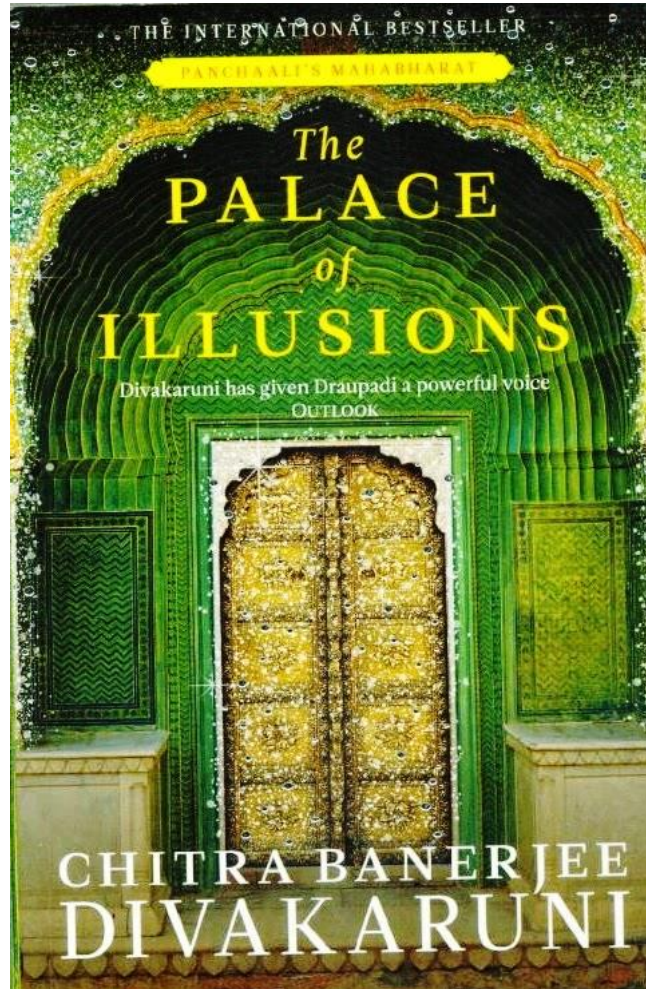


**Shades of Violence in *The Palace of Illusions*  
– A Critical Study**

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**Abstract**

From the ancient times, the concept of violence has become an essential part of human life. It is multi-dimensional working both at interpersonal level and at the domain of warfare. Presumably, violence involves physical wounds but it is connected with mental agony also. So, a definition of 'violence' in a line or two is absurd as it covers multidimensional perspectives. Further, violence involves a cultural tradition. For some theoreticians, the concept of violence develops with the victims, offender and witness being associated to the idea. Hence, violence acts as an indicator of how relationship develops between two persons, communities, societies, cultures, etc.

In *The Palace of Illusions* these divergent types of violence are accommodated. Narrated by Panchali, herself the heroine, the reader enjoys violence in its different forms and colour ubiquitous in the novel. No doubt, the primary reference of violence in this novel is the battle between the Kouravas and the Pandavas held in Kurukshetra. The sexual assault on Draupadi by Dussasan in the *sabha* and the vow she takes as a reaction was the primary cause of the devastating war in Kurukshetra. Though the war is physical, it is ideological too. Panchali herself faced violence of multiple shades and forms and was cause too. There was violence against nature when the Pandava brothers planned to build their palace in Indraprastha. The violence resulting out from dominance by Kunti and resistance from Paanchali is another important aspect delineated beautifully which gives an interesting twist to the otherwise serious epic. In its multiple shades, resistance too was held responsible throughout the novel for violence.

This article explores the how the multifaceted violence has been effectively delineated in this novel by Chitra Banerjee.

### ***The Palace of Illusions***

*The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni may be rightly considered a novel wherein these divergent types of violence are accommodated. Narrated by Panchali, herself the heroine, the reader enjoys violence in its different forms and colour ubiquitous in the novel. No doubt, the primary reference of violence in this novel is the battle between the Kouravas and the Pandavas held in Kurukshetra. The sexual assault on Draupadi by Dussasan in the *sabha* and the vow she takes as a reaction was the primary cause of the devastating war in Kurukshetra. Though the war is physical, it is ideological too. At least this is how Krishna encourages the Pandava brothers to fight against their brothers and elders. The presence of Karna creates a violence within Panchali. There is violence against accepted truth when Panchali searches for a place in the other world where women would be free from male demands. Arjuna's marriage with other princess incited violence within Paanchali which was handled by mellowing words from Krishna. There was violence against nature when the Pandava brothers planned to build their palace in Indraprastha. The violence resulting out from dominance by Kunti and resistance from Paanchali is another important aspect delineated beautifully which gives an interesting twist to the otherwise serious epic. In its multiple shades, resistance too was held responsible throughout the novel for violence.

