

Deconstructing Myth: A Study of Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*

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Abstract

Yajnaseni is one of the interesting attempts by Oriya writer Pratibha Ray. The novel is a re-interpretation of the great Indian epic the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's point of view. Draupadi even being intelligent, courageous, she was neglected and not given a justifiable or proper status in the earlier versions of the epic. All the earlier versions of the epic have tried to celebrate the bravery of male heroes and their heroism. They always have put the woman in marginalized form, even being responsible for their success. All versions have reflected a prejudiced norm against female. Marginalization being an age old story, is reflected even in this great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. Pratibha Ray tries to bring forth or highlight this discrimination of late past against woman. She chooses Draupadi to be the narrator, who raises questions against the patriarchy and demands for justice. This paper makes a study of modern Draupadi's perspective in the *Mahabharata* and her struggle against patriarchy. It also makes a deconstruction of myth, which have been natural. In mythology, we have been reading Draupadi, a woman having five husbands, no one tried to show the anguish felt by Draupadi because of this polygamy. The main purpose will be to retell the story of Draupadi from modern perspective and her struggle to come in centre from the marginality.

Keywords: Pratibha Ray, *Yajnaseni*, Man-woman relationship, patriarchy, gender, feminism, stereotypes.

Deconstruction is a way to re-evaluate the existing text to a new perspective to get the new meaning and truth. It does not believe in the stability of meaning and claims that meaning is flexible, when it is read or conceived to a different perspective. Even it gets change with the passage of time. A same text can be read many times, with many perspectives. Deconstruction is referred as a never stopping process. It always tries to decentralize the meaning. As the American critic Barbara Johnson described it, "The deconstruction of s text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text (112)."

On the other hand, myth is a story transmitted orally. It is a form of writing, basically having a second meaning. These are not logical stories but just the stories rooted with something. Like stereotypes, some things stick solidly to something without being logical and become rigid in meaning. They become just replies in yes or no only but can't be justified through the logics. In mythologies, Roland Barthes uses the term myth as indicative of any made up, illusory thing, the false representations and invalid beliefs prevalent in the society which we accept as "natural."

It is mandatory to mention that earlier women writers followed the path paved by male writers. Every writer has focused on *Mahabharata's* retelling to a limited perspective. Earlier versions of the *Mahabharata* have shown woman characters as weak or we may say through the forms of weakness who never raised a voice against patriarchy. In other words, women of this great Indian epic are shown as ideal Indian women. But in the modern era, women disapprove the dominance of men in society and have started demanding for their human rights. *Yajnaseni* is a novel written by Oriya writer Pratibha Ray, which was translated by Pradip Bhattacharya. Pratibha Ray is one of the brilliant names along with many Indian writers like – Anand Neelakantan, Kavita Kane, Devdutt Pattanaik who retells mythological stories. With her great works, she has enlightened the Indian English writing world. Her works have realistic touch and sensitive appeal of the scenario, when they were written and about. *Yajnaseni* novel is based on the story of the great Indian epic *Mahabharata*. As we know, myths have covered almost all aspects of life, so the literary world is also not left untouched by it. They (myths) take us back from today's life to the time that seems remote but actually speaks to us of our contemporary quest for truth and understanding of life.

Upto 19th century, women were not very much interested to take part in the domain of literature. They did not think about their inevitable part of the domain of literature . But during 20th century, they started to awake that deep sleep, under whom guise they were. Before 20th century woman was considered inferior to man, who was fit only in her household duties and made just to decorate the house, family, husband, children etc. They had no potential to take part in any literary or other activities. This same happened with our mythical heroines like Draupadi, Kunti, Sita, Savitri etc. They were known only for their exceptional devotion to their husbands and dharma. Krishna Daiya quote to Sarla Palkar, who observes in this regard:

“cultural representations of women in the image of a Sita or a Savitri or an Ahilya – women known for their exceptional devotion to their husbands - still proliferate in popular media as well as in serious literature. In most of the popular films, dutiful daughters, devoted wives, self – sacrificing mothers are valorized (65).”

