



A STUDY OF PATRIARCHAL MYTHS IN PRATIBHA RAY'S *YAJNASENI: THE STORY OF DRAUPADI*

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Paper Received date

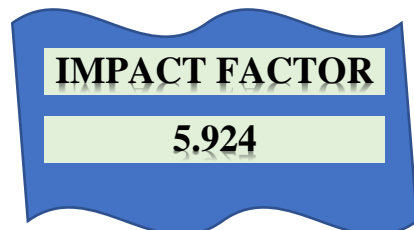
05/03/2025

Paper date Publishing Date

10/03/2025

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15163322>



ABSTRACT

Yajnaseni: the story of Draupadi is revisiting the popular epic the Mahabharata by Pratibha Ray. In this novel, she uses female perspective to give new voice to Draupadi. The original text of the Mahabharata was written from male perspective and Draupadi's voice was left unexplored. But Ray makes an effort to justify the character of Draupadi. All earlier discourse of myth was focused on male figures and kept female figures back. Here, the author explores Draupadi's character must be centre. This paper is an attempt to analyse portrayal of patriarchy throughout this novel.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminist perspective, Identity. Subjugation of woman.

Introduction

Pratibha Ray presented all the major characters of the Mahabharata but it was Draupadi who hold the centre role with her miserable and wretched condition. Through her novel, Ray was aimed to raise the voice of Draupadi which was suppressed under patriarchy. Ray portrayed Yajnaseni different from Vyasa's Draupadi in her indomitable nature who dared to ask questions over patriarchy. She was written this novel in epistolary form in which Draupadi addressed to Krishna, her sakha while expecting her death at the Himalayas. In this letter, she encountered her life and hoped no one should be humiliated publically as she had been humiliated. As Helene Cixous points out, "Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her movement" (Cixous 875).



Ray put forward the voice of Draupadi which remained unheard in male dominated world. Draupadi asked if it is the responsibility of women alone to become the reason of destruction and creation. Sita became the medium of destruction of Lanka and creation of Ram's rule, i.e., establishment of dharma. For this, she had to face Ravan's lust and forced to give public trial of chastity. Draupadi too took birth to preserve dharma and to destruct Kaurava but at the end what would she get.

From even before birth, I was destined to avengemy father's insult! I was going to be the weapon for preserving dharma on this earth and destroying the wicked. It was for this that I was born (Ray 8).

Ray presented Draupadi's inner psyche which was often ignored. She had no freedom to choose her husband. She wanted to marry Arjuna but Dhrishtadyumna reminded her "The father's dharma is the daughter's dharma", and she had to marry a poor brahmin to fulfill her father's vow. King Drupad vows that Aryavart's finest archer would win her daughter's hand.

Tohonourfather's vow if my dharma as a woman was harmed, let that be so, first things first. Even if my dharma was destroyed, my father's dharma must be preserved. (Ray 46)

Draupadi is perceived merely as an object figure in the novel that can be seen when elder brother Yudhisthir said, "Mother, today we have brought a priceless thing. Open the door and see! Your sons have not returned empty-handed".. It was appeared that women alone had to perform just for the welfare of land. In the novel, 'Yajnaseni', Draupadi had to marry all five Pzandavas. Her mind disgusted not at the words of Kunti but they all were ready to obey her mother's command as their supreme aim. Even her husband also agreed to this so that she had no choice to protest because if she didn't follow Arjuna her husband would feel guilty for not obeying her mother and elder brother.

Did I have no say? I had placed the garland of bridegroom-choice around the neck of one already. By law, and according to dharma, it was he alone who was my husband... Why should I accept the other brothers as my husbands? (Ray 56)

Draupadi asked how a man could have many wives was acceptable but a woman could have many husbands would be called unchaste. In the society, rules are not made equal for men and women. It would be called unchaste. In the society, rules are not made equal for men and women. It would be a male God who created all those rules.



