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Panchavathi Anathavathi Draupadi

Pankhuri Aggarwal

Research Scholar

Dept. of English

University of Jammu

Abstract:

Mahabharata to me predominantly is about Draupadi. Even when we read about the Pandavas and the Kauravas on the very outset of this epic poem, it was Draupadi who seemed to take centre juncture. Draupadi is also known as “Panchavathi Anathavathi” which means “The one with five husbands but husbandless in times of need”. It was Draupadi who left her hair unbound, Draupadi who washed her locks in Duhshasan’s blood. Earthy, energetic, quick-witted, sharp-tongued, she bore hardship and misfortunes without losing sight of vengeance she had promised herself. It was Draupadi for whose sake was this stern battle fought.

Draupadi functions as an overt. She acts as a pictogram of protest against injustice towards women. The narrative of the retribution is dramatized through her. The epic makes a rich use of the dynamics of the feminine body in a powerful dramatization of revenge. Does the charisma of female image necessarily present an upbeat image of the status of women in the society of those times? No.

Thus this paper will attempt to study the spread of women’s movements and a vigilant feminist consciousness which eventually would alert one’s empathy towards the conventional receptions of this epic epitomizing Draupadi and the role-models they inculcate.

Keywords: Vivacious, Psyche, Womanhood, Dwapara Yuga, Beauteous, Polyandry, Feminist standpoint, Male hegemony, Patriarchal society, Subjugation, Catastrophe.

Indian myth and folklore are special due to their vivacious legendary characters, leading human lives and reflecting human persona of love, courage, fearlessness and virtue, and also hatred, revenge and aggression. Talking in universal terms about Mahabharata, Draupadi has virtually shaped the psyche of Indian women in the past and continues to do so, even in this spurt age of modernity and advanced technology. Draupadi is considered as an emblem of Indian womanhood even today. She shows prominent similarities in her life graph as that compared with other women in general but then they are also different in their own ways. Yet, she continues to shape the modern Indian women in different ways.

Although Draupadi was a divine being, who had come to earth to accomplish certain missions, yet she became an embodiment of the woes of women of today. Draupadi was born in the Dwapara Yuga. This yuga was a mixture of bigheaded, egoistic and sinful human beings who always followed wrong ways to get what they wanted in life. Duryodhana, Dusshasana and Shakuni were perhaps the slyest of all, who could resort to anything to achieve success in attaining their targets. Thus, these people were never the merit of attaining mercy for their deeds. Draupadi's rage and her stance of seeking revenge, was correct for the Dwapara Yuga. In the present Kali Yuga where we reside, things are only getting worse. The global terrorism, unrest and war have taken its roots in almost every part of the world. Thus, we need to opt to stern measures to restrain the existing hostility. Passive means may not essentially turn out as a good

evaluation for this era. Hence, women need to be like Draupadi if they want to live and continue a prolific life.

Like Athena and Durga, Draupadi also emerged from the beautiful glory of full-grown youth from the fire-altar. She had all the traits of burning nature in her. According to different treatises on Hindu mythology, Draupadi was said to be an incarnation of many different Devis. It is said that Draupadi married the earthly counterparts of these demigods, who had manifested in the form of the five Pandavas. Draupadi's struggle against wrong reflects Parvati or her Shakti phase. The persona of Kali can also be seen in her. Sometimes, Draupadi was submissive and domestic and ponder over time to be saved, thus the qualities of goddesses Sachi and Usha are personified in her. Draupadi was embodiment of wisdom too, when she hid herself and asked Bhima to take revenge from the evil Keechaka just like Goddess Bharati. Draupadi was also avatar of Goddess Shree or Wealth who was the wife to five Indras in their earthly manifestation, that is, the five Pandavas.

