Indian society have a vital role in nurturing their families, maintaining a prosperous home, and supporting and creating the family's economic, political, and social circumstances [3]. Nevertheless, women's financial, social, and political position maintains lower than that of men. Patriarchy perpetuates male supremacy by restricting women's possibilities and promoting inequity in many areas of life. Men have more influence than women in the fabric of society, particularly in the relationship between husband and wife or father and daughter [4]. They are intended to be the breadwinners in the household, while women are expected to conduct housework and care for children. This is reflected in how boys and girls are nurtured, with boys given a greater degree of autonomy and independence and girls educated to be willing to follow rules.

In India, women are mythologically assumed to be reincarnated forms of the Goddess, yet they are the ones who endure the greatest physical, mental, and emotional abuse [5]. Gender inequality between Indian men and women has been established to persist since birth [6]. To maintain social peace in Indian society, women and men are nevertheless required to fulfill a set of rules and duties. Women should be completely responsible for the kitchen and children, while males should go to work. These are two noteworthy examples of such regulations and requirements. Furthermore, marriage rules evolved in ancient India, and one major setting was

the swayamvar, which allowed a woman, predominantly a princess, to determine her spouse from a list of potential suitors. Swayamvar is the rite of selecting one's spouse [7]. It is a competition in which the winning warrior marries the princess [8]. During swayamvars, applicants do activities or challenges to exhibit their qualifications. While this may indicate limitations in women's choices, it also reflects the cultural and social context of the time. Marriages developed alliances between families or kingdoms, making swayamvar more than just a personal decision. It often has political and strategic implications.

Divakaruni exploits the circumstances in India to create a novel that retells an epic event from ancient Hindu history. *The Palace of Illusions* is a book about the Mahabharata. The author narrates the narrative from Draupadi's viewpoint. The story portrays Princess Draupadi's life. She was born in a fire and would cause the biggest conflict known as the Mahabharata. Draupadi must contend with uncommon life challenges after marrying the five Pandava brothers. She is portrayed in *The Palace of Illusions* as a strong, rebellious, and realistic figure in the story. Draupadi's existence is almost identical to the present independent lady that is able to express her own voice.

The writer selects Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* to be analyzed since the plot is based on a well-known Indian epic. Furthermore, gender issues, particularly those affecting women, continue to persist in certain nations. Gender inequality has a detrimental impact on women's social status. As a result, women misplace the right to gender equality. Another reason is that the author characterizes the female character as courageous and capable of playing a leading role. It is consistent with the theory that the writer used, which is feminism theory.

Earlier research that examined *The Palace of Illusions* novel primarily focused on feminism issues. Previous scholars investigated many facets of feminism and using a feminist approach. Sharma [9] examined the novel utilizing Robin Lakoff and Deborah Tannen's theory to investigate conversational style, polysemous interpretations of language strategies, and the use of sexist terms. Batra [10] evaluated the feminist image using a socio-psychological method. Sulistyono [11] analyzed the novel using male feminism approach. Thus, in this research, the writer uses Naomi Wolf's theory to evaluate the female characters' struggles, particularly those of Draupadi and Amba.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism emerged in the early twentieth century. The initial stage of feminism was focused in obtaining women's legal rights, such as the capacity to vote, chances for educational institutions, and possession of property [12]. As the concept of feminism, the inequalities between men and women should be confronted. The goal is to achieve a balance between feminist and gender norms. People have insisted that men and women have comparable capacities, and they have worked to improve their social standing. Feminism attempts to modify women's perceptions of their situation, such as changing women's ways of feeling, thinking, and giving their best in life.

The feminist movement persists against patriarchal societies in many nations. Feminist critique examines how literary works (and other cultural works) promote or fight the social, political, economic, and psychological subordination of women [13]. Men who write fictional stories frequently depict women as spouses, dutiful mothers, great families, and controlling companions. Feminist literary criticism is the examination of literary works through a feminist lens. Literature frequently comprises sociological reflections on how men and women connect to their own societies [14]. There is also a feminist author called Naomi Wolf. Wolf's advocacy for women's rights and gender equality includes reproductive rights, fair pay, and the campaign against gender-based assault. Naomi Wolf popularized the phrase "power feminism."