Pratibha Ray has shown this mythical image of her heroine above than it. She unveils Draupadi in proper light and shade. She has tried to expose the mental disharmony of her heroine due to polygamy. No- one tried to show the problem faced by Draupadi, but in every version of *Mahabharata*, always heroes and their heroism is celebrated. But the modern Draupadi of Pratibha Ray has become more aware of her potential. The novel projects the inner world and revolutionary thoughts of Draupadi. She is a revolutionary woman who is seen to be acting against dominance by birth. At the time of Svayamvar, she questions her brother- “Can’t the arrangements for Svayamvar be stopped (33)?”

No choices are allowed to women in their lives whether it is the context of private liberty or public. Every time, there is the shadow of male dominance over every aspect of her life. This patriarchal dominance thwarts their progress and so they have to face many problems to come over the situation. They are never allowed to come out or be fulfilled. Woman is forced to choose, and her choice is a gamble, it is always looking in the dark the unknown. That’s why anxiety begins with human being. In the novel Draupadi was dreaming to get married to Krishna but suddenly the decision gets change on Krishna’s advice to her father. Now the same Draupadi has to get married to Arjun. Hence, at this moment she says:

“But what of me? The garland 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, death- all were dictated by someone else. Why had I come and why should I remain alive? Why should I die? What was the intention? I knew nothing. Ignorance was my only stay.(24-25)”

Even Draupadi was also scared to this marriage ceremony to which every girl is scared. Normally when a person is in dilemma, he/she has only one option, that is pray to God. The same happens with Draupadi. On the day of Savayamvar, she also appears in front of Parvati for worship and Prayed, “Devi! Preserve my honour... if the person I have accepted as my husband has been burnt to death is that not an insult to me... if anyone other than Arjun was successful in passing the test, father would accept him as son in law, but how can I take him as husband? (36).”

Pratibha Ray also brings in the issue of marriage to indicate the injustice done to woman. Marriage is not the same thing to a man as to a woman. It is like an imposed thing upon a woman, which she has to follow forcibly. After Svayamvar, when Draupadi and five Pandavas, returns to Ma Kunti, she says divide among all the thing, which you have brought. This is also the indicative of male dominance, which he announces to his own way as he thinks suitable. To

call a woman an ‘object’ is a shameful term used by Yudhishtir for Draupadi. Here, this modern Draupadi states:

“It seemed to me that the elder brother had deliberately uttered such equivocating sentence to convey the news of my arrival to Mother. The elder brother knew that every day the food and money obtained as alms was divided equally amongst themselves. Then why did he not say, “Mother your third son, having won princess Krishnaa in the svayamvar, has brought her here and your third daughter- in –law is waiting at the door for your blessings?” (58)

Not only this, but a woman also has to merge herself into others, experiencing a loss of boundaries like her mother, father, native places and so many memories she has to dip under shadow. Her identity is lost, and she has to live according to her husband’s wishes. As in the novel, Arjun follow her mother’s views and her brothers’ decision, the same has to do Draupadi. Even she complains, yet there is no solution. She complained,

“You have won me. You could have said, ‘No one else has a right to Krishnaa! Why did you leave everything to me?’” (81)

Conclusion

In this way, *Yajanseni* is a novel which represents the situation or dominance faced by women in Dvaparyuga. This discrimination was present there in that time also. Ratna Shiela Mani and Kotesware Rao, quote to Hayden white, who goes on to suggest that, “history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation (171).”

Pratibha Ray’s novel enable us to get an idea of a woman’s struggle against this gender discrimination. While reading this novel *Yajnaseni*, one gets the idea that Draupadi’s life was full of upheavals, who was passing through various trials and exams. Draupadi’s struggle to manage five husbands’ unity, her loyalty towards them and to have a responsibility to keep all of them happy, etc. is not so easy as in the earlier version patriarchy has been defined it. Through the reading of this novel one can be familiar with the idea that Ray’s objective to depict the story from woman point of view is to clear the negative interpretations about the character and give her the rightful place where she deserves. Hence the ideal image of Draupadi disappeared with the arrival of new Draupadi or modern Draupadi of Pratibha Ray. This new Draupadi shatters the earlier ideal definition of Draupadi which was defined by patriarchy just to keep mum a woman through her example.

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