This article explores the how the multifaceted violence has been effectively delineated in this novel by Chitra Banerjee. Also, this article studies whether or not all those activities or relations

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classified as violent should at all be treated so. Can these functions be considered rationally and legally so much threatening so as to call these violent?

## Violence

The concept of ‘violence’ is an essential part of human life since ancient times but its causes are multiple- may be a human “propensity” (Wrangham 1996 qtd in Whitehead) or an “invariant” cultural or social condition (Eller, 1999 qtd in Whitehead) or the nature of interpersonal interactions (Riches, 1986 qtd in Whitehead). Violence is inherent within a human being making it pervasive, ancient, infinitely various, and a central fact of human life though its occurrence is often misinterpreted. Violence involves both physical wounds and mental agony. It is multi-dimensional working both at interpersonal level and at the domain of warfare. At one level, therefore, the experiences are shared between the victim and the perpetrator while at the other domain it is depersonalization of the enemy. Even witchcraft or verbal aggression are supposedly part of violence having no instant material relation. Violence works incessantly within one’s mind also. Therefore ‘violence’ covers multidimensional perspectives. Nevertheless, one of the major reasons causing violence is imbalance- in the nature of man, in relationship, in enjoying power etc.

Violence involves a cultural tradition. There are forms of violence meant to challenge the established culture but this encounter is from within a cultural discourse shared with the victims or it remains ineffectual in the first place as Sorel notes, “There are so many legal precautions against violence and our education is directed so much towards weakening our tendencies towards violence that we are instinctively inclined to think that any act of violence is a manifestation of a return to barbarism.” (1999:175 qtd in Whitehead) Some theoreticians conceptualize violence developing with the victims, offender and witness who are associated with the idea. Violence takes place with the offender attacking the victim. Reversely, the victim’s resistance causes violence. So, violence is an indicator how relationship develops between two persons, communities, societies, cultures, etc.

Violence is always assessed in terms of degree, intensity and culturally competent judgment. Police dispersing an unruly mob with water cannon may not be too grievous to call it violent but the same police opening fire on the unruly mob or a war between two countries may be violent. But it must also be agreed upon that situations like a war of words between the in-laws or somebody having Hamlet syndrome may be violent although not to be equated with the state’s violence in severity.

The monopoly of violence by the colonial power has gradually weakened individual in the face of violence, which has made modern man dependent increasingly on state's use of violence. The purpose is to disarm and disempower the non-elite. (Neil L. Whitehead, 2004)

### **Critique of Violence**

An added dimension to the meaning of violence is found in Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* where he says violence means public force, legitimate power, domination, authority and violence. He justifies the relationship of violence present within the framework of the society - to law and justice. The relationship between law and violence is twofold- violence meant to frame laws and dominate. He distinguishes between law making and law preserving violence. Violence directed towards natural ends is law-making violence while violence directed towards legal ends will be law-preserving. Law manifests violent domination for its own sake. Its force is destroyed with the state power being destroyed. The divine violence purifies the guilty and not the guilt and just ends can only be decided by God and no law is there for justified means. Ends are situation-specific.

### **Divine Violence – *The Palace of Illusion***

By his argument on divine violence, Benjamin makes political demands of existence of violence outside law. Divine violence signals the coming of Messiah in the form of the revolutionary general strike to usher in a new historical epoch.