Power feminism aims to achieve more equality for women. Its ideology is versatile and inclusive [15]. Power feminism recognizes that the obstacles women face are different,

necessitating adaptable and dynamic responses. Power feminists argue that when the system is arbitrary, women should utilize their strengths to push it toward improvement, rather than asking for gentler treatment based on victimhood [15]. This approach encourages women to work with political and economic systems in order to effect change from below, with the hope that women may influence these structures to better represent their interests. Power feminism's critics argue that it ignores systemic impediments that prevent women from achieving equality, such as systematic discrimination and gender prejudice, such as the gender wage gap. The gender pay gap is commonly ascribed to factors such as biased workplace practices, unequal chances for professional development, and gender prejudice in wage discussions.

Naomi Wolf [15] deliberates major principles of power feminism. It advocates for the smart use of power to promote equality and kindness, while also honoring women's caring and forceful abilities. It rejects sexism without prejudice toward males and supports women's autonomy in sexuality and looks. Power feminism stresses women's empowerment through monetary autonomy while challenging cultural standards that favor masculinity. Power feminism honors individual voices, promotes skepticism, and aims to combine ancient wisdom with contemporary resources. Besides, power feminism emphasizes the necessity of gender collaboration and mutual assistance in moving society forward. It promotes women's rights to pleasure and self-expression while recognizing their worldwide impact. Additionally, it prioritizes assertiveness and originality above uniformity in the pursuit of women's empowerment.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The current study analyzes data using qualitative methods in which the instrument of this research is the writer herself. The qualitative technique uses naturalistic data to analyze objects in their natural situation or context. Creswell and Creswell [16] argues that qualitative research is an approach of exploring and analyzing the significance that individuals or groups concentrate on a human or societal issue. As a result of the preceding explanation, the approach to qualitative research is deemed suitable for application in this study. This is because this study additionally satisfies the criteria for qualitative research in which data are obtained without the use of tools that participants must fill out. The primary data of this study are the characters' utterances and the narrator's narration from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions*. Furthermore, the secondary data for this study are obtained from publications and books associated to the theory and women's concerns examined in this study. The analysis of the data, e.g., the characters' utterances and the narrator's words were done by condensing the data. In condensing process, the data that do not meet the issues of this study were reduced. After being reduced, the data were displayed on the basis of the struggle done by the female characters. Next, the conclusion was done by referring to the female characters' struggle for their equality.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The female characters in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* have their own journey to struggle for their rights. In this study, the writer finds seven points which are explained as follows.

A. Employing Power

The female characters are aware that they have their own power. The data findings show how female characters go through their stories, exhibiting a strong awareness of their benefits and the capacity to recognize and effectively use their power. In this novel, Draupadi shows how to use her power and has the ability to be strong in her own way.

When at mealtime the brothers praised the brinjal for its distinctive taste and asked for more, I remained in the kitchen and let Kunti serve her sons. I kept my face

carefully impassive, my eyes on the floor. But she and I both knew that I'd won the first round. [17]

The narration above describes when Draupadi and Kunti prepare for the mealtime. After Draupadi cooks brinjal, she lets Kunti, her mother-in-law, serve her sons meanwhile she decides to stay in the kitchen. She lets her five husbands think that the delicious food they eat is cooked by their mother. Draupadi wants to win Kunti's heart because her mother-in-law seems to hate her since the first met.

In the narration above, Draupadi carefully hides her emotions and be calm while allowing Kunti, the Pandavas' mother, to serve her sons. Draupadi may appear quiet, but her actual motives are hidden. This implies that her authority stems not just from her explicit deeds, but also from Draupadi's secretive acts. She knows that she has already won Kunti's heart. What Draupadi has done indicates that she illustrates how influence may be used wisely even though it is by doing quietly, but successfully utilizing her position. It emphasizes the idea that women may use their power in a variety of ways, including intentional decisions rather than just explicit behavior. This is compatible with Wolf's [15] proposal that women should grow and use power wisely, both individually and to make the world a more egalitarian environment for mankind. Draupadi's choice to let Kunti serve her sons might be examined as a recognition of the circumstances and an ethical application of authority. Draupadi senses that by doing so, she will establish a more equitable environment among her family. Allowing Kunti to take the lead in this circumstance assists her to avoid potential conflicts while contributing to a good family dynamic.

