



Draupadi Unveiled: A Kaleidoscope of Indian Authors' Perspectives in Novels

Reddygari Yamini

Research Scholar

Department of English

Yogi Vemana University

Kadapa

Abstract:

Feminism in India has evolved through complex intersections of socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts, offering a unique lens through which gender dynamics in the region can be understood. This abstract delves into the diverse landscape of feminist discourse in Indian literature, with a focus on the innovative utilization of myths by feminist fiction writers. Drawing from diverse mythological traditions deeply entrenched in Indian culture, feminist writers both men and women have reinterpreted and subverted traditional narratives to challenge patriarchal norms and articulate feminist concerns.

This article delves into the rich and diverse tapestry of Draupadi's character as portrayed by Indian authors in their novels. By examining various literary works, the exploration unfolds the multifaceted dimensions of Draupadi, showcasing the nuanced interpretations and creative liberties taken by writers. From classic retellings to modern reinterpretations, this literary journey traverses the cultural and historical landscape, shedding light on how Draupadi has been brought to life through the vivid imaginations of Indian authors. Through this exploration, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of Draupadi's character and its significance in shaping the narrative fabric of Indian literature.

Keywords: Draupadi, Retellings, Reinterpretations, Imaginations.

Introduction:

The traditional centrality of the original Sanskrit **Mahabharata** has been challenged by the contemporary paradigm of "many **Mahabharatas**." Today's audience frequently finds themselves captivated not by the original Sanskrit text but by the myriad retellings of this grand epic. This expansive paradigm encompasses various forms

of interpretation, including television shows, movies, graphic novels, mythological fiction, and more. Despite this shift, the **Mahabharata** continues to wield a profound influence on Indian literature, resonating across regional languages as well as in English.

Draupadi, the iconic and formidable female figure from Indian mythology, stands as a beacon of strength, resilience, and feminist identity in the **Mahabharata** ancient epic. This legendary character, born of fire and possessing a spirit as fierce as her origins, has transcended the confines of her mythological roots to become a symbol of empowerment and complexity. In Indian literature, numerous writers have taken up the challenge of reimagining Draupadi, breathing new life into her character and infusing it with contemporary relevance. This article delves into the diverse portrayals of Draupadi by Indian authors in their novels, exploring how her feminist essence is interpreted, dissected, and reshaped to resonate with evolving narratives and perspectives. Through these literary lenses, Draupadi emerges not just as a mythical heroine, but as a symbol of timeless strength and a canvas for the ever-evolving imagination of Indian writers. Notable works include **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions,"** offering a feminist reimagining of the **Mahabharata** from Draupadi's viewpoint, exploring her emotions, struggles, and relationships. **Kavita Kane's "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen"** takes a different angle, shedding light on characters like Draupadi and their interactions with Karna, adding layers to Draupadi's character. **Saiswaroopaa Iyer's "Abhaya,"** a historical fiction novel, weaves Draupadi into a broader narrative, exploring her role in the socio-political context of ancient India. **Karna Parameswara's "Draupadi"** focuses specifically on Draupadi's life, delving into her relationships, challenges, and the societal dynamics of the time.

Indian male authors have approached the portrayal of **Draupadi** in their novels with diverse perspectives, often offering nuanced insights into her character. While the primary focus has historically been on the female experience, these authors have contributed to a multifaceted representation of Draupadi. Devdutt Pattanaik's "Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata" provides a comprehensive overview, delving into the complexities of Draupadi's relationships and the societal dynamics surrounding her. Anand Neelakantan, in "The Rise of Sivagami," although not solely focused on Draupadi, explores the broader Mahabharata narrative, offering a different perspective on her character and interactions. Ashok K. Banker's series, "The Forest of Stories: Book 3 of the Forest of Stories Series," incorporates Draupadi into a larger narrative context, emphasizing political intrigue and power dynamics. These male authors collectively contribute to the evolving narrative of Draupadi, exploring various aspects of her character and relationships, bringing forth a spectrum of interpretations that enrich the broader understanding of Draupadi's significance in Indian mythology and literature.

