



E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
www.allstudyjournal.com
IJAAS 2024; 6(11): 91-93
Received: 04-09-2024
Accepted: 08-10-2024

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Matrix of feminism in epics: A study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2024.v6.i11b.1301>

Abstract

Feminism in the great epics of India is always a centre of attraction for discussions. The women writers emerged after eighteen century focused on the problems of women who were misinterpreted by the male writers which the women writers thought. They came forward to write raising their voice against the atrocities of men against women in all sorts of fields. They also criticized the epic writers who portrayed women as the slaves of men. In this way some feminist writers try to re-write epic characters in the feminist perspectives. The paper deals with Draupadi's problems in the feministic perspectives portrayed by different Indian women writers.

Keywords: Epics, feminism, second sex, atrocity, westernization, modernization, gender, deconstruction

Introductions

Feminism still has its grip over literature even through the world has gone far ahead leaving behind the gender gap and women atrocities. In the developing countries like India and underdeveloped Africa women enjoy different legal and constitutional rights as their men counterparts despite their basic problems remain unsolved. As they are economically dependent and do not have enough space to get themselves either employed or to self employed to earn their bread and butter, they have to often compromise with the situation. Even the technically educated ladies have to depend on the male members of their family.

Though spaces are there to chase their dreams and to take facilities to translate them (dreams) into reality, they often lag behind due to certain socio-cultural, economic and gender problems. Stringent laws are there to punish a rapist but the society has not progressed to that extent to marry a rape victim. The social reluctance marrying the rape victims rap on the system meant to provide protection to them women. Only law can punish a rapist even to the extent of death but such punishment may not eliminate the problems. How can the law change the mind set of looking and mucking at an innocent rape victim. The rapist, the criminal, is weighed more than the rape victim. Such mind set compels a victim to protest the atrocities meted out to her in any places. She prefers to tolerate than to protest.

Such a social scenario is re-portrayed in *Yagyaseni* written by Prativa Roy, a noted feminist writer bagging Gyanapitha award for her lifelong achievements for literature. The re-portrayal of Draupadi's characters maybe a mythological structure but this character is linked to the modern context of Odish social scenario how the Odia women live a life against their willing. Often in the name of tradition women bear many unnecessary and irrelevant burdens that go against their mind and body. In these contexts women always are problems for women. Mother in laws is the main sources of atrocities for daughter in laws. The freedom of daughter in laws is always sacrificed.

Draupadi is often put in problems due to Kunti's attachment for her five sons. She also pressurizes her daughter in law to meet Karna, her god-son in the mid night with food and beverage in a family function. Such things are out of the text of the Mahabharata, but Prativa Roy adds this plot to highlights how the Odia daughter in laws are forced to do certain things which often go against their self-respects in the name of customs and to satisfy the egos of mother in laws. It implies mother in laws are to sketch the character certificate of the daughter in laws. They women suffer like Draupadi in the name of customs and traditions even they are qualified and from the well-to do-family.

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The problems of women do not end here. She has to satisfy all the members of her family. Draupadi bears the burden to satisfy all her five husbands who are different to each others in nature, whims, personalities and their approach to their wives. Reading their mind set, likings and disliking, she has to deal with them. It is very difficult to adjust in such situation. But there are no ways to get relieve except accepting the situation. Here the women are not born as women rather.

Odia women treat husbands as their gods, mother in laws as goddesses. It implies they have to serve them as the servant. The real status of married women in family is not more than the status of a home maker. Draupadi is delineated as more than a servant and less than a house wife. Roy's analysis of Draupadi's problems of often breaches the text of Mahabharat and it remains within the contexts of feminism. Her relationship with inside and outside family members are portrayed in the context of feminism not in the perspectives of the characters as portrayed in the epic. A beautiful woman is always the centre of attraction both inside and outside of the family. Kunti could understand how her sons were infatuated by the beauty of her newly wedded Draupadi with Arjun. Her diplomatic blessing to her sons to equally distribute the attractive objects compelled Draupadi to marry five even against her wish. Marrying five men at the same time turned worse and she had to pay heavy price. Her sixth sense reached her in the conclusion that Kunti's diplomatic blessing, maybe feigned as accidental, is a well-crafted plan to use Draupadi as a thread to unite all her sons without any expected disputes in future out of her beauty. Daughter in laws' liking and disliking are generally ignored in the family for the happiness and status of the family which is portrayed in the character of Draupadi. The writer often narrates her own experiences as daughter, wife, daughter in law and mother. Here a curious mixture of realism through mythology is punched up to develop unique arts.

