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Draupadi's Polyandry: A Study in Feminist Discourse Analysis

By Saumya Sharma¹

Abstract

Draupadi serves as a crucial link between warring characters in the *Mahabharata* (an ancient Indian Sanskrit epic), particularly through her polyandry. Born of fire, personifying purity, yet bound by a matrimonial covenant, she is caught in a complex marital relationship with five husbands that completely changes her life and also theirs. In consonance with the aims of gyno-criticism, literary depictions of women seek not only to reconstruct but also to critique patriarchal conventions. Drawing on the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005), with its tools of speech acts, presupposition, vocabulary, and modality, this paper seeks to examine the varied representations of Draupadi in three translated texts of the *Mahabharata* by Buitenen, Ray, and Divakaruni. The aim of the paper is trifold: to study the construction of Draupadi through the events of her marriage and post-marital occurrences, to examine her power/powerlessness vis-à-vis others, and to explore the othering of her character against the notions of *dharma* (right conduct or action) in marriage. The analysis reveals that Buitenen's translation emphasizes destiny and *dharma*, but it does not provide a voice to Draupadi and constructs her as an embodiment of ideal womanhood. In contrast, Ray and Divakaruni represent Draupadi as expressing emotions, opinions, and judgments of her own self and of others. She appears powerless and oppressed before patriarchal conventions yet reclaims power through her vivid articulations and her questioning of phallogocentric norms. Thus, the women writers humanize Draupadi, lending her agency and critiquing misogyny.

Keywords: *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, Feminist critical discourse analysis, Gyno-criticism, J.A.B. van Buitenen, Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Indian literature

Introduction

The *Mahabharata*, known as the “national epic of India” (Sahoo & Dash, 2022, p. 13), contains 18 *parvas* or chapters that describe in detail the origins of the Kuru lineage, the animosity between the *Pandavas*² and the *Kauravas*,³ the marriage of Draupadi, the game of dice, and the subsequent exile of the *Pandavas* leading to the brutal war of Kurukshetra and the eventual victory of the *Pandavas*. The *Mahabharata* has been a part of the South Asian public imagination (Hegarty, 2012) and has elicited much scholarship from various viewpoints: *dharma* (right conduct or action) and action (Das, 2009; Hildebeitel, 2001; Hudson, 2013), a figurative understanding of its philosophy and religion (Srivastava, 2017), culture and negotiation (Narlikar

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² *Pandavas* were the five sons of Pandu (the king of Hastinapur) and the central characters of the *Mahabharata* story.

³ *Kauravas* were the sons of Dhritarashtra and the cousins and enemies of *Pandavas*.

& Narlikar, 2014), philology and textual criticism (Adluri & Bagchee, 2018), and gender and sexuality issues (Brodbeck & Black, 2007), to name a few.

The Centrality of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata*

Draupadi is one of the central characters of the narrative, the pivot that moves the complex machinery of events through her words and actions. She has been represented differently in each rendering of the *Mahabharata* and has been valorized as a goddess in festivals and folklore (Hiltebeitel, 1991). Considering that the *Mahabharata* provides exhaustive lessons on “the human condition” (Srivastava, 2017, p. 30), Draupadi’s life provides answers on the interrelationship of womanhood, tradition, and religion (Luthra, 2014). Her appropriation by feminists has been able to “keep feminisms relevant” (Luthra, 2014, p. 138) to women across strata, by evoking sustained dialogue and critique of her actions and the saga itself. In other words, the epic and its protagonists act as cultural resources for feminist articulations, adding to the burgeoning literature on the *Mahabharata*. Some early scholars on gender in the *Mahabharata* explored the role of women protagonists such as Draupadi in relation to sociocultural norms and practices (Jayal, 1966; Shah, 1995). Moreover, the notion of the “traditional woman” (Sangari & Vaid, 1999, p. 10) reconfigured before and after independence, led to the creation of “ideal womanhood” suffused with chastity, filial piety, duty, and obedience as seen from early Anglo-Indian literature (Tharu, 1999). In consonance with this, the earlier representations of Draupadi conformed to the matrix of sacrificial womanhood (see Rajagopalachari, 2010; Chaturvedi, 2006). However, the more recent renderings of the story by women writers deviate from this norm, imparting a sense of agency, egoism, and even dissent to Draupadi’s character. These modern-day narratives of the *Mahabharata* differ considerably from its standard translations by J.A.B. van Buitenen and by Bibek Debroy.⁴ Thus, in the translations and in literary fiction, there seem to be differences in the portrayal of Draupadi which are worthy of study, particularly regarding the first major event of her life that changes her fate and the plot of the epic, namely her polyandrous marriage.