Draupadi was a well-groomed, princess, born out of fire, intellectual and knowledgeable, beautiful and sensible; she is eternally bound by law-that is the law of compliance. As a first person narrative, the story speaks of her wedding against her wishes to the five Pandavas. And yet she continues to admire and respect each one of them. In love with Krishna, she admitted herself to his wishes and agrees to marry Arjuna. It is a story of a woman in love; a woman who sacrifices herself for the integrity of her family and people. But she gets little in return. Her life is open in the form of a prayer to Krishna – her Sakha, her soul-mate. She is called as one of the earliest feminists, be it in requisites of polyandry, regarded as a matter of condemn by society, then and now, or in terms of her thirst for vengeance. Draupadi is a good vantage point from where a survey can be conducted over the depth and power of a subjugated woman. Deprived of justice by the male ruled society, from the feminist standpoint, *Mahabharata* depicts women as a non-entity and totally meek to man. The epic provides a framework to challenge the patriarchal point of view, which moulds realities, fixes morals and limits idea of individual potential. The mythical framework of *Mahabharata* gives tone of voice to all silenced women.

The traditional tale and signs perpetuate male hegemony. Draupadi realizes that marriage offers no contentment to her. In a patriarchal defined model of conduct, to be feminine means to be feeble. Liberty is a male element here. Here, contentment is banned for women. Any sign of self affirmation in woman is a disgrace. It is unpleasant that woman has no say in the preference of her husband. Reluctantly, Draupadi lets herself to live with the four brothers of Arjuna. She reminds us of the cunning male oppressors who psychologically manipulates women. In a patronizing manner Krishna pins her down to his object of preserving dharma leaving no way to run away. Literally, Krishna the pictogram of male hegemony imprisons her emotionally. She has no choice but to comply with male authority. Draupadi is driven into marriage. In patriarchal belief, women set off adversity and catastrophe. Man always tries to overpower the potential authority derived from her reproductive capacities with his sexuality. Draupadi is not just a princess with vivid image. She is the pictogram of a common lady of sentiment, struggling to endure in such a dismal condition. Rage, hurt, sense of worth, humiliation all are chocked in her.

Vyasa states that the creator had rendered her with beauty that surpassed that of all other women and enchanted everyone and won the hearts of all men around. That is why Draupadi's idol holds

in one hand a parrot, the vehicle of Kama and the god of eroticism. And all men in her environs were so besieged by desire for her that they became enemies to one another. This is very well testified in the swayamvara (ceremony of choosing one's own spouse) hall where the kings are ready to take up arms against each other to pledge claim on her. And again in the potter's hut, where Arjuna brings her after winning her in the swayamvara, and all the Pandavas are immediately spellbound by her. Noticing this and thereby recalling Vyasa's prophecy, Yudhishtira announces that she would be their common wife after their mother's order.

She devotedly serves her husbands and their other wives without pride, anger or desire. With affection and self restraint she waits attentively on their wishes without any selfish thoughts. She works hard to manage the home never speaks harshly, never laughs loudly, never causes offence and is never idle. She never cooks food her husbands do not like, and she is dutiful in performing the offerings to the ancestors and in serving guests. Even though they are gentle by nature she treats her husbands as if they were venomous snakes, always prone to anger the eternal dharma for a woman is to serve her husband in this way, for he is her god and she has no object in her life other than his service.

(Sutton 423)

What added more grief to this extremely catastrophic situation is that all her life, Draupadi had to quietly suffer the humiliation of many transitory references to her manifold husbands, at times rudely adjoining on the dishonor of being termed a prostitute. Karna had, in fact, openly remarked in a packed assembly that a woman who had more than one husband certainly enjoyed the sport like a prostitute. Yet, the admiration that Draupadi commands can never be mitigated. She is a female protagonist who is spontaneous, progressively strong-minded and who could also possess the severity of a customary Hindu wife. Draupadi has been undertaken as an early feminist because of her boldness in confronting with the people who tried to harm her family or herself. Draupadi lived in an era when a woman's position was too weak as compared to her husband. Dr Vanamala Bhawalkar states that in Draupadi's epoch, women equalized with men were nowhere an issue. Thus, wife was equivalent to the husband and they both made a complete self.

When Krishna visits the family after the marriage, he tells Draupadi that her becoming the wife of five brothers was because of a karmic correlation - from an event in her preceding birth. In that birth, Draupadi had been a staunch devotee of Shiva. She had undergone stern atonement to please Him and when He manifested, she asked Him to endow her a husband with five pleasing qualities. Shiva told her that it would be complex to get one husband with all the five qualities. But he granted her a windfall that she would get the same in her next birth. Hence she got married to five brothers, each one in lieu of one of those qualities.