Prativa Roy, in her other novels, portrays women in the feministic perspectives. From the mythology to the modernism, feminism is the centre of her writings. The strength of women depends on how much they bear down upon their patriarchal family restricting the freedom of women. In the family of Kunti is something different. It is more matriarchal than patriarchal family where Draupadi's freedom is restricted. Kunti controls her sons. The old widow Kunti heads the family mainly focusing the interests of her sons. She openly crushes down the freedom of Draupadi for the sake of her sons. In a patriarchal society women are control by the men. Their freedom of speech is treated as often taboo.

Prativa Roy portrays Draupadi as the property of the five Pandabas. But in the Mahabharat Draupadi is the centre on which all the characters centre round. In Yagyaseni, Roy relates the characters with the down trodden women who only serve the family suffering to any extent in life. She rebels but within herself only.

Feminists unleash a debate regarding the punishment meted out both to Ravan and Duryodhana. Whether this punishment is meant for the justice to Sita and Draupadi or to satisfy the male ego of the Ram and the five Pandavas which was verily hurt after dishonor of their wives is really debatable. Feminists point out certain events which justifies their views. On seeing their wives unrobed in the royal court, the Pandavas remained silent and saw their wife's

humiliation even though she repeatedly called them for her rescue. What are the reasons of this silence? Is not it to protect their own dignity? Playing dice to lose kingdom is Dharma but to protest against the humiliation of wife in the royal court is Adharma. The question of Dharma and Adharma is very complex and is always tilted in the favor of the male. The women is defiled and to take the test of fire but nobody questions Ram's hobnobbing with anybody in the absence of Sita in the place. Ram promised not to see any other women except Sita. Society never put any questions to Ram in this context because it the male dominated society. Women have to tolerate all the atrocities. She is a woman. She is born as a male but the society makes woman for men.

Since the time of the Mahabharata Age, Indian society has been running favoring men and restricting women only to serve their men despite having talents and ability. The women are not less talented as men but they are not as strong as their men counter parts. Physical strength was the only the means to do any works. Society transferred due to the technological development equalizes men and women replacing physical strength to the mental ability. Sita and Draupadi were mentally and morally strong and had the ability to tolerate all sorts of atrocities either from the outside or inside the family. Women are trained toleration to lengthen and strengthen their family relations. In a patriarchal society women go through a lot of restrictions. He does not have any rights either to take decisions or to oppose them despite being injustice and atrocity in nature.

Draupadi has been variously portrayed by the various regional writers who re-sketch the mythological mysterious heroine in their own way and in the perspectives of their regional cultures. For example Draupadi is a typical Odia woman in the text of Prativa Ray and a Bengali lady in the work of Chitra Banarjee. Some structural changes are there. One finds the same twin ladies brought up in the different cultural backgrounds which are incorporated from their time totally deviating from the original text of *The Mahabharata*. The women writers understand the inner problems of Draupadi and Sita which the male writers cannot understand. The men see a woman from outside but it is only the women who could understand a woman properly. So Draupadi is properly understood by the women writers who find their own problems in her (Draupadi).

Insult is more painful than physical assaults for a woman. When a woman is publicly assaulted by the outsiders it is really more painful which sometimes brings her into trauma. Emotionally injured women become habitual with such types of circumstances.

Though feminism has lost its vigor and spells, the modern women writers pick up some issues and paint them in the brush of feminism. The women readers generally prefer reading the problems of women to any other issues. So in the way feminism is rooted deeply in the soil of India which is unevenly developed in education and economy. Despites of several government and private sponsored steps Indian women, both in urban and rural areas, are backward for which the problems for women linger in India despites of several developments. N Geeta writes says that women are negatively portrayed due to their developed status brought them through employments and constitutions. They are negatively portrayed in different texts for misutilising the powers thrust on them by the legal authority.

N. Geeta says, "Feminist writers and critics have keenly felt the complete negation of the female experience in literature. Even the projection of the image of women has been compressed into new acceptable roles. Women are usually caste into a few popular stereotypes of narrow range of characterization. There are two basic types of image: positive roles, which depict women as independent, intelligent and even heroic; and a surplus of misogynistic roles commonly identified as the bitch, the witch, the vamp and the virgin/goddess". (61)

Feminism is likely to lose its relevance even though the half of the population is women due the shrinking of the gap between male and female. In the course of time the women are stand in the equal footing with their men counterpart as a result the gap is getting bridged gradually.

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