..... More and more, Yudhisthir began to ask my advice when a tricky judgement had to be delivered. And I, having learned more of the workings of women's power, was careful to offer my opinion only in private, deferring to him always in front of others. [17]

The narration above describes how Draupadi's husbands still ask for her opinion about the political issues. Her five husbands know that she has a great sight and wisdom. However, despite sharing her thoughts to her husbands, Draupadi still remain silent in public. It is intended to maintain her husband's dignity. After all, her husband is still a man whose role is to lead his people. It illustrates how Draupadi recognizes and employs her own authority, particularly in the political sphere. Furthermore, Draupadi's struggle may be evident in her quest to be acknowledged for her brilliance in government matters. The datum shows how Draupadi increasingly gets her abilities recognized. Yudhisthir, her oldest husband, eventually admires her intelligence and requests advice on matters of administration after realizing the value of her views. Draupadi's power and abilities become more and more appreciated, as seen by Yudhisthir's actions.

According to Winarti and Kusuma [18], individuals can achieve self-actualization throughout education, politics, economics, and other fields, demonstrating that both genders have equal rights to better themselves. In this case, Draupadi uses her power in a thoughtful and planned way. She decides to convey her opinion privately to Yudhisthir rather than in public. During post-Vedic period, the era when the Ramayana and Mahabharata were composed as epics, women faced several restrictions in order to maintain the patriarchy [19]. When women are expected to be obedient to men in public, nevertheless, Draupadi uses her power in private, making her a silent but significant figure behind the scene. Despite her knowledge and her capacity to affect political decisions, she must operate in secret due to social norms. The employment of this authority helps to preserve peace in the eyes of the public while actively engaging in decision making. On the other hand, Amba, known as Sikhandi, also employs her power as a response of the inequality she experiences. It can be seen in the data below.

.....*First I remembered my death upon a pyre: flesh melting, eyelids burnt away, the skull bursting. And through it all: my impatience to be gone. Because without death there is no rebirth, and without rebirth I could not kill Bheeshma.* [17]

Amba tells the story about her transformation into a man. Since it is the only way she can conceive about killing Bheeshma, she commits to kill that greatest warrior whatever it costs. The data above illustrates Amba's opinion that, in order to destroy the greatest warrior, Bheeshma, she must transform her identity into that of a man. This choice indicates Amba's acknowledgment of the limits that constrain her as a woman and the utilization of her strength to transcend these limitations. Amba believes that in order to accomplish justice, she must sacrifice herself and become a man.

She employs her power in a battlefield against Bheeshma by changing her identity first. Amba's change into Sikhandi, a male, represents her comprehension of the constraints placed on her as a woman. The choice to transform her identity to a male allows Amba to go beyond the limitations that she accepted in society as a woman and confront the injustices she perceived. Amba takes responsibility for her future by choosing to be reincarnated as a male to get justice. This act of self-empowerment is consistent with Wolf's [15] statement for women to take control of their own growth. Then, to achieve the justice she desires, Amba must kill Bheeshma on the battlefield. It is supported by the narration below.

So it was that Sikhandi was stationed in the front of Arjun's chariot, his unbound hair blowing in the wind. He challenged Bheeshma to battle, and Bheeshma laid down his bow, saying, Amba, you know I will not fight you. [17]

As Sikhandi, Amba appears at the forefront of Arjun's chariot, challenging Bheeshma to battle. The appearance of Sikhandi at the front of Arjun's chariot when the greatest war finally ongoing, urging Bheeshma to a battle, represents gaining power. Bheeshma, a fierce warrior, lays down his bow after recognizing Sikhandi as Amba's reincarnation. This is a critical occasion because it highlights Sikhandi's impact. This moment underscores the influence that Sikhandi has as a man enabling him to take part in the war. Even though Sikhandi has been rose from the dead as a man, he was still Amba in the inside. Sikhandi takes advantage of the chance to join the war by deciding to be reincarnated as a man, and is finally able to confront Bheeshma directly on the battlefield. This strategy also succeeds in making him win the fight against Bheeshma because after all, inside him, he was still Amba who was a woman. This means that Bheeshma, no matter how strong he is, will not have the heart to fight Sikhandi. On the other hand, Sikhandi eventually conquers the immortal Bheeshma. He can utilize his authority in this situation to avenge the injustice that Amba has suffered.

