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Gynocentric Resistance in Dystopian Narratives: A Comparative Feminist Analysis of Divakaruni and Deshpande

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of dystopian vision and the emergence of female hegemony in select novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande. Rooted in feminist theory, the study examines how both authors construct gynocentric narratives that resist patriarchal structures and reimagine power through the lived experiences of their female protagonists. While dystopia is often conceived as a space of societal collapse and oppression, Divakaruni and Deshpande employ it as a critical lens to expose gender-based inequalities and systemic silencing of women in both familial and socio-political spheres. Through a close textual analysis of select works – such as *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* by Divakaruni, and *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* by Deshpande. This paper investigates how the protagonists navigate cultural constraints, reclaim narrative agency, and redefine the contours of womanhood. The study reveals that dystopia, in these narratives, is not merely a bleak backdrop but a transformative space where women's voices emerge as sites of resistance, negotiation, and empowerment. Ultimately, this comparative analysis underscores the subversive potential of Indian English women writers in shaping feminist discourse within postcolonial literary frameworks.

Literature has long served as a mirror to societal structures, power dynamics, and the evolution of human consciousness. In particular, dystopian fiction provides a powerful

framework through which writers critique the present by envisioning alternative, often grim futures that reflect systemic injustices and suppressed voices. Traditionally dominated by

Western paradigms, the genre of dystopian fiction in Indian English literature has begun to evolve, revealing new dimensions when infused with feminist perspectives. Within this evolving landscape, the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande stand out for their nuanced portrayal of women's lives amidst internal and external turmoil, often bordering on dystopian realities. Though neither author writes within the classic dystopian genre in a literal sense, their narratives metaphorically construct dystopic environments marked by psychological oppression, gender-based violence, and cultural marginalization—conditions that reflect real-world patriarchal domination.

This research paper, titled “*Gynocentric Resistance in Dystopian Narratives: A Comparative Feminist Analysis of Divakaruni and Deshpande*,” seeks to examine how both authors articulate the experiences of women navigating hostile, patriarchal structures and how these narratives contribute to the discourse of female hegemony. Drawing on feminist literary theory, the study investigates how Divakaruni and Deshpande develop gynocentric spaces that subvert conventional power hierarchies. While Divakaruni often draws from mythological and historical frameworks to reimagine women's roles and voices, Deshpande's realism and introspective style highlight the psychological and emotional dystopias experienced by women in contemporary Indian society. By critically analyzing select novels such as *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* by Divakaruni, and *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* by Deshpande, this paper aims to reveal the ways in which the authors construct female-centered narratives that resist, redefine, and reclaim power. The objective is not only to foreground the voices of women silenced in traditional narratives but also to explore the transformative potential of these voices in reshaping the cultural imagination of gender, agency, and justice.

Literature Review

Feminist literary criticism has long focused on the representation of women in literature and the power structures that influence those representations. Seminal scholars like Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have shaped feminist discourse by examining how literature perpetuates or resists patriarchal norms. In the Indian context, writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande have contributed significantly to this evolving tradition, offering narratives where female characters resist conventional roles and assert agency in complex, often oppressive environments. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works, particularly *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, reimagine classical Indian epics from a female perspective. Her protagonists, like Draupadi and Sita, are recast not as passive figures but as women with voice, choice, and political consciousness. Scholars have analyzed Divakaruni's use of myth to critique contemporary gender politics, emphasizing how her retellings disrupt male-centric narratives and introduce a feminist counter-history.