The above-mentioned study on violence by Neil L. Whitehead and by Walter Benjamin explicated further by Signe Larsen is handy to focus on how violence has been constructed in *The Palace of Illusion*, a novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In her 'Author's Note', Divakaruni refers to 'the fierce rivalry between two branches of the Kuru dynasty' (2009, p. xiii) - both sides struggle to legitimise the violent acts of each side culturally interpreting their action of killing, maiming, and assaulting the opponents, which otherwise appear incomprehensible. (Whitehead, 2004) The reader is apprised of a system of violence key to the plot of both the epic and the novel. To reinforce her stand on violence and the major theme, terms like 'participated and perished' (Divakaruni, 2009, p. xiii) 'inspiring virtues and deadly vices' (*ibid.*) – are juxtaposed giving an impression that different shades and forms of violence are likely to be presented in the novel. The chief protagonists in this violent clash are Krishna, Bheeshma, Drona, Drupad and Karna. Divakaruni familiarises them as warlord– Krishna, the mentor to the Pandavas, Beeshma, the patriarch committed to protect the Kuru throne, Drona, the teacher of both the groups training them to master their skills in the use of arms, king Drupad extremely eager to take vengeance against Drona and Karna, the great warrior. The novelist, disappointed with Vyas' failure to portray women characters of that stature, refers to Kunti, Gandhari and Paanchali whose role in the great war

of Mahabharata was menacing. Although introduced as shadowy figure in *the Mahabharata*, some readers made Paanchali responsible for the Great War by her headstrong decision.

### **Provocations**

However, Divakaruni feels there were provocations from the man's world for women characters, which made Paanchali mostly responsible for the carnage in Vyas's *Mahabharata*. Had she been its creator, she 'would place the women in the forefront of the action.', (2009, p. xiv-xv) When she says,

'I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits. Better still, I would have one of them tell it herself, with all her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs, her heartbreaks, her achievements, the unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it.' ((2009, p.xv)

she suggests many other forms of violence to be exposed bit by bit in the novel through the narrator character, Paanchali.

### **Paanchali**

The novel begins with a type of violence - nature of Paanchali's 'interpersonal interactions' (Riches) evolved out of resistance: the palace of Drupad 'seemed to tighten its grip around me until I couldn't breathe' (Divakaruni, 2009, p.1) - the resistance here is a defence against her father's encroachment into her territory.

Jasbir Jain states 'The element of intellectual debate can save resistance from descending into violence'. (Jain, 2012, p.xii) Though not a debate but surely an intellectual activity in this case when Paanchali, reacting to this, preferred to listen to the story of her birth from her Dhai Ma. Violence of a different shade developed as 'the story inspired me to make up fancy names for myself: Off spring of Vengeance, or the Unexpected One. And then Dhai Ma narrates the birth of both Paanchali and her brother and how the assembly cried out in one case and was quiet when Paanchali emerged out of fire (Divakaruni,2009,p.1-2) - an instance of discrimination against female new-borns. From her early period, Draupadi became aware of her unwantedness.

A gaunt, glittering man walked towards my brother and me - - - held out his arms -- --  
-. Only my brother that he wanted (Divakaruni, 2009, p.6).

### **Clash against Cultural Practices**

So, the clash of ideas began since Paanchali's birth against the prevalent cultural practice of differential treatment though the intensity of the clash was insignificant at this early stage. While narrating events, Dhai Ma mentioned Paanchali's father to be physically weak but had a revengeful mind. From her story, Paanchali came to know how the unearthly voices offered the king a son warning him of a dire consequence. The term 'vengeance' is associated with victim. Conceptually, violence develops with the King as a victim eager to retaliate against an offender. For Paanchali, violence is challenging established socio-cultural norms- her birth is to 'change the course of history' (Divakurani, 2009, p.5), which she would do from within a cultural discourse. So a note of discontent pervades in her analysis of the paternal names for her and her brother

Dhri's name fell within the bounds of acceptability - - - .But Daughter of Drupad? Granted, he hadn't been expecting me, but couldn't my father have come up with something a little less egoistic? Something more suited to a girl who was supposed to change history? (*ibid.*)

### **Skin Colour**

The womenfolk were made so much conscious about the skin-colour by the existing societal culture that even Paanchali, supposed to change the history in future, had to be crouched down feeling humiliated for no fault of her own. 'If someone addressed me - - - I tended to blush and stammer and - - - trip over the edge of my sari.' (Divakurani, 2009,p.9) In course of time, this humiliation led an enormous psychological change in her to become the cause of a great war. She acquired an ability of resistance to face the impediments of her life violently when the case demanded so.

### **A New Paanchali**

Thus, a new Paanchali was discovered in Divakaruni's novel. A change in her appearance gave her an extra amount of confidence. She looked brighter opening up a floodgate of curiosity and admiration from far and wide thereby gearing her up for the next step of violence - a step towards domination and authority at the cost of the established cultural practices.