B. Collaborating with A Man for Mutual Support

In the struggle for social equality, men are partners rather than competitors [15]. It implies that men, rather than functioning as opponents, also play a cooperative and supporting role to attain greater social equality. This suggests that men actively work with women in certain contexts to advance social justice and equality, rather than standing as a barrier to such goals.

.....*I said, "If Keechak touches me again, I'll swallow poison."*
Bheem pulled my cracked palms to his face. I could feel his tears on my calluses. He said, "Without you by my side, what use is a kingdom? I promise you that tomorrow I'll kill Keechak, even though I'm discovered."

.....*In the dark of the dance hall where I lured him the next night, Keechak was pounded to death.*[17]

Keechak, the commander-in-chief of Matsya kingdom, threatens to abuse Draupadi sexually in this section. If the abuse continued, Draupadi declared that she is going to do something against this mistreatment, even if it means killing herself. Nonetheless, the notion that men and women should cooperate to support one another is demonstrated when her second husband, Bheem, comforts her and offers to find a solution. In this case, Draupadi collaborates with Bheem to revenge for the harassment she receives from Keechak.

Draupadi and Pandavas are in disguise because Yudhistir lost his gambling. They are not allowed to be found out. If they are found out, their hiding, which should have lasted twelve years, will be repeated all over again. Therefore, Draupadi plans to kill Keechak without betraying her other husbands by staying in disguise. Bheem, one of her husbands, offers her a plan to revenge. The following night, Draupadi entices Keechak to the dance hall by offering the opportunity to see her alone. She takes a dangerous action. Bheem lurks in the shadows. When Keechak launches an assault on Draupadi, Bheem comes and smashes him on the body. Draupadi's tenacity and fortitude are essential in carrying out the plan, whilst Bheem's physical strength and protective instincts help him succeed in carrying out the revenge plan.

The help of Bheem is critical. It implies that to achieve equality, men can also contribute to the success of the plan. Bheem's willingness to revenge Draupadi's dignity, despite the expense of exposure, demonstrates that the quest for fairness and equality is not limited to women. Men have a crucial role in combating sexism and harassment. Draupadi's dependence on Bheem at this time of distress illustrates how strength and resilience can be shared, and meaningful relationships relies on mutual respect and assistance.

Furthermore, Draupadi is not represented as a man-hating character. She hates sexism, but this does not imply that all men should be despised. They instead collaborate to fight sexism and harassment together. Instead of hating all men, Draupadi knows how to gain strength with the help of a man. She devises a revenge plan and puts herself in danger to lure out the target. Later, Bheem, as a man, helps her execute Keechak. This demonstrates that women may be powerful and strong without holding hatred against males. Partnership and mutual support across genders is critical in resolving gender equality difficulties, as seen by Draupadi and Bheem's partnership in battling harassment.

C. Taking Advantage of Male Power

Recognizing the current power imbalances between men and women is significant, as men frequently have larger societal influence. However, in the quest of gender equality, it is critical to avoid broad generalizations about all males impeding women's development. As Wolf [15] observes, assigning a collective motivation to obstruct women's development to all men is neither true nor fair. Instead, establishing equality entails acknowledging men's various viewpoints and goals.

..... This time I invoked a yaksha. He appeared in the sky with his burning demon sword.....

..... When I awoke, I was a man. And yet not completely so, for though my form was changed, inside me I remembered how women thought and what they longed for.