Chaste woman! Unchaste woman! In the same way why don't the scriptures speak of chaste men and unchaste men? Are men's heart made of gold that sin cannot tarnish them? Have the scriptures prescribed lists of sins only for women? (Ray 94)

Ray depicted that it became natural for her life that despite her protest against her mind, Draupadi could not have freed herself from patriarchal habituation. On several events, she had to face the lustful eyes of Jayadratha, Duhshasan and Duryodhana. In the inauguration ceremony, Draupadi cooked food herself and served them. Duhshasan caught her hand and told he was younger brother-in-law. She said nothing but he continued his talk that the beauty they saw in svayamvar was burning them even now. When she went to serve kheer, Jayadratha told, "Bhabhi, if the food prepared by your hands is so tasty, how would you yourself be? (Y 130) Draupadi controlled her anger and said such jokes often cracked by husband's brothers and husbands of sister-in-law. She pretended that she accepted these as jest. But she became angry when Duryodhana continuously looked at her with lust. Her husbands were watching all these silently. As Anila Chandran writes, "Draupadi reveals the underlying mysteries of the society and often explodes at the objectification of woman" (Chandran 1-5).

Draupadi asked to bring food for Karna because he was dharma putra of Kunti, therefore, her brother-in-law. She went his chamber with Maya and Nitambini who hold food and vessel of water. Karna only took fruits and gave the reason of not taking his favorite dishes that these were cooked by Draupadi. He humiliated Draupadi, saying her public woman for having married five husbands at a time.

But at one time to share the beds of five husbands is not sanctioned anywhere....Such a woman, despite being married, is considered a public woman. Even to touch water from her hands is to one's dharma. (Ray 133)

Draupadi was tormented by Karna's words but could not answer him back. She felt even more dejected that after learning of her unwell Yudhisthir was busy in playing dice. Arjuna taking her brother's side told that dicing gave him pleasure and women looked everything in devious manner therefore suffered more. She was more hurt and thought, "I had five husbands, but nothing was forthcoming from anyone".

Ray displayed Draupadi as strong female character who dared to question the patriarchy. In Kuru Sabha, Draupadi was humiliated and disrobed in front of her husbands and elders. She dared to question her kinsmen, "My husband whether first he staked himself and lost or me?". As Divakaruni writes, "If perchance a man lost himself, he no longer had any jurisdiction over his



wife” (Divakaruni194). It was unjust for her that Yudhisthir could bet on her in a dice game. She could not bear anyone's unrighteous command over her and elder's silence.

Was woman merely men's movable or immovable property... being a woman did I not have right even over myself, my soul? If they had rights over this body of mine, did it mean they could do as they wished with me? (Ray 235)

Since generations, men tried to subjugate and suppress women. Shakuni angered her more by saying she could have been saved if requested for forgiveness. In that she responded that she never been for mercy but justice. Sarcastically, she told elders to forgive her for not greeting while entering in the sabha.

Ray focused on the struggles of Draupadi that can be found when her sister in law's husband, Jayadratha, forced her to take with him. She was saved by Pandavas but Yudhisthir told that anyone could be attracted to beautiful women. She thought if Jayadratha would won then by rights she would have been become her mistress. She cursed the rules and laws of society for the inequality of the sexes by saying,

So the fault is mine? That it is sanctioned by the scriptures for the woman to be enjoyed by the enemy after her husband defeated in battle, is the true fault. But who will understand that? Who will oppose the scriptures? (Ray 323).

During their incognito in Matsya kingdom, Draupadi was being insulted by Keechak who caught hair, threw down, kicked and abused her in front of her husband and king. They both thought of their welfare. King Virat depended on Keechak's strong arms and Yudhisthir wanted to protect their secret.

The path to justice are barred from all sides to women. Debaunched men outrage me and insult me in public, but regarding it as inconsequential without interfering in it you keep playing dice. If the king does not protect woman then he ought to grant her permission to commit suicide. (Ray 340)

In novel, 'Yajnaseni', Draupadi was referred to Sita. Sita was a devoted and docile wife incapable to raise her voice against wrong doings to her and ultimately entered to earth. But Draupadi protested for all unjust done to her. Ray revisited the mythical character of Draupadi that she was also a woman with feelings like any ordinary woman. It was through her pen that Draupadi was no longer appeared as an object, rather than subject.



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Conclusion

Ray's portrayal of character of Yajnaseni is not only as a sufferer in patriarchal society but also as a strong woman who raised her voice against the male dominated society. She questions about the polygamy law in this novel which is unjust for men and women. Time has come to make change in the dominating ideology of patriarchy. For this, it is necessary to establish equal rights for both men and women regarding all aspects of life. Ray has nurtured a strong character of Yajnaseni to stand against the male dominated society and the shallow patriarchy.

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