A Review of Draupadi’s Role in Inciting the Kurukshetra War as per Yuganta,
By Irawati Karve.

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Abstract: This paper tries to address certain pertinent issues related to the great Indian Epic, Mahabharata. The primary focus of this paper is to analyze the extent to which the Queen of the Pandavas - Draupadi, was responsible for the Kurukshetra war. To be precise to analyze Draupadi’s role pre-and post the Kurukshetra war. The purpose of this paper is not to hold Draupadi responsible or to safeguard her but rather to analyze few significant attributes of her character, starting from her polyandrous marriage to the five princess, the power struggle between the princely clans which led to the ill famous dice game, and subsequent exile of 14 years. The study is particularly based on the character analysis of Draupadi from the book ‘Yuganta. The end of an epoch’ by Irawati Karve. / 

Keywords – analytical, Aryan, Non – Aryan, clan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Irawati Karve’s book basically tries to explore the different characters of Mahabharata and tries to give an analytical explanation to each of the characters. The clash between family, brothers, or the Aryan Non-Aryan clash whatever it maybe it is a known fact that a dreadful war was indeed fought among the kins of a generation. Draupadi has always been one of the most interesting and fascinating characters of the Indian culture. Karve claims that Mahabharata is not an imaginary, made up story, but represents a series of real events that took place approximately in 1000 B.C. Any analysis of Mahabharata would remain incomplete without throwing light on one of the most interesting characters of the great Epic, Krishna. Whether it was an attempt to ruin the Aryan culture and establish the rule of the Non – Aryans/ the original inhabitants of the nation or was it purely a war in favor of the just against all sorts of injustices remains a major question. But this paper would be an analytical study of the character of Draupadi from the Karve’s point of view.

2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to explore the various dimensions of Draupadi from the Mahabharata. To be precise, the primary focus of this paper is to analyze the role of the Queen of the Pandavas, the Panchal Princess.

2.1 Firstly, the primary objective is to see to what extent Draupadi was responsible for the Kurukshetra war.

2.2 Secondly, to see whether Draupadi was at all responsible for the war and whether the war was inevitable.

2.3 Thirdly, to analyze how far other characters especially Krishna wanted the war either to bring in the destruction of the Aryan Civilization or to end the rule of the despotic rulers. To see whether Draupadi was a victim of the situation, or whether it was a war of revenge or an inevitable destruction of the Aryan clan. Overall, the war of Kuruskshetra was merely a family feud or part of a bigger political game which was always playing in the background.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We plan to use Mixed methods for the analysis of this paper. Primarily the data will be based on secondary sources. Qualitative data would be used. There would be an attempt to seek the opinion of some young youths of contemporary society. The focus would be on College going youths both men and women of age group 18 – 21 years. The sample could be selected from the Government aided colleges of North Kolkata, West Bengal India. The sample size would be around 200 – 250. But the sampling method would primarily to seek opinion from those who has read some or any interpretation or original Mahabharata. The attempt would be to know their opinion on what do they feel or how far or rather at all they hold Draupadi responsible for the Kurukshetra war. But primarily this would be a study based on secondary sources and secondary data.

Field research and Direct Face to Face Interview will be of extensive use along regarding various Interpretations and explanatory analysis on the topic.
Reliability is interpreted as the ability to replicate the original study using same research instruments and to get the same result. Analysis could be done by labelling actions and codifying materials that represent empirical data on original issue and question. The paper has a multiple paradigm research. I propose to use Mixed Methods for the analysis of the topic. The focus will be on both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The study includes an in depth multifaceted investigation whereby both the qualitative and quantitative research methods of a single social phenomenon is being used for analysis.

4. DISCUSSION

Draupadi was the daughter of Drupad. Her father had performed a yajna and out of the yajna there a boy and a girl. The girl was Draupadi. Irawati Karve very beautifully pens down the agony, the success, the failures of Draupadi as a daughter, a queen, a mother, a diplomat, and a great support for her husbands both as a wife and as an administrator. Now, here is there is an interesting turn. Draupad was determined to take revenge from Dronacharya. This was the primary reason for Draupad to perform the yagna, revenge. Years later during the Kuruukshetra war Dhrishtadyumna, the son born from the Yagna killed Dronacharya. Now, Dronacharya was the GURU, teacher of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Here the analysis takes a turn. Initially Arjuna and the Pandavas attacked Panchal kingdom to take revenge from Draupad and captured him as part of their Gurudakshina to Dronacharya. Later Draupad was freed but a part of kingdom came under the administration of Dronacharya’s son, Ashwathama was made king of one half of Draupad’s kingdom.