I had to be a man, because only a man can do what I must accomplish—kill the greatest warrior of our time. [17]

The datum above shows when Amba desperate since she cannot find someone who is able to defeat Bheeshma. Then, she decides to invoke a yaksha. Yaksha was originally used as a synonym for deva or devata, referring to a god, but eventually became associated with demigods [20]. They are frequently considered to be protectors of natural wealth, such as buried treasures in the earth, and are believed to possess the capacity to grant blessings or cause calamity. Amba

tells her purpose of seeking her right to the yaksha. Then, she wakes up as a man without losing her memory when she was a woman.

In this case, Amba, known as Sikhhandi then, demonstrates strategies for overcoming the limits she faced when she was a woman. She realizes that her transition into a man has given her the ability she needs to combat the man who has caused her world to disintegrate. However, Amba, who despises men, does not dispute the reality that she needs masculine power to exact retribution by changing her gender.

Amba's commitment of changing her gender becomes an opportunity of gaining access to the advantages of male strength, particularly when confronted on the battlefield by a powerful person like Bheeshma. She understands that her transformation into a man has granted her the capacity to battle the man who triggered her world to crumble. Amba, who despises men, does not deny that she requires masculine power to wreak vengeance by altering her gender. When challenged on the battlefield by an imposing opponent like Bheeshma, Amba's resolve to change her gender becomes a chance to obtain entrance to the advantages of masculine strength. Amba transformation evolved into a method of disregarding the limitations placed on women in a culture where only men are regarded qualified for certain obligations. According to Wolf [15], neither men nor women have a benefit in weaknesses; does not reject men as a gender, but senses that excessive male dominance and the cultural prioritizing of maleness over femaleness are unwelcome. It emphasizes the extent to which women must go, including altering their gender, and relying on male power in order to obtain agency and equality.

D. Taking Initiative for Woman's Need

Wolf [15] argues that women learn to perceive themselves as powerful change agents with a wealth of resources, rather than hopeless victims. Women endure a process in which they build a view of themselves as change agents with various skills and resources. This point of view contradicts assumptions that women play a passive role. This encourages women to embrace their strengths rather than lament their destiny as powerless victims.

The moment I set eyes on the garland-that-never-fades, my past returned to me, and with it my rage. I took the garland for myself, determined to do on my own what no man dared do for me.

Remember that, little sister: wait for a man to avenge your honor, and you'll wait forever. [17]

In the data, Amba muses on her rebirth and exhibits knowledge of her background and the abuses she endured. Amba, then known as Sikhhandi, resolves to assume responsibility for avenging justice for herself because no one wanted to aid her. The gender change she selects lead her to commit herself to repaying the abuses she faced in her prior life. This move underscores Amba's resolve to encounter her own desires, proceeding away from men who are supposed to address concerns of honor and fairness. This stresses an evolution apart from the passive position that has been assigned to women and indicates a determined attempt to influence their fate, resisting conventional narratives that restrict women to passive and dependent roles.

As Wolf [15] declares that women should evaluate their desire for signature, acceptance, and fame so that they may take honor for themselves and openly give to others. As a consequence, they may pursue these things on their own initiative. Sikhhandi, previously known as Amba, reflects on his rebirth and demonstrates an awareness of his origins and the horrific events he suffered. He vows to take responsibility for avenging justice because no one else would. Since Amba knows that no one can help to achieve justice that she needs, she takes an initiative to do it on her own even though it costs her future life. As Sikhhandi, Amba becomes aware of her past and the horrible situations she has been through. Sikhhandi takes an active role to pursue justice

for himself, recognizing that waiting for someone else to revenge his honor would be pointless. Regardless of the personal cost to his future existence, Sikhandi's endeavor to resolve his issues on his own demonstrates a desire to restore his power and authority over his destiny.

E. Appreciating A Woman's Appearance Choice

Wolf [15] states that every woman's actions and the way she looks are her own concern. Women are in charge of their own bodies and may choose how they appear and dress. In this novel, Draupadi implements one of the characteristics of power feminism proposed by Wolf, namely appreciating the appearance choice of women.

..... "because Sikhandi wants to see you, too. This afternoon, in fact. Only—she isn't really a woman anymore."

