
REVIVAL OF MODERN DRAUPADI IN TRISHA DAS'S *MS. DRAUPADI KURU*
MS. MANISHA D. MORE

Lecturer in English
Government Polytechnic, Murtizapur

DR. PANKAJA S. INGLE

Associate Professor in English
Smt. Narsamma Arts, Commerce & Science College,
Amravati

ABSTRACT:

Trisha Das's *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* reimagines the afterlife of Draupadi, the iconic Mahabharata heroine, alongside other female characters like Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba, offering a feminist critique of their suppressed desires and societal roles. The novel portrays these women in heaven, where they remain unfulfilled despite material luxuries, while their male counterparts revel in pleasure. Draupadi, embodying modern feminine aspirations, seeks permission from Krishna to revisit Earth for 30 days, symbolizing a quest for autonomy, identity, and justice. Through this journey, Das explores themes of self-exploration, gendered discontent, and the reclamation of agency, challenging traditional narratives that confine women to passive roles. The paper analyzes how Das revives Draupadi as a symbol of rebellion and empowerment, reflecting contemporary feminist discourse and the enduring struggle for equality. Keywords such as feminine aspirations, self-exploration, and patriarchal critique underscore the novel's significance in reinterpreting mythological women through a modern lens.

KEYWORDS: Mahabharata, Draupadi, feminine desires, self-exploration, feminist retelling, patriarchal critique.

INTRODUCTION

The epic Mahabharata has its special place in the heart of Indian people. Being an age old meta-narrative it has a deep impact over Indian minds. Draupadi is the well-known character from Mahabharata. She was the Princess of Panchal Kingdom and becomes the lawful wife of the five Pandava brothers. She witnesses the great war of Mahabharata along with her husbands. She has played an important role in the story of Mahabharata. Without her character the story of Mahabharata may remain incomplete. She was bound with her duties towards her family all the time.

Trisha Das in her novel *MS. DRAUPADI KURU* has explored Draupadi with different lenses. She has imagined Draupadi's afterlife in heaven. Here the story starts to unfold the suppressed desires in her heart. What she decides to explore further in the story. The present paper tries to unfold the epic journey of unfulfilled feminine desires of Draupadi in Mahabharata as imagined by Trisha Das in her novel *MS. DRAUPADI KURU*.

In the postmodern era of Indian writing in English a revival of female epic characters is so evident. Many Indian novelists had selected and still selecting the popular and unsung heroines in the epic to explore their feministic side. Some are going for first person narration, some for second person and some for third person narration to express their view through the characters. Among them Draupadi from Mahabharata and Sita from Ramayana lured more novelists, whereas other female characters too were explored. As Draupadi is the glamor herself in the story of Mahabharata, without Draupadi, the story of Mahabharata will not move ahead. She being a daughter of Drupad, the king of Panchal Kingdom, her magical kind of birth out of holy fire, her charm being a dusky skinned Princess, her upbringing, her conscience and ability to take decisions, her fighting spirit for her self-esteem, everything is fascinating for every Indian,

Irrespective of gender. So that She holds an important place in the tapestry of Mahabharata. Trisha Das projects Draupadi as the woman full of living spirit in afterlife. Draupadi longs to explore her capabilities. All the story is based on the imagined afterlife of Pandavas and Kouravas women in heaven. The story revolves around the four women characters i.e. Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari and Amba. All these women are living in heaven afterlife. They have all the luxurious facilities of heaven around them, but still they are not happy, just showing off as they are happy. Whereas men are really enjoying in heaven, as they everyday boast of their exuberant performance in the Great War. They have *Apsaras (the female dancers in the heaven)* around them to pamper them, to flirt with them.