Shashi Deshpande, on the other hand, is known for her psychological realism and introspective portrayal of women caught in the web of tradition, duty, and silence. In *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande interrogates the quiet, everyday dystopias that Indian women endure—emotional isolation, marital oppression, and social invisibility. Critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee and Jasbir Jain have acknowledged Deshpande's contribution to Indian feminist writing, noting how she redefines heroism through interior strength rather than overt rebellion. While both authors employ different narrative strategies—mythical vs. realist—they converge in their exploration of female consciousness, autonomy, and resistance. However, few comparative studies have specifically focused on the dystopian

dimensions of their work and how these narratives construct spaces of female hegemony. This paper aims to fill that gap by offering a feminist-dystopian reading of select novels, using both textual analysis and theoretical insights. Despite a growing body of feminist literary criticism on the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande, several critical gaps remain unaddressed. Most existing research analyzes these authors individually, often within separate literary traditions (mythological retellings vs. realist fiction). There is a lack of comparative studies that examine their works in tandem through a shared thematic lens. While feminist perspectives on both authors are widely discussed, their use of dystopian vision—whether literal or metaphorical—as a critical device to expose patriarchal oppression remains relatively unexplored. Discussions around resistance in the novels often stop at victimhood or survival. Few studies analyze how female characters move beyond resistance to claim hegemonic space—exercising leadership, autonomy, and moral authority. There is limited engagement with how cultural settings (mythical vs. modern Indian society) influence the portrayal and assertion of women's agency across different narrative worlds. The notion of a 'gynocentric narrative space'—where women not only resist male power but create alternative systems of meaning and community—is yet to be fully theorized in relation to these authors' works. This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative, feminist-dystopian analysis that integrates both thematic and narrative dimensions of power, voice, and transformation in the selected novels.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the dystopian elements in the selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande, both metaphorical and literal.
2. To analyze how female characters in these novels resist patriarchal domination and

assert their agency within oppressive socio-cultural frameworks.

3. To examine the narrative strategies employed by both authors in constructing gynocentric spaces that challenge traditional gender roles.
4. To compare the use of myth (in Divakaruni) and realism (in Deshpande) in shaping feminist discourse and articulating a vision of female hegemony.
5. To contribute to feminist literary scholarship by highlighting how Indian English women writers expand the boundaries of dystopian fiction to reflect indigenous gender realities.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research methodology grounded in feminist literary criticism. The primary method involves close textual analysis of selected novels—*The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande—with particular attention to themes of dystopia, resistance, and female hegemony. A comparative approach is employed to examine how each author constructs gynocentric spaces through differing narrative strategies—mythical reinterpretation in Divakaruni's case, and psychological realism in Deshpande's. The analysis is guided by theoretical frameworks drawn from feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, along with concepts from gynocriticism and postcolonial feminist theory. Contextual interpretation is also applied, situating the narratives within their socio-cultural and historical backdrops to better understand the depiction of patriarchal oppression and the emergence of female agency. Secondary sources, including critical essays, journal articles, and author interviews, support the analysis and help position the research

within existing literary scholarship.

Discussion

Dystopia, as a literary concept, is often associated with exaggerated depictions of futuristic societies characterized by authoritarian control, dehumanization, and resistance. However, in the context of Indian English literature by women writers, dystopia takes on a more metaphorical dimension—depicting the everyday lived realities of women as oppressive and alienating within patriarchal social orders. In the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande, dystopia emerges not through technological collapse or totalitarian regimes but through emotional isolation, cultural subjugation, mythic determinism, and gendered silencing. These authors construct complex, often bleak, narrative landscapes where women struggle for voice, identity, and agency amidst overwhelming systemic constraints. Divakaruni says in an interview, “I presented them in the context of the times, and not how I see them right now—because that is how Rani Jindan would have seen them and judged them, especially the first time she is faced with them, with the death of her best friend, Rani Guddan.... I wanted people to feel the amount of pressure there was on Rani Jindan, too, to become a sati. The fact that she is even able to stand strong against all this pressure says something about the firmness of her character. Later, she is horrified when another dear friend, Rani Pathani, decides to become a sati - but she understands why, although she does not agree with her. The reality, as Rani Guddan points out to Jindan, is that life was very difficult for a widow, and often royal widows met a violent end after their powerful husbands (their protectors) passed away - as we see in the tragedy of Maharani Chand Kaur and her daughter-in-law Bibi.” (n.p).