Throughout the different stages of the war and prior to this, Krishna had an important role to play in her life as a close friend and guide. Krishna was a manager and also root of all the troubles. It was his frequent advice that infuriated the Pandavas for the ultimate violence. In all the troubles of Paanchali, Krishna stood by her side. With his pragmatic intelligence, Krishna equipped Paanchali.

He asked me what I thought of my place in the world as a woman and a princess- and then challenged my rather traditional beliefs. He brought me news of the world that no one else cared to give me, the world that I was starving for – even news that I suspected

would be considered improper for the ears of a young woman. And all the while he watched me carefully, as though for a sign. (Divakurani, 2009, p.12)

This readiness made Paanchali optimistic enough to tear off the age-old subjugation of women in near future. Normally, the Indian women were denied their right to education and Paanchali was no exception. But Krishna supported Paanchali's urge to get education and advised the king to take steps accordingly so that she could gear up her for the prophesied great job. The changes were noticeable soon after. Dhai Ma 'regarded the lessons with misgiving. She complained that they were making me too hard-headed and argumentative, too manlike in my speech.'(Divakurani, 2009, p.23) Quite in tune with Benjamin's interpretation of violence within the society, and ultimately, the state, a phase of violence cropped up from opposing groups with Paanchali believed to be a threat for the traditional culture of the kingdom. The antagonism which stemmed from argument-cross argument if she should continue her study at all along with her brother, found her fighting a lone battle with even her brother changing his stance. The tutor tried to dissuade her telling that the job of a Kshatriya woman was to support the warrior and 'pray that they die with glory on the battlefield.'(Divakurani, 2009, p.26). Violence at the level of intellection was created when she decided to do things otherwise - teaching her men how to survive proroguing battle as far as practicable while preferring to work at other fields gloriously.

### **Gender Discrimination**

Gender discrimination does not begin with sex but is an impact of socio-cultural exercise. So 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' (Beauvior, 1973, p.301) Paanchali rebelled against this socio-cultural system of making her a woman, of belittling her status. The story of her struggle thus began with her girlhood, marriage, motherhood and extended upto the Great War and her final attainment of Truth. The term, 'envied' records her eagerness to attain the knowledge of statecraft possessed by her brother. Neil L. Whitehead feels 'To be violent is clearly a capability we all possess, but why we should choose to be violent, or how we can be induced to act violently, will obviously differ culturally and historically.'(2004, p.55) Any Tom, Dick and Harry and specially the womenfolk might not be interested in statecraft but the same induced Paanchali to act otherwise. Her desire intensified as she was to change history. Envy for her had some sort of tie-up with the concept of violence. Culturally, Paanchali was unlike other royal ladies and historically far ahead of her time- so much so that she was misunderstood by the womenfolk of her time while men were worried as she was no longer subservient to her men before and after marriage. Chitra Banerjee cultivates in her an ambitious spirit to stand at par with her men which was to contribute to a revolutionary change in the

social structure in near future. Thus the novel shares a feeling of power- of gaining or retaining- through intrigues, deceit, manipulation and what not. Paanchali was provided training in areas wherein a noble lady was supposed to be proficient

- - - but my heart was not in such frivolities. With each lesson I felt the world of women tightening its noose around me. I had a destiny to fulfil that was no less momentous than Dhri's. Why was no one concerned about preparing me for it? (Divakurani, 2009, p.29)

### **Lessons on Womanly Conduct**

The more Paanchali was given lessons on womanly conduct, the more rebellious she became, her disagreement with her trainers widened though not always expressive. In this preparatory stage as someone to change the history, she noticed her maidservants and other close associates keeping distance- awestricken or simply because they failed to assess the inward strength of Paanchali responsible for the ultimate violence.

Morality carries the Kantian tradition of an abstract universal law in English. So moral relations survive within the politically framed ethical life. Violence should be critiqued in terms of its relations to law and rights within the framework of ethical life which includes the family, civil society and the state. "For a cause" Benjamin writes "becomes violent, in the precise sense of the word, when it enters into moral relations" (1986, p.277). Thus Benjamin is interested in the violence present within the framework of the society, and ultimately, the state.

### **Violence as a Moral Step**

In Paanchali's case, the cause of her violence too was moral. Her growing violence was prompted by the failure and unwillingness of some of her close associates, mostly menfolk, in her family to interpret her demeanour appropriately within the context of political ethics. But a handful others - Krishna, Dhri and Dhai Ma –who could assess the terrible force within Paanchali gearing up for the great violence for which she was responsible to great extent. Paanchali realised too others might extend their support to bring about the revolution – to form a new image about women and to establish political ethics replacing the existing one.

