

Draupadi Breaks the Mould: A Feminist Study of *Draupadi* by Yarlagadda Prasad

SURYAKANT YADAV

Ph.D. (English) scholar in the University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi

| Abstract: | Draupadi occupies the central position, |
|--|--|
| The concept of intertextuality as given by | mostly as the embodiment of sacrifice and |
| Julia Kristeva has been put to perennial use | suffering. This paper shall highlight the |
| in the Indian literature(s). Many writers | injustices Draupadi, as a woman, faces |
| have recreated the previous works from a | during her lifetime and how she has become |
| different point of view. The Mahabharata is | a symbol of resilience in modern Indian |
| one among them, it has been the nucleus | literature. |
| around which many poems, plays and | |
| novels have been built up. In such an epic | |

Keywords: Myth, Feminist Study, Resilience, Sacrifice, Polyandry

Introduction

Yarlagadda Prasad won the Sahitya Akademi award for his novel Draupadi. The work was first serialised in the Telugu magazine Andhra Jyothi and is written in a unique style highlighting the account of different incidents occurring in Draupadi's life which have been beautifully fused together to present an abridged version of Nannaya Bhattaraka's Andhra Mahabharatham. The narrative process and the structural method of description used by the writer fully engage the readers. Nannaya Bhattaraka initiated the scripting of The Mahabharata in Telugu in the eleventh century. Thikkana Somayaji and Yerrapragada carried his worked forward and composed the whole epic in Telugu language by the fourteenth century. The three poets came to be reckoned as the Kavithrayam (trinity of poets). The Telugu version of The Mahabharata is called the Andhra Mahabharatham. This was also the first major work of literature in the Telugu language. Many new poets emerged influenced by the efforts of the Kavithrayam. The many variations of this seminal text have been scrutinised through multiple critical lenses. The adaption by Yarlagadda Prasad focuses on the story of Draupadi, from her past lives to the tragic end she is met with. This paper shall highlight the injustices Draupadi, as a woman, faces during her lifetime and how she has become a symbol of resilience in modern Indian literature.

The concept of intertextuality as given by Julia Kristeva has been put to perennial use in the Indian literature(s). Many writers have recreated the previous works from a different

1/10 SURYAKANT YADAV[·] Ph.D. (English) scholar in the University School of Humanities and Social Science. Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi.

DRAUPADI BREAKS THE MOULD: A FEMINIST STUDY OF *DRAUPADI* BY YARLAGADDA PRASAD

point of view. *The Mahabharata* is one among them, it has been the nucleus around which many poems, plays and novels have been built up. In such an epic Draupadi occupies the central position, mostly as the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering. According to modern feminist critics the whole issue in the epic revolves around the concept of 'Body' and 'Gender'. Roshan Thomas' words in her article "Woman as Body" will not be out of context at this juncture. She views,

"The process of humanizing the penis (phallus) involves a refiguring of the notions that contribute to the cultural construct of masculinity. If masculinity depends on the presence of the phallus and its symbolic attributes like power, domination, aggression and violence, it has to be demystified. The equation of manhood and potency with the objectification and conquest of the female body has to be deconstructed. (Thomas 254)"

In *the Mahabharata*, Draupadi's birth is the consequence of her unfulfilled desires and sensual pleasures of her previous two births. The main objective for writing this novel is to discuss whether or not Draupadi, born as boon to Lord Shiva to get her sensual desires satisfied, has achieved that fulfilment. He has also tried to explore the various facets of Draupadi's individuality, her highly admirable self-confidence, her exemplary good nature which is worthy to become the crown of the feminine world, and to examine her role as a sister, wife, mother and daughter. Yarlagadda Prasad has construed the narrative with such brilliance that the reader is all overwhelmed with delight and surprise with the sheer knowledge of the writer over its subject. He has portrayed Draupadi with a feminist approach without digressing from the plot of the epic.

