

## **USE OF MYTH IN KORAL DASGUPTA'S *DRAUPADI***

### **Abstract**

Koral has published an eclectic range of books from academic nonfiction to relationship dramas. Her stories explore the inherent nature of complex minds leading to a relatable conflict and unpredictable climax. Having published widely with Westland Books, Niyogi Publishers and Rupa, her books are discussed from the context of gender studies, art, myth and eco-critical literature. Other than India, Koral's books are shelved in the libraries of University of Harvard, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, University of Wales, Duke University, University of North Carolina, TAMU, and others. Her fourth book has been optioned for screen adaptation. She is currently working with Pan Macmillan on the five-book Sati series, a retelling of the stories of the Pancha Kanya from Indian mythology - *Ahalya* and *Kunti* are on the shelves. *Kunti* deals with the myth of The Mahabharata that tells the story of the sensibility of Kuntis's sensibility in the different facets of her life.

**Keywords:** Koral, dramas, ecocritical literature, myth, Kunti

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The *Mahabharata* is a great epic of India in which multiple oral, legendary and mythological stories are compiled and all of them are woven in grand style to show the great cultural value system of India. All the characters are portrayed using mythological stories about them. There are lots of fables, stories and myths regarding the character of Draupadi, the heroine of the epic. In the original version of the epic written by Ved Vyasa, she is shown as submissive wife of five husbands. She is docile and decent. She is shown as someone who follows most of the norms laid by the patriarchal society of her time. She requires protection from her husband as well as Krishna, the god. She can express her thoughts and feelings but she cannot resist against the injustices on her. Recently many Indian writers in English have tried to redefine and revisit this mythical character. Koral Dasgupta is one of them. In this article, a sincere attempt has been made to analyse her revisiting of Draupadi in her fiction, *Draupadi*, a book in Sati Series.

As mentioned earlier, many recent writers have portrayed Draupadi of the Mahabharata from their own approaches and perspectives in novels published recently. In fact, there is a new trend in Indian English literature to revisit the epical, mythical and legendary characters of epics, oral literature and Indian scriptures. This fashion of presenting these legendary mythical characters is liked by the readers to wish to enjoy the old mythical characters presented in new light and analysed keeping in mind contemporary approach. Devdutt Pattanaik, Amish Tripathi, Kavita Kane and Koral Dasgupta are some of the famous authors who revisit the past in order to present it in post-modern light. Amish Tripathi's books including the popular Shiva Trilogy explore how mythical character is Shiva can be presented innovatively and the original narrative can be changed keeping in mind contemporary taste of readers. Kavita Kane, on the other hand, portrays female characters from Indian scriptures and epics which are marginalised by the authors as well as readers. The woman characters such as Surpankha (Ravan's sister), Uruvi (Karna's wife), Satyawati (Shantanu's wife) etc. have been revisited in her novels and they are presented with their potential strength, brilliant wisdom, significant courage and innovative management skills. These characters express their rights of individuality and freedom of speech and actions. They demonstrate how skilfully they can manage some crucial events of their family. Kane's portrayals of these mythical women in her novels are remarkable because they are not docile or submissive to the patriarchal hierarchy of their time. Rather, they display their courage and confidence during the time of crisis. Devdutt Pattanaik's fictional characters based on Indian epics and scriptures exemplify how they can survive in some critical conditions with their courage, bravery, intelligence and boldness.

Koral Dasgupta is a famous author who writes in diverse genres in Indian English literature. She writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She has also earned repute in the field of story-telling. Her work explores human emotions, socio-cultural intricacies and novel aspects of feminine identity. Connecting the tensions of personal space with the universal space, her literary works demonstrates societal and personal anxieties and perspectives. In recent years, she has emerged as a renown literary figure with her sizeable readers. In her latest series on Sati, she has tried to revisit some mythical women of Indian epics and scriptures. In "Series Introduction", she elaborates:

The panch kanyas of Hindu mythology were Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Mandodati and Tara- while the five Satis were Sita, Sati, Savitri, Damayanti and Arundhati. The distinction of two different title arose primarily because various versions of the epics have taken the liberty to celebrate women as per the popular beliefs of an era and, of

course that of the translators. 'Sati' has been defined by a school of thought as the women's unconditional devotion towards and dependence on their men. It casts the women as loyal followers strongly supporting the vision of their men or helping them overcome social and emotional complications. These women are depicted as sacrificing and selfless, yet invincible in drafting their own position of strength and supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