Contrasting Varied Depictions of Draupadi in Novels by Male and Female Authors:

While it's crucial to acknowledge the diverse portrayal of Draupadi in novels, varying significantly from one author to another, some general trends emerge when comparing works by male and female Indian authors. However, it's essential to avoid broad generalizations, recognizing that each author brings a unique perspective to storytelling. Male authors may often focus on Draupadi within the broader context of the Mahabharata, emphasizing political dynamics, power struggles, and societal complexities. Conversely, female authors tend to highlight Draupadi's emotional journey, her challenges in navigating societal norms, and her experiences as a woman within a patriarchal society, offering a more empathetic exploration of her character. When applying a feminist lens, male authors might seek to understand and highlight the challenges faced by women in ancient epics, exploring gender dynamics and inequalities, while female authors may bring a more direct and personal feminist perspective, focusing on issues of agency, autonomy, and the impact of patriarchal norms on Draupadi's life. In terms of narrative style, male authors might emphasize action, strategy, and the broader political landscape, showcasing Draupadi's role in shaping these elements, whereas female authors may lean towards a more introspective and emotionally charged narrative style, delving into Draupadi's internal struggles, relationships, and personal growth. Exploring interpersonal relationships, male authors may examine Draupadi's interactions within a larger socio-political framework, while female authors might delve into the intricacies of her relationships from a more personal and emotional standpoint, highlighting the complexities of her connections with the Pandavas and others. Regarding societal commentary, male authors may use Draupadi's character to comment on broader issues such as governance, power structures, and the impact of war on society, while female authors might use her experiences to provide commentary on gender roles, societal expectations, and the challenges faced by women in ancient and contemporary contexts. Moreover, the evolving landscape of literature sees authors breaking away from traditional gendered expectations in their storytelling, resulting in a more diverse and inclusive representation of characters like Draupadi.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni:

In "The Palace of Illusions" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Draupadi(Panchali) is portrayed through the lens of the first-person narrative, as the novel is told from Draupadi's perspective. The entire story unfolds through her voice, allowing readers to intimately understand her thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Draupadi serves as both the protagonist and narrator, giving her character depth and complexity.

Through the long, lonely years of my childhood,
when my father's palace seemed to tighten
its grip around me until.... (TPI 1)

Through Draupadi's narrative, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni provides a unique interpretation of the events in the Mahabharata. Draupadi's character is depicted as multidimensional, moving beyond her conventional roles as a queen and wife. The author explores Draupadi's internal conflicts, desires, and challenges within the context of a patriarchal society.

In an interview with Preeti Zachariah on April 24, 2013, Chitra clarified that:

I came from a traditional family ... the world around me was suddenly so different. Immigration was certainly a transformational experience and I tried to explore its intricacies.

The novel portrays Draupadi as a woman of strength, intelligence, and resilience. Divakaruni delves into Draupadi's relationships with various characters, including the Pandavas, Karna, and Krishna. These relationships shape Draupadi's character and contribute to the overall narrative, providing a nuanced understanding of her role in the epic.

By choosing Draupadi as the storyteller, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni allows readers to see the Mahabharata through a feminist lens, emphasizing Draupadi's agency and individuality. The first-person perspective enables a more personal connection with Draupadi, encouraging readers to empathize with her struggles, triumphs, and the complexities of her character as she navigates the challenges presented in the epic tale.

Pratibha Ray:

In Pratibha Ray's novel "Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi" (1984), the author presents a unique and compelling portrayal of Draupadi. The novel, which earned Pratibha Ray the prestigious Moortidevi Award in 1993, was inspired by a real-life incident involving a woman named Krishnaa, who faced societal mockery for her decision to remarry.

the garland that I had been weaving since the morning to put round Krishna's neck would have to be put round Arjun's. That too at Krishna's behest! Did I have no wish of my own, no desire, no craving simply because I was Yajnaseni born of the sacrificial fire? My birth, life, and death all were dictated by someone else."
(Yajnaseni, 23, 24)

Draupadi's character in this retelling is marked by a strong awareness of her roles as a daughter, wife, woman, and human being. The narrative unfolds through Draupadi's perspective as she writes her life story while left alone to die in the Himalayan range. The use of the first-person pronoun "I" establishes a direct connection between the reader and the protagonist.