Draupadi is a distressed woman, but that's only one aspect of her character. She is a woman with firm determination and an unbending attitude. Though Draupadi is the central figure in the novel but through her Yarlagadda Prasad presents the prosperities and misfortunes of other characters as well. Draupadi is presented as a 'Kuladharma Patni' in the novel, with a fine blend of feminine features. Prasad has attempted to analyse the psychological state of a woman living with five husbands. He presents the picture of Draupadi's previous two lives and focussing on that he brings forth the misery of the boon obtained from Lord Shiva.

The novel is divided into fifty chapters and every chapter delineates an outline of the protagonist, Draupadi. When the character is someone like Draupadi, whose critics possibly outnumber her admirers, the writer's task becomes even more difficult, especially if he wants to be fair. Through the chapter "Submission" at the beginning of the book we come to know of the extensive reading the author went through to gather such deep knowledge of the epic and its characters. He read a number of books on *The Mahabharata* and more than a hundred books in various languages on Draupadi's character. The idea in the writer's mind was to present Draupadi as a flesh-and-blood character, with human feelings and emotions, one who could touch the innermost chords of the readers' heart. As for other characters, the eighteen-day war— which caused such death and disaster that it did not matter in the end who won and who lost as there was very little difference between victory and defeat— brought everyone down from their pedestals and reunited them in their grief.

Draupadi is anomaly, she is unlike any other central character in Hindu mythology due to her engagement in polyandry. Initially, she had thought it was a mistake to marry five men at one point of time. But when there was acceptance from her family and society, she decided

2/10 SURYAKANT YADAV[:] Ph.D. (English) scholar in the University School of Humanities and Social Science. Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi.

DRAUPADI BREAKS THE MOULD: A FEMINIST STUDY OF *DRAUPADI* BY YARLAGADDA PRASAD

to go ahead with it, wondering whether all of them would love her and most importantly, whom she would love the most. Prasad depicts her union with the five brothers very sensitively, keeping her nature as well as those of her husbands, along with their differences, in mind. Extensive research tends to make a work of fiction more ponderous and less readable. It is to Prasad's credit that his novel never loses its readability, one of the main reasons being that he looks at his characters as human beings with good qualities as well as weak points, not mythological characters or superhuman beings.

Draupadi is that woman from the Mahabharata times who was the symbol the women's suppression and angst during that time. But she was in no way the only woman who was trapped in the clutches of patriarchy. There were others too, such as, Gandhari, Kunti, Duhshala, Amba and many others. In fact, when we pay careful attention to Kunti's story, her life can be understood to have been as disastrous and painful as that of Draupadi, if not more. In Draupadi, Yarlagadda Prasad shows us the respectful relationship of Kunti and Draupadi. Whether Kunti had knowingly asked the brothers to share Draupadi among themselves or it was just a mistake, is an argument that could never come to a conclusion. But there is no denying the fact that Kunti was the only person there who could understand what Draupadi must be going through. She could empathise with Draupadi. And on the other hand, Draupadi could ask for opinion from her mother-in-law as she had gone through some ardent times in herlife as well. When Draupadi spend the first five nights with her five different husbands, there was a conflict going in her mind about her physical relation with five men. In this time of introspection, she questions Kunti, "Mother-in-law, you too had experiences like mine. Didn't you then feel that you were doing something wrong?" Kunti has had such experiences and is wise enough not to make Draupadi guilty of herself. She knows that her daughter-in-law will face such queries in future as well so she tries to convince Draupadi by saying, "Who will decide right or wrong? After many centuries the rule that a woman should not make love with more than one was imposed. It was not there in ancient times. Then women lived with the men they chose." (Prasad 134-135)

Kunti gives us hints about the matriarchal type of society, which might have existed, where women really got to choose men whom they wanted to live with and not like Draupadi who only had to fulfil the formalities in her 'svayamvara'. Kunti gives the background of the origin of the rule for women to marry only one man. She narrates the story of Swetaketuvu, where he exercised his authority over the women and banned them from having physical relationship with any other man except for her own husband. Before Swetaketuvu came to power, women were allowed to have as many partners as they wished. But the irony is that a man made such a rule and other men moulded it according to their needs. Thus came the rule where a woman, when allowed by her husband to engage in physical relations with another man, could do so. Why did man begin to exercise such control over women is not known. But women had to have permission from their male counterparts.