Polyandry and *Dharma*

Pratap Kumar (2016) is of the view that Draupadi forms a crucial connection between several characters in the story—her father Drupada and his former friend Drona, on one hand, and the *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* on the other. However, her position is paradoxical in that she stays in the periphery while being one of the prime causes of the war at Kurukshetra. She “evokes a sense of continual isolation in her relation to every other character” (Kumar, 2016, p. 167), and I contend that her isolation and othering begin at her marriage, which demands examination due to its complex structure.

Born of fire, Draupadi experiences a unique marital situation because she is “parceled out among five men within the sacrament of marriage” (Bhattacharya, 2006, p. 38) even though she emerges a virgin after each union. She is a *panchakanya*, referred to by Kunti as a “*sarvadharmopacayinam* (fosterer of all virtues)” (Bhattacharya, 2006, p. 39), and no other character in the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* shares her fate nor her marital situation. Moreover, in ancient India, marriages happened in multiple ways (through parental consent, purchase, elopement, and mutual agreement between the parties concerned), and one of them was the

⁴ The English translations of Buitenen and Debroy are based on the comprehensive critical edition (in Sanskrit) done about five decades ago by the Bhandarkar Institute at Pune, incorporating multiple variants of the tale across languages, time periods, and social class (Adluri & Bagchee, 2018). Buitenen’s translation published by Chicago University Press is considered a standard work, often quoted and cited by scholars in the area.

*svayamvara*⁵ where the bride selected the groom of her choice (McGrath, 2009). Even in this sense, Draupadi's wedding is a paradoxical violation, for she chooses a groom but is wedded to more than one. Furthermore, women were determinants of social, economic, cultural, and political wealth in marriage. In the pre-monetary society of the *Mahabharata*, they were also the "repository and voice of the ksatriya⁶ tradition" (McGrath, 2009, p. 13), becoming agents of change through their actions and opinions in crises, as Draupadi does in her marriage.

Marriage in ancient India was a way of preserving the family lineage and institutionalizing the relations between individuals in a socially acceptable manner. It was a *sarir-samskara*⁷ that required each person to fully perform the householder's duties (Singh, 1978). Here again, Draupadi's conjugal life presents a challenge since she has to perform the duties of a housewife with more than one man. In addition, the question of *dharma* lends complexity to her marriage. *Dharma* in the *Mahabharata* has two parts: *pravrtti dharma* is worldly and pragmatic, aiming for salvation through a performance of householder's duties, while *nivrtti dharma* entails renunciation and the practice of austerities to attain salvation (Dhand, 2008). Polygyny is more common than polyandry, and there is a strict code of conduct in terms of family and sex, "demarcating boundaries regulating the sexual encounters of family members" (Dhand, 2008, p. 115); the new bride is supposed to "symbolically assume the role of the mother" (Dhand, 2008, p. 117) to all who are younger to her husband and the role of the daughter to those who are elder. However, Draupadi's polyandry clearly violates these unwritten rules, creating tensions and ruptures and initiating a dialogue with *dharma*. Thus, in ancient India, as understood through the epics, a strict code of conduct prevailed for marriage and the varied roles that a woman was expected to perform as a mother, maid, wife, child-bearer, and ideal woman (Meyer, 1952). Considering this strict taxonomy, Draupadi's polyandry presents a conundrum on *dharma*, family life, sex, and marriage (Black, 2021).

Much scholarship exists on the *Mahabharata* and Draupadi as mentioned earlier, but little attention has been given to a linguistic study of the text (see Ranero-Antolin, 1999). This paper offers a linguistic discourse analysis of Draupadi's marriage and her varying representations across three texts: J.A.B. van Buitenen's translation of the *Adiparva*⁸ of the *Mahabharata*, Pratibha Ray's *Yagyaseni*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. By comparing women's writings with a standard translation of the text by a male author, the aim of this paper is threefold: first, to study the construction of Draupadi through the events of her marriage, linguistically and behaviorally; second, to examine the power of Draupadi vis-à-vis the men and women involved in this event, and third, to explore the positioning and othering of her character against the notions of *dharma* and sin in marriage. Elaine Showalter, a proponent of gynocriticism, advocates fresh and continuous examination of women writers who question "the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures" (Showalter, 1981, p. 183), and challenge patriarchal logic and normative social behaviors. Thus, through a language-based study of gender, the paper

⁵ *Swayamvara*, in ancient India, was a practice in which a girl of marriageable age chose a husband from among a list of suitors.

⁶ The duty of kings, queens and other members of the royal family (symbolic of the warrior class) to protect its subjects, abide by tradition, and perform actions according to the laws of the kingdom.

