



## Recasting Draupadi: An Analysis of Patriarchy and Polyandry in *Yajnaseni*

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### Abstract

Draupadi or Yajnaseni or Panchali is an eminent figure in Mahabharata and other subsequent books written on this topic time to time. Written originally in Oriya language it is an embodiment of Yajnaseni's odyssey where she is trying to evolve herself putting certain questions before the patriarchal society. In Mahabharata she is out of fire to destroy the Kshatriya. Her birth is marked by a prophecy; she is born from a holy sacrificial fire- Yajna and hence named Yajnaseni to avenge her father Draupad's insult by Dronacharya. She has been defined "a Queen full of virtue but suffering is in her lot". Her story right from her birth to swayamvara is full of scorn. She is forced to accept polyandry and all the blame of Kurukshetra war is upon her. She has been considered an apple of discord between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Besides, a tag of lascivious and pernicious woman is given to her. This classical myth is accepted by many Indian generations. But the feminist modern writers like Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee and Mahashweta Devi have tried to raise their voices against the Patriarchy and its powerful construction. Written in epistolary form Pratibha Ray has also tried to raise the voice of Yajnaseni in different colours and shades. The human world is not ready to hear her deliverance and thus a supernatural figure, Lord Krishna (Sakha) is brought down on this earth to lend his ears to Draupadi. No doubt, Krishna is her other self who is always ready to hear her voice and guide her and clarify her doubts happily. Purpose of this Research Paper is to find out the implication of Patriarchy, Polyandry, her sacrifice and enlightenment.

Keywords: Yajnaseni, Patriarchy, Polyandry, Inner-self, Dharma.

The autonomy of Indian patriarchy and mythological structure has always been challenged by feminists from time to time. In this scenario, Pratibha Ray cannot be ignored.

She has tried to re-imagine Yajnaseni (1995) from a victim to a philosopher queen. She is depicted as intelligent enough to challenge hardships and mental slavery, which seems to

be the main cause of her sorrows and sufferings. She directly challenges the double standard of patriarchy that forced her into unknown darkness and dilemma to defend dharma. She considers it an 'ethical bearing' but simultaneously poses questions and challenges to shallow morality, where the powerful are rewarded and the vulnerable are chased to be punished.

Chitra Banerjee seems much more humane in her creative venture *The Palace of Illusions* (2008). Her heroine appears to be dealing with natural instincts like love, jealousy, and the quest for self-identity. She has tried to give proper psychological care to her modern heroine, who is ready to explore the male-dominated world through her sharp and unparalleled intellectual abilities and emotional resilience.

Mahasweta Devi comes a step further when she tries to radicalise Draupadi in her short story 'Draupadi' (1978). Devi shatters the mythical structure and presents her Santhal tribal woman named 'Dopdi Mejhen'. Indeed, she has tried to present old wine in a new bottle by completely changing its taste, aroma and label. This sheer juxtaposition by Mahasweta Devi creates certain questions in the mind of a reader, where the mythical Draupadi of the Mahabharata is begging Lord Krishna to protect her modesty, while the modern Dopdi, being a Santhal tribal woman, is adept in survival skills and also able to face upcoming uprisings and chaos. She is against state-sponsored sexual assault and becomes an entity of elevation when she does not cover her body but uses it as a shield against the oppressors.

*Sita: The Warrior of Mithila* (2017) is also full of myth and tradition. In this retelling, Amish Tripathi has achieved wonder by redesigning the age-old narrative like *Yajnaseni*. In the Ramayana, the whole story revolves around Lord Rama, and the voice of his 'better half' remains unheard and lopsided. Tripathi has tried to redefine Sita in a novel shape and

sequence. She is portrayed as an embodiment of patience and purity. She is totally devoted to Lord Rama and thus reposes her faith and fidelity in him. In *Ramcharitmanas*, Sita is virtuous, loyal, compassionate and a traditional wife. But Amish Tripathi's Sita is an unbending warrior, full of vigour and vitality. She is full of bravery and also a seasoned archer who could shoot arrows relying on sound. Her subjects are happy under her able guidance and commitment. No doubt, Sita is Tripathi's ultramodern figure who is a seasoned warrior, visionary and leader. In fact, these modern retellings give way to charged emotions and female elevated fantasy.

### Objectives

1. To study Draupadi as an independent writer and as a mouthpiece of the author, full of logic, reason and introspection.
2. To explore the traditional framework of patriarchy and compare it with modern retellings.
3. To analyze institutionalized slavery: patriarchy and polyandry, and textual diagnosis.

### Analysis

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* holds a mirror in her hand, and every time she invites the patriarchal world to see its face. The world has given her the role of a joker, where she sometimes appears to be a 'Divine Queen' in search of justice, a princess in search of self-identity, and a rebel who seems to be waging a war against the oppressors. The role changes, but she has always been an object of exchange. Slowly and steadily, she stands against the silent structural violence of patriarchy, forcing the reader to rethink gender, caste and power. In this creative venture, Ray has tried to shift from a male-centred, authoritative and polyandrous narrative to the real experience of Draupadi herself. In the mythical narratives, she is silenced by male authority, but in this modern

epistolary retelling, Pratibha Ray has tried to give vent to her pent-up emotions. The narrative has changed the earlier concept of Draupadi being considered the main cause of the Kurukshetra War; now she is 'a conscious witness to it'. In the Mahabharata, she is expected to be an ideal wife who silently faces all the problems imposed by patriarchy and polyandry for the sake of dharma, at the cost of her dignity and emotional well-being. She is an open voice against systematic injustice, hypocrisy and the male-made moral code.

