

“FEMINISM IN MAHABHARATA: THE UNHEARD VOICE OF DRAUPADI”

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ABSTRACT

This study provides the view about the character of Draupadi from epic Mahabharata with the help of the fictional novel "Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi" by Pratibha Rai, one of the books that focus on the important character of Mahabharata. The writer has showcased Draupadi as a learned woman who fails to live fully and experiences pains throughout her life.

The overall study revolves around Draupadi that shows how her character has been assumed by society according to their understandings, despite she was standing alone for herself, even when the assembly felt helpless while she was being harassed by trying to take off her clothes. Her husbands (Pandavas) failed to protect her. She even felt guilty of not marrying Karna who would have been her only husband. She was a princess of Panchal, but then also, became the wife of five brothers because of one mere misunderstanding between them and their mother. She is the unsung heroine who suffers to a great extent. Being Drupadkanya, she has a miserable life and has been sent to a mysterious exile with her husbands.

The status of women and the feminine principle is presented keeping in mind the atrocities of not only Draupadi but everyday woman of present scenario. Feminine literature has been subject to many great changes over the past few years. With the help of the well-built characteristics of Draupadi, she has been shown as the woman who faces most pains and is the most sacrificing lady. She is a highly principled woman who forgives the murderer of her sons only because he is a brahmin. And she does not want his mother to face the same agony.

My aim in this study is to show the woman who is born out of fire to protect her and her father's respect. Draupadi is not only the essential figure of Mahabharata but also a crucial figure in Indian culture. But literature has not touched upon her deeply. Sufferings of women's life, relationships that are being held closer to women are the basis of this work. Though no woman in the entire world has been through this much affliction and suffering, still she managed to represent everyday women. Till now, she was the only unit of the Mahabharata. Now, she has become a significant unit of literature and also influencing fragment of people.

Keywords: *exile, fragment, Feminine, agony, affliction.*

FULL PAPER

Indian Mythology is said to be one of the oldest genres of Literature that comprises of Vedas, Puranas, Epics, etc. It is said to be the best of learning history through the places, characters, morals portrayed in it. Hindu Mythology starts its essence from Treta Yuga that is said to be the Maha Yuga. The genre deals with different Yugas that are, Treta Yuga, Satya Yuga, Dwapar Yuga, Kali Yuga. The most known and famous thing about Indian Mythology is the epics. Every generation knows the two famous epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Mahabharata is out of two epics that every Indian knows. It is the longest epic poem in the world that is said to be narrated by Krishna and written by Ganesha. It deals with the story of the war of Kurukshetra between Kauravas and Pandavas for mere land and throne.

Mahabharata shows a woman's disrespect as a mere part of the culture. It shows lust for land. It has many perceptions but being a woman, what is most heart-breaking is imagining Draupadi facing the sufferings that are not because of her but only because of her fate. Krishna being the brother of Draupadi could have saved her from ill-treated fate, but she was all alone.

Many writers have touched upon the characters and stories of Epics and Indian history. One of such writers is Pratibha Ray. She is an Orissa based writer and professor by profession. From her household duties, she chose writing at a very early age. She is one of the prominent writers writing about Indian Fiction that were later translated into different languages. She has been welcomed by the readers of every clan, as she wrote about mysteries about life. Her vivid thoughts and fearless attitude made her write about many characters and topics that are still untouched with the beauty of words. She started writing very early in her career when even her counterparts were fearful enough to not write about the topics regarding tribes that were aggressive; she played the role of denoting them specifically. She believed in equality but not in class, religion and social status. She had written various novels, stories, articles showing the same concern. Out of her many novels "**Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi**" is one of the most overwhelming novels that excite the reader to delve themselves deep to understand the dilemma and plight of Draupadi.

The character of Draupadi has been woven beautifully and fascinatingly. Has she been one of the most skilled experts, her real side of being the most sacrificing lady of India has been shown with great creativity. Draupadi is one of the characters of Mahabharata that has faced suffering, pains throughout her life. The starting words of "**Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi**" introduces Draupadi as writing her life story to no one other but Krishna. She narrates the lifelong lessons and sufferings to him, also she questions him about leaving her all alone in every part of her life.