"Do you mean she no longer behaves like one?" I asked. Dhai Ma had a lengthy compendium of rules as to how women should behave. For years she'd tried to din them into my head. Already I felt sympathy for the unknown Sikhandi. [17]

Dhai Ma tells Draupadi that Sikhandi comes and wants to see her. Draupadi never knows that Sikhandi exist since no one has ever mentioned his name. In the data above, Sikhandi's identity is revealed by the quotation, which states that she is "no longer a woman." Sikhandi, previously known as Amba, chooses to change her identity and looks into a man for her own sake. No man wills to help her in taking revenge. Thus, she chooses to change her appearance and identity into a man in order to kill Bheeshma. Draupadi's response to Amba's circumstance is one of empathy.

According to Wolf [15], a woman's conduct and appearance are her own business. Since Draupadi knows that her unknown sister, Amba, has been through hard times that leads her to change her appearance as Sikhandi, Draupadi shows empathy. Dhai Ma mentions that Sikhandi, whom Draupadi wishes to meet, "is not actually a woman anymore." In response, Draupadi displays sympathy for Sikhandi. Then, Draupadi has a profound awareness of the tribulations endured by her unknown sister Amba, who has assumed the identity of Sikhandi. Draupadi's empathy for Sikhandi is seen in her reaction to Dhai Ma's regulations regarding how women should behave. Draupadi feels sympathetic to Sikhandi despite having been taught these norms for years, demonstrating that she is aware of the challenges of not complying to society's required gender roles. Draupadi's struggle is visible in her mental conflict between Dhai Ma's societal standards and her empathy and understanding of Sikhandi's disobedience. These difficulties mirror greater social obstacles confronting those who do not comply to established gender conventions.

F. Being Able to Express the Thoughts

Women often cannot express what is on their minds due to the influence of stereotypes. Women are considered to always obey what has been destined for them. This is also depicted in the novel *The Palace of Illusions* by Divakaruni. Draupadi is able to say what is on her mind if things are displeasing to her.

The artist uncovered the first portrait. "This is the noble Salya, ruler of the southern kingdom of Madradesh," he intoned, "and uncle to the Pandava princes."

..... "He's old!" I whispered to Dhri in distaste. "He probably has daughters my age. Why would he want to come to the swayamvar?" [17]

At the moment, Draupadi is found the suitors that are participated in her swayamvar. When she looks at Salya's picture, Draupadi expresses her displeasure with the elder monarch, Salya. She considers Salya is too old to be her husband. Her dislike for her prospective partner, as well as her doubts about Salya's reasons, are explicit manifestations of her thoughts and wants.

Traditionally, women are not permitted to make judgments since men are thought to be more intelligent and the ones who bear domestic responsibilities [21]. Yet, Draupadi voices her displeasure with the ancient King Salya as an achievable suitor, despite her family's decision to allow Salya to get involved in the swayamvar. This is reliable with Wolf's [15] idea, which promotes women to share their thoughts. Draupadi's actions reveal the significance of women having the ability to express themselves and make decisions based on their own aspirations and views. Draupadi's bravery in voicing her displeasure with Salya as a possible suitor also contradicts the assumption that women's roles are supposed to accept whatever is prepared for their life. The ability of Draupadi to articulate herself demonstrates her liberty. The power to speak Draupadi's ideas and express her feelings about her own fate is a struggle for equality. It highlights her commitment to speak up and make choices that reflect her desires rather than being pushed to do things she does not want to do. She refuses to remain passive in her own life and prefers to make her own story. She believes she has the authority to decide who deserves to stand by her side.

G. Making Big-Impact Decisions

Throughout history, women have made crucial and profound decisions, frequently in the face of hardship and social norms. These choices have an impact on individual's personal life as well as larger social change. Draupadi, one of the female characters in the novel, makes a decisive choice by cursing those who have degraded and mistreated her.

"All of you will die in the battle that will be spawned from this day's work. Your mothers and wives will weep far more piteously than I've wept. This entire kingdom will become a charnel house. Not one Kaurava heir will be left to offer prayers for the dead. All that will remain is the shameful memory of today, what you tried to do to a defenseless woman."