⁷ Bodily rite, the duties to be performed by both individuals united through marriage

⁸ The *Adiparva*, known as the first chapter or the *Book of Beginning*, discusses the origins of the Kuru clan, the birth of and animosity between the *Kauravas* and *Pandavas*, the incident of burning the lac/wax house, and the marriage of Draupadi.

seeks to contribute to the tradition of gyno-criticism (Showalter, 1981) and add to the rich literature on the *Mahabharata* from a feminist perspective (Brodbeck & Black, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the viewpoint of feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) as advocated by Lazar (2005). For more than four decades, gender has been a significant area of research, particularly in discourse studies (Lakoff, 1973; Tannen, 1990; Hall & Bucholtz, 1995; Sunderland, 2004). Most studies focus on the sociocultural construction of gender and its fluidity and variability according to context (Baxter, 2003; Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Gender is part of an individual's way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, and a constructivist outlook underscores that gender differences are closely related to power asymmetry (Lorber, 2010).

Following the above notion, FCDA involves a “critique of gendered social practices and relations” (Lazar, 2005, p. 6) aimed at questioning patriarchal ideologies and bringing about social transformation. It is based on the notion that language or discourse is not neutral, and all knowledge is socially and historically contingent. Gender functions “as an ideological structure that divides people into two classes, men and women” bound by relations of domination and subordination (Lazar, 2005, p. 7). Gender enters into every relation of an individual and is inextricably linked to power structures, subtly worked out in and through discourse, while recognizing differences and diversity in the social matrix (Lazar, 2005). FCDA attempts to examine discursive ways of speaking and writing to unearth how language oppresses the marginalized and represents and misrepresents them in social relations, talk, and texts. It draws on Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis that views discourse as a kind of social practice, both constitutive of and constituting society (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Fairclough (1989, 1992) focuses on textual analysis through grammatical structures, lexis, and tools from pragmatics to reveal hidden ideologies and power play in texts, linking the textual to the social. Since literary texts are a kind of social discourse, capable of reflecting ideological agendas and power imbalances through the themes and interaction of the characters (Fowler, 1979), they have been studied as part of discourse analysis and stylistics (Dijk, 1985; Cook, 1994; Carter & Simpson, 2005). The fictional world of the characters reveals their status, privileges, and discourse(s) through an exploration of the language, style, interpersonal, pragmatic, deictic, and text-cohesive aspects (Fowler, 1979). Investigating the discourses in a literary text involves a linguistic description of the text “in relation to its extra-textual coordinates” (Fowler, 1979, p. 551), gender being one of them. Hence, a discursive study of gender in literature entails an examination of gender and power through explicit and implicit meanings embedded in texts. As mentioned earlier, I draw on four specific tools from Fairclough’s approach for this purpose: speech acts, presupposition, vocabulary, and modality.

Speech acts are understood as language that performs actions contextually such as ordering, challenging, requesting, and confessing (Austin, 1962). Speech acts have been taxonomized depending on whether they entail directing someone, committing oneself to action such as promising, representing/asserting certain propositions, or expressing one’s psychological states (Searle, 1969). The speech acts issued by a person create particular effects on the hearer (perlocution) and the ensuing interaction can reveal power imbalances in conversation. Presuppositions likewise are contextually understood assumptions that denote the existence of referents (Birner, 2013). For example, stating that the milk boiled again presupposes that the action has already taken place earlier. Presuppositions can be analyzed through certain trigger words

such as lexis, factive verbs, and wh-questions,⁹ and they can connote particular ideologies prevalent in society. Fairclough (1989, 2003) explains that vocabulary includes evaluative and ideologically loaded words—words that carry certain connotations and meanings, such as antonyms, synonyms, describing words, and classificatory schemes. A change in words can evoke particular social meanings, for instance, the use of the word “healthy” instead of “fat” or “obese.” While the former is more euphemistic, the other two are more direct and pejorative in the context of body shaming. Lastly, modality refers to the use of modal verbs that denote possibility, certainty, and commitment to a particular action. It shows the many ways in which a person can express attitudes (having a strong stance or distance) and is an important factor in reflecting one’s social and personal identity (Fairclough, 2003). For example, the use of the verb “be” in the following statement signifies the categorical commitment of the speaker to this belief: “she is going to file a lawsuit against the company; it will be done.” Due to space constraints, brief extracts that are representative have been selected for analysis below (Short, 1996).