Draupadi was happy having Kunti as her mother-in-law and satisfied with her answer. Kunti displayed no reservation towards Draupadi and talked like two 'sakhis'. With every conversation Draupadi had with Kunti she was consoled and her affection towards her motherin-law grew. Kunti herself had endured unimaginable pains, only then was she able to interact with Draupadi. she expressed how she felt when she went through similar pains like Draupadi

DRAUPADI BREAKS THE MOULD: A FEMINIST STUDY OF *DRAUPADI* BY YARLAGADDA PRASAD

and by expressing her pain she not only shrugs off her sorrow but also becomes a source of motivation to her daughter-in-law. Kunti had a special gift that she obtained from the sage, Durvasa She had a boon that allowed her to acquire sons from the gods. Through this boon she could bear a child by just thinking of the deity she wanted to involve herself physically. The first time, she only wanted to test whether this boon worked or not, she summoned Surya, the sun god. Her first son, Karna, was born from this. The unfortunate lady could not have kept the child as it was born out of wedlock and because society only mocked and ridiculed the mother of an illegitimate child. Women's still face this issue and have to either resort to abortion in the earlier stages or end up abandoning their children. Kunti lives savouring her guilt of abandoning her first-born child throughout her life.She lives and dies with the pain.

Kunti comes across as a brave and a wise woman, grievously hurt and disappointed in love. She was not a woman cast in the conventional mould. She was rather lonely, fighting to protect her sons amidsttreachery and hatred. She had the wisdom to educate her sons in proper use of power. She guided them along the path of Dharma. She not only anticipated a war but willed it to happen in order to regain honour and the lost kingdom for her sons. Towards that end she built and sustained political alliances with foresight and sagacity. She had the wisdom to recede from active scene when it was prudent to do so. When her mission was accomplished she had the detachment and strength of mind to renounce the fruits of her efforts and to walk away into forest and into fire.

Another strong yet deprived woman character is that of Amba. While Draupadi is the one whose body had been violated, Amba's will had been thwarted due the male-prejudiced norms of the times. Amba is among those muted princesses of Kshatriya family whose lives' pricing is done, just like Draupadi was objectified by her father and husbands. Both Amba and Draupadi practice no free choice in their own 'svayamvaras'. Amba and Draupadi merely become modes for the Kshatriya men, fighting amongst themselves, to boast of their masculinity. By exercising control over their women, the Kshatriya men expressed their physical prowess and also their proficiency in politics. Bhishma got the better of Shalva in Amba's 'svayamvara' so even though Amba was attracted to Shalva, she, being muted Kshatriya princess, went with Bhishma. Bhishma had sworn live life as a celibate, a decision that directly affected Amba.

The story of Amba is intricately inscribed in *The Mahabharata* in more than one way. It forms a crucial sub-plot as Amba is reborn as Shikhandin to take revenge from Bhishma for ruining her conjugal life. Born to King Drupada, she is also a sibling of Draupadi. Shikhandin was deprived of love and affection because Bhishma was determined to remain a celibate for his full life-span. Amba would take her revenge as Shikhandin by killing Bhishma as he could not raise his hands on a woman because of the celibacy he was practising. It is ironic that it was this code of chivalry, which prompted Bhishma not to lay hands on woman, to kidnap a woman from her 'svayamvara'. The system of 'svayamvara' and marriage has been developed and manipulated by men and is falsely projected as the fulfilment of female desire. Amba challenges this order of marriage system by expressing herself in front of Bhishma.Her vocal expression of her desire and needs which depicts her individuality and starts a commotion by questioning the ancient ways of marriage. It creates a rupture in the social relations of those times, opening up unprecedented contradictions and situations. She desires to be with Shalva

but she is denied that and later when Shalva is swaddled by his own ego, Amba loses her grounds as she has been rejected by both Bhishma and Shalva for no mistake of her own.

