

Status of Women in Ancient India to Modern Era, with Special Reference to Uruvi and Draupadi

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Abstract: *Many research studies have proved that substantial development is unfulfilled dream without women's empowerment and gender equality. When women are making independents, and educated properly and supported with care and love, they gain an opportunities to speak up for their own rights and also to advocate for their families, communities, and nations. Mythology and folktales presents the culture, beliefs, and value systems of ethnic groups, Indian epics are terrain of patriarchy with women in the last stage of social ladder. Draupadi an important character in the mythological epic the Mahabharata. The insult, sacrifice and exploitation she endured continues to befall innumerable women in India and all over the world even present scenario in our society. In an attempt to highlight the ironical state of women which hasn't changed over the centuries, therefore modern writers tried to give them justice for their outstanding sacrifices. Draupadi is a symbol of chastity. So, we have discuss how Every woman in the modern world is Draupadi in spirit. The article mainly attempts to highlight the history of the evolution and deprivation of women's status from ancient to present in the context of Indian mythology. In Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen, Kavita Kane talks about the characters Uruvi and her husband Karna, who were marginalized from the society and alienated from their belongings. Both Uruvi and Karna were called as 'outsiders' by their own family members.*

Keywords: Ancient India, Mythology, Patriarchal society, Empowerment, Mahabharata, Sacrifice;

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, the present trend among the Indian English writers is to pen down their own creative works based on the Indian epics, namely the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Using the mythical stories, the writers of post modernity alter and modify the original story highlighting the view point on women. The construction of the ancient story is based on the pertinence to the contemporary needs and desires. Banani Chakraborty elucidate the motive of retelling:

“India has a rich treasure of mythological stories having admirers across the countries. Mythological stories of the great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are not merely tales of Gods, demons, demigods, miracles and mysteries; these also provide us knowledge about the social structure and cultural beliefs of the ancient time and people. Retelling of the Indian mythological stories re-establishes their significance in the modern Indian social context.” (Chakraborty, 108)

In Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen, Kavita Kane talks about the characters Uruvi and her husband Karna, who were marginalized from the society and alienated from their belongings. Both Uruvi and Karna were called as 'outsiders' by their own family members. 'Pratiloma' means practice of marrying women of a lower caste. It was prohibited in ancient time. King Vahusha was the one of who support his daughter Uruvi. Others opposed her decision. Princess were allowed to choose their husband as their own choice. Here, everyone opposes her choice for choosing Karna.

The modern society too is full of instances where women are failed and violated wretchedly by the deceit of men. Only time can forecast the rise of another Draupadi who would march forward with the ideals of Shakti, raging another great war to restore dharma and settle the unfair elements to rest once and for all.

Draupadi is a symbol of chastity. Because, she did not sleep with all the Pandavas together. They had made a rule. Any one brother would sleep with her for one year.

After the one year was over, she would do severe tapasya to remove the memories of the brother she slept. It was like a new relationship with all the old memories gone one by one.

We can easily draw a parallel betwixt Draupadi and the modern society's attitude towards women. Numerous Indians still believe that Draupadi suffered so much only because she refused to accept Duryodhana's advances before her marriage. She had also derided him. Several Indian women are still violently and brutally beaten up by their husbands because they refuse to obey their husbands. We also hear of numerous women being humiliated, raped or even murdered by a potential suitor for having rejected him. The Indian women depicts many forms. She is an ability of expressing the deep love and tenderness of Sita, while also turning into militant, revenge-seeking entity like Draupadi. Draupadi exhibited her own spiritual and gentle side when she pardons to Ashwathama towards the end of the war. Sita, on the other hand, showed her aggressive and defiant side when she chose to reject Rama and instead, return to her mother, Bhoomidevi. Each Indian woman has a little bit life struggle of Sita and Draupadi in her. No matter what trauma or suffering she has to undergo in her life, she is capable of bending to her conditions, finally emerging victorious. Though she remains submissive in a patriarchal society that is still largely male-dominated, she manages to struggle and hold on to her dignity, achieving success and winning the respect and recognition identity of all those around her. Draupadi and Sita were equally powerful women, who have proved the very essence of the true Indian woman. Highly virtuous, extraordinarily beautiful and they were also strong—so strong, in fact, that no crisis could diminish their spiritual aura. It is no wonder Indian Hindu women still hold them in the highest of considered and worship them for their own salvation. Indian women even present scenario is expected to stay within the "line of control" men make for them. Her behaviour, the way she moves around in the social circuit and so on, is generally governed by her familial head. Relinquishment and social ridicule are what she will have to face if she dares to defy any of the set own rules. One of the most contentious women from the mythological past does reside timelessly in the hearts across generation to generation. As mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik puts it in his article "The Clothes of Draupadi:

“To call Mahabharata a story based on historical war is to strip it of its magic, its power, its sheer magnificence, to make Mahabharata historical is to confine it to one period of his tory, if one does that, it holds little relevance in modern times. To be relevant, it cannot be confined to one period in history. It must be a-historical, timeless, free of geographical and historical moorings, independent of space and time. To me, that is what Mahabharata is. To me Mahabharata is a symbolic narration that reflects the thoughts and feelings, concerns and commentaries of the Indian people over centuries. That is why it is an epic. That is why it is sacred. It continues to enchant and enthrall us just as it enchanted and enthralled audiences a hundred years ago. Through the story of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, it discusses the nature of human society. (Pattanaik, 2015)

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In the present 21st century where we live, things are only getting worse with global terrorism and unrest in almost all countries of the world. In such a Kali yuga, one would probably have to resort to severe measures to curb the existing violence. Peaceful means may not work for this certain yuga. In this context, a woman would have to be more like Draupadi in order to survive and live a fruitful life and own identity. Every yuga came with its own specifications and particular requirements. So, we cannot easily say that Draupadi was too aggressive or that Sita was too submissive. It was all a need of the time at that particular moment in our history. Divakaruni was left disgruntled with the portrayed of female characters in both the epics since childhood. In the authorial note of *The Palace of Illusions* Divakaruni admits:

“But always, listening to the stories of the Mahabharata as a young girl in the lantern-lit evenings at my grandfather's village home, or later, poring over the thousand-page leather-bound volume in my parents' home in Kolkata, I was left unsatisfied by the portrayals of the women. It wasn't as though the epic didn't have powerful, complex women characters that affected the action in major ways. For instance, there was the widowed Kunti, mother of the Pandavas, who dedicates her life to making sure her sons became kings. There was Gandhari, wife of the sightless Kaurava king, who chooses to blindfold herself at marriage, thus relinquishing her power as queen and mother. And most of all, there was Panchaali (also known as Draupadi), King Drupad's beautiful daughter, who has the unique distinction of being married to five men at the same time—the five Pandava brothers, the greatest heroes of their time. Panchaali who, some might argue, by her headstrong actions helps to bring out the destruction of the Third Age of Man. But in some way,

they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons.” (Divakaruni, 349)

Why a woman should live by a male’s identity? The demand of this movement should be on female’s own identity. The literature silently inspires women to such a movement against the male authority and in India.

Every woman in the modern Indian are Draupadi and Uruvi in spirit. How?

Every woman who sacrifices her interest and desire for the sake of unity of her family is Draupadi.

Every woman who is loyal and devoted to one relationship is Uruvi.

Every woman who fights with powerful to protect her dignity and identity is Draupadi. Every woman who stands for her injustice and right is Uruvi.

Every woman who opposes atrocities by patriarchal society is Draupadi. Every woman who opposes against her being used and gambled is Draupadi.

Every woman who accepts hardship along with her family is Draupadi.

Every woman who is ready for revenge against injustice is Draupadi.

Every woman who values and respect her relationships is Draupadi.

Every woman who is always ready to sacrifice her children for dharma is Draupadi. Every woman who has Lord Himself standing for her honour as a friend is Draupadi

Every woman who is thinks for others is Uruvi.

Every woman who stands with her family in awful situations is Draupadi.

Every woman who respects other women is Draupadi.

Every woman who thinks and acts beyond her time is Uruvi.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, silence sad and disempowers women and because men know that most of women would suffer in silence, they continue to advance their tyrannical and brutal deeds. However, one woman, Draupadi stood her ground and voiced her dissatisfaction whenever she felt wronged. That was very brave and impressive of her considering the time, community and place she lived in. In the midst of the torture, humiliation, suffering and abuse, Draupadi found strength in herself to fight the injustices meted on to her by cruel males in a male-dominated androcentric society. In this context modern women also follows Uruvi and Draupadi’s rules. They live like a Draupadi and Uruvi..

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