Womanhood and Action

In Buitenen’s text, Draupadi’s birth and marriage are knotted together. Born of the sacrificial fire and an offering to gods, she is described thus:

[T]hereupon a young maiden arose from the center of the altar, the well-favored and beautiful Daughter of the Pāñcālas, heart-fetching, with a waist shaped like an altar. She was dark, with eyes like lotus petals, her hair glossy black and curling—a lovely Goddess who had chosen a human form (1973, Chap. XI, verse 155.42).

A strong degree of modality and declarative statements (speech acts) assert the beauty of Draupadi through a set of evaluative words (“young,” “well-favored,” “beautiful,” and “heart-fetching”) praising her form, youth, and favorable impression on others. Her dark complexion matches with her lustrous hair and is contrasted with her lotus-shaped eyes earning her the epithet *Krishnaa* (having a dark hue). Draupadi’s beauty is crucial to the story, enticing suitors in the *svayamvara* and making them lustful: “their bodies bathed in their mind-born love/and proclaiming ‘Krsnā shall be mine!’” (Buitenen, 1973, Chap. XII, verse 178.3) Her goddess-like status is mentioned at her birth through the verb “chosen,” a relevant point since she willingly accepts her fate without any negative emotion. Bodily beauty and perfection of character are emphasized in Buitenen’s construction of Draupadi which is in stark contrast to the Draupadi in the other two texts.

Past events in the text are linked to future ones, perpetuating a cycle of karma and reincarnation. Vyasa prophesies to Kunti’s sons about their marriage to Draupadi:

There once was a young girl who lived in a wilderness of austerities, the daughter of a great-spirited seer, with a narrow waist, full hips, and a beautiful brow—a girl favored with all virtues. Because of previous acts, which she herself had done, she was unfortunate in love, and the girl, lovely though she was, did not find a husband. (Buitenen, 1973, Chap. XI, verse 157.5)

She replied to the Sovereign for her own benefit, “I want a husband with all the virtues!” And she said it again and again. Then the eloquent Sovereign Śamkara said

⁹ Questions that ask why, who, which, what, where, when, and how

to her, “You shall have your five husbands, dear girl!” When she replied to God, “Give me just one husband!” Śamkara said this final word: “Five times you told me to give you a husband, and it shall be as you asked for when you have been reborn in another body!” (Buitenen, 1973, Chap. XI, verse 157.10)

Through a series of assertive speech acts, Draupadi, in her past incarnation, is constructed as a mix of opposites possessing beauty and practicing spiritual austerities. This contrastive focus on the spirit and flesh is also seen in her present birth where Draupadi is expected to fulfill her marital duties yet bear misfortune with fortitude. The mention of Draupadi’s body structure (narrow waist and full hips) presupposes that beauty is an essential parameter of womanhood, and along with virtue, it constructs a traditional yet feminine image of Draupadi belonging to a phallogocentric universe. In this version, one can also say that childbearing was crucial to womanhood, favored by such a body type. Past and present are linked once again as the woman, due to her actions, does not find a suitable match, seen through the lexical contrasts “unfortunate” and “lovely.” In the next set of lines, the conversation between Draupadi and Lord Shiva is through iterative requests and directives (speech acts). There is a repetition of Draupadi’s boon and of Shiva’s use of the modal verb “shall,” signifying his strong stance even though she hesitates and asks for just one spouse. The lexis “want,” “virtue,” “five,” and “again and again” construct her as desiring marriage, having high standards, but being impatient because she repeats her request. Here, the importance of speech as a maker of one’s action/destiny is stressed. Before the wedding, Vyasa recounts this story to Drupada and that of the *Pandavas* being incarnations of five Indras who were punished by Shiva for their arrogance, justifying their god-like stature and how the polyandrous marriage was predestined. Thus, present actions are linked to past ones, creating a chain of temporality and choice.

Draupadi’s Positioning with Suitors

Draupadi’s power and emotions are portrayed through her interactions with her suitors, particularly Karna, Krishna, and Arjun. In Buitenen’s and Ray’s texts, Draupadi does not interact with Karna and questions his eligibility to participate, but in Ray’s narrative, her feelings for him become evident. When Karna is about to pick the bow, Draupadi feels excited, confessing (speech act) her attraction towards him and hoping for his victory: “Perhaps for a moment I too had this desire—that this hero should be victorious!” (Ray, 1995, p. 41). The words “desire” and “victorious” confirm this, and her feelings become transparent when he is insulted by a courtier and questioned by her brother Drishtadyumna: “My heart was full of remorse particularly because Karna had been insulted by raising the question of his birth. In truth, what was the necessity for this *svayamvar*?” (Ray, 1995, p. 42). The assertion and “be” verb highlight her strong stance, serving as a confession of Draupadi’s regret/sympathy towards Karna and the injustice done against him. The phrase “full of remorse” and the adverb “particularly” are evidence of this. Her questioning the need of the *svayamvara* reveals her feeling since none of the courtiers have been able to win her so far. In Divakaruni’s story, Draupadi is attracted to Karna’s eyes and portrait, which is conveyed by her declaration that “they pulled me into them” (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 69), but Krishna forcefully objects to it by issuing a single-word command (speech act)---“stop” (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 70). He tells her to see Arjun’s portrait and warns her not to choose wrongly at the *svayamvara*. At the event, Drishtadyumna insults Karna’s low birth and requests him to not participate as a suitor, leading to a commotion.