Now, it cannot be clearly said that whether the seeds of the Great War were planted in this story of vengeance or not. From this perspective, also Draupadi could have merely been a pawn of the game. Karve’s Yuganta, Mahabharata is a tale of many individual lives – brothers, step-brothers, older, younger generations, wives, uncles, nephews, relations by marriage and many others. A tale of rivalries, love, marital alliances. The character of Draupadi herself has many dimensions to her. She was won by Arjuna, the third of the Pandavas at the ‘swayamvar’ sahha. when the brothers returned with Draupadi, Kunti - the mother of the Pandavas, another important character of the Great Epic mistakenly asked the brothers to share whatever they have won. Now per many analytical explanations this was done purposely to keep the five brothers united lifelong.

The queen of the Pandavas, the wife of five men itself was quite controversial. Though incidences of Polygamy were known but this was a rare case of polyandry. Due to this Draupadi had to face a lot of controversy throughout her life. Per some independent evidences and evident through some of the dialogues in Mahabharata, a woman could have conjugal relations with as many as three men – apart from her husband, to produce offspring. In Draupadi’s case, there were five men who laid equal claims on her. Thus, she was branded as fallen woman and even likened to a prostitute at times.

Many illustrations of the Epic have recorded that Draupadi was a great wife to all the five brothers. She has a special relation with each of them. She was a mother to five sons born from each of the five brothers.

But the primary focus of this paper is firstly to see the level of victimization Draupadi faced and then her tale of bouncing back, a revenge or again just a mere pawn in the game, just a revolutionary character in the greater tale being written elsewhere and going on in the background.

Draupadi was dragged to court as her husbands, mainly the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhisthir had lost the in the game of dice. She was insulted and verbally, physically abused in front of an open court by her own family members, her brother-in-law’s to be precise. It is strange that this was a violent act carried out by her own in-laws, and all the elders of her family like Bhishma, Bhritarashtra, Dronacharya were present in the court, and kept silent.

This silence might have planted the seed of the destruction which was about to come, not only of the family but of an entire clan. The Pandavas went on an exile for fourteen years. Draupadi promised to take revenge and if the tales are to be believed let her hair loose for all those fourteen years just to remind her husbands what she has gone through and all she wanted was a revenge of her insult. However, the question is, can Draupadi really be blamed for what she did or rather, how she expected her husbands to retaliate? She was the Princess of Panchal, the Queen of the greatest warriors of their time, still did she really deserved such humiliation? The Kuruukshetra war brought an end to the greatest of all kingdoms and family in history. However, towards the end of the war some accounts of Mahabharata portray Draupadi repenting the loss of all her sons in the war and wishing it would have not taken place.

The level of humiliation and deprivation Draupadi faced despite being a Princess, a Queen was immense [3]. Possessed with the strong character depicted in all the versions of Mahabharata, it is not however, unnatural for her to fight back with vengeance [9].

Draupadi is popularly known as NATHAVATI ANATHAVAT in many analysis on her character. She was the Pandava Queen, daughter of the rich
Panchal Kingdom, sister of the great warrior Drishtadyumna, friend of Krishna still the way she was humiliated and her dignity was put at stake deserves special mention. It was quite disrespectful for the elders of her family, her husbands to stand in silence and be just a witness to her being dishonored in front of an open court. Draupadi was a perfect Queen, a perfect friend, despite all her qualities as a woman the way the society ill-treated her was surprising and what was even more dreadful was the utter silence of the powerful men/protectors in her life.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper tries to cover some important aspects of Draupadi’s character. Whether fact or fiction, the narrative of the Mahabharata remains quite a mystery. The primary focus was to see whether and to what extent Draupadi can be held responsible for the Kurukshetra war, whether her desire to take revenge kept the Pandavas motivated to wage a war to regain the lost kingdom and the lost glory. The Pandavas were deceived and deprived of their royal rights. Karve refutes the point which many narratives make, as Draupadi being the main cause of war. She stretches the root cause on the day Dhritarashtra, although the elder brother, was denied the throne because of his blindness and Pandu was made the King. This is an extremely interesting point that Karve makes in her narrative. The patriarchal society has always betrayed and denied the dignity of women, be it the traditional or the modern society. Holding a single woman responsible for the destructive war will be wrong, especially if we go by Karve’s account and her way of analysis of the Epic. The seeds of the war were implanted much before. To analyze Draupadi’s role for the war it will also be equally important to analyze Krishna’s role. It was Krishna who was there by Draupadi’s side all along. It was because of him that Draupadi’s modesty could be saved after she was dragged to the open court. Whether it was Krishna’s desire to end the Aryan clan or bring about a social revolution throughout the Aryavarta (India) remains a question. But it would be unfair to say that Draupadi’s desire to take revenge, her waiting for years to get an answer for her humiliations were not responsible for the Kurukshetra war. But she was solely not at all responsible for the war neither for the destruction of the civilization. A lot many other reasons, causes, some analyzed, some discussed and few still not analyzed could have been an even more important reason for the war between the brothers, the Kauravas Pandavas and bringing an end to an era.