Draupadi is no ordinary woman. She is born out of the sacrificial altar performed by her father, Drupad. The sacrificial fire happened because Drupad wanted his son or daughter to take revenge from Dronacharya (Guru) for the insult he had faced once. After her birth, by the elders (father and fatherly figures), she has been claimed as the only woman to preserving dharma. The grief follows her path throughout while she was doing her part in any manner possible to preserve dharma.

She has come out to be the most beautiful and charming lady. Her features have made anyone fall for her. She smells like a lotus. She is a confident woman who speaks her heart. She is an incomparable woman who was born without childhood for the only purpose of saving dharma.

The narrative of "**Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi**" shows the false bond between a husband and a wife (five husbands and a wife). She had faced exploitation even when she was set to marry one who stands out of everyone. That was Arjun, one of the third Pandava out of five. Her father wanted her to marry Arjun or remain unwed. When Arjun won her in swayamvar, she was delighted and happy in her hearts of hearts, unknowing of her ill fortune to take place. She reached the place of her husband's mother, where Bheem says, "*Mother, today we have brought a priceless thing. Open the door and see! Your sons have not returned empty-handed.*" Hearing the ecstatic words from her son, their mother, like always, asks them to divide it among them, "*My sons, whatever you have brought, divide it amongst five of you equally.*" (Ch7, p55)

To obey their mother, they equally divide Draupadi as their wife. She was tormented because none of them said a word against their mother. It was Yudhishtira because of whom nobody took stand as he was the follower of dharma, according to him, following his mother's order was dharma at that moment.

Earlier she was a happy princess who has enjoyed with her *sakhis*. The one who captivated every youth because of her beauty. The one who has taken birth to bestow her father's honor.

"It is my duty to honor my father's wishes; leaving dharma aside, what meaning will my life hold?" (Ch2, p9)

Despite being the woman who speaks her heart, she fails to speak in front of her mother-in-law for not accepting the rest of her four sons as her husband because her dharma does not allow her. She would have been mocked by society. Is it only dharma that does not allow or the male dominance that was so prominent at that time that she could not utter a word for her sake? Is it only a woman's duty to face challenges and violence at every stage for the sake of men?

" Oh Lord, if my birth is for preserving dharma on earth then give me all the insults but also give me the strength to bear them all." (Ch8, p90)

Asking for strength to bear the insult is what she demands instead of asking for no insult without her fault. This is merely the acceptance of stereotypical society that she lives in. Her father has used her as a bait to take the revenge.

During her swayamvar, princess of every area approached Drupad's estate to marry her, but the condition to shoot the arrow in the fish's eye, placed upward, without looking at it was not an easy task to follow. Karna was one of the good suitors of Draupadi who wanted to marry her. But Draupadi denied marrying the dharma putra by calling him a "soot putra". It hurts Karna, who could have been her only husband.

The incidents that took place in Draupadi's life were all pain-causing and totters the human heart and soul. She accepts the five husbands, if not, might be mocked by the world for not preserving dharma. All five men would

place their feet towards the bed of Draupadi has happened in the initial stages of her married life. If she would have chosen Karna, life had been different. But this is how it was destined for Draupadi to bear negligence.

After the marriage rituals happened, the time came for them to reach Hastinapur. Every person was showering wishes on Draupadi for being the beautiful, lovingly wife of Pandavas. Still, few demons were disrespectful towards her by calling her a suitable wife of every man. They were Dushashan and Duryodhan.

The war of Mahabharata had already started inside the hearts of Kauravas and Pandavas. Pandavas have been thrown out of the kingdom earlier before their marriage to Draupadi. It was, in fact, Draupadi whose efforts in the first dice game have made Kauravas return Pandavas' freedom and empire. Then also people of any generation blame her for being the sole reason behind the war.