To protect her brother, Draupadi assumes power and questions Karna: “Before you attempt to

win my hand, king of Anga, ... tell me your father's name. For surely a wife-to-be, who must sever herself from her family and attach herself to her husband's line, has the right to know this" (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 95). Though the lines are in the declarative mode, Draupadi's question (asking about the father's name) and justifying her need to do so demonstrates her power. Her speech presupposes the marked relevance of the husband's lineage and implies the existence of the *varna*¹⁰ system for matrimonial alliance. The words "right to know" and the modal "must" reinforce this while the lexis "wife-to-be," "sever," and "herself" show the normative duties of the wife and the importance of the husband's lineage to secure one's future. Unlike the other two texts, here Draupadi's queries silence and belittle Karna, positioning her as a dominant speaker, though she behaves this way to save her brother and the situation. In both Ray's and Divakaruni's texts, her feelings for Karna are amply clear but more pronounced in Divakaruni's.

In Ray and in Divakaruni's writings, Krishna appears as a guide and comrade. Ray's Draupadi initially takes Krishna as her potential husband, but he requests her to relinquish her desires and only be guided by *dharma*. Draupadi agrees but her emotions come to the fore in the following way:

But what of me? The garland I had been weaving since the morning to put around Krishna's neck would have to be put around Arjun's. That too at Krishna's behest! Did I have no wish of my own, no desire, no craving simply because I was Yajnaseni-born of the sacrificial fire? My birth, life, and death—all were dictated by someone else. Why had I come and why should I remain alive? ... If you do not give me that strength, how shall I turn from a mere woman into a goddess? (Ray, 1995, pp. 23-24)

The extract consists of a series of questions and expressives (speech acts) that delineate the psychological state of Draupadi. The first question "what of me" presupposes her dejected state since she had dreamt of a future with Krishna and had woven a garland for him but then Krishna redirected her desires. The assertion (speech act) after that highlights the state of affairs and her broken heart. The "garland" becomes a symbol of her affection, and the change of names from Krishna to Arjun denotes the transfer of affection. The interrogative speech acts, the lexis "my own" and negation of "wish," "desire," and "craving" connote her helplessness and sadness. The fact that it was done at "Krishna's behest" and because she was born of "the sacrificial fire" shows that she has very little power in making her own choices and decisions, everything being regulated by destiny, *dharma*, and Krishna. This is reinforced by the lexis of the next statement—"birth," "life, and "death"—three important events that are not Draupadi's, exacerbating her helplessness and positioning her as a weaker party vis-à-vis *dharma*. The models "should" and "shall" in the last two questions signify her lack of choice yet her obligatory duty to follow *dharma*. The change from a "mere woman" to a "goddess" not only implies Krishna's support but presupposes that Draupadi has to adhere to principles, eschewing her feelings and desires. Each of the series of questions professes her despair and frustration, denoting what she does not and will not have in her life. She is positioned as powerless in the face of patriarchal norms and structures, yet voicing her views is her way of reclaiming her power against patriarchy.

Divakaruni's Draupadi is more opinionated and forceful than Ray's. She is both exasperated and happy with Krishna at different moments preceding the *svayamvara*, but she is furious with her father for arranging the event: "Why even call it a swayamvar, then?" I cried. 'Why make a

¹⁰ The fourfold classification of dividing society on the basis of castes into priests (*Brahmin*), warriors (*kshatriya*), merchants (*vaishya*), and laborers (*shudra*).

spectacle of me before all those kings? It's my father, not I, who gets to decide whom I'll marry'" (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 56). The interrogative mood and the lexis highlight her emotional state. The words "even" and "svayamvar" presuppose that the marriage event should not be called so; it appears to be her choice, but in reality Drupada's test for the groom is extremely difficult to achieve, which would result in making a "spectacle" of Draupadi before the kings. The cause-effect structure, Draupadi's assertive remark, and strong modality denote her father's authority and hence her anger. Herein like Ray's, Draupadi's prime decisions are made by others, including that of her marriage, but she gains power by resisting authority through her protest. In Buitenen's translation, there is neither power possessed by Draupadi nor any emotional articulation. Ray's Draupadi is disappointed and anguished, but Divakaruni's protagonist is assertive, forceful, and challenges others, even though her key life events remain the same.