"Whom then shall I blame? Myself or the invincible Bhishma? Or that foolish father of mine who made arrangements for my self-choice? Perhaps it is my own fault! [...] Cursed be Bhishma! Cursed be my own wretched father of foolish understanding, who had arranged prowess to be my dower, sending me out as if I were a woman (disposable) for consideration! Cursed by myself! Cursed be king Shalva himself and cursed be my creator too! Cursed be they through whose fault such great misery has been mine. (Sharma 103)"

Amba sacrifices her female sexuality to become a warrior to contest Bhishma. The one major distinguishing factor between Amba and Draupadi is that Amba relinquishes her femininity whereas Draupadi asserts her femininity with renewed vigour. Amba destroys herself in fire to be reborn as Shikhandin and Draupadi is born from fire to destroy a race. Amba's passion for revenge against the celibate Bhishma is not accepted and her austerities incite the wrath of Bhishma's mother, Ganga. Yet Amba is determined not accept any kind of suffering, active or passive. She does not back down and moves forth with the austerities without retracing her steps back to the silent interiors. She makes herself visible to the social gaze and asserts herself in the society where women like her are just considered as objects unworthy to live by herself. Rejected by Shalva and unaccepted by Bhishma, Amba embraces the masculine role to meet Bhishma on equal terms. She immolates herself in fire and in the next life is born to Drupada to seek revenge.

Shikhandin is initially born as girl to Drupada but is brought up like a son and later marries the daughter of the King of Dasharnas. When the King of Dasharna comes to know that he has been deceived of Shikhandin's gender, he threatens Shikhandin who ultimately leaves the palace and goes into exile to lead solitary life. There she meets a Yaksha who expresses his desire to exchange his masculinity for Shikhandin's femininity. When Shikhandin comes back as a man, the king of Dasharna is satisfied and accepts him (Shikhandin). Janaki Sreedharan opines: "The amorphous sexuality of Shikhandin is contraposed to the total celibacy of Bhishma, who has conserved all the masculine energy within him and is sexually inaccessible to women." (Sharma 105) Bhishma here is to be understood as the powerful male against whom the deprived Shikhandin is trying to level himself/herself. Shikhandin cannot overcome the male dominance of Bhishma just as a woman, although being a woman was condition necessary to bring down the powerful Bhishma. Although it is clearly observed in *The Mahabharata* or any other myth in the world that it is chivalrous to kidnap a woman but it is unchivalrous to die at the hands of a woman. Both Amba and Draupadi are deprived of their deserving rank and status in their kingdom and in the society as well.

> 'Who am I?' questioned Draupadi? 'You are the flame of desire' replied Krishna-Dwaipayana. 'Am I born from the hawankund?' 'You are the hawankund.' 'When do I cool down?'

'You are the ever-burning pure flame. You are the mistress of senses and mind. Through enjoyment desire will not be soothed. [...] When ghee is poured into fire, the fire shoots up.' (Prasad 73)

After the war, Draupadi is bereft of children, father and siblings and questions her own existence and identity. This conversation with Krishna Dwaipayana takes place after the coronation of Dharmaraja Yudhishthira as the King of Hastinapur. Draupadi, having lost her five beloved sons after the war is in despair. The strength of in her character helps her avoid trauma but she still is prone to grief which only a mother can empathise with. At this moment, she questions Veda Vyasa and he reminds her of her capabilities and strength. She was born from the 'yajna', she is an embodiment of fire, her desires cannot be fulfilled easily. Dwaipayana, to instil some power back into Draupadi, tells her about her previous births.