..... *"I will not comb it," I said, "until the day I bathe it in Kaurava blood."* [17]

In this part, Draupadi hits the Kaurava princes with a powerful prophecy as the cost that they must pay for violating her. Draupadi declares that an epic battle will play out as a result of their horrible treatment of her. Draupadi's commitment never to comb her hair until it has been covered with Kaurava blood is a representation of her unwavering commitment to achieving justice and exacting revenge for the assault she suffered. Furthermore, the curse of Draupadi emphasizes the anguish and suffering that women go through as a result of the deeds of people in positions of power. This section focuses on the ways in which Draupadi may question male-dominated power systems and affect the future through their significant decisions. She fights for the abuse she endures and makes everyone pay for their evil actions.

She makes a decisive decision by criticizing those who have insulted and abused her, knowing that her words would have a significant influence. Draupadi's strong prophesy and pledge show her unrelenting desire to obtaining the rightful compensation for the harm she sustained, as well as the pain she endures as a result of the acts of those in positions of authority. This shows that a woman's choices can influence many people around her and change the world [15]. Draupadi's actions have far-reaching consequences in the epic battle that followed later. Draupadi's curse and vows to not comb her hair until it has been covered in Kaurava blood represents her unwillingness to accept the cruelty and disgrace she has suffered. Furthermore, Draupadi's strong decision to curse those who mistreated her displays her uncompromising assurance to justice and vengeance. It also acts as a forceful message against women's oppression and assault, emphasizing women's power and determination in the face of difficulties. Her curse has become a symbol of resistance to unfairness and oppression.

The results of this study show similarity and difference with Sharma's [9] study. In her research, Sharma explores the breadth of feminist linguistics, which demonstrates how concepts from the fields of language and gender materialize in literary works and character interactions. Sharma's study focuses on conversational style, the polysemous meanings of linguistic tactics, and the use of sexist language as represented in the characters' interactions. The results of the research, which include conversational techniques, linguistic methods, and sexist language, reveal that the characters behave differently and demonstrate their social standing. The difference between this study and the present study is the topic and the theory used. Sharma applies Robin Lakoff and Deborah Tannen's linguistics theory to this topic. Meanwhile, this research employs Naomi Wolf's theory, which emphasizes the female characters' quest for equality.

Meanwhile, Batra [10] utilizes the same data source as the present study. According to Batra's findings, Divakaruni delivers Draupadi adulterous longing in order to achieve her character's feminist teleology. Draupadi, the major female character in Divakaruni's novel, often critiques India's patriarchal discourse, indicating that men are superior to women. As a result, Divakaruni tends to be conveying the idea that the eradication of patriarchal attitudes is most likely related to women's gender existence. In the story, Draupadi is depicted as a rebel, which is comparable to the current study. She transcends gender stereotypes and advocate for her rights. However, Batra's research differs from the current study. In his analysis, Batra emphasizes on the unique ways used to demonstrate Draupadi's feminist credentials, as well as the plot's departure from the original epic. He concludes that only in the hereafter can women be free of the cultural constraints that have been put upon them. Meanwhile, the results of his research make no reference of the original epic, which emphasizes men's strength. Furthermore, the current study is concerned with both Draupadi's and Amba's struggles. Amba recognizes that she can fight for her own rights by using her masculine force in the conflict. Besides, men also contribute to the success of women's fight.

Furthermore, this study strengthens the findings of Sulisty's [11] research. The source of data has similarities with Sulisty's work and the current investigation. Sulisty investigates male feminism as represented by the male figure Krishna. As a result of his article, Krishna portrays a masculine feminist. According to this study, men can also contribute to equality. While both studies depend on the same primary sources, this research differs in that it focuses on the female perspective, investigating how female characters confront patriarchal norms. In contrast to Sulisty's work, which emphasizes the supporting function of a male character, this research focuses on the resilience and growth of female characters. How the female characters develop themselves to fight for their rights.