She says, "A woman's heart is not a public square where five roads meet; it is a sanctum where one light should burn" (p. 58).

Pratibha Ray uses the first-person confessional mode in *Yajnaseni* to challenge the masculine definition of dharma against the imposition of polyandry upon Draupadi, which upholds the political stability of the Kuru dynasty at the violent expense of her individual autonomy and sexual sovereignty. This explicitly reflects the conflict between 'duty' (the male mandate) and individual autonomy (the female experience). It gives space to criticize the hypocrisy of the Pandavas, who claim to be virtuous while exploiting their wife for political stability and unity. She appears as an open critique of patriarchy when she says, "Full of anguish and anger I was thinking: was the woman merely man's movable or immovable property? Being a woman, did I have no 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?" (p. 235).

*Yajnaseni* deconstructs the epic narrative of polyandry to expose it not as a divine duty but as a patriarchal instrument of containment that reduces the female body to a communal source, a political prisoner within the domestic sphere of the Pandavas. She is not merely a plot point of the Mahabharata; it is a structural mechanism of control that Ray exposes as a form of patriarchal erasure of the female self.

She says, "I ask this assembly of elders: Did Yudhishtira lose himself first, or did he lose me? If he was no longer his own master, by what law could he gamble away my freedom?" (p. 168).

She goes a step further, condemning the institutionalized system by lamenting, "Is this Aryan justice? Is this the civilization we boast of, where the queen is treated worse than a dicing slave?" (Assembly Hall scene, Chapter 12).

*Yajnaseni* challenges the hollow institution of marriage and polyandry again and again. She asserts:

"Those words shattered my heart. I mused: how false is this bond between husband and wife! Affection, love, sacrifice and surrender! If man suffers the consequences of his own deeds, then offering myself at the feet of five husbands for the sake of preserving Yudhishtira's dharma, why did I have to bear the burden of the whole world's mockery, sneers, innuendo, abuse, scorn and slander?" (p. 3).

In her prefatory letter to Krishna, she rejects humanity by asserting:

"Time may transform me into a goddess, but I appeared on this earth within this body in human form. My five husbands are each creature of this mortal world. ... I am not a goddess and no knower of past births ..." (p. 2).

In the Mahabharata, she is said to be a sati or a chaste woman. She is well aware that she has been the shared wife of five Pandavas. She condemns the institutionalized treachery by opening her innermost thoughts: "Men and women of Kaliyuga will laugh scornfully saying, if with five husbands Draupadi could be a sati, then what is the need for fidelity to one husband? With many husbands, why can't the women of Kaliyuga be satis?" (p. 250).

The Kurukshetra war seems to be a vain endeavour for *Yajnaseni*, one that leads to

destruction and futility. She is much focused on the domestic, emotional and psychological impact of war, like a queen making her strategies as a philosopher. She does not behave as a victim in Kuru's court. Her defiance is not silent but active and vocal. In the chapter 'Vastraharan', she challenges the traditional concept of property and ownership. She is being treated as an asset rather than a human being. She realizes that a woman is considered a man's property and has no right over her own body. She challenges patriarchy by asking: they have no right to play with my body. The interesting fact is that the length of the saree was incredibly increased by Lord Krishna, and the five husbands remain inactive and mute spectators of the scene.

Even in the epilogue, she is deeply concerned about the futility of human life and the institutionalized trap of patriarchy. She knows that love is the superb feeling in this beautiful world, but it is transitory. Human emotions, relations and promises – all are thrown to the winds, and the reality of life is more powerful and bleak. She has been a dancing figure as far as relationships are concerned – with friends, her lovers, and with society – all force her to protect dharma. As a philosopher, she judges her past, saying, "Those words shatter my heart ... how false is this bond between husband and wife" (p. 301).

### Conclusion

Thus, it would be sufficed to mention that Yajnaseni is an embodiment of patience, love, courage and challenge. She is a new shifting of focus from heroic exploits of men to the real experience of Draupadi. Polyandry is not a moral ambiguity but an unescapable product of patriarchal institutionalized violence. Ray recasts Draupadi from a passive object of exchange into an articulate, suffering and deeply resilient item. The narrative reinforces the fact that Draupadi's silence in the Mahabharata was not an absence of agency, but a testament to the suffering confines of her era –

continues that this creative venture challenges when when Draupadi is "born of fire" princess of a Difference against systematic oppression. She has tried to unfold the social, religious, moral and ethical structure of Patriarchy and Polyandry minutely. Her patience, wisdom and logical reasoning is unparalleled. For her death is more composed and generous as she is not perturbed with death. She seems to be much optimistic about the succeeding generations of women that would put more intricate questions before the Patriarchy.

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