In her previous birth Draupadi was Nalayani, the wife of Maharishi Moudgalya. Though Moudgalya was a leper and could not satisfy Nalayani's sexual desires yet Nalayani served him with great devotion. Pleased with her ministrations towards him, Moudgalya granted her a boon. Nalayani had great urge of sensual pleasure, so she asked him to give up this leper's body and become an embodiment of 'Kamaroopa', one with five fascinating bodies different from one another. In this way, she could gain sensual pleasure of the highest degree when Moudgalya would make love to her in the form of 'Kamaroopa'.

After some time, the Maharishi abandoned her and went to 'Brahmaloka'. Nalayani died soon, still unsatisfied, her sensual desires still unfulfilled. She was reborn as the daughter of Kasiraja, a 'Rajarshi'– a king turned into a sage. Four gods or 'devtas' came to Kasiraja's daughter– Yama, Vayu, Indra and Ashwini– and promised to marry her in her next birth. Kasiraja's daughter did severe penance, sometimes going without food, water and even air for long periods of time. Parmeswara was pleased by her penance and granted her a boon. She said "Grant me a husband" five times greedily. Parmeswara granted her boon and said that she will have the privilege of having five husbands simultaneously, something unheard of. But she was well aware of the ways of the world, dharma and adharma, and requested Parmeswara to take back this boon. Parmeswara pitied her and gave his word that even though she will five husbands yet her 'Pativrata Dharma' will not get tainted. This is story is not known to many as it is found in Nannaya's translation of *The Mahabharata* and not in its Gorakhpur edition. In her next birth, as Draupadi, all pieces of the puzzle come together when Kunti asks the brothers to share Draupadi equally amongst themselves. She becomes the wife of five valiant husbands but was her desire then fulfilled?

When Draupadi is born as Yajnaseni, she is destined to bring down the Kuru clan. She struggles and bears the miseries of being wife to five men, but that is not all. Veda Vyasa grants her a boon, which will transform her into a virgin, after she spends a year with each of them. Draupadi tells him it seems to have been designed in favour of her husbands and that she would have preferred the boon to forget the time she spent with one husband. But she is not the to decide what is better for her, her husbands and the sage decide that.

Another place where the epic reveals Draupadi's desire is in the subtexts of her relationship with Karna. Karna, is the first-born child of Kunti, an illegitimate son. Draupadi's expression of desire towards Karna is not direct but Veda Vyasa gives subtle hints in the epic

DRAUPADI BREAKS THE MOULD: A FEMINIST STUDY OF *DRAUPADI* BY YARLAGADDA PRASAD

that the mistress of Indraprastha might have been attracted towards Karna. Karna desires her and would have won her in the 'svayamvara' had he not been seen as a charioteer's son. There are several instances where Karna praises Draupadi's beauty and intelligence. He also calls her a whore in the assembly hall but that can also be considered as concentrated anger and jealousy of having her as a wife although she was shared by five brothers. Through the following lines, Yarlagadda Prasad also writes depicting her deep feelings towards Karna:

"Karna was the first born of the Pandavas. Draupadi felt some strangeness in the thought of that, if Karna was the brother of the Pandavas, the question of his relationship with her began to stir in her mind. Karna was not among the Pandavas, hence the remaining became her husbands. If he were one of them, the very feeling made her body tingle." (Prasad 32)

Draupadi's free spirit was never wholeheartedly appreciated. Draupadi was living not merely a polyandrous life but also polygamous life because Arjuna, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva, all had more than one wife. Draupadi exposed patriarchal hypocrisy of Hindu sexual life, unreasonable proprietorship of wives, and above all, she served as voice for woman's sexual desire, female self-determination, and her own presence of mind. She exemplified that a woman's sexual potency, which more recent Hindu patriarchy is afraid to confront, may actually be stronger than that of a man.

Why did ancient Hindu scripture feel the need to create such an aberrant character like Draupadi, who represents such a drastic contrast to the traditional virtuous model of the Hindu womanhood that has more recently been so popular? Who is Draupadi? What does she actually represent, and why is she so timeless and popular if she is merely an aberrant character? What does Draupadi mean in the rapidly-changing social context of neo-liberal India where the traditional ideals of monogamy, arranged-marriage or 'pativrata' (unconditional loyalty to husband) are transforming into love marriages, open relationships, frequently divorce and non-monogamy?