Draupadi provides a rich discourse on women's speech. Women are supposed to be weaklings to be subordinated, sheltered, protected and always controlled. Men psychologically blackmail them through love and marriage and compel them into submissiveness. Draupadi controls herself before the injustice done by her favourite husband Arjuna. She has been waiting for Arjun who has gone to the forest and is making arrangements for his return.

Waiting, especially waiting for the beloved – how delightful it is! I was decorating room I was decorating his garden, His library, sitting room... I decked Myself lie a Virgin bride. Let not him feel that twelve Years had gone by and that I had grown older by twelve years. (Yajnaseni 197)

Draupadi is a herald of the female in a patriarchal civilization who is bound into obedience. She cannot dissent against her husband's deeds without considering her emotions. Arjuna brings a new bride Subhadra, Krishna's sister. She is forced to give up the newly built mansion for the new bride. Arjuna does not even ask Draupadi's consent for his marriage. She becomes a representation of "every woman", a powerless victim in the patriarchal world of subjugation.

She being a victim of patriarchal society, the famous disrobing scene is significant to bring out this point. Draupadi is forcibly brought into the court, a space conquered by men. Dushashana drags her and pulls her hair and brings her in facade of all the members of the court. Category of a prostitute and a slave is accorded to her. And in the discourse of man she has no right to solicit or question this status. Here Draupadi's indignation is clearly pictured, when she thinks about her five husbands who stacked her and having handed her over to others. Polyandry makes her an easy mark in public. She refuses to supplicate for mercy. This is an outrage to male sexuality and supremacy. Draupadi demands fair dealing and gets silence in return. What becomes evident in the entire incident is that woman is simply an entity and a possession. And the state which owns her too can do little to protect her from the disgrace and loss. Law and the so-called Dharma, legal system, fall short to protect her. The legendary Draupadi had Krishna as her knight in shining armor.

What is left of the Dharma of the kings? Draupadi's question echoes in the ears of the dignitaries in the assembly. Her lexis is not just an entreaty of a mortified and powerless woman, but also confront to the knowledge of right and wrong of the kings. It was a stride unimaginable for a woman of her time and setting. Draupadi's question is not an archaic question of a mistreated, honorable queen whose honor has been put on wager. Rather, it holds as much importance and significance now as it did then. It is a question of the fortification of those who find themselves insecure in a system. It is a question every young woman would want to ask the established safety classification of the nation post the gang-rape, brutal assault and the recent case which led to consequent death of the twenty-three year old paramedic student in Delhi on the 16th of December, 2012.

As a pioneer of feminism, she fought for her rights when her confined enslaved husbands lost her in a game of dice. In a court full of the most authoritative kings of the time, here was a woman who dared to stand for herself and speak up, aloud, against male perpetrated injustices. She was Outraged when her husbands did not come to her support her, protect her. Then her rage and fury became visible to the whole assembly and she personified an antagonistic stance in reaction to her husbands' inert conduct. The situation justifies Draupadi's response to guard her. "Only divine intrusion kept her from being entirely dishonored in the presence of her husbands and the entire assembly, thus her anger is justified" (Sutherland 66).

While women, during that point of time, were considered the minor sex. Draupadi was left to guard herself, usually calling on a god to aid her. However, it is through these situations that her

conduct was justified. When the husband will not give protection a woman must take matters in to her own hands. However, the point is still entrenched in the literature that a woman should remain truthful to her husband. It is vital to judge the epic from the angle of the time in which it was shaped. However, this does not mean that its teaching's have not permeated contemporary ethnicity. "Modern people thought still attests to patriarchal virtues in which women are considered lesser and issue to their passionate nature" (Sharma 41). This indicates that the dynamics between men and women are still surfacing in a male subjugated system. However, Draupadi's conduct identifies with those women who are still articulated and forced.

