

YAJNASENI: THE STORY OF DRAUPADI - THE JOURNEY OF DRAUPADI FROM FIRE TO ICE

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Received : 8-5-18

Accepted : 12-6-18

ABSTRACT

Indian women writers are leading a step forward towards the fruitful outcome of their thought process in Indian literature. Their innovative and imaginative works are celebrated and appreciated across the globe. Among the contemporary fiction writings from Orissa Yajnaseni-the story of Draupadi is one of the best known woman's voices. The writer Pratibha Ray beautifully examines the Mythological character Draupadi and draws the verbal sketch of the heroine Draupadi's sentiments and social evils prevailing in the society in her novel. By showing Draupadi's journey from her very birth from fire to death on the Himalaya, the writer come with humanitarian approach towards the most misunderstood woman character of the Mahabharata Draupadi. The writer gives her honour which Draupadi deserves by becoming a strong thread of binding all five Pandavas together in one beautiful garland of relationship. Yajnaseni stands as a concrete example of socio-historical reality. Through the help of mythological character Draupadi Pratibhaji become successful to expose woman's consciousness and psycho-storms which she holds since many years together. She reconstructs and revisions Draupadi's character in her own way different from the actual epic character.

Key words: *humanitarian, sentiments, reconstructs, revision, women's consciousness.*

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INTRODUCTION

Indian literature is incomplete without the myths and mythological stories. Mythological theme in Indian English and other regional literature captivated interest of readers in literature. Stories from the great epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have been used as a tool for interpretation of myth and mythical characters. Many Indian women writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Amrita Pritam, Ajit Kour, Mahashweta Devi, Pratibha Ray, Chitra Benerjee Divakaruni redefine myth and project 'female self-exploration.' These

Indian women writers divert their energies to deconstruct the past and reconstruct a new history and struggle with patriarchy. Indian Mythology portrayed five women characters as role models Sita, Savitri, Draupadi, Ahalya and Arundhati. If one looks at these five role models, One comes to know that by one or other way these all women have become victims of strong Patriarchal rules and atrocity. Unfortunately Draupadi is one such symbol who suffers a lot by male atrocity and fights back to regain her position as a woman. Pratibha Ray of Orisa literature tried her hands to present and re-

interpret this most misunderstood woman character of the *Mahabharata* – Draupadi not only as a woman but as a human being with flesh and blood and full of tender feeling as a woman. Pratibha Ray's *Draupadi* is the epitome of "humanist feminism."

Indian womanhood is a product of most challenging changes, some are fundamental and some are temporary. The pot of female Indian psyche is melting in a state of liquidity with socio-economic, spiritual, psychological ingredients by which emerges a new self-image. But the process of change can be understood by an examination and analysis of the historical data relating to Indian womanhood.

The Indian understanding of womanhood has been largely depended on India's two great epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Both the texts are full with women characters that represent every facet of womanhood. These characters of the epics are loaded with different layers of human consciousness which make it possible for every age to discover a new layer. It is the only reason that in recent times the portrayal of the dynamic, assertive and active women characters has been taken up. It is in this context that a study of contemporary representation of Draupadi is possible.

This paper focuses on the contemporary award winning novel *Yajnaseni: the story of Draupadi* by Pratibha Ray. In the post Kahnu-Gopinatha era and during the post modern development of Oriya literature Pratibha Ray stands out a genius in the field of fiction writing. Looked from different stylistic and diversity of thematic angles she is considered to be the main inspirational power of Oriya fictional writing. She has written extensively novels, short-stories, biographies, and travelogues. These all qualities established her as very substantial and prominent writer of Oriya literature. She was awarded Janapitha's, Murti Devi award for her

deconstructive mythic novel *Yajnaseni* in 1991.

Yajnaseni: The story of Draupadi was written in the last quarter of the twentieth century 1984. It is the time when the role of women in an Indian society took place. Pratibha Ray chooses to narrate the story of Draupadi-Krishna without much deviation from the *Mahabharata*. She largely tries to keep Draupadi within the framework of Vyasa's text but seeks to give Draupadi depth and dimension to speak to the audience. She also inspired by the Oriya *Mahabharata* of Saria Das. In some places in the novel the events of Vyasa's *Mahabharata* is not strictly followed by the writer. The novel *Yajnaseni* is written in the style of epistle - an address to Krishna by Draupadi. Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* attempts at fictionalizing the epic from Draupadi's point of view. The whole life of Draupadi slowly unfurls through her thought stream. The author nicely presents incidents in her life right from her birth to the denial of Swargarohana (Ascension) together in cohesive sequence.