Chapter five begins with this relationship issue.

Early in my life, I learned to eavesdrop. I was driven to this ignoble practice because people seldom told me anything worth knowing. - - - Krishna was the only one who told me the truth. But he wasn't with me often enough.



So I took to eavesdropping and found it a most useful practice. (Divakurani, 2009, p.34)

This passage shows how the relationship issue has been addressed to sustain the existing political ethics by dint of flattery, avoidance, discouragement or by not sharing unpleasant facts thereby protecting Paanchali from facing the same. But this irked Paanchali as she was dying to know the not-permissible facts in the existing moral relations. Her eagerness resonated in her expression- she felt she was ‘drowning in a backwater pond while everything important in the world was happening elsewhere.’(Divakurani, 2009, p.36)

Paanchali soon came to know of her future quite in a mysterious way with the help of a sage. The invocation made by her and the spirits responding to her call has some sort of similarities with the witches in *Macbeth*. Knowing her future, Paanchali was confused and dejected. Violence within left her to be stunned. She won’t marry, didn’t like to own the most beautiful palace and refused to be the cause of so many deaths. Her cultural tradition and experience dissuaded her to accept these prophecies, but the sage said it would take place in her life incited by her pride, temper and vengeance. So the clash of the two ideals began within her. She wanted to escape requesting Vyas to change or modify the prophecies, which he said he couldn’t because of the Great Design already set rolling in. This great violence would recreate history and culture. ‘So men will remember you as the most amazing queen this land has seen. Women will chant your name to bring them blessing and luck.’(Divakurani, 2009, p.40) – an utter acceptance of the women power after the great violence. Vyas gave her some advice to follow so as to lessen the catastrophe.

When there was trouble going within Paanchali, Dhai Ma received a cultural jolt knowing Paanchali would have five husbands. Paanchali too was appalled by the prophecies. Marrying more than one was a right exclusively enjoyed only by the men folk in the Indian culture. So, this prophesy was to invalidate the age-old tradition.

## **Kunti**

Like Paanchali, Kunti is another female character not so much prominent in the epic but had a definite role in the novel that culminated in the Great War between the Kouravas and the Pandavas. A widow at her young age, Kunti brought up her five sons firmly to see her sons inherit their kingdom occupied by the Kauravas unlawfully. The force behind to motivate her sons constantly so that they never got distracted from their coveted target, she remained resolute to her decision even when she

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asked her five sons to share Draupadi amongst them. Her decision was not at all whimsical although it sounded so at first. Perhaps, she wanted to curb the importance of Draupadi when Kunti mentioned her as a woman, all of which perturbed Paanchali's mind. She was particularly shocked the way a scared Kunti behaved with Paanchali in front of the Pandava brothers.

Both Paanchali and Kunti were sandwiched between misunderstandings linked up with a feeling of hatred against each other. Divakaruni prepared the stages both in the main plot and in the sub-plots through small clashes of ego between the two in-laws and thereafter with other protagonists, which finally culminated into the Great War. Earlier, Paanchali felt proud to be wife of the greatest warrior of her time but as they reached their home, all her joys were reduced to tears. Her predicaments began when Kunti's verdict was implemented with Draupadi having no option left. For her, it was humiliating. Although the sage Vyas had an unusual boon for her, this only disgraced her womanhood. That Kunti, like any other mother-in-law in a patriarchy, preferred dominance over newly-wed Paanchali, a sort of baiting it seems, is very much expressed in the lines below :-

Kunti didn't believe in using spices. Or perhaps she just didn't believe in letting her daughter in law have any. She'd handed me a pulpy brinjal, along with a lump of salt and a minute amount of oil, and told me to prepare it for lunch. I asked her if I might have a bit of turmeric and some chilies. Perhaps some cumin. She replied, "This is all there is. This isn't your father palace!" -- I swallowed my anger and chopped the bringal on the dull cutting blade. (Divakaruni, 2009, p.107)

The last line of the quoted passage shows how skilfully Divakaruni draws the tension between the in-laws. This tension might not have a direct impact on the ultimate violence but these misunderstandings created an ambience for that final fury.