Shashi Deshpande's novels, especially *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, explore dystopia not as an external catastrophe but as a deeply internalized and socially normalized

condition. Her characters exist within oppressive domestic and cultural spaces where silence, invisibility, and guilt are tools of control. In *That Long Silence*, the protagonist Jaya inhabits a stifling emotional and marital world. The house she shares with her husband Mohan becomes symbolic of a dystopian enclosure—one where communication has broken down, autonomy is denied, and internalized patriarchy governs every act. Jaya reflects, “I had been so busy playing the roles of daughter, wife, mother, that I had never paused to think of myself as a person.” This quote encapsulates the metaphorical dystopia of a woman who has been erased by the very roles meant to define her. The dystopia here is subtle and psychological—it is the silencing of a woman's inner life. Moreover, Deshpande's treatment of silence as a dystopian element is profound. Jaya, like many women around her, has learned to remain silent to maintain harmony, sacrificing her truth and voice. The statement, “Silence became a habit, a mask, and finally a shield,” highlights how silence is both a coping mechanism and a prison. The domestic realm, often idealized in traditional narratives, becomes a space of surveillance and self-censorship a metaphorical Panopticon.

In *The Binding Vine*, the dystopia is further intensified by Deshpande's portrayal of sexual violence and institutional neglect. The protagonist Urmi uncovers the tragic life of Mira, a woman who was raped by her husband and silenced by her family. Mira's story, discovered through her poems, echoes the dystopia of bodily violation and cultural complicity. Urmi observes, “Why do we not talk about rape within marriage? Why does society pretend it does not happen?” The erasure of Mira's voice and the normalization of her trauma reflect a collective moral decay a hidden dystopia functioning under the veneer of tradition and respectability. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* employ mythological retellings to construct dystopias that are both historical and

metaphorical. By rewriting Indian epics through the eyes of Draupadi and Sita, Divakaruni exposes the foundational misogyny embedded in cultural narratives and offers a powerful critique of historical silence. In *The Palace of Illusions*, the Mahabharata is retold through Draupadi, who is constantly manipulated and traded as a political pawn. Her palace meant to be a place of power—is eventually burned, symbolizing the destruction of a woman's autonomy. Draupadi says, "I was born for a war I had no say in." This chilling statement captures the dystopia of a life scripted by others, where a woman's desires and identity are crushed beneath dynastic agendas. The literal wars of the epic mirror Draupadi's internal war against patriarchy, fate, and silence. The famous episode of her public humiliation in the court, where she is disrobed while her husband's remain passive, is the ultimate dystopian spectacle. Draupadi asks, "Whom should I ask for justice—those who watch in silence?" This moment reveals a society where institutions of justice and morality have failed utterly where womanhood itself becomes a stage for public degradation. Divakaruni's genius lies in portraying epic grandeur as a dystopian illusion for women. To quote her words in 2023 interview with Mansi Shah "I started writing the stories of women just because they were more natural to me. I felt like I understood other women more and of course, I thought it was an authentic view point I realised that all of our great mythological heroines were always shown to us from a male writer's perspective. And the stories were always interested in the men. The women characters were there, but they were kind of pushed to the side. Their complexities were not explored, their voices are not heard. So that became really important to me. For me to imagine them in the centre of the narrative, telling their stories, in their own voice." (n.p.).

Similarly, in *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita's narrative challenges the idealized image of womanhood glorified in *The Ramayana*. Divakaruni's Sita is not merely a faithful wife

but a thoughtful, questioning individual who recognizes the dystopia of her circumstances. Her abandonment in the forest by Rama, despite her unwavering loyalty, is framed as an ultimate betrayal. Sita reflects, "Why is a woman's purity always under question, and never a man's actions?" This question penetrates the moral hypocrisy of patriarchal culture and highlights the dystopian standard of purity imposed on women. The Ashram, which could have been a space of peace, becomes a site of exile and single motherhood—another form of isolation and punishment. The metaphorical dystopia here is religious and cultural—where divine figures are used to reinforce subjugation rather than empowerment. Both authors present intersecting dystopias that stem from gender, tradition, and voice or the lack thereof. In Deshpande's novels, modern Indian women grapple with inherited silence and social expectations; in Divakaruni's works, mythic women confront divine patriarchy and epic injustice. What links these worlds is the shared erasure of female experience and the systemic suppression of women's voices. As White notes, "The writer of realistic fiction sets her story within a time and-place-specific context and examines, through the actions of her imaginary characters, the line that divides the reality of that time and place from what historians would recognize as the truths we know about it" (148).