*Draupadi* is one of the novels of the Sati Series. In it, the writer retells the story of Draupadi of the Mahabharata. Her story is told keeping in mind contemporary approach. The novelist provides fresh perspectives on the iconic and legendary epic figure. The present article analyses the use of myths in *Draupadi*. It examines how the writer has used myths with a purpose to revisit some legendary characters of the great Indian epic. Dasgupta mentions in the preface of the novel:

Draupadi's story is far more complicated than Ahalya's or Kunti's because it shines light on the social reaction of many generations regarding crime against women. In my understanding, I find Draupadi to be a wonderful homemaker. Her identity is much broader than the popular portrayal of an angry, bitter woman. She was certainly tough and did not hold back from giving a fair fight to all whom she disagreed with.<sup>2</sup>

In *Draupadi*, the novelist has portrayed the character of Draupadi with new approach. She points out the challenges she faces as a woman. She demonstrates how she emerges as a powerful woman who can resist against the patriarchal and hegemonic powers of her time. The writer skilfully blends myth of Draupadi with modernity of her heroine in the novel. Her heroine is based on the epic character of the *Mahabharata*. The writer does not try to alter or change the main events of the epic. She does not make visible alterations in the narrative of the drastically. Therefore, the narrative of the epic is followed and she has been loyal to the main story line of it. The writer does not make any change in the story between the Pandavas and Kauravas which is depicted in the Mahabharata. She presents the key events of the epic without changing most of the original narrative.

There are many Indian writers who have retold the mythical story of Draupadi in their literary works. One of the remarkable adaptations of this epic character is written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Therefore, it is useful to compare the character portrayed by Koral Dasgupta and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Both writers reinterpret Draupadi and show her emotions and reactions against the patriarchal norms of ancient time. Koral Dasgupta has woven her novel, *Draupadi* with contemporary setting. She has tried to explore her contemporary relevance. She demonstrates her resilience and how she becomes a key agent in bringing changes in cultural norms which try to validate the virtues of the woman in her submissiveness, dependence and docility. Suchinchitita Das notes:

Indian mythology is a profound source of inspiration for a wide array of artistic and literary endeavours. It has influenced visual arts, literature, dance music and theatre, making it an integral part of the cultural and artistic heritage of India. These expressions of art not only celebrate richness of Indian mythology but also serve as a medium for conveying its enduring significance to audiences around the world.<sup>3</sup>

Incorporating elements of Indian mythology into literature allows us to tap into rich cultural heritage of the country, providing deeper understating of its traditions and beliefs. The writer

skilfully paints the mythical characters reactions and resistance against the age-old hegemonic rules which were formulated by the patriarchy. Her character is portrayed as strong and outspoken. It is woven keeping in mind contemporary approach. She is empowered advocate of the rights of the woman. Dasgupta's Draupadi can defy traditional roles. She can challenge the hegemonic norms of patriarchal system. She can resist the injustice in outspoken manner. For her, socio-cultural constraints cannot prevent her from expressing her free and intendent spirit. She can express her ideas clearly and bravely. The character of Draupadi is reimagined keeping in mind contemporary audience with their modern ideas and ideologies related to gender-roles. The writer is successful in presenting feminist consciousness by designing the mythical character of Draupadi with contemporary thoughts.

Divakaruni, on the other hand, presents a traditional retelling of Draupadi. Her Draupadi is a person who exhibits her emotions, passion, experiences and desires. She weaves her relationship with her husbands in intense manner. Her role in the grand narrative of the Mahabharata is highlighted in *The Palace of Illusions*. The novelist's portrayal of Draupadi is complex as she deals more with the themes of love, passion, desire, destiny and consequences of war. Though the writer cannot avoid the larger and magnanimous political and mythological contexts of the great epic, she portrays key events of Draupadi's life and shows her personal emotions and desires. Her style is poetic and grand. She presents personal and emotional perspectives of the heroine of the *Mahabharata*.

To conclude, it can be mentioned that Indian epics have rich treasure of folk tales and myths which can be revisited to show their significance in contemporary time. Indian mythology is a treasure trove of timeless wisdom, offering profound insights into the human condition and the nature of existence.

## REFERENCES

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