Once Arjun, disguised as a Brahmin, wins the contest, Draupadi's interaction with him constructs her image in relation to ideal womanhood and wifely duties. In Divakaruni's text, a bleeding and barefoot Draupadi is vexed with Arjun for not attending to her but is appeased when he does so later. In Ray's retelling, when they are walking while conversing, Arjun teasingly asks her what she would do if Arjun is alive (until then his identity is unknown to her). She says the following:

If I find so noble a person at my door, I shall greet him with appropriate hospitality. The guest is Narayan. If I do not do so, my dharma as a housewife will be destroyed. Not only this, I shall request him to befriend my husband. My husband is Arjun in my eyes. So he will be another Arjun. It will be only natural if the two Arjuns become friends. (Ray, 1995, p. 52)

Draupadi's duties as a householder come to the fore in this extract. Her sense of hospitality, *dharma*, and piety are presupposed in the use of the conditional clauses and in the strong degree of a modality found in "guest is Narayan" and "dharma as a housewife." Moreover, her purity of heart, loyalty, and spousal admiration can be presupposed in her assertion that her husband is Arjun for her. Therefore, he can befriend the real Arjun, implying her virtue and hospitality. She is constructed as an ideal woman possessing all the qualities to discharge her *pravrtti dharma* (Dhand, 2008). Thus, in each of Draupadi's interactions with her suitors, she appears powerful or powerless, questioning patriarchy through her opinions and feelings.

Polyandry and *Dharma*

After the contest when Draupadi is announced as a prize by the Pandava brothers and unwittingly commanded by Kunti to be shared, the story remains the same yet the representation varies in all three texts. In Buitenen's text, marriage is considered a *dharmic* act and therefore Vyasa invites views on *dharma* and marriage from elders in the families:

Drupada—"In my view, it is a breach of the Law, contrary to Veda and the world, for one wife of many men is not found, good Brahmin."

Drishtadyumna—"But then, how can an elder brother have congress with the wife of his younger brother, brahmin, bull of the twice born, and still be strict in his virtue, ascetic? Surely, the Law is too subtle for us to know its course entirely! The likes of us cannot decide whether it is Law or a breach of Law."

Yudhisthir—"My voice does not tell a lie, nor does my mind dwell on lawlessness! As my thoughts favor it, it cannot be a breach of Law at all!"

Kunti—"It is as the law-obeying Yudhisthira says. My fear of lies is severe. How shall I escape the Lie?" (Buitenen, 1973, Chap. XIII verse 188.5-10)

Drupada forcefully asserts (speech act) that polyandry is unlawful, a "breach" of the Vedic laws, and his son Drishtadyumna questions the union between a man and his younger brother's wife. The speech act of questioning and contrasting sexual union with "strict" asceticism highlights his disapproval of the relationship as it presupposes the transgression of one's boundaries due to covetousness. Unlike the father's strong modality and one-pointed objection, the brother's argument is convoluted and toned down. He uses *dharma* to distance himself from it, as conveyed through the words "subtle," "law," and "breach of law," and he is not positioned as Draupadi's well-wisher. Contrary to him, Yudhisthir employs a series of declarations and strong modals "cannot" and "does not" in order to favor polyandry. He negates lying and lawlessness, providing proof of his sincerity and piety which becomes a reason to support polyandry. Since he is known as *Dharma Raja*, an embodiment of law, his speech acts personify the same. The lexis and the exclamative tone of his speech reinforce this. He later cites the example of a woman named Jatila who had relations with seven ancient sages to justify polyandry. Kunti supports Yudhisthir and refers to him as "law-obeying," enhancing his *dharmic* status. However, she is scared of her commandment being considered a lie and incurring sin, conveyed by the repetitive phrases "fear of lies," "escape the lie," and "severe" which goads her to support Yudhisthir instead of considering Draupadi's predicament. Kunti, thus, supports polyandry because of the fear of sinning, while Yudhisthir does so because of his obedience to his mother but also due to his feelings for Draupadi.

