

# Trauma and Strength in Yajnaseni

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## Abstract

In Ray's Yajnaseni, Draupadi—a controversial character in Indian mythology—is referred to as Krishnaa. Since the beginning of civilization, a patriarchal culture has existed in which men are regarded as superior to women and possess the authority to make consequential decisions. Women are expected to be unintelligent, quiet, and compliant. In matters of legal or "Dharma" significance, Krishnaa exemplifies boldness as an educated scholar who challenges authority figures. She is considered a fervent woman who played a significant role in the illustrious Kurukshetra conflict by marrying five men (the Pandavas). She is a princess, being the daughter of King Drupad, the sister of Drishtadyumna, the wife of renowned Bharata warriors, and the mother of five boys. She has endured insults and the anguish of separation multiple times, whether from her children or her cherished Arjun. The paper seeks to elucidate the challenges she encountered throughout her life and the resilience she had shown in the face of injustice.

**Keywords:** Insult, Sacrifice, Dilemma, Separation, Suffering

Ancient Indian literature is considered by some to be the most esteemed literary tradition globally. The epics, a hallmark of Sanskrit literature, rank among the oldest and most esteemed works of Indian literature. These masterpieces encapsulate a nation's profound literary and cultural heritage, influencing subsequent generations. In her 1984 work Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi, Odia author Pratibha Ray narrates the story of the Mahabharata heroine Draupadi. The word "Yajnaseni" means "born of fire" describes the central character. The narrative is situated within the context of the Mahabharata. Draupadi is married to the brothers Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. The book examines the lives of Draupadi and her spouses as they navigate the intricacies of their relationships and cultural conventions.

Draupadi's dilemma as a woman is addressed in the novel. No woman of the kind has yet existed. She has endured the same form of abuse as other attractive women, even in the company of intelligent, respectable men. Her mother-in-law's words resulted in her marriage to five brothers, which subsequently subjected her to ongoing mistreatment by her relatives. Her life encompasses both joyous and painful periods. A succession of diverse defeats did not undermine her confidence. All five of her husbands possessed her. Despite her power, devotion, and diligence, she could not experience the joy of heaven. She anticipated that one of her husbands would be present to save her when she collapsed after stumbling in the Himalayan foothills towards the conclusion of her life. However, none of her husbands extended her the benefit of the doubt.

Pratibha Ray contests conventional patriarchal beliefs in this work by providing a sophisticated examination of Draupadi's existence, autonomy, and empowerment. This paper will analyze Yajnaseni from a feminist viewpoint, emphasizing its portrayal of Draupadi. This study will examine how Yajnaseni contests patriarchal themes throughout the Mahabharata.

*"The fault is his who has filled woman with beauty and men's eyes with the thirst for beauty"* (Yajnaseni 233)

Pratibha Ray's "Yajnaseni" is a complex reinterpretation of the Mahabharata, concentrating on the episodes of Draupadi. In Ray's interpretation, Draupadi's fictional autobiography—composed as a comprehensive letter to Krishna—constitutes the epic narrative. In her reimagining of the heroine, Ray presents Draupadi with a modern viewpoint and a profound commitment to serving her community. The prologue to this narrative delineates the circumstances behind Draupadi's demise. A letter she composes to her friend Lord Krishna unveils her feminine consciousness while she slumbers among the foothills of the Himalayas.

Ray's rendition of the epic preserves its realism while implementing slight modifications to emphasize Draupadi's might. Draupadi clearly exhibits a profound inclination toward helping people. Beyond Draupadi, Yajnaseni highlights the plight of women globally. Ray's critique underscores the detrimental impact of objectification and exploitation on women's honor and dignity.

Draupadi seeks solace by recounting her difficulties with Krishna and the audience. This epistolary work, composed as an extensive letter near the conclusion of her life, narrates her experiences as a woman, spouse, and mother. The author has chosen to focus on the episodes involving Draupadi instead of adhering to the epic's chronological sequence.

In Yajnaseni, Pratibha Ray tackles the stereotypes surrounding Draupadi's polyandrous identity by reimagining her character. Unlike the original Mahabharata, Ray delves into Draupadi's psyche in this novel, illuminating her feelings, aspirations, and anguish. Ray articulates the anguish of other female characters, including Sathyavati, Amba, Madri, Gandhari, and Uttara, by elucidating Draupadi's inward experiences. The narrative consistently emphasizes the profound spiritual connection between Draupadi and Krishna.