Trisha Das's *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* is a creative imagination of the afterlife of the Pandava and Kourava brothers and their wives. Where all are expected to enjoy the heavenly pleasures. Even all epic male characters like, Yudhishthira, Arjuna, Bhishma, Duryodhana, Dushshasana etc. are also there in the story. In there after life in heaven, they don't have any vengeance for one another anymore now. They all are happy seeking the material pleasures of dancing, drinking and sweet talk with *Apsaras*, the glorified dancers in the heaven. They all still recalls of the scenes of their valor and bravery in the mortal battlefield of the Mahabharata war. But in contrast to it, female characters like Draupadi, Amba, Kunti, Gandhari are living a boring afterlife, because their means of pleasures are different from men, being the women. They meet each other every day, share the gossips in the heaven but not satisfied with the heavenly life. In this condition Draupadi seeks permission from Krishna to go to Earth once again for a short time, during Krishna's visit at heaven. "*I wish to return to the mortal world in spirit. To visit, not to be reborn*". (DAS, 24) Krishna allows all four ladies asking for a favor, to visit the *Indraprastha*, the capital of their old time empire for 30 days. He sends Narad Muni to assist and teach them how to behave on the Earth, because the times has changed now so drastically and in opposite direction in the sense of living style, social etiquettes and manners.

"*Draupadi was a devoted wife, chaste, religious minded and adhering to duty. Her integrity and fidelity were admirable. She was always careful to please her husbands, served not only them but even their wives*" (Bhawalkar 142).

But still Draupadi was the victim of shameful disrobing episode in Mahabharata story. She was always suppressed with weight of her duties towards her husbands and family. She had to sacrifice her own decisions for the sake of family glory. But as imagined by Trisha Das, in her afterlife, Draupadi remained no older Draupadi. Here she is independent of taking own decisions as she was not before. She takes permission from Krishna to visit to their Kingdom on the Earth again and convinces to Gandhari, Kunti and Amba to come along in her journey to Earth.

QUEST OF SELF-EXPLORATION

In the whole story of the epic Mahabharata, Draupadi is seen performing her role as a Princess, then married to five Pandava Brothers. This polyandry marriage was imposed on her as she had married only Arjuna initially, but the fate pulled her towards accepting the five brothers as her husbands, she had no choice than accepting it. She has been shown, always performing her duties as wife, as daughter-in-law, as a mother. Even her love towards her husbands is still a topic of discussion, even today. How did she behave, what she should have done, but no focus was given to her own will or own self. She is blamed for the great war of Mahabharata, though not having a decision making authority. All these things are re-written in many more novels. But Trisha Das has made a praiseworthy effort to imagine Draupadi's life with different perspective. Her afterlife, her quest of self-exploration, the modern feminine instincts in her ancient character. Though it's an imaginary journey of Draupadi's life, its important from feminist

perspective. Draupadi's qualities are well-known and well discussed, but how would be her life if she had given the complete liberty to take her own decisions. In this novel, she is independently taking her own decisions. Well she is not the only character in the novel, but other female characters like Kunti, Gandhari and Amba are also with her in this endeavor. After all she was a live spirited Queen, she deserves the independent life, though in imagination of a writer.

SPRIT OF ALIVENESS IN DRAUPADI

Being a dutiful Hindu wife, Draupadi's integrity and fidelity among her family was undeniable. She existed in a time where woman's role was to serve her husband and family. But she was fierce enough to fight for her self-esteem even with her husbands, it shows the spirit of aliveness in her character. She was a woman with her own ideology. She dares to speak for her dignity in the court of Dhritarashtra, as her husband loose her in a bet in the game of dice. She raised questions in the court regarding the social justice to the existence of a woman, as a human being, where all remained silent. The same way, in the afterlife, she is asking questions to Krishna. All men are enjoying in the heaven with *apsaras* (the female dancers in the heaven), but what about women. What they are supposed to do? She got bored with the facilities and fatigue in the heaven. She wanted to explore the life, what was undone in her previous birth. She performed her duties without thinking of her own 'self'. So she takes permission from Krishna visit the Earth to explore the human life on the Earth. Though it was only for 30 days. The spirit of aliveness completely suits to her character.

