

ANCHOR BOOKS



eBooks

The Palace of Illusions

A Novel

Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni

Acclaim for Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's

THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS

“An exotic escapist tale.... With *The Palace of Illusions*... Divakaruni has proven that her storytelling talents put her right up there with the best.”

—*The Miami Herald*

“Divakaruni, renowned for her skillful take on women's relationships, creates a very believable character in Panchaali, a queen who must choose between making history or following her true desires.”

—*The Oregonian*

“A lyrical tale imbued with the scent of ancient incense yet... rooted in modern day relevancy.”

—*BookPage*

“Full of wonders.... Draupadi is a complex, impassioned heroine with a wry sense of humor, and the women who surround her are fierce and uncompromising.”

—*The Onion A.V. Club*

“Introduces Western readers to an ancient mythology—this time with complicated, strong, memorable heroines.”

—*San Antonio Express-News*

“Divakaruni has taken a male-centered story and breathed new life into its female characters, giving us a rich tale of passion and love, power and weakness, honor and humiliation.... Entertaining, insightful, and suspenseful.”

—*The Union*

“A novel look at [an] ancient Indian epic.”

—*New York Post*

“*The Palace of Illusions* is not only an exciting, action-packed read, but also an educating one, and will likely encourage those curious enough to delve into the original Mahabharata.”

—*The Toronto Star*

“As grand and tragic as the epic poems by Homer.... Divakaruni's best work yet.”

—*Bookreporter*

“[Divakaruni's] women are desperate, wonderful, complicated, lyrical, memorable, even magical.... Daring.”

—*Vogue India*

“*The Palace of Illusions* is unique, amongst Divakaruni's very best.... A creative, illuminating feminist work that compels us to re examine the original text.”

—*India Currents*

“Imaginative.... Poignantly told.”

—*Hindustan Times*

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the author of the bestselling novels *Queen of Dreams*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, and *The Vine of Desire*, and of the prize-winning story collections *Arranged Marriage* and *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*. She lives in Houston, Texas, and teaches creative writing at the University of Houston.

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ALSO BY CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Queen of Dreams

The Vine of Desire

The Unknown Errors of Our Lives

Sister of My Heart

The Mistress of Spices

Arranged Marriage

Poetry

Leaving Yuba City

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The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming

The Conch Bearer

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THE
PALACE
OF ILLUSIONS

A Novel

CHITRA BANERJEE
DIVAKARUNI



Anchor Books

A Division of Random House, Inc.

New York

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to my three men

Abhay

Anand

Murthy

always

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Who is your sister? I am she.

Who is your mother? I am she.

Day dawns the same for you and me.

From *Innana's Journey to Hell*,

3rd Millennium BCE,

translated from Sumerian by N. K. Sandars

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks to:

My agent, Sandra Dijkstra, and my editor,
Deb Futter, for guidance

Antonya Nelson and Kim Chernin
for encouragement

My mother, Tatini Banerjee, and my mother-in-
law, Sita Divakaruni, for good wishes

Murthy, Anand, and Abhay for love

Baba Muktananda, Swami Chinmayananda, and
Swami Vidyadhishananda for blessing.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Like many Indian children, I grew up on the vast, varied, and fascinating tales of the *Mahabharat*. Set at the end of what the Hindu scriptures term Dvapara Yuga or the Third Age of Man (which many scholars date between 6000 BCE and 5000 BCE), a time when the lives of men and gods still intersected, the epic weaves myth, history, religion, science, philosophy, superstition, and statecraft into its innumerable stories-within-stories to create a rich and teeming world filled with psychological complexity. It moves with graceful felicity between the very recognizable human world and magical realms where yakshas and apsaras roam, depicting these with such exquisite surety that I would often wonder if indeed there was more to existence than what logic and my senses could grasp.

At the core of the epic lies the fierce rivalry between two branches of the Kuru dynasty, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The lifelong struggle between the cousins for the throne of Hastinapur culminates in the bloody battle of Kurukshetra, in which most kings of that period participated and perished. But numerous other characters people the world of the *Mahabharat* and contribute to its magnetism and continuing relevance. These larger-than-life heroes, epitomizing inspiring virtues and deadly vices, etched many cautionary morals into my child-consciousness. Some of my favorites, who play prominent roles in *The Palace of Illusions*, are: Vyasa the sage, at once the composer of the epic and a participant at crucial moments in the action; Krishna, beloved and inscrutable, an incarnation of Vishnu and mentor to the Pandavas; Bheeshma, the patriarch who, bound by his promise to protect the Kuru throne, must fight against his beloved grandsons; Drona, the brahmin-warrior who becomes teacher to both the Kaurava and Pandava princes; Drupad, the king of Panchaal, whose desire for vengeance against Drona activates the wheel of destiny; and Karna, the great warrior, who is doomed because he does not know his parentage.

But always, listening to the stories of the *Mahabharat* as a young girl in the lantern-lit evenings at my grandfather's village home, or later, poring over the thousand-page leather-bound volume in my parents' home in Kolkata, I was left