In the patriarchal community a woman who desires and tries to outline her persona as a human being is scorned at. A hostile woman is always alleged as a peril to man's supremacy and dominance. A woman who denies her feminity has to accept the condemnation of man and the world. Either she has to be like other women, or else she has no position in the society. The patriarchal social structure has laid down the approved ways of expressing womanhood. A woman should live as daughter, wife, and mother or as a prostitute. Draupadi questions the injustice which was done by Pandavas with full agony and annoyance:

Was woman merely man's movable or immovable property, male and female slaves horses and elephants? Being a woman did I not have Right even over myself, my own soul? If they had rights over this body of mine, did it mean they could do as they wished with me? (Yajnaseni 235).

Draupadi was by no means the sort who would easily pardon and forget. Of course, she also had a lot of endurance and tolerance, when she was in forest she had faced lots of adversity and distress. When Kunti asked all her sons to share Draupadi reluctantly, she never spoke a word against it. At Yudhishtira's sway, she peacefully got married to all the Pandu brothers, but this construction of marriage was not rampant at her time. She also suffered numerous verbal abuse form Dushashana, Duryodhana, Karna, Jayadrata and Kichaka. But she focused on her dedication to Krishna, knowing that he would come to her rescue when the time came. Draupadi went through awful disgrace when the vastraharan episode took place. Eventually having such gallant husbands, no one came to her rescue, when Dushashana misbehaved with her and disrobed her. She still escorted her husbands to the forest for thirteen years of banishment. She had also revealed a keen sense of judgment and swift thoughts when she denied that she had been enslaved in the game of dice. She marked out that no one had the right to put her at stake, as her husband himself had no powers left and had himself become a mere slave. Draupadi also pardoned Ashwatthama for slaughtering her children, when she came into terms with the futility of war and swayed from her past. Other than that, she never pardoned any of her enemies.

Draupadi was an equally authoritative woman, who has captured the very quintessence of the factual Indian woman. Extremely beautiful and enormously virtuous, she was so strong, in fact, that no catastrophe could weaken her pious aura. It is no marvel that Indian women still hold them in the uppermost of regard and reverence. The women still in modern times are asked to be in limits. The manners a woman should follow, the way she moves around in the societal trail and so on, is typically governed by her family head. Rejection and social mockery are the consequences to be faced if she defies resisting or rebelling any of the set rules. Draupadi was born of king Drupada's vengeance against his enemies. She showed these traits throughout her

life. Eventually the vastraharan episode led to the classic war of Kurukshetra. This reprehensible incident led to her curse that a soil that reduced its women to such levels of humiliation would never ever flourish. Here too, we can draw an analogy between Draupadi and the present society's outlook towards Indian women. Many Indians still consider that Draupadi underwent such adversities in her life because she rejected to admit Duryodhana's advances prior to her marriage. She had also ridiculed him, calling him "the blind son of a blind father". Many Indian women are still viciously beaten up by their husbands because they "back-answered" them, hence challenged their authority and power. We also hear of many women being mortified, raped or even killed by a possible suitor for having him casted off.

The Indian woman depicts many shades of disposition. She is accomplished of expressing the profound love and kindheartedness while also turning into a destructive, vindictive like Draupadi. Draupadi displayed her gentle and sacred side when she forgives Ashwathama at the closing stages of the war. Each Indian woman has a little morsel of Draupadi in her. No matter what pain or ordeal she has to experience in her life, she is competent of meandering to her state of affairs, finally rising victorious. Though she remains docile in a society that is still mainly male-dominated, she copes to fight back and hold on to her self-esteem, achieving success and winning the admiration and gratitude of all those around her.

If the *Mahabharata* is an intricately woven chronicle of intense abhorrence and ardent love, brutal bloodshed and gracious thoughts, awe-inspiring valor and fearfulness, beauty and tenderness, triumph and conquer, then Draupadi is its unblemished jewel, casting the gloominess of her immense persona over the epic poem and the all destructing war it's vivid description, and thereby, sowing the initial seeds of the struggle of a woman for her right. What we deem nowadays as feminism. The splendid character of Draupadi, like persistent devotion to duty, courage of self sacrifice, determination; valor, ability for hard work, presence of mind, firmness, endurance, thirst for knowledge, perception to distinguish between right and wrong and potency to fight against injustice, truth, modesty, forgiveness, gentleness and austerity as the juncture demanded, these traits seen in Draupadi are universal and beyond the perimeters of time and space.

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