In both cases, however, the dystopia is not without resistance. Jaya begins to write again; Urmi breaks the silence around Mira. Draupadi asserts her identity in the court; Sita composes her story in the forest. These acts of narration and memory serve as powerful counters to dystopian erasure. By reclaiming voice, the women in these novels create alternative, gynocentric spaces—where truth, however painful, is no longer hidden. As feminist dystopias, these texts do not dwell solely in despair. They offer visions of possibility where introspection leads to transformation and storytelling becomes revolution. The protagonists' emotional and

intellectual awakenings challenge the reader to see beyond social facades and into the structures that perpetuate inequality. The works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande offer profound insights into the complex dynamics of gender, power, and resistance in contemporary Indian society. Through their female protagonists, both authors illustrate how women navigate and resist patriarchal domination within restrictive socio-cultural frameworks. Their characters not only endure systemic oppression but also assert their agency, making conscious decisions to reclaim their identities and voices. This essay explores how the protagonists of Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, and Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* resist patriarchy and assert agency within oppressive environments.

In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, resistance is portrayed through the lens of mythic retellings, where female protagonists, often rooted in the Indian epics, confront the patriarchal constraints that define their roles in society. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi, the central character, emerges as a complex figure who resists the constraints imposed on her by her familial and societal expectations. As the wife of the Pandavas, Draupadi's identity is often reduced to her relationships with men—her husbands, brothers, and father. Yet, Divakaruni reshapes Draupadi's narrative to highlight her inner strength, political astuteness, and defiance. Draupadi's famous public humiliation in the Kuru court is one of the most striking scenes in the Mahabharata, where she is disrobed by Duryodhana and his associates. However, in Divakaruni's retelling, Draupadi's response to her humiliation is marked not by passivity but by resistance. She prays to Lord Krishna for help and later takes control of the narrative when she challenges the court's judgment. Her act of defiance voicing her anger and seeking justice for the injustice done to her—becomes an assertion of her agency in a world that seeks to silence her. In the words of

Lerner, "It is important to understand that 'woman's culture' is not and should not be seen as a subculture. It is hardly possible for the majority to live in a subculture.... Women live their social existence within the general culture and, whenever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness, they transform this restraint into complementarity, and redefine it. Thus, women live in duality—as members of the general culture and as partakers of women's culture" (Lerner, 52)

Additionally, Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* offers a nuanced portrayal of Sita, another iconic female figure from the Ramayana. Sita's journey, though often depicted as one of sacrifice and suffering, is reframed by Divakaruni as a journey of self-discovery and resistance. Sita's decision to speak out against her husband, Rama, when she feels unjustly abandoned in the forest, represents an act of defiance against patriarchal expectations. In the original Ramayana, Sita's silence is often taken as a symbol of her idealized womanhood, but in Divakaruni's retelling, Sita refuses to remain passive in the face of injustice. When she says, "I will no longer be your ideal woman," she reclaims her voice, rejecting the societal norms that demand her submission. Through these acts of resistance, Divakaruni's female characters assert their agency by reclaiming their stories and reshaping their identities outside the confines of patriarchal expectations.