In Ray's play, the anguished Draupadi implores Krishna and the audience to alleviate the suffering of others, as she cannot endure witnessing their pain. Her account of the anguish and distress is as follows:

*‘Seeing each hair-raising incident of my life the people of kaliyuga will be able to decide whether the insults Draupadi suffered have ever been borne by woman of anytime . God forbid that in future anyone should suffer such abuse’* ( Yajnaseni -4)

Following the emotional turmoil of Krishna's rejection, Draupadi, the protagonist of Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni, consents to marry Arjuna out of a sense of duty to defend Dharma. Draupadi seeks to halt the Swayamvar upon discovering the purported demise of the Pandavas. Nonetheless, her brother Dhristadyumna warns her that Panchal would be unable to overpower the assembled monarchs unless the Swayamvar is revoked. Draupadi is compelled to take the Swamyavar. She emits a discernible sigh when speaking.

*‘I would have remained on unwed, virgin as it is!’* ( Yajnaseni – 34)

In Ray's version of the story, Draupadi rebels against ridiculing her polyandrous marriage. There is discrimination in the moral codes, and she is angry about it. Being a woman isn't easy, Draupadi learns. The idea that Sathyavathi and Amba had also fallen prey to male members is something she contemplates over.

War is barely described in a few of chapters in Yajnaseni. She has not placed much emphasis on war which according to her is mainly a male-oriented endeavor. She as a humanitarian, despises it. Through Draupadi, she expresses her distaste for warfare. Ray uses Draupadi to convey the pointlessness of war, despite the fact that she is first depicted as a lady who is insatiably thirsty for battle.

Even after returning to her children after thirteen years of exile, she felt the pain of separation. Ashwathama slaughtered all of her sons during the Battle of Kurukshetra. She rose to the position of queen in a kingdom devoid of male rulers. Even though Yudhisthir was more to blame for the deaths of men, her life story was one of misery. The dharamraj Yudhisthir ruined Krishna's life. Instead of her mother asking all five pandavs to marry her, it was Yudhisthir who, after failing to resolve his mother's remarks, proclaimed that they should all be married to her. Yudhisthir was the one who dove headfirst into the game, putting his "WIFE" in danger. He then proceeded to play, lose everything, and force her to endure the pain of being separated

from her children. Every wrongdoing that befell Krishnaa was more the fault of Yudhisthir. While on their journey to Swarag, she tripped and Bhim attempted to help her up. However, Yudhisthir urged him to abandon her, claiming that her weakness for Arjun was the reason for her fall and that they should stop paying attention to her. An abused woman who has given her all for her husbands must endure his chauvinism and abandonment.

Draupadi, played by Pratibha Ray, personifies tolerance, inclusivity, and friendship across cultures. Draupadi fights for the education and empowerment of oppressed groups and argues for the necessity of racial harmony in the book. She is also shown as a selfless woman who has realized the point of not having money and who gives it all up for the sake of helping others. She demonstrates her administrative acumen by proposing a road connecting the woodlands with Hastinapur city. Draupadi begs Kuber to use his fortune to build infrastructure in this novel.

The entire life of Krishnaa, the Yajnaseni, had been a story of misery and shame brought on by the very husbands who were sworn to defend her honor. In her feminist retelling of the Mahabharata, Yajnaseni by Pratibha Ray restores Draupadi to her rightful place as a potent symbol of women's strength, compassion, and autonomy. Patriarchal standards and preconceptions are challenged by Ray's subversion of traditional images. Ray also highlights Draupadi's feelings, wants, and independence in this book. Ray also brings attention to the hardships, anguish, and resilience of women. Pratibha Ray personifies the independence and bravery of Draupadi. Ray promotes sex equality and social justice in this book. Traditional feminist roles are also rethought by Ray. Despite her kindness and generosity, she was the most multi-faceted character in the ancient epic Mahabharata because she cared about everyone around her but never received the same treatment in return. The slightest wrongdoing to her would also make her enraged. In spite of all, she remained the most resilient and unwavering in the face of hardship. She came out as a rebel in her community because she was able to use her intelligence as a weapon to question the authority.

Pratibha Ray reimagines the Mahabharata in her book Yajnaseni, presenting Draupadi as a powerful symbol of female empowerment. The retelling elevates Draupadi's character to a crucial one, highlighting her unfaltering bravery and strength. Thus, it is clear that Yajnaseni offers a new take on the Mahabharata by reimagining Draupadi as a symbol of strong women.

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