V. CONCLUSION

Draupadi and Amba, the female characters in *The Palace of Illusions*, are described as independent women through their struggle. Hence, Draupadi fights for the equality by employing power, collaborating with Bheem, appreciating another woman's appearance choice, being able to express her thoughts, and making big-impact decisions. Meanwhile Amba chooses to employ her power, take advantage of male power, and take initiative for her need. Draupadi and Amba reveal how to use their strength and capacity to be powerful in their own ways. Then, when Amba chooses to change her identity into Sikhandi, Draupadi appreciates her decision and feel sympathy; which indicates supporting other woman's choices. As a woman, Draupadi also voices her thoughts freely as an awareness of freedom of speech. Then, she dares to curse everyone that violates her which causes big trouble, known as a great war called Mahabharata. Moreover, despite being rebellious and challenging gender expectations, Draupadi does not hate men. Men are allies that can support women to gain their rights which is reflected by Bheem.

REFERENCES

- [1] Y. Puspita and Z. Rafli, "The Life Struggle of Female Characters in the Novels of Abidah El Khalieqy," *IJLECR - Int. J. Lang. Educ. Cult. Rev.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 65–76, 2017, doi: 10.21009/ijlecr.031.08.
- [2] I. Sivakumar and K. Manimekalai, "Masculinity and Challenges for Women in Indian Culture," *J. Int. Womens. Stud.*, vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 427–436, 2021.
- [3] S. Kumar, "Gender Disparity and Status of Women in India," *Int. J. Creat. Res. Thoughts*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 4713–4727, 2021.
- [4] R. Mardiyani and T. Tawami, "Gender Inequality and Feminism in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things," *MAHADAYA J. Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 165–174, 2022, doi: 10.34010/mhd.v2i2.7598.
- [5] M. J. Kaur and S. Sharma, "Exploring Social Barriers to Gender Equality in India," *J. Posit. Sch. Psychol.*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 6341–6345, 2022.
- [6] S. Zodpey and P. Negandhi, "Inequality in Health and Social Status for Women in India - A Long-Standing Bane," *Indian J. Public Health*, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 325–327, 2020, doi: 10.4103/ijph.IJPH_1312_20.
- [7] S. Das, "Vyasa's Draupadi: A Feminist Representation," *Int. J. Gend. Women's Stud.*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 223–231, 2014.
- [8] A. García-Arroyo, "A Deconstruction of The Mahabharata: When Draupadi Writes Back," *Miscelánea A J. English Am. Stud.*, vol. 58, pp. 13–29, 2018.
- [9] S. Sharma, "The Scope of Feminist Linguistics for Literary Texts: An Analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions," *An Int. Peer Rev. J. English Stud.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 117–124, 2023.
- [10] J. Batra, "Working Out Feminist Psychology in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions," *Int. J. Psychosoc. Rehabil.*, vol. 24, no. 06, pp. 7668–7677, 2020.
- [11] N. Y. Sulisty, "The Male Feminism of Krishna in Chitra Lekha Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions," *Spectr. J. Ilm. STBA*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021.
- [12] P. Singh, "A Study on Waves of Feminism," *J. Emerg. Technol. Innov. Res.*, vol. 5, no. 12, pp. 363–365, 2018.
- [13] L. Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2015.
- [14] W. S. Hasanuddin, Emidar, and Zulfadhli, "Literature as a Learning Medium for Gender Equality Values," *Int. Conf. Lang. Arts*, pp. 91–96, 2023, doi: 10.2991/978-2-38476-124-1_14.
- [15] N. Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- [16] J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. Melbourne: SAGE, 2018.
- [17] C. B. Divakaruni, *The Palace of Illusions*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- [18] Winarti and A. H. Kusuma, "Women Struggle in A Midsummer Night's Dream: de Beauvoir's Feminism Perspective," *Leksema J. Bhs. dan Sastra*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 113–130, 2017, doi: 10.22515/ljbs.v2i2.929.
- [19] R. H. Patil, "The Social Status of Indian Women of Different Periods in the Patriarchal Society," *Res. Ambition An Int. Multidiscip. e-Journal*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 1–10, 2021.
- [20] V. Ts, "Depiction of Yaksha and Yakshi's in Jainism," *Int. J. Appl. Res.*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 616–618, 2016.

[21] Y. D. Saputri, "A Feminist Analysis on Women's Struggles in Breaking Gender Inequality as Seen in Nevil Shute's *A Town Like Alice*," *English Lang. Lit. J.*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2018.