Pratibha Ray's *Draupadi* is a beautiful princess of Panchal Kingdom. She is a young girl full of zeal for life. She is aware of the knowledge that her birth is not a simple one but she is born from a sacrificial alter built by sages. Her birth is revenge for the benefit of her father *Yajnasena*.

...My birth was not from my father's seed put from the sacrificial alter built for the fulfilling a vow. From even before birth, I was destined to avenge my father's insult. It was going to be the weapon for presenting dharma on this earth and destroying the wicked. (*Yajnaseni*, 8)

Draupadi is deprived of childhood. She never experienced the love of mother. In *Yajnaseni* she finds herself alone in the palace of Draupad. The only companion of her is Nitambini that Pratibha Ray introduces from the previous chapters. Young Krishna shares her

womanly feelings to Nitambini.

The young Draupadi described by the author is extremely beautiful dark complexion virgin with lotus like fragrance. She possessed unbeatable beauty and knowledge. As a young girl she is eagerly waiting for the great man of Arayavrata and hero of Yadava region Krishna. In *Yajnaseni*, young Krishnaa is waiting for her beloved Krishna because her father wants to offer her hand to Krishna. She takes information of Krishna from Nitambini. Here we come across passionate quality of Draupadi as a young beloved which is beautifully presented by Pratibha Ray. At the same time when she is seen busy in preparing garland for Krishna, Krishna refuses her hand for himself and Krishna verbally introduces Arjuna to Draupadi and discloses to her that Arjuna is destined to be her husband. As a young girl she scatters and becomes sad and cries on her destiny that she has no choice of her own. In this exceptional work of fiction Pratibhaji makes Draupadi all-knowing narrator. She voices the silence that Vyasa had left for the readers to find.

Pratibha Ray looks at Draupadi not just as a mythic character but as a woman of flesh and blood. She lives a life in which she is forced to make difficult choice at every stage of her life. It is that choices made by Draupadi that guide the future events throughout the epic. Therefore, Draupadi of Pratibha Ray by narrating her own life story to Krishna at the every moment of her life justifies her choices to herself as well as others.

As the title suggests Pratibha Ray is presenting the story of Draupadi rather than the story of the *Mahabharata*. The heroine *Yajnaseni* is more interested in telling the story of her life rather than what is happening around her. By tracing her journey from being an admired and loved princess through becoming wife of five men the writer tries to give a glimpse

into the mind of Draupadi.

Draupadi's character is an exceptional character than all the other women characters of two great epics. No other character in the vast Indian tradition goes through such humiliation as she passes through. Her birth is from sacrificial fire, her marriage to five men at once, her being disrobed in a public hall by her own family members and her exile with her husbands. All these events in the life of Draupadi seem extraordinary but for *Yajnaseni* each of these events stands as a huge event for her dramatic life. "Peculiar scenes thronged this predicament-filled act of my life-drama." (YJ.323)

In *Yajnaseni* the author brings undisclosed passages of Draupadi's mind. Through the use of narrative technique Ray takes us to the journey of Draupadi's life and enables to hear Draupadi's voice. The author excellently reads, communicates and presents Draupadi's interpretations. It actually fills the gap for the events of the epic. Her marriage to the five Pandavas is the biggest controversy of Indian society which raises several questions in the mind of Draupadi. *Yajnaseni* herself voices this ridicule marriage to the five Pandavas:

This would not add to the fame of woman as a species

for all future time Draupadi would remain condemned in the history of the world as a woman of despicable and stained character. So much so that in the Kalyuga people would call fallen women having many men as "Draupadis of this era", making me the butt of scorn. What would they understand of the situation in which Panchali become the wife of five men: (YJ, 59-60)

Vyasa's *Mahabharata* centre around five Pandavas and all actions are also from the perspectives of the Pandavas only. But

Yajnaseni records the history from the perspective of Draupadi. Traditionally, one can see Draupadi in two roles only a faithful wife and a loyal daughter-in-law. Pratibha Ray's Draupadi has a larger role to play. This Draupadi is multidimensional Draupadi. She is not merely an obedient daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law and a mother but also a good friend, social worker, a mouth piece for women and a queen.

