Rewriting Cultural Women: Presentation and Representation of Draupadi in Select Indian Re-Writing

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Abstract: The present paper investigates the representation of the memory of the cultural scripts by contemporary writers and the phenomenology of cultural memory associated at individual and group levels. The knowledge and power structure existing for a long time and the forces struggling to talk about the silence and the gaps in the representation of women in society and social memory through literary narratives is been taken into great consideration while discussing several mythological representations within re-writing. The purpose and the relevance of discussing the re-writing from the point of view of finding the reason for those gaps that existed between the genders are done to foreground the memory structure and the retrieval that fills up the blank aspects of the female self in the character of Draupadi and its presentation in new writings, within linguistic space as revolted by feminists to reshape the intentionally fixed gender identities.

Religious and mythological beliefs are one of those long-term memory structures because of the time, repetition, and acceptance by large societies that affect social life every day. These stories have male and female characters but the quality of certain (mostly female) characters or the manner of representation is important to be considered. Here, the story is although similar, the characters are also the same, the manner of representation of Draupadi is molded in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, and Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi,* to fit in the contemporary model of female idealism. The question arises- why do women study these old characters from mythic tales when they were so doomed to silence by patriarchy? Now that we are out of that unknown space where the traditional female characters suffered why do we need to re-visit them? What can we learn from them and their life and why do they still hold space in our memory? The answer is in our ideology as still when a woman is pictured the stereotypes associated with them is never forgotten and so it becomes a necessity of present to re-shape and re-write the historical memory to infuse new image of a female and find out what disappeared, what remained, and, what emerges with time.

Keywords: **Rewriting, Mythology, Women rewriting, Cultural Scripts.**

The birth of all thinking is the upbringing and the environment of the person. Nature and nurture play an equally important role in shaping one's personality and ideology. As, famous literary thinker, Louis Althusser (From 'Ideology and the State' 1969 essay) says, "Ideology is a 'Representation' of the Imaginary Relationship of Individual to their Real Conditions of Existence"(Waugh 55). This subsumes the imaginary and material nature of ideology and the hegemonic forces exercise control on the human subjects through these imaginary and material substances and as a result 'Ideology Interpellates Individuals As Subjects'. The cognition of the structure in a definite manner automatically shapes the individuals to follow as a guide. Varied forces too play their part in creating a hegemonic ideology stagnant. Althusser named them as, first, Ideological State Apparatus (Religion, family, education, legal, political, etc.., forces that belong to private domain) and Second, Repressive State Apparatus (the forces that belong to the public domain). The role of conventional women in one way or the other is in a way fashioned by these ISA and RSAs and thus there has been constantly writing and rewriting done to understand the constructive nature of the ideological Apparatuses working in society and culture.

Jeffrey K. Olick in his essay, " From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products" expresses the power of the religious and historic facts or belief that guides us, by saying, "There are long terms structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individual to escape them" (156 Erll and Nunning). Religious and mythological beliefs are one of those long-term memory structures because of the time, repetition, and acceptance by large societies that affect social life every day. These stories have male and female characters but the quality of certain (mostly female) characters or the manner of representation is important to be considered. According to Trisha Das (Writer), "it is

important for a modern woman to acknowledge what her historical counterpart went through to get to the present day. There was a process for us to get here. The fact that women today get an opportunity to receive a higher education can choose whom they marry- this was a process. It didn't happen over one or two generations. It happened over hundreds of years. It is important to acknowledge where women started, and how far we have come". The purpose to take such a traditional topic to discuss the role of women is done with the purpose to map out this growth in the traditional and modern standards of freedom for genders. Draupadi, the traditional character has newness in her manner of representation that helps fill the gaps of missing female voices. With the discussion on every scene, we will discover how the writer is using her privilege to write in favor of gender equality and how she gives a new and required voice to the female characters within the traditional system.

Through her book *The Palace of Illusions,* Divakaruni tries to keep forward a life that needs readers to understand the issues and perspective of Draupadi, a strong female lead of the ancient mythological narrative Mahabharata. The book moves in a progressive, chronological manner by depicting a story from the birth of Draupadi till her death in her own words and through her mind, and also with an emphasis on prominent scenes related to her personal life that were never narrated by Patriarchal narratives. Through the book, readers came across the retelling of the similar epic tale of Mahabharta, but from the perspective of Draupadi, who has gone through a lot of major incidents but was never seen as the center of the action as men took all the attention by the mythological writers for a long period. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is practicing the tradition of repetition in supporting the female voice and identity through her narrative and imaginative reconstruction of the missing perspective.

For Draupadi, her appearance made her different from the traditional princess model. Her dark complexion defies the idea of beauty associated with fair skin. Draupadi no doubt had the personality that made her look different from other females in the crowd; to her, it was the mental quest that was important. It is the fire within her that made her glow more attractive inside out. The characters of other females that surround her are observed by her in a different light, she finds Princess and commoner, both are the bearer of the same traditional role. She compares herself with women who surround her and she says, ". . . they don't know how to escape out of the place if they wish to" (Divakaruni 43). But Draupadi considers her story to be different as predicted; she wanted to explore how she could change history.