The duties of a chaste wife are expounded over and over again in Mahabharata. As is the usual technique in the epic, different characters are used to say the same thing in different situations in order to lay down the dharma or the moral principle. Thus, Draupadi tells Satyabhama the duties of a chaste and Parvati lays down the code of conduct for her at the behest of Mahadeva who assures her that it would become universal law since she formed half the part of his body. The duties of a woman are created through kinsmen in the rites of marriage. In the presence of the mystical fire, a woman becomes the associate of her husband in the performance of all righteous deeds. This makes her the equal partner of her husband. It is not clear whether a woman has the right to dissociate herself from the unrighteous actions of her husband. The question is not far removed from the issue raised by Draupadi after the game of dice, about whom did Yudhishthira lose first, himself or her. It raises the whole question of the status of a wife and the extent of her husband's rights over her. The question is a tangled one involving two issues: the rights of a master over a slave and the rights of a slave over his wife. It is unanswerable because if Yudhishthira loses his rights over Draupadi by virtue of his slavery then she is left entirely at the mercy of the Kauravas and if he doesn't he has a right to stake her. By losing her too, however, he has put her in the clutches of the Kauravas. This

DRAUPADI BREAKS THE MOULD: A FEMINIST STUDY OF *DRAUPADI* BY YARLAGADDA PRASAD

incident parallels that of Nala and Damayanti. It is ironical that Draupadi saves the Pandavas in this situation instead of being protected by them. Ironically, Yudhishthira at that time had said that it was not worth Arjuna's while to slay someone who had been saved by his wife and who therefore had no prowess. When Dhritrashtra intervenes because he fears the consequences of the indecency that has taken place and grants Draupadi three boons, she asks nothing for herself. With the first, she asks for Yudhishthira's freedom and with the second that of the others as she feels that once her husbands are free and armed, the rest can be retrieved. She thus saves the Pandavas from degradation winning even Karna's admiration. No woman, he says, has done before what Draupadi has accomplished. But, none other than Draupadi also discourses upon the duties of a wife.

After the second game of dice, when the Pandavas are living in exile in the forests, they are visited by Krishna and Satyabhama. Draupadi and Satyabhama meet as long-standing friends and Satyabhama, in jest, inquires of her how she manages the five Pandavas to make them all so obedient to her and solicitous of her welfare. Was it the practice of some vows, or asceticism, or beauty or the recitation of some mantras that made her in such complete command of them she asks. The suggestion that asceticism or the practice of some vows could lead to such a situation is curious in this context but although Draupadi gently rebukes her by saying that all the practices mentioned by Satyabhama were of wicked women, the kind of routine that Draupadi has laid for herself speaks of great discipline. She says that she has controlled all vanity, desire and wrath and serves them all together with their wives without jealousy, with great devotion and without any sense of degradation. She never thinks or looks at another man and does all that a chaste wife should. Hence, her husbands have become so obedient to her. Satyabhama apologizes for her levity and Draupadi then proceeds to tell her how to win Krishna's heart. A wife she says, must be able to convince her husband that she truly loves him and him alone. She should be his confidante not divulging anything that he says to her whether it is meant to be confidential or not. She should keep aloof from anyone who is hostile or deceitful towards him. She should not converse with any man, not even speak to her sons in private. She should also associate only with women who were high born and devoted to their husbands. Finally, she should ornament herself and make herself beautiful for him.