### **Love and Hate**

A relationship of love and hate that persisted between Paanchali and Karna since their first meeting, has a direct bearing on the Great War. Draupadi's yearning for Karna was secret but everybody in the vicinity and even Karna knew about her hatred for him. Silencing Karna asking him his father's name is the beginning of that confrontation between the two. '- - - he never forgot the humiliation of that moment - - - . And when the time came for him to repay the haughty princess of Paanchali, he did so hundredfold.' (Divakaruni, 2009, p.95) But she confessed secretly to the reader that she had to act to stop the impending bloodshed.

The line of approaching battle was drawn by Divakaruni in the following paragraph

Later, some would commend me for being brave enough to put the upstart son of a chariot driver in his place. Others would declare me arrogant. Caste –obsessed. They'd

say I deserved every punishment I received. Still others would admire me for being true to dharma, whatever that means. But I did it only because I couldn't bear to see my brother die. (Divakurani, 2009, p.96)

### **The Function of War**

The War was meant to reinstate dharma overturning all that was debauched. Benjamin Franklin understands this war as a necessity for reinstating Justice which is *possible* (but not *knowable*) through an act of divine violence. Justice is neutral only when it is divine. Although Pandavas were fighting against the Kouravas to protect Dharma and to institute the rule of law in their country, they too were found going against Dharma in many cases as when Kunti arranged a stay of the *nishad* woman and her five children in the *lac* house and burnt them when they were asleep – all these to mislead the Kouravas and save her sons.

### **Violence All Over**

As mentioned earlier, there were incidents of violence throughout the novel – may be its force varied with the type of clash. One such was the clash of words between the Pandava brothers coming to the King with an urge to allow all the five brothers marry Draupadi to keep their mother's word adding that if the king disagreed, they had to leave Paanchali in her father's palace. The reaction of Paanchali, of the king and his son were no less violent:

I stared at him in outraged shock. King Drupad stiffened, and my brother's hand fisted around the hilt of his sword. To be sent back to her father's house was the worst disgrace a woman could face. When she was a woman of a noble house, such an insult could lead to a blood feud between the two families. (Divakurani, 2009, p.117)

Why was the king so angry? Because such a condition – the possibility of the Kampilya men calling Draupadi a whore – would demean their status in the kingdom. So it was not for Draupadi's sake they were fuming. Their anger subsided soon after when Vyas assured them that this marriage would heighten the status of King Drupad. In the meantime, a guilt feeling for her misbehaviour with Karna reverberated whenever she found herself in distress. She 'longed to see him again.' (Divakurani, 2009, p.130)

### **Arjuna's Role**

Like Paanchali, Arjuna too did not endorse the decision of Kunti from the core of his heart. But this revolt from within was suggestive which only Paanchali could read from his gestures. Both the two – the mother striving to retain her hold over her sons overpowering their aspirations while Arjuna becoming aggrieved by her decision- rammed into one another, which was again a form of violence

though it was not overtly expressed. Paanchali noticed ‘there was a starkness on his face, the look of a man who was consumed by jealousy and hated himself for it.’(142)

### **Another Kind of Violence**

A violence of another type has been perceived when the Pandava brothers destroyed a forest land killing its inhabitants, the animals for their palace. The palace is the symbol of power imposed upon the inhabitants- common men and women- symbolised as animals to institute law. Those who opposed them were either killed or destroyed while the others had to flee away.

After the Pandavas settled down in their new palace, they wanted to find out those kings who contest their authority. They arranged Rajasuya construed by Krishna as ‘carefully controlled bloodletting’ that would ‘prevent a great carnage later on’ (Divakurani, 2009, p.158) Signe Larsen understands this form of violence meant for ‘domination’. Their success in Rajasuya meant subjugation of the kings to the Pandavas as ‘Violence under the name of power (*Macht*) is the end of the law.’(criticallegalthinking.com)

The Kauravas accepting the invitation to attend the carnival in the palace of illusion was a challenge for the Pandavas, which marked the opening of the final violence. It was also a test for Paanchali to face Karna and to soften the strained relation between them but Karna didn’t respond favourably. The next scene – Sisupal using slandering words against Bheesma, Krishna and Kunti – led to his beheading by the disk of Krishna gave the hints how violent the final War would be to reinstate Dharma.