In contrast to Divakaruni's mythological reimaginings, Shashi Deshpande's novels, particularly *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, delve into the psychological and emotional landscapes of women trapped in the societal confines of modern India. Deshpande's protagonists struggle with the weight of tradition, social expectations, and familial obligations, but their resistance often takes the form of introspection and self-examination. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, faces a personal crisis that challenges her entire understanding of herself as a wife and mother. After years of silence in her marriage, Jaya

begins to question her role in a relationship that has stifled her autonomy. The silence that pervades her home, both emotional and communicative, represents a metaphorical form of imprisonment. Yet, Jaya's introspection becomes an act of resistance against the roles imposed on her by society. Jaya begins to write, something she had long suppressed, and in doing so, she takes the first steps toward asserting her identity beyond the restrictive roles of wife and mother. She states, "I had forgotten that I was a person with desires, with thoughts, with words of my own." This realization is a direct challenge to the patriarchal constructs that have dictated her existence. By writing, Jaya not only resists the silence imposed by her husband but also reclaims her voice, asserting her right to express herself, to question, and to exist as an individual beyond societal expectations. Jaya's journey from silence to self-expression illustrates the subtle yet powerful ways in which women in Deshpande's novels resist patriarchal domination.

In *The Binding Vine*, Urmi's resistance is also marked by her journey of self-discovery. As she uncovers the traumatic history of Mira, a woman who endured sexual violence and societal rejection, Urmi begins to confront the harsh realities faced by women in a patriarchal society. Mira's story becomes a catalyst for Urmi's own awakening, and she ultimately decides to write about the injustices women face. Through this act of remembrance and expression, Urmi reclaims her power and rejects the passivity expected of women who are victims of violence. In both of Deshpande's novels, resistance is portrayed not as physical rebellion but as a psychological and intellectual awakening. These women resist by questioning the very systems that seek to silence them and by reclaiming their agency through self-awareness, introspection, and creative expression. In both Divakaruni's and Deshpande's works, resistance is not solely an individual endeavor but also a collective one. Female solidarity plays a key role in their

assertion of agency. In *The Binding Vine*, Urmi's empathy for Mira's plight and her decision to bear witness to the violence faced by women demonstrates the power of solidarity. By giving Mira a voice, Urmi acknowledges the importance of shared experiences and the strength that comes from collective resistance. Similarly, in *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi's relationships with other women, particularly her bond with Kunti, her mother-in-law, highlight the importance of female alliances in navigating patriarchal systems. Draupadi's sense of solidarity with other women allows her to challenge male-dominated power structures, such as her complex relationship with her husband Yudhishtira and her eventual rejection of the idea of being a passive, sacrificial figure. Female solidarity in Divakaruni's and Deshpande's novels serves as a means of resistance to patriarchal structures, offering women the opportunity to support and empower each other. This collective resistance transcends individual struggles and becomes a more profound statement about the possibilities of female agency within oppressive systems.

In both *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande, female characters resist patriarchal domination by rejecting the roles imposed upon them by society and by asserting their agency through acts of self-expression, introspection, and solidarity. These characters refuse to be defined solely by their relationships with men or by societal expectations of womanhood. They challenge cultural norms, reclaim their voices, and assert their right to define their own identities. Whether through mythological reimaginings or psychological realism, both Divakaruni and Deshpande illustrate how women navigate and resist patriarchal structures, ultimately reshaping their roles within oppressive socio-cultural frameworks. Their stories of resistance and empowerment highlight the enduring relevance of feminist

narratives in challenging patriarchal norms and asserting the agency of women in contemporary society.

In their works, both Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande employ distinctive narrative strategies to create gynocentric spaces that subvert traditional gender roles and offer alternative representations of women's lives. Their novels move beyond conventional portrayals of female subordination to explore themes of empowerment, autonomy, and resistance within patriarchal structures. The authors' skillful manipulation of perspective, voice, and narrative structure constructs spaces where women can assert their agency and challenge the gendered norms imposed on them by society.

Divakaruni's narrative strategy in *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* is centered around reimagining ancient mythological narratives from a feminist perspective, offering a fresh interpretation of iconic female figures such as Draupadi and Sita. By shifting the focus from traditional male-centered viewpoints to the experiences of these women, Divakaruni constructs gynocentric spaces within the framework of well-known epics. The first-person narrative technique she employs in *The Palace of Illusions* allows Draupadi to become an active agent in her own story, rather than a passive object defined by the actions of her male counterparts. This shift in perspective transforms Draupadi from a symbol of female suffering into a woman with her own desires, frustrations, and ambitions. The intimate, reflective voice of Draupadi provides a window into her emotional and psychological state, allowing readers to engage with her resistance against the constraints imposed by patriarchal norms.