"What mighty obstacle would that oh! have created to their attaining heaven? Who had wanted heaven? Who had wanted kingdom? And you had wanted war? Despite someone else being the root of all the causes, the emptied the entire cup of blame on my head and went away- leaving me thus at death's door." (Ch1, p2)

While their way to the Himalayas, after they left everything for the present heir to their kingdom, six of them (Pandavas and Draupadi) decided to make their way towards Himalaya. Yudhishtira, the Lord of Dharma, decided not to turn their backs ever no matter what happens to the other person, no matter what Tsunami brings along with it. It was Draupadi first whose feet slipped and she fell. Even after having five husbands, none of them bothered to have turned their backs and tried to save her. She died with remorse and lamentation of loving dearly all five men but not receiving the same love, if not love then at least respect.

In her marital life, it is said that she has to live one year with one husband, and then she has to go through the fire in order to regain the chastity and purity and then can only she be passed to another husband. Why one long year with one husband? Is it so to get pregnant and bear the child and deliver it before getting passed on to the other one? She has been disrespected by her husbands as they ask her to behave like their mother, sister, and nurse. Why not only as a wife?

She is one of the five *satis* who are remembered for being chaste. Instances have been framed by Pratibha Ray, where Draupadi has been compared with Sita. Sita has tormented and lived her life for preserving her husband's pride. What all she gets in return is tears rolling out of the eyes through cheeks. But the unchanged fact was that Sita has one and only husband whereas Draupadi had five. When Arjun was alone going on an exile of twelve years for entering the chamber of Yudhishtira while he was making love with Draupadi, he makes fun of her as she compared her with Sita, for Sita had one husband and she had five.

Arjun at his exile married Ulupi, Arya of Kalinga, Chitrangada of Manipur and also Subhadra who was the sister of Krishna. While this was all happening, Draupadi, already in love with Arjun live like a Brahmcharini. She consoles herself by thinking, 'even if Arjun married hundreds of ladies, she won't grieve, because he might do so for political reasons'.

Justifying polygamy of a man for political reasons is unacceptable when already he has a beloved in Draupadi, who even has accepted his four more brothers for the sake of his family.

Once again, she was violated by Dushashan and Duryodhan in Kuru's Court. It was again the dice game. Yudhishtira was no expert but loves playing this. It was Shakuni who made him lose his kingdom and his wife as well. Draupadi has been brought by dragging her by her hair in the court. Even Pandavas felt shameful but could not help it. This is how a woman having five most prominent men in her life, lived at that very time where Lord Krishna himself was present, was supposed to suppress her voice, for the sake of dharma. She was trembling, shouting for help. Her eyes were glancing at everyone thinking some hand would come to help her. She needed some hope when the court laughs at her helplessness. No doubt, lord Krishna has played his role of a brother and helped her by keep on extending the piece of her clothing that it would never end. But if He can do this then why not stopped this brutal act towards her?

She was the only lady facing lots of men in such an embarrassing condition where her fathers-in-law, Gurus were present. She was the strong lady though, as she vows to never comb and tie her hair until she washes her hair with Dushashan's blood. But not even her strong-headed boldness has helped her decreasing her agonies.

She even went to exile with her husband for twelve years and incognito for one year. She does not hold any fault but because Yudhishtira lost the kingdom, she has to follow her husband. It was the dominance of males that the only prominent lady of the epic poem suffers so much. The society of that era has used her as a toy and not as a human being. She was humiliated at every point in her life. Being a woman, she had been placed inferior at every stage so that the narrative could proceed. Why for the sake of Mahabharata, only Draupadi was made to suffer agonies and why not any men? Like her father, she had been used by Krishna for his sole purpose. She was divided amongst five men without knowing her wish because what has been decided by the elders and males is final.

The way women are being treated, the same way she has been mocked, insulted and dragged into the court. This shows the plight of women, no matter which era it is. Males have been dominant throughout. No education can make them think positive and good about women. Panchali Pratha is still prominent in areas like Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh. Woman is forced to marry siblings of one family and lead a marital life. Draupadi was the unheard voice like many of us in Kali Yuga. She has the strongly built characteristics of being a bold headed lady of dignity but the society had not allowed her to be so. The society at every place has questioned her morals. It was merely for being a woman in stereotypical male dominant society.

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