In the meantime, the violence between Kunti and Paanchali at the psychological level kept on for dominance over one another- ‘for though we continued to be polite to each other, matters had grown thorny between us.’(Divakurani, 2009, p. 182).Kunti tightening ‘her hold on my arm’ (Divakurani, 2009, p.187) at a time when Paanchali wanted to mend her relation with Karna was probably an erroneous step for Kunti. She was worried lest her authority over Paanchali slackened - a law preserving action, as it were. If Paanchali were allowed to talk, it could make a different Karna in the Sabha where Paanchali was assaulted. Instead, his gloomy smile communicated ‘Why should Draupudi be treated any differently? Take her clothes, too.’ (Divakurani, 2009, p.192)

### **Playing Dice with Lives**

This incident of playing dice in the Sabha, losing all their belongings and even themselves and the insults heaped on Draupadi in the open Sabha marked the beginning of the Great War. Her

husbands did not come for her rescue for they loved honour, loyalty towards each other and reputation more than her as heroic fame was more important for them. This understanding enabled Paanchali to be more self-reliant and Krishna led her to be much above mundane shame - 'No one can shame you, he said, if you don't allow it.'(Divakurani, 2009, p.193)

The vow she took afterwards was what Benjamin Franklin termed as 'a revolution'.

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 defenceless woman." (Divakurani, 2009, p.194)

All these were prelude to the great Kurukshetra War. While interpreting Benjamin, Larsen adds

If violence as a means is directed towards natural ends—as in the case of interstate war where one or more states use violence to ignore historically acknowledged laws such as borders—the violence will be law making. This violence strives towards a “peace ceremony” that will constitute a new historically acknowledged law; new historically acknowledged borders.( criticallegalthinking.com )

So, the end of this war would be to frame new laws to reinstate Dharma and ensure peace. Franklin believes Justice is *possible* only through an act of divine violence that opposes completely the mythic violence of law. It was further stated that divine violence does not aspire to dominate. Divine violence accepts sacrifice. Divine violence is “pure” and immediate because it puts forward independent criteria separating means and ends. (criticallegalthinking.com)

## Two Reasons for the Great War

There were two reasons for the Great Kurukshetra war - firstly to satiate Paanchali's personal vengeance and secondly to reinstate dharma recompensing 'the crimes committed by the mythic violence of law and return us to the time before the decay (*Verfall*) of the law'. (criticallegalthinking.com) Was either of the two achieved in its entirety?

## Divine Explanations

Towards the end of the novel where an interaction took place between Krishna and other major characters, the reader was exposed to some divine explanation of the war and association of human beings with other related activities. To Draupadi he gave an optimistic view about Death. He said 'Because of anger and desire, our two direst enemies' (Divakurani, 2009, p.264) people are driven to

wrong doing inspite of their best intentions to do good for others. So man made laws are biased. In his God form, he showed Arjuna “all our enemies- and many of our friends – fell into his gigantic mouth and were crushed to death” (ibid.) He said further ‘when a man reaches a state where honour and dishonour are alike to him, then he is considered supreme. Strive to gain such a state.’(Divakurani, 2009, p.263) Krishna is the Messiah to bring a new historical epoch. The war was to eradicate the evil force but the aftermath caused misery to many families due to the shortcomings of Krishna and the Pandavas as human beings, which the Pandavas realised very soon.

## Conclusion

Responding, as it were, to what Benjamin feels ‘ - - - divine violence does not aspire to institute as law a relation of domination: divine violence accepts sacrifice.’(criticallegalthinking.com), the Pandavas ‘having purged the earth of evil, having changed the course of history, having raised a child to be a true king, - - - had rendered themselves unnecessary. - - - It’s time for you – for all of us – to die.’(Divakurani, 2009, p.340) Their last painful journey through the narrow and steep path of the Himalayas metaphorically stands for the strenuous experience a human being undergoes to shed off all the six adversaries – lust, ego, anger, pride, vanity and deception, which only a Yudhisthir can resist with his perpetual insistence on Dharma. All other Pandavas including Draupadi are embodiment of those sins. As they fall one after another, the purified Yudhisthir enters the divine regime. Franklin considers Divine violence has the power to purify the guilty of the law and founding a new historical era for Man when divine power was not bastardized with law. (criticallegalthinking.com)

The novel records a series of conflicts, from insignificant clashes of ideas at home to the violent Great War so as to eliminate what was decadent so as to establish the Divine Law. But the process was imperfect as this man-made war was, more or less, partisan. With Yudhisthir, getting rid of all the human-vices, entering the Heavens as an epitome of righteousness signals how the Divine law resurges after a period of chaos in the human world.

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