DESIRES OF DRAUPADI IN TRISHA DAS'S *MS. DRAUPADI KURU*

- 1. Desire for Autonomy and Freedom:** In the modern world, Draupadi craves personal freedom — freedom from divine scripts, patriarchal expectations, and the burdens of her past lives. Unlike the epic Mahabharata version, this Draupadi doesn't want to be bound by dharma or duties towards her husbands. She questions roles imposed on women, seeking to chart her own path, even if that means defying norms.
- 2. Desire for Identity Beyond Myth:** She yearns to be seen not as a symbol not as a wife of five men, not as a victim of war but as an individual woman with her own desires, fears, and voice. Draupadi seeks to reclaim her narrative, to break free from the mythologized pedestal and live as a real, flawed, feeling woman.
- 3. Desire for Love on Her Own Terms:** In Das's retelling, Draupadi explores the idea of romantic and sexual agency. She is not ashamed of her needs. The novel suggests that she longs for a relationship where she is chosen for herself, not shared as a trophy or used as a pawn in political games.
- 4. Desire for Justice and Closure:** Though reborn, Draupadi still carries emotional remnants of her past trauma the humiliation in the Kaurava court, the powerlessness she felt. She desires justice, but also peace, closure, and a sense of having the last word, not just being a tragic figure in a saga of vengeance. As per Iravati Karve, *She had spoken in the assembly of men, something she should have known must not do.* (Karve, 101)
- 5. Desire to Redefine Womanhood:** Draupadi in *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* becomes a stand-in for many modern women, especially in Indian society. She desires to rewrite what it means to be a woman not just in roles of sacrifice, but in roles of ambition, rebellion, and choice. Her desire is to *revive*, not replicate, her past.

In addition, within a masculine and patronymic context, Draupadi is exceptional, indeed single in the sense of cold, unpaired and detached. She provides the occasion for the violent transaction between men, the efficient cause of the crucial battle (Spivak 1981).

THE PORTRAIT OF FEMININE DESIRES

Though Draupadi was allowed for only 30 days on the Earth. She was ready to face all problems would occur to her. She convinced to Amba, Kunti and Gandhari to come along with her. After all it was their second chance on the Earth. Every one of them was having their own desires to fulfill. They had their undone goals in previous life to attain. Kunti agrees to come for the sake of Karna. She comes to know that Karna has taken rebirth on the Earth. As she couldn't show her motherly love to Karna openly, due to the social fear of defamation for he was her child born before marriage. The child before marriage was the cause of defamation for a modest woman in that age. So. She had a guilt in her mind. To settle that guilt, she aspired to meet reborn Karna on the Earth, and fulfill her undone motherly duties. Gandhari accompanies them due to her desire to visit her birthplace once, where she used to be happy ever before her marriage. She wanted to see, how it looks like today. Whereas Amba accompanied Draupadi, because she and Draupadi became close friends in heaven. Amba was denied from marriage by Bhishma in the previous birth. So she wanted to seek for pure love. She had a hidden desire of marrying to her true lover and live the blissful life. Though all these women got a second chance of life but still their desires are provoked by their past life. They are old like them.

MS.DRAUPADI KURU, though having a background of Mahabharata's female characters, is completely different story, that of old one. Trisha has executed the wonderful task of portraying and exploring the hidden desires of Draupadi, Amba, Kunti and Gandhari with modern context. All these ladies are seen little disoriented with the modern world initially at the time of their entry to Earth. They get intrigued by seeing a car instead of chariot, traffic lights, sky scrapers, aero planes, shopping malls, Television etc. It's funny and creates interest of the reader in the rest of their journey.

SYMBOLISM OF THE 30-DAY EARTH VISIT

The 30-day Earth visit granted to Draupadi and the other women can be interpreted as a powerful metaphor a "trial period" for second chances. In mythology and even in real-life narratives, women are seldom offered the opportunity to rewrite their stories or reclaim agency over their identities. Trisha Das uses this fantastical premise not just as a plot device, but as a deeper commentary on the limitations placed on women across time. The temporary return to Earth becomes a symbolic space where Draupadi reclaims her voice, explores her desires, and questions the rules that once bound her. It highlights the rarity and radical importance of giving women the chance to revisit their stories not as passive characters, but as active authors of their fate.