It is also important to note the feelings of the *Pandavas* for Draupadi in Buitenen's text:

They all stared at the glorious Krsna who stood there and sat looking at one another, holding her in their hearts. And as all these boundlessly lustrous men gazed at Draupadi their love became evident, churning their senses...Kunti's son Yudhisthira knew their manifest feelings; and remembering the entire declaration of Dvaipayana (Buitenen, 1973, Chap. XII, verse 182.11-15)

On Kunti's command, when the younger brothers look towards Yudhisthir, Buitenen's text employs vivid lexis to highlight their feelings for Draupadi. Their actions of staring, "looking at one another," "holding her in their hearts," "churning their senses," and "manifest feelings" all denote their strong attraction towards her and therefore Yudhisthir chose to keep them united through polyandry, keeping in view Vyasa's prediction of their marriage. Therefore, his actions are not solely due to *dharma* but also due to attraction/lust. Though the apparent focus is on *dharma* in marriage, each of the speakers has a vested interest and a stance, unmindful of what Draupadi would want or think. Each of the speakers is a man or an authoritative figure, marginalizing Draupadi in this important decision. In fact, Draupadi is later shown to cheerfully obey her mother-in-law without any complaints or emotion and marries the *Pandavas*.

In Ray's retelling, there is a greater focus on Draupadi's psychological state and reactions. On hearing Kunti's command and Yudhisthir's decision, Draupadi is livid (in the lines below) denoted

through the use of the interrogative speech acts and vivid vocabulary:

Why should I silently bear such an insult? Was I a lifeless statue? Lust-crazed by my beauty, bereft of reason and judgment, would these brothers impose upon me their whimsical authority and should I accept that? (Ray, 1995, p. 56)

Hearing my husband's words, I flared up. I wished I could turn into a searing flame of the sacrificial fire and destroy the world and in it these five brothers too. (Ray, 1995, p. 57)

I was not pained by the words of Gurudev Dvaipayana. I was astonished, taken aback. I thought in this world no one invited blame upon himself. Everyone was busily shifting the responsibility onto others to remain blameless. (Ray, 1995, p. 59)

In these lines, her situation is contrasted with the brothers. She is portrayed as a "lifeless statue" without feeling and opinion and is expected to "bear such an insult," presupposing a lack of dissent on her part towards polyandry. In contrast, the *Pandavas* are accused by her of being "lust-crazed," "bereft of reason and judgment," and possessing "whimsical authority." Her objectified status vis-à-vis masculine desire is thus constructed. Through Draupadi's accusations, the brothers are represented as ordinary mortals, controlled by desires, possessing a patriarchal attitude, and not considering what she might want. On hearing Arjun's submission to his brother in sharing Draupadi to fulfill his mother's command, her anger surges and is connoted in figurative language such as "flared," "searing flame," "sacrificial fire," and "destroy." Since she is born of fire, her emotion of fire/anger targets the destruction of everything including the *Pandavas* for not considering her choice. Even though she does not commit such an act, Ray gives her enough power by voicing her fury to challenge her subjugation.

Her anger changes to surprise on witnessing everyone's behavior. Not only does Arjun agree with his elders, but Vyasa, instead of guiding, distances himself, passing the responsibility of choice on Draupadi. Her assertive speech acts, the contrast between "blame" and "blameless" and the words "pained" and "astonished" denote her emotional state as no one wants to decide, fearing blame, but they make Draupadi do so for the same reason, othering her all the more. The apparent freedom of the *svayamvara* is challenged as Draupadi is bound by the decision of others. Finally, subduing her anger and frustration, she decides to enter into a polyandrous marriage, sacrificing herself:

If I did not take five husbands then my renown as a sati would increase, but thereby Mother's words would not be honored, and the *Pandavas* would not be able to safeguard the truth. The establishment of dharma on earth would be hindered. Therefore, I should sacrifice myself. (Ray, 1995, p. 63)

This declaration (speech act) is both physical and emotional and an indictment of everyone involved. Her justification (through the use of the conditional clause) pits her piety as *sati* against Kunti's order and *Pandavas'* *dharma*. The phrase "renown as sati" indicates piety by not marrying which is in contrast to the declaration to sacrifice herself (that denotes infamy). Since *Pandavas* are equated with the words "truth" and "*dharma*," her sacrifice is the price for the greater good. Unlike Buitenen, Ray constructs Draupadi as an ordinary woman undergoing different emotions

before accepting her fate. Ironically, she assumes power through the articulation of her emotions, highlighting her oppression, accusation of patriarchal attitudes, and the sacrificial choice she is forced to make.

In Divakaruni's text, Draupadi views Kunti as a strong and sharp woman who is committed to the unity and survival of her sons. On the first night after the contest, Kunti deliberately gives her very few ingredients to cook food, smirking at her inability to do so as a princess but is surprised when her sons appreciate her culinary skills. Divakaruni's Draupadi is shocked at the heated conversation between Drupada and Yudhisthir. Unlike Buitenen's text, here the focus is not on *dharma* but on threats and Draupadi's oppressed status:

Drupada—"To say nothing of the reputation of the royal house of Panchaal!" my father added. "Draupadi would most likely have to take her own life, and then we'd have to hunt you down and kill you in revenge."