While Draupadi acknowledges her adherence to her duties (dharma) as dictated by societal norms and her family, she questions the decisions made on her behalf. The novel explores Draupadi's internal conflicts and her quest for justice within the constraints of her societal roles. Her marriage to Arjuna, chosen for her by her father and Krishna, becomes a source of discontent, highlighting the lack of agency for women in such matters.

Pratibha delves into Draupadi's intellectual side and decision-making power, particularly during the Swayamwar ceremony. The portrayal emphasizes Draupadi's dilemma as she navigates through societal

expectations, reluctantly supporting her father's decisions and adhering to her prescribed role. The narrative reflects Draupadi's struggle with the lack of autonomy in decisions related to her marriage and subsequent life.

As the story unfolds, Draupadi faces a series of challenges, including the traumatic event of immolation, where she is insulted and humiliated. The novel captures Draupadi's fiery nature and her vocal discontent with the decisions imposed upon her. She questions the actions of her husbands, especially Yudhishtira, in the wake of such disgrace.

Ray's portrayal of Draupadi in "Yajnaseni" is characterized by early feminist zeal. Draupadi emerges as a woman who is not content with societal norms and voices her thoughts and emotions. The narrative brings out the complexities of Draupadi's character, her internal struggles, and her reactions to the injustices she faces. Overall, she provides a nuanced and bold reinterpretation of Draupadi's character within the context of the Mahabharata.

Mahasweta Devi:

Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Draupadi (Dopdi Mejhen) in her novel "Draupadi" is a departure from the traditional depiction of the character from the Indian epic, Mahabharata. In Mahasweta Devi's novel, Draupadi is not portrayed as a demure and submissive woman, but rather as a strong, assertive, and independent figure.

Draupadi is depicted as a tribal woman who is fiercely resilient and determined to fight against oppression and injustice. She is shown as a symbol of resistance against the dominant and exploitative forces in society. Draupadi's character in the novel embodies the struggles and resilience of marginalized communities, particularly women, against systems of power and oppression.

Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Draupadi highlights themes of gender, caste, and class oppression, and she uses the character to critique social hierarchies and injustices. Through Draupadi's character, Mahasweta Devi offers a powerful commentary on the socio-political landscape of India, drawing parallels between the struggles faced by marginalized communities in contemporary society and those depicted in ancient epics like the Mahabharata.

Dhruv Bhatt:

In Dhruv Bhatt's novel "Agnikanya" (1988), Draupadi, known as Krishnaa, is portrayed with a fiery and intelligent demeanor, torn between inner anguish and societal expectations. Bhatt's Draupadi, much like Pratibha Ray's portrayal in "Yajnaseni," reflects a woman challenging patriarchal norms. While obedient to her father and mother-in-law's decisions, the novel explores Draupadi's inner feelings, particularly her admiration for Karna.

Yudhishtira himself is a Chakravarty king and so he does not need to obey anyone's instructions; moreover, Kshatriya never refuses the battle but rejecting the invitation of playing a dice game does not violate dharma. (Agnikanya, 70 ,71)

In contrast to societal norms, Draupadi openly expresses her views, as seen when she questions Vidur's invitation to Yudhishtira for the dice game, highlighting his perceived incapability. The narrative also delves into Draupadi's inclination towards Arjuna, even though she divides her time equally among the five Pandavas. Her intelligence and decision-making prowess are evident in various incidents throughout the novel.

The author portrays Draupadi as a woman with agency, grappling with her emotions and societal constraints. Despite her strong character, she faces challenges, such as the rejection of her suggestions by Yudhishtira during critical moments. The narrative unfolds with Draupadi expressing her grievances, particularly when facing the immolation at the hands of the Kauravas.