5.1. The clan wars in Mahabharata begin from the first recorded Emperor of Aryavarta (later called Bharat) – Yayati, who bequeathed his empire to his youngest son Puru, and cursed his eldest son Yadu that his clan would never be Emperors. The lineage of Puru ruled Hastinapur and were later known as the Kauravas. The line of Yadu spread out, but were mainly known as the Yadavas, from whom Krishna hailed. Krishna might have had a hidden agenda against the Kings of the times, as he is seen destroying one king after another – Kamsa, Shishupal, Jarasandh, among others. From the point of view of revenge, role of Krishna in the Mahabharata can thus be interpreted.

5.2. The times of Mahabharata are clearly shown as a time of extreme authoritarianism, where Kings had absolute power in society. Although there was a moral and social code in place, they are seen interpreting, bending rules and norms to their advantage. Krishna was the harbinger of destruction in Mahabharata, and after the war a new social order was set. Most versions of Mahabharata hail Krishna as the savior – Avatara, who walked this earth to purge it of evil. Mahabharata, and after the war a new social order was set. Most versions of Mahabharata hail Krishna as the savior – Avatara, who walked this earth to purge it of evil.

5.3. Draupadi had her reasons strong enough to seek revenge or get back her lost glory. It cannot be denied completely that to some extent Draupadi was a reason for the revenge, the war. But again, following Karve as the paper is primarily based on her interpretation of the mighty lady, Draupadi, Draupadi could never be hold responsible entirely for the deadly war. In fact, towards the end when Draupadi witnesses so many lost lives of near and dear ones, she wished the war had never taken place. Following the deadly war Draupadi accompanied the Pandavas on the MAHAPRASTHAN. The war was perhaps inevitable. The seeds were planted long back. Be it Pandu becoming the King instead of Dhritarashtra, be it a deliberate attempt to end the Aryan clan, or be it an attempt to establish the rule of the just, the war, the confrontation was perhaps bound to happen because it was a war of ego, a clash of personalities.

In the end following Karve, it could be said that Draupadi was earthy, she was the daughter of Earth. She was a vindictive, yet loving, caring yet a great administrator. She was a woman of strength. Surrounded by strong men from all sides throughout her life she faced humiliations and disgrace in some form or the other. Her eager to fight back is something which deserves special mention. The
deadly war was inevitable perhaps and Draupadi was mere one cause of the war if we may say so but the level of humiliation she faced and her attempt to get back her lost glory and make a mark for herself was justified but surely not at the sake of end of a civilization perhaps. Karve ends her analysis of the character of Draupadi on an interesting note saying that when Draupadi fell in the walk towards the Heaven and Bhima approached her for help, she remarked ‘In our next birth be the eldest, Bhima: under your shelter we can all live in safety and joy’. The women characters starting from Gandhari, to Kunti, or Amba, Ambali, Chitrangada and many others all have been quite powerful and a great topic for analysis. But Draupadi, Karve’s Draupadi seems to be far more interesting. A woman of true soul, a fighter, a game changer, a powerful administrator, a vindictive queen, and a loving mother all at the same time. She remains a mystery in the pages of history and to the general society out there even today.

6. References


[1] Madhuri Guin. Draupadi, the Woman: Epitome of Feminity and Feminism – excerpts

“Draupadi is the most complex and controversial female character in Hindu literature. On one hand, she could be womanly, compassionate and generous and on the other, she could wreak havoc on those who did her wrong. She was never ready to compromise on either her rights as a daughter-in-law or even on the rights of the Pandavas and remained ever ready to fight back or avenge high-handedness and injustice meted out to her modesty. She secretly vowed that one day she would definitely seek vendetta on the injustice meted out to her. She did it by igniting the spark of revenge in the hearts of the Pandavas.

If the Mahabharata is an intricately woven saga of hatred and love, bloodshed and noble thoughts, courage and cowardice, beauty and gentleness, victory and defeat, then Draupadi is its shining jewel, casting the shadow of her towering personality over the epic poem and the all-destroying war it describes.”


When her brother Drishtadyumna visited her in the forest, she wept continuously and cried with bitter rage, ‘I have neither husbands, nor brothers, nor a father. If I had, do you think they would have stood for my being insulted like this?’


“Draupadi was not a woman to suffer in silence rather she clenched her fists and cursed, she burned with anger.”