Yudhisthir—"The choice is yours," Yudhisthir said, without heat. (Was that calmness a façade, or was he truly unshakable in the face of threats?) "An honorable life for the princess as a daughter-in-law of Hastinapur—or a death you force upon her." (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 117-118)

Drupada objects to polyandry due to the reputation of his house and the insult that Draupadi would bear, leading to her suicide. He threatens the *Pandavas* with death if that happens. His vociferous speech acts are calmly answered by Yudhisthir, giving him the choice to either consent to Draupadi's polyandry or her death. The phrases "honorable life" and "daughter-in-law of Hastinapur" presuppose the fame and status Draupadi would have in polyandry as a daughter-in-law. The clause "death you force upon her" highlights the ignominy and shame she would carry being unmarried. While Drupada is constructed as the protector, Yudhisthir positions him as the cause of his daughter's potential death, gaining an upper hand. Draupadi's disapproval of Yudhisthir can be seen in her questioning his "façade of calmness." In fact, she is utterly unhappy with the conditions of marriage and Arjun's behavior, blaming Kunti for her plight.

In a later set of passages, Divakaruni constructs Draupadi as feeling insulted, equated to a "communal drinking cup" shared by many against her wish:

Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it or not. Nor was I particularly delighted by the virginity boon, which seemed designed more for my husbands' benefit than mine. (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 120)

My heart sank as I saw that he'd made me the target of the frustrated rage that he couldn't express toward his brothers or his mother. I blamed Kunti for this development. She knew her son's psychology: if he couldn't have me all to himself, he didn't want me at all. (Divakaruni, 2008, p. 122)

The negation of her desire is pointed out by the phrase "wanted it or not" and by her exposing patriarchal attitudes. The virginity boon presupposes the need for a chaste virgin as a wife (despite the *Pandavas* knowing that they were all marrying her) and therefore shows a strong sense of misogyny. Moreover, she is upset by Arjun's displaced anger. Their emotional states denoted by the words "heart sank" and "frustrated rage" position them as powerless vis-à-vis polyandry, yet

Draupadi's desire for Arjun makes her more helpless than him. Unlike Ray's retelling, here Draupadi accuses Kunti about her marriage, constructing her as a cunning mother-in-law who toyed with Arjun's emotions to unite the brothers. The conditional and the focus on wanting and relinquishing all show Arjun's state of mind, while the assertion and the verb "blamed" connotes Draupadi's resentment towards Kunti. Divakaruni's Draupadi is observant and forceful. She experiences anger and resentment and exposes patriarchal convention. Although her fate is sealed, she gains power and agency by issuing strong judgments and accusations about the behavior of others.

Conclusion

Draupadi's polyandrous marriage is a crucial thread in the narrative of the *Mahabharata*, changing the lives of those involved. Drawing on the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis and the linguistic tools of speech acts, presupposition, vocabulary, and modality, this paper examines Draupadi's construction and position vis-à-vis others in her marriage in three texts by Buitenen, Ray, and Divakaruni, emphasizing the differing representations in each. Via assertive statements and evaluative vocabulary, Buitenen's text constructs an ideal image of Draupadi, through bodily beauty and virtue. Past is linked to present and polyandry to *dharma* as the stance of each patriarchal stakeholder is exposed while marginalizing Draupadi. Her obedience to convention endorses her ideal womanhood in a male-dominated society. Unlike Buitenen's male perspective, Ray and Divakaruni's Draupadi is more humanized. Through the use of assertions, interrogatives, and strong modality, Ray's Draupadi articulates her emotions, demonstrating her lack of choice vis-à-vis her relation with others while Divakaruni's Draupadi is more forceful, questioning the *svayamvara*, voicing her dissent on being shared in marriage, and accusing Yudhisthir and Kunti for her predicament. Divakaruni's Draupadi is powerful in her interaction with Karna while that of Ray appears sympathetic, being regulated by Krishna. Employing vivid vocabulary and presuppositions, both the women writers depict the helplessness of Draupadi but reclaim her power through the voicing of her emotions and accusations of patriarchal behavior, underscoring misogynistic, patriarchal attitudes of the *Pandavas* and her oppression. Ironically, her othering in the marriage process allows her to resist authority and see through the power play of others. Such agency and forcefulness in the construction of Draupadi cannot be seen in Buitenen's text.

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