As the story progresses, Draupadi's character becomes a binding force for her family, providing enthusiasm to her husbands during times of war. However, the novel concludes with Draupadi peacefully passing away alone in the Himalayan range, highlighting the solitude of her fate. Bhatt's portrayal of Draupadi in "Agnikanya" underscores her strength, intelligence, and the internal conflicts she faces in challenging societal expectations.

Trisha Das:

In Trisha Das's novel "**Ms Draupadi Kuru**" (2016), the author takes a radical and postmodern approach to portraying Draupadi. Unlike the traditional depiction of Draupadi as a woman bound by duties, in this novel, she is presented as a liberated woman free from worldly constraints. Alongside other mythic women—Kunti, Amba, and Gandhari—Draupadi leaves heaven, desiring to experience modern life in contemporary Delhi. She is portrayed not as a submissive queen but as an independent and ambitious woman, brave and beautiful.

The narrative begins with these celestial women seeking Krishna's permission to return to Earth for a thirty-day vacation. Draupadi, unencumbered by her past life as the Kuru queen, arrives in modern-day Delhi, or the modern-day Indraprastha. The women, unfamiliar with 21st-century developments, are awestruck by modern advancements. Despite progress, they observe that the social status of women remains unchanged, and age-old restrictions persist.

Draupadi, a symbol of courage and independence, is particularly impressed by the title "Ms," denoting a woman's identity without specifying marital status. Choosing this title for herself, she becomes a woman with her thoughts and mindfulness. The novel explores contemporary issues such as rape and molestation, drawing parallels with Draupadi's own experience at the Kuru court. Draupadi intervenes to protect Amba and Gandhari, demonstrating her strength and resilience.

The narrative introduces Zafar, a young man who aids the women and falls in love with Amba. Zafar becomes instrumental in helping these women fulfill their dreams in the modern world. As the thirty-day vacation concludes, the women are given the choice to return to heaven or stay on Earth. Each woman makes a decision based on her experiences. Draupadi achieves individuality through interactions with Angela, a character who facilitates her entry into the modern world as an independent woman.

The portrayal of Draupadi in "Ms. Draupadi Kuru" highlights her journey from a mythical character to a representation of women in various roles in society. The novel explores feminist thoughts, postmodern events, and psychological developments, reflecting the changing perspectives on Draupadi from earlier works like Pratibha Ray's "Yajnaseni" (1984) to Trisha Das's contemporary reinterpretation. Draupadi becomes a symbol of every woman who struggles for her status in a male-dominated society, embodying independence, self-sufficiency, and success in her career.

Kavita Kane:

In Kavita Kane's novel "**Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen**," the character of Draupadi, portrayed through the perspective of Uruvi, offers a unique and contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional narrative from the Mahabharata. Uruvi, a fictional character, serves as Karna's second wife and acts as a modern lens through which readers can engage with the epic tale.

Uruvi's portrayal embodies modern characteristics, making her relatable to contemporary women. As a Kshatriya princess from Pukeya, she is depicted as independent and strong-willed, unafraid to question societal norms or her own circumstances. Her decision to marry Karna, despite societal opposition and her parents' vigilance, showcases her agency and determination to follow her heart.

Through Uruvi's perspective, Kane explores Karna's private life, which remains largely unknown in traditional tellings of the Mahabharata. By delving into Karna's relationships and struggles, Kane adds depth to his character, presenting him not just as a warrior but as a complex individual with his desires and conflicts.

Kane's use of postmodern features in the novel adds layers of complexity to the narrative, offering a fresh interpretation while still maintaining traditional aesthetics. The novel's open-ended structure allows readers to engage with the story on their own terms, inviting them to interpret and fill in the gaps according to their imagination.

Overall, Kane's portrayal of Draupadi through Uruvi's perspective in "**Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen**" offers a contemporary reimagining of the Mahabharata, providing readers with a nuanced exploration of familiar characters and themes within a modern context.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee:

In Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel "**Anandamath**," Draupadi symbolizes Hindu nationalism, embodying Hindu values and devotion amidst the backdrop of the Indian nationalist movement. Chatterjee uses her character to convey his religious and political perspectives, portraying Draupadi as a steadfast Hindu woman committed to her faith despite adversity.