In the patriarchal framework of the epic, women gain status as wives and mothers through which relationships their sexuality is regulated but which also gives them a voice that cannot be easily dismissed. But rarely did a woman stand for herself, always fearing that something she might say invoke the wrath of her father or husband. But Draupadi is the one who doesn't fear to express herself in the patriarchal setup. Since sons are of vital importance as a means of gaining worth both in private and public domains, they are a cause of intense rivalry among women. For example, Vyasa pleased with the services of Gandhari blesses her with the boon of a hundred sons. She conceives but does not deliver in spite of a year having passed. When she hears of the birth of Yudhishthira, making him the oldest son in the clan and thus giving him rights to the throne that would eventually give Kunti a higher status than her, she is devastated. Maddened by her grief at this news and impatient of the long gestation period, she strikes violently at her womb delivering a ball of flesh as a consequence. In despair, she is about to throw it away when Vyasa arrives and admonishes her for what she has done. He then asks her to get pots filled with clarified butter while he divides the ball of flesh into a hundred

and one parts, each the size of a thumb and puts one in each pot to be opened by Gandhari after two years. Gandhari knew that only husband and sons could help her climb the stairs of the patriarchal society to keep herself relevant.

Draupadi, despite her knowledge of the power than men hold in society, never bows down and fights for herself and her family and clan. In today's India, where women are becoming increasingly crucial role players in influencing population dynamics, politics, and social life, the exaltation of the ideal of perfect chastity and absolute female monogamy seems abstract - and sometimes appears rather cynical, obsolete, and ridiculous. Modern India is witnessing a growing trend in which couples are moving away from traditional strictly monogamous marriages. The modern Draupadis are returning for two different reasons. The first is purely based on economic constraints, while the second is purely based on the urge to explore. The polyandry of ancient Hindu scriptures does not seem to have been merely a myth, for even today there exists various highly traditional ethnic groups, such as in the villages in Haryana and Punjab, in which women are simultaneously married to all the brothers in the family. On the other end of the social spectrum, there also exists a segment of very modern, urban, and highly affluent India who wants to explore beyond the realms of monogamy - and who therefore are willing to embrace the ideals of polyamory. Indian cinema has given distinct space to polyamorous relationships, and their treatment has significantly changed over time. In earlier years, they were treated with a very condescending approach, but as the years have passed, such relationships have been increasingly treated in a more accepting, inclusive manner.

CONCLUSION

Draupadi's discourse on polyamory not only subverts Hindu patriarchy and debilitates chauvinist Dharma, but also proves to be legitimate, normative and realistic. The image of Draupadi may resonate even more vigorously with the future generation of Hindu women, especially as a result of the impact of technology, such as cinema and the internet, on modern life. In the text, with the passing away of Krishna Vasudeva, Draupadi, along with the Pandavas, realized that they were going through the last chapter of life. It was time to go on the ultimate journey— the 'mahaprasthan'. The novel ends with Draupadi's passing away on the journey and merging with the flute's melody dissolved in the infinite space. There is no regret, no sorrow, no looking back, only a sense of the sublime, of merging with the infinite form of one who was a friend, philosopher and guide. It is a sad yet befitting end to the life of one of the most remarkable and complex characters of *The Mahabharata*, one who remained an enigma, whom few understood. The novelist manages to portray her multi-faceted character yet retains his modern/feminist perspective. The novel makes the reader sit up and think about a number of things like love, life, relationships, the ultimate end.

REFERENCES

- Bose, Brinda, editor. Translating Desire: The Politics of Gender and in India. Katha, 2016.
- Das, Sisir Kumar. A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956. Sahitya Akademi, 2015.
- Karve, Irawati. Yuganta. Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2015.

- Prasad, Yarlagadda Lakshmi. Draupadi. Translated by K.V. Purneswara Rao. Sahitya Akademi, 2016.
- Satchidanandan, K., editor. Myth in Contemporary Indian Literature. Sahitya Akademi, 2010.
- Sharma, T.R.S., editor. Reflections and Variations on The Mahabharata. Sahitya Akademi, 2017.
- Thomas, Roshan. Anglo American Feminist Literary Theory: A Critical Analysis. University of Kerala, 30 Dec, 2002, hdl.handle.net/10603/130239.