In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni reinterprets the story of Sita, offering a voice to a character often depicted as the ideal wife and mother in traditional narratives. Sita's internal monologue in the form

of reflective, intimate narration challenges the idealization of her character. By framing Sita's struggles—her banishment, her sacrifice, and her eventual questioning of Rama's decisions—within a feminist context, Divakaruni creates a space where Sita's resistance to patriarchal authority is clearly articulated. This technique provides readers with insight into Sita's personal growth, enabling her to assert her autonomy in a world that demands her submission. Divakaruni's strategy of retelling myths through the lens of female agency allows her to construct a space where women can transcend the passive roles typically ascribed to them.

Shashi Deshpande, in novels like *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, employs psychological realism and introspective narration to create gynocentric spaces that challenge the conventional roles women are expected to play. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande's protagonist, Jaya, engages in a profound self-examination, breaking free from her silence to reclaim her voice. The first-person narrative in this novel gives Jaya the space to reflect on her life, marriage, and societal expectations, allowing her to reframe her identity outside the domestic roles of wife and mother. Through Jaya's introspection, Deshpande challenges the silence and invisibility women are often expected to accept in patriarchal society. As Jaya begins to write and articulate her feelings, she asserts her selfhood and challenges the confines of the traditional roles imposed on her. Deshpande uses the theme of writing as a tool for resistance, as it enables Jaya to create her own narrative and to position herself as a subject rather than an object of patriarchal control.

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande uses the interweaving of multiple narratives to create a space where different women's voices and stories converge. Through the stories of Urmi and Mira, the novel becomes a platform for women's experiences of suffering and resilience. Mira's traumatic past and Urmi's journey

toward self-awareness serve as a counter-narrative to the patriarchal structure that seeks to silence and subjugate women. Deshpande also uses the motif of memory and the act of telling stories as a means of reclaiming agency. By giving women the freedom to speak their truths, Deshpande constructs a space of empowerment where women are no longer defined by their relationships with men but by their personal experiences and internal lives. This narrative strategy provides a platform for women's voices that are often marginalized in traditional patriarchal discourse. The exploration of feminist discourse and the articulation of female hegemony in literature often involve diverse narrative strategies. While Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande both address the themes of female empowerment and resistance against patriarchal structures, their approaches differ significantly. Divakaruni uses myth and mythological reimagining as a tool to challenge gender norms, while Deshpande employs realism to explore the complexities of women's lives in contemporary, socio-cultural contexts. Despite these differences, both authors contribute to a broader feminist discourse, albeit in distinct ways.

In works like *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni revisits the classical Indian epics the Mahabharata and the Ramayana – to reimagine the stories of legendary female figures such as Draupadi and Sita. These figures, often depicted as passive victims or symbols of idealized womanhood in traditional retellings, are reinterpreted in Divakaruni's feminist retellings. The author gives these mythological women voices, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of their struggles, agency, and desires. Divakaruni's use of myth allows her to reshape the roles of women in these texts. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi, the central character, is presented as more than just a pawn in a male-dominated world; she is a figure who grapples with power, ambition, and identity. By

focusing on Draupadi's internal monologue, Divakaruni shifts the narrative from patriarchal heroism to female resistance, presenting her as a complex agent who exercises agency within the constraints of a male-dominated society. Similarly, in *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita's journey is reframed from one of silent sacrifice to one of self-awareness and resistance. Sita's decision to speak out against her abandonment by Rama and to reflect on her own identity represents a challenge to the submissive ideal traditionally associated with womanhood.

The use of myth in Divakaruni's novels constructs gynocentric spaces where women transcend traditional roles, thereby asserting female hegemony. By giving these mythological women agency, Divakaruni challenges the patriarchal interpretation of their stories and redefines their roles within these ancient texts. Myth becomes a vehicle for feminist discourse, where the past is reimagined to offer new possibilities for contemporary.