Throughout the narrative, Draupadi represents the essence of Hindu dharma, highlighting its role as a pillar of strength for the Indian people. Chatterjee's depiction of Draupadi as a symbol of Hindu nationalism resonates with his broader themes of Indian identity and the struggle for independence from colonial rule.

By presenting Draupadi in this light, Chatterjee underscores the cultural and religious significance of Hinduism while emphasizing its contribution to shaping the collective identity and resistance against foreign rule. Draupadi's character serves as a potent symbol of the enduring spirit of the Indian nation and its unwavering dedication to its cultural heritage.

In "Anandamath," Bankim Chandra Chatterjee utilizes Draupadi's character to champion his religious and political beliefs, portraying her as a representation of Hindu nationalism and emphasizing the pivotal role of Hindu dharma in the Indian nationalist movement.

Rabindranath Tagore:

In Rabindranath Tagore's novel "**The Home and the World**," Draupadi's character serves as a poignant symbol of the plight of Indian women during colonial rule. Tagore utilizes Draupadi to shed light on the oppressive conditions faced by women in Indian society, while also critiquing patriarchal norms and advocating for women's empowerment.

Draupadi's character embodies the struggles of Indian women caught between traditional societal expectations and the influences of modernity brought about by Western ideals. Tagore portrays her as torn between these two worlds, facing the constraints of a patriarchal Indian society that limits her agency while also confronting the challenges and complexities of embracing modernity.

Through Draupadi's experiences and conflicts, Tagore highlights the urgent need for women's empowerment and the assertion of their rights and agency. Her character becomes a vehicle for Tagore to explore the tensions between tradition and progress, patriarchy and empowerment, as well as the complexities of navigating these dynamics within a colonial context.

Overall, in "The Home and the World," Rabindranath Tagore utilizes Draupadi's character to critique the subjugation of Indian women under colonial rule, while also advocating for their empowerment and agency in the face of patriarchal norms and societal expectations.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the multifaceted portrayals of Draupadi in Indian authors' novels offer a rich tapestry of interpretations that transcend traditional boundaries and illuminate the complexities of her character. Through diverse literary lenses, authors have reimagined Draupadi as a symbol of strength, resilience, and feminist identity, exploring her emotions, struggles, and relationships within the context of a patriarchal society and also placing her

in the context of postcolonial modern society as a modern woman.. Female authors often emphasize Draupadi's emotional journey and challenges in navigating societal norms, while male authors tend to focus on broader political dynamics and power struggles within the Mahabharata narrative. However, these general trends are not absolute, as each author brings a unique perspective to storytelling, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Draupadi's significance in Indian mythology and literature. From Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's feminist reimagining in "The Palace of Illusions" to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's portrayal in "Anandamath" as a symbol of Hindu nationalism, and Trisha Das's contemporary reinterpretation in "Ms. Draupadi Kuru," the evolving landscape of literature continues to offer diverse and inclusive representations of this iconic figure, resonating with contemporary readers and enriching the broader narrative fabric of Indian literature.

Works cited:

- Bhatt, Dhruv. Agnikanya. Ahmedabad: Gurjar Grantharatna Karyalaya, 2013. Print.
- Das, Trisha. Ms Draupadi Kuru. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2016. Print.
- Ganguli, Kisari Mohan. The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyas, Trans. SacredTexts.com, 2003. PDF.
- Interview by Preeti Zachariah. In Search of the Self. Web. 01 May, 2014.
- Parmar, Surabhi. "Ms. Draupadi Kuru: Reinterpreting the Women from the Mahabharata", IJELLH, Vol. IV, Issue X, October 2017.
- Pattanaik, Devdutt. Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata. London: PenguinBooks, 2010. Print.
- Ray, Pratibha. Afterword. Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi. English Trans. By Pradip Bhattacharya. Rupa, 2016.