In *Yajnaseni* Draupadi often becomes a spokesperson for women. One can see her approach upon predicament of women in general. She questions to the system of patriarchy and the rules that society has laid over women. The unjust, wronged, ugliest manner when she is in a single piece of cloth under menstruating being stripped in the open court. She says aggressively:

Alas! At one time comparing Dharmraj Yuddhishtir's personality to that of Ram I used to feel immensely glorified. For protecting the honour of chaste Sita hoe much sorrow and pain did Ram not undergo... while my husband having staked me and having handed me over to others is sitting there .A mute spectator, he is watching me being insulted' (YJ.241)

As Ray unveils the hidden layers of Draupadi's life, Draupadi appears a person with clarity of thought and purpose. She wants to reveal the truth-the real story of Draupadi's life. Through *Yajnaseni* the author wants to show evolution of the life of women in so called society of male domination.

Yajnaseni, the novel and the character Draupadi traces the feminist consciousness which questions the entire patriarchal system and special norms for women. Draupadi in *Yajnaseni* is a aspiring force for women of contemporary society. The issues raised by her are commonly seen in contemporary Indian society. The rape ratio in Bihar and entire part of

India are day by day increasing and our system is helpless to solve out the mysteries of such incidents. Ultimately the blame is laid down on the victim.

As a woman and a loyal wife Draupadi has served each of her husbands with same love, respect and faithfulness. But her very existence as a woman and a human being shattered when she slips and falls in the journey to Swargarohana and none of her husband turns back. This incident of insult and ignorance breaks her heart.

What agonies did I not suffer for preserving dharma? I had thought that on the strength of my adherence to dharma and fidelity as a wife I would be able to accompany my husbands to heaven....

why did I have to bear the burden of the whole world's mockery, sneers, innuendos, abuse, scorn and slander?' (YJ.2-3)

Ray wants that Draupadi to be relived of this pain and the world knew the real truth of Draupadi's inner life. *Yajnaseni* wants to narrate the story of her life herself to gain justice from the society,

I shall speak the truth. The story of my life is nothing other than the life –story of any human being on this mortal world. Read the indelible words of this letter seeing such hair-raising incident of my life the people of Kaliyuga will be able to decide whether the insults Draupadi suffers have ever been born by any woman of any time. God forbid that in future anyone should ever suffer such abuse.⁶ (YJ.4)

In *Yajnaseni* one can find Draupadi as an ambassador not only as woman but also of a changed society in general. Ray also projects Draupadi as a human being who wants to spend her life serving mankind. She even speaks about Aryan-non Aryan integration and says:

Consequently, it would be possible to establish integration between Aryans and non-Aryans, sages and hermits. Exchange of ideas, participating in festivals marriages and celebration of one another would be possible. In this manner among them bonds of friendship and even of marriage could be forged (YJ.298-99)

Thus, *Yajnaeni*'s role is that of a messenger of peace and world integration. Ray by putting words in the mouth of Krishnaa wants to establish humanitarian approach not only for women but for entire nation. "Permeated with Krishna, bliss love"(397). She does not wish to attain Moksha but to be re-born on the sacred earth of Bharata so as to turn it into a "path finder of the whole world in friendship and peace."(398)

Vyasa's *Mahabharata* leaves with numerous unanswered questions which different authors tried to answer in their own way in the age in which they live. Here, in *Yajnaseni* Pratibhaji captures them imaginatively by presenting Draupadi as a passionate empowering character of Indian womanhood.

Conclusion:

Draupadi of Mahabharata represents all that is happening to women today. The Mahabharata would be incomplete without her presence. She was beautiful, valiant and graceful. She was a woman of her times. In spite of being married to one, she shared her life with many. Today, insanity is the order of the day. Even while women are being successful, doing the kind of things their ancestors would not have dreamt to do, they are paying a price for being independent. They are in many ways like Draupadi trying to lead a life of their own but are being pushed back and down with chains of restrictions.

Today, women are being raped and mistreated at the drop of a pin. In the villages, in towns and in cities, children, little girls and women are being disrobed for lust, for jealousy, for enmity, for god knows what other unjustifiable reason.

People forget that all human beings are born free. It is society and its stereotype selfish rules that hold them in bondage. Draupadi compensated the war to regain her lost respect. She lost a lot in the process but she gained realization about the futility of relationships, about the vulnerability of weakening emotions and about the illusion of life itself.

In some ways, her journey is the journey of women in some parts of the world even today, spent in a lifetime of efforts to just be recognized as human beings and not just objects of lust and power.

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