COMMENTARY ON SOCIETY'S RECEPTION OF MYTHICAL WOMEN TODAY

The image of a liberated Draupadi, as portrayed in *Ms. Draupadi Kuru*, challenges deep-rooted societal norms and invites diverse reactions from modern audiences. In a world where social media amplifies every voice, the reimagining of mythological women often leads to polarized discourse. Some readers welcome Draupadi's transformation as a bold feminist reawakening, applauding her reclamation of agency, desire, and choice. Others, however, resist this departure from traditional values, seeing it as irreverent or even sacrilegious. This split reflects the ongoing tension between progressive reinterpretations and cultural conservatism. Trisha Das's version of Draupadi joins a growing trend of pop-culture retellings — seen in web series, literature, and digital art — that reframe mythological women not as silent sufferers, but as complex, empowered figures. This shift signifies a broader feminist movement that seeks not only to revive ancient voices but to rewrite them with modern relevance and autonomy.

Reflection on Heavenly Discontent

The portrayal of Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba's dissatisfaction in heaven despite being surrounded by luxury and comfort serves as a powerful feminist metaphor. Trisha Das subtly exposes how patriarchy persists even in supposedly idealized realms. The women in heaven, while free from earthly suffering, are denied fulfillment, expression, and autonomy. Their discontent becomes symbolic of how women's needs and desires are often silenced or sidelined, even in spaces designed to appear perfect. This heavenly setting, instead of being a reward, reflects the same structural limitations they faced on Earth only dressed in divine aesthetics. It questions whether true liberation can exist without equity, and whether peace can be attained in spaces where gendered power dynamics remain unchanged. This discomfort, rendered in a setting assumed to be utopian, echoes the feminist critique that real transformation must go beyond appearances into the core of social structures and consciousness.

PATRIARCHAL CRITIQUE IN MS. DRAUPADI KURU

Trisha Das's Ms. Draupadi Kuru offers a sharp critique of patriarchal structures, both ancient and modern. Through the lens of Draupadi's dissatisfaction and rebellion, the novel exposes how patriarchal norms continue to shape women's lives across timelines whether in the palaces of ancient Hastinapur or the posh apartments of Delhi. Draupadi's previous role as a shared wife, her humiliation in the royal court, and her expectation to remain devoted despite trauma, all mirror the systemic silencing and objectification of women. In the contemporary setting, even amid modern freedoms, Draupadi encounters new forms of gender policing and societal expectations. This continuity emphasizes that patriarchy is not confined to a time or place it is a recurring pattern embedded within culture, religion, relationships, and even perceived empowerment. The novel thus challenges readers to recognize and dismantle these structures, framing Draupadi not just as a mythological figure, but as a feminist voice echoing across centuries.

Pradip Bhattacharya in his Panchkanya: Women of Substance, notes that there is also a "*sudden decline in the status of women itself*" (Bhattacharya 67-83), which seems true in the case of Draupadi.

CONCLUSION

Trisha Das's Ms. Draupadi Kuru is more than just a creative re-imagining of an epic heroine; it is a profound commentary on gender, power, and selfhood that bridges the distance between myth and modernity. By reviving Draupadi in a contemporary setting, Das allows her to step outside the rigid role imposed on her in the Mahabharata and to voice long-suppressed desires. In this new narrative, Draupadi becomes a symbol of autonomy, questioning the definitions of duty, justice, and identity that once confined her.

The novel's imaginative premise granting Draupadi and other epic women a temporary return to Earth functions as both a literal and metaphorical second chance. It offers them the freedom to explore unfinished aspirations, to claim space as individuals, and to redefine what womanhood means in a society that often silences female voices. Through humor, satire, and sharp critique, Das highlights that the struggles of ancient heroines remain strikingly relevant today. The revival of Draupadi in this novel is not about erasing the past but about reclaiming it. It asserts that myths are living texts, open to reinterpretation, and that women within those myths deserve to be seen not as static icons but as evolving figures with agency. In this way, Ms. Draupadi Kuru transforms Draupadi from a tragic emblem of humiliation into a timeless voice of resistance, resilience, and renewal an emblem of the continuing feminist quest for dignity and freedom.

REFERENCES

1. Das, T. (2016). Ms. Draupadi Kuru. HarperCollins India.
2. Karve, I. (1968). Yuganta: The end of an epoch. Disha Books.
3. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 1981. 'Mahasveta Devi Draupadi. trnsl.' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference. Winter, 2002
4. Bhawalkar, Vanamala. Eminent Women in the Mahabharata. New Delhi: Sharada Publishing.