In contrast, Shashi Deshpande employs realism in novels like *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* to explore the lived experiences of women in contemporary society. Deshpande's female protagonists navigate the complexities of domesticity, marriage, and personal identity within a traditional, patriarchal framework. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, is a woman who, after years of silence in her marriage, begins to question her role as a wife and mother. Through psychological realism, Deshpande delves into Jaya's emotional and intellectual awakening, portraying her journey toward self-expression and self-empowerment. Deshpande's use of realism presents a grounded, everyday reality that mirrors the struggles women face in negotiating their autonomy in a patriarchal society. In *The Binding Vine*, the intersecting stories of Urmi and Mira offer a portrayal of women coping with grief, trauma, and societal expectations. Realism allows Deshpande to depict women's internal and external battles in a relatable, tangible manner, showcasing how they resist patriarchal

oppression through emotional resilience and intellectual engagement. Rather than mythic grandiosity, Deshpande's characters resist the patriarchal system through subtle acts of defiance, psychological growth, and the reclamation of voice. While both Divakaruni and Deshpande engage in feminist discourse, their approaches highlight different facets of female hegemony. Divakaruni's mythological approach repositions women as central, active agents in patriarchal narratives, providing them with the tools to resist subjugation and reclaim their power. Her vision of female hegemony is rooted in the empowerment of mythical women who confront and challenge the patriarchal systems embedded within traditional texts.

Deshpande's realist approach, on the other hand, focuses on mundane yet profound personal struggles, portraying women as active agents within the confines of everyday life. Her depiction of psychological realism and women's silent rebellions shows that hegemony is not always enacted through grand gestures but through the small, personal choices that defy societal expectations. Deshpande's focus on emotional resilience and self-awareness as tools of resistance challenges the notion that hegemony requires visible domination; instead, it can reside in quiet yet powerful acts of assertion.

Conclusion

In exploring the selected works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande, this paper has examined how both authors construct narratives that challenge traditional gender roles and articulate visions of female hegemony through different yet complementary approaches. While Divakaruni harnesses the power of myth to reinterpret the lives of iconic female figures like Draupadi and Sita, Deshpande grounds her feminist discourse in the realism of everyday women's lives, highlighting the psychological, emotional, and social intricacies of their experiences.

Divakaruni's use of mythological

retellings allows her to provide a platform for women to transcend their passive, victimized roles in traditional epics, transforming them into complex, active agents of change. By reimagining figures like Draupadi and Sita, she offers a feminist rethinking of their narratives, placing them in positions of authority and defiance within the patriarchal structures of mythology. Her work emphasizes that female hegemony can be achieved not just through resistance to patriarchal systems but through empowerment in the very stories that have historically confined women to subordinate roles.

In contrast, Deshpande's realism situates her feminist discourse in the gritty, emotional realities of women's everyday lives. Her characters, such as Jaya in *That Long Silence* and Urmi and Mira in *The Binding Vine*, resist patriarchal control not through grand gestures, but through small acts of defiance—be it reclaiming voice, breaking silence, or asserting emotional autonomy. Deshpande's approach to psychological realism invites readers to witness the internal lives of women as they navigate the complexities of marriage, domesticity, and self-discovery, illustrating that female hegemony can be found in the quiet, persistent resistance against the limitations imposed by society.

Both authors ultimately demonstrate that female agency and hegemony are not monolithic or singular. They take different shapes—whether in the mythic, symbolic realm of reimagined epics or the real, personal struggles of contemporary women. Yet, in each case, the women in these novels challenge and resist the patriarchal systems that seek to define and control them. Whether through mythological revisionism or psychological exploration, Divakaruni and Deshpande offer rich, diverse contributions to feminist discourse, advocating for a world in which women, in all their complexity, can exercise agency and assert their power. Through these narratives, both authors urge readers to rethink the roles assigned to women in both myth and reality and

to consider new possibilities for women's empowerment that are grounded in their own voices, choices, and histories. In doing so, they not only challenge traditional gender roles but also shape a future where female hegemony is not a threat to the established order but a reclamation of space, identity, and autonomy within it.

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