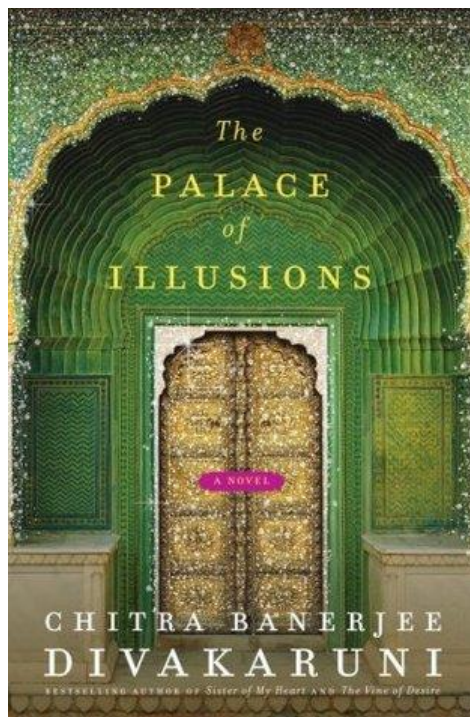


Book Review - The Palace of Illusions

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While wandering through the aisles of a local bookstore in search of some mystery novel interesting enough to rekindle my reading habit, I found this book waiting at one corner of the store. The first thing that made me take notice of the book was its attractive cover. Then I went ahead and read the synopsis, and I had to take it, at least for the sake of having a book with pretty cover in my shelf. This book was very different than the ones I usually read, which were

dystopian YA novels. When I picked this book in that bookstore, I never thought it would end up being one of my most favorite reads. And through this small para I want to explain my experience of with reading this book and my review on it, and maybe you can also rekindle your reading habit, or this book can be the next read on your reading journey for the year.

Palace of Illusions is a reimagining of the world-famous Indian epic, the Mahabharat—told from the point of view of an amazingly strong woman – Panchaali. The book takes us back in time to a story that is half history, half myth and wholly magical.

This book was written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who is an Indian American author and poet. Divakaruni's stories are mostly centered in India and the United States, and they frequently revolve on the stories and lives of South Asian immigrants. She writes for both children and adults, and her novels have appeared in a variety of genres, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, myth, and fantasy. The Palace of Illusions is one of her many notable works.

Coming back to the novel, the story follows the princess Panchaali from her birth in fire to her lively balancing act as a lady with five husbands who had been tricked out of their father's kingdom. Panchaali is drawn into their journey to restore their heritage, accompanying them through years of exile and a horrible civil war involving all of India's key kingdoms. Meanwhile, we never lose sight of her strategic battles with her mother-in-law, her difficult friendship with the enigmatic Krishna, or her hidden affection to the mysterious man who is her husband's most deadly adversary. Panchaali is a fiery heroine who re-defines a universe of warriors, gods, and fate's ever-manipulating hands for us.

The synopsis catches our mind, and it does justice as the trailer to the movie of The Palace of Illusions. I am not someone who used to read mythologies, I am sure most of us can relate to that. But this book has changed my perspective on mythologies, and mainly on the story of Mahabharata. Mahabharata is a story, I knew in bits and pieces, and it never really occurred for me to read it, because I always thought I wouldn't relate to that story. And so, this book was my first literary read of the epic Mahabharata and it was thought provoking. If you haven't read Mahabharat yet or are unfamiliar with it, this book will provide you with a wealth of knowledge on the enormous and fascinating epic. If you've previously read the epic, this book will give you a fresh perspective on it. The author had taken the liberties of a writer and created a new plotline involving Draupadi and Karna, as well as Draupadi and Krishna, which was refreshing. This novel is rich fine details, human dramas, conflicts, plot twists, complicated

family dramas with histories and secrets and Gods who wield magical weapons and offer boons.

This story even though hundreds of years old, makes one think that some things and emotions that people experience transcend through centuries. That's why a 22-year-old girl in Hyderabad could relate to the woman of the story of Mahabharata in some way or the other. The novel takes you on such a journey that the emotions of a Princess and a Queen of an epic story feel so relatable to the reader at some level and some point. The story deals with Draupadi's perspective of Power, grieving of the dead, and the opinion of the narrator on the wars and revelations. It revolves around how Draupadi took stand for herself in front of hundreds of powerful men, how she handles power and love and the consequences of them. This book takes the ancient and epic tale of Mahabharata and retells it with a dollop of relevant modern feminism, and lots of strong female characters and their perspective on the war, which was never done before in such a thought-provoking way. I would recommend this book to everyone, mainly the young people because this gives you a fresh perspective on life and its many entanglements.

My Favorite Quote from the book: *"A situation in itself," he said, "is neither happy nor unhappy. It's only your response to it that causes your sorrow."*

Book Rating: 5/5