The word 'Unlike' goes with the personality of Draupadi, as the writer presents her in the book. She speaks in the first person about her outlook towards her childhood. Draupadi compares her upbringing with that of Dhrishtadyumna and marks out the differences by pointing out the discrimination that exists in society between genders. As discussed earlier Draupadi being a girl was kept in the territories of the women's chamber while Dhri was moving freely in the palace wherever he wants. The brother was even given the education of several disciplines while Draupadi had to secretly make her way to learn those lessons. She was caught many a time as the knowledge that she wants to have is what she is not supposed to get, it is exclusively for males. She was forced to follow what other female members were doing even if she does not want to. Draupadi was told to follow the advice of Dhai Ma and be like princess Sulochana, the queen's mother. But to Draupadi, they were not in an ideal role to be copied but living a dictated life being a patriarchal female, who pleases males by their ignorance to worldly knowledge and state affairs. About her outward behavior that is condemned by everyone she quotes, "they suspect anything that fell outside the borders of custom. They accept men like Dhri but women?" (Divakaruni). The writer joins the tradition of re-writing to normalize the acceptance of women in unconventional roles.

Draupadi in her words, "You need to be your savior", gives out the message and reality of women empowerment. Draupadi as a character has seen discrimination, inaction and in narration, in learning and education, marriage, choices, decision, power, freedom, slavery, voicing out, etc. By the end we see her as a lady constantly expressed her non-suppressing attitude towards the dominant ideology. She features herself in a completely new light and labels herself as a rebel always. She lived a life of rebellion, that the writer gives the main focus. The change suggested by the writer was the requirement of age, as Gerarld Echterhoff in his essay titled "Language and Memory: Social and Cognitive Processes", "When the same event is verbalized and expressed differently it is also remembered differently" (263). Differences in representation and evaluation may also shape how the incident is later remembered. The female in the present time wants to change the treatment towards their sex and so she has to alter the cultural roots in the discourse, and the book "The Palace of Illusions" is an attempt to do it. Jurgen Straub also determines the importance of such autobiographical writings and their relevance so as, "measure where and how we change and remained the same" (292).

In the book *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* male features the dictator, whose role is to preserve Dharma, by imposing the responsibilities (in name of necessary actions), on the woman to carry it forward. Krishnaa's own life as a girl, daughter, wife, friend, and lover is directed by several male contenders who decided the rules for her conduct. The only way male exercises his control over a woman is by driving her back into silence and never gave her any other memory than that of a silence that makes up all her dharma as wife, mother, daughter, and in every other role. Discourse existing in society does not show concern towards the females (and others, considered as inferior to the dominant group), is because there is no authentic information available about the life and story of these marginalized sex. Stories exist as a figure of memory of a certain time and place and the impact of this formation and maintenance of memory depend largely upon the reappearance of the story in different forms repeatedly. In the same tradition of repetition of women representation, Pratibha Ray made her contribution to feminist literature through this book, by giving space to Draupadi to be seen as a new woman. Ray, is a writer from Odisha, her writings are translated into English that got her national acclaim. Her career started as a school teacher and lead on to a professional writer, and academician. She received the Moortidevi award in 1991 for the Novel *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 2000 for the short story Collection Ullaghna and Jananpith award in the year 2011.

(Draupadi or) Krishnaa too had this silence, but the book offers us to read her mind. Draupadi's life was now all about being a good wife to all her husbands. Each husband was greedy enough to have Draupadi more than the other, and it is this need of the woman in life that Arjun, or as Pratibha Ray named him, Phalguni, was upset and wanted to punish Draupadi for accepting the division. It was Phalguni, who was Draupadi's choice, and even Phalguni wanted her back; but now being the wife of all five brothers, it was getting difficult to please everyone. Even in her sickness, she took care of Bheem, and, Yudhishthira. To get close to Draupadi for a while, as Krishna sensed this, Phalguni got injured and need instant care. Draupadi being wife had to keep them happy, and she did that silently even when she was sick. That is how womanhood is glorified in cultural texts in which females no

matter what, never fails at pleasing the male in her life. Draupadi too was enticed within the web of glorified womanhood that she had no expression of her interests and comfort in her life.

The suppressed emotion and discomforts that are culturally expected from a female have guilt involved in the expression of those emotions. Draupadi being the wife of Yudhishthir that year had to give her time to Arjun and Bheem for unavoidable reasons finds herself not happy but guilty of not being at service to Yudhishthir. Division among five brothers did not give her a life full of only duties towards them but insults too. Presenting Draupadi's character in the light of feminism is important to understand the circumstances of the character in her time and the challenges that she had to face at that period. How Patriarchy still governs female gender based on those rules and norms they laid down in the name of cultural history? The memory of these stories and narratives still compels females to be mutilated. C. T. Mohanty too in her essay puts up the cultural image of women as, "assumed to be sexual-political subjects before entry into kinship structures" (342).

We sense Silence in the character of Draupadi based on traditional reading but this book *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* offers thoughts that run through her mind for every character. Karna and Arjun both managed to get her attention, which she admits, but in silence. Her life, full of insults is somewhat similar to that of Karna, as both fall in the category where no power lies in their hand. The only difference is that of gender and that creates a huge gap between them. Draupadi being a female has no space of her own to exercise her voice and tell her story to others.

The cultural narrative framed the memories and memory structures concerning the female gender in a particular fashion of confinement and limitations from which every woman has tried hard to move out and attain equal stature as every other Man. These women were rebuked by society for going against the system of suffering in suppression and make a way to lead other women out of a culture of limitations. The narratives of the present time map out the ongoing scenario related to gender struggle and Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, and, Chita Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, adds to the culture of change. Ray and Divakaruni, both believe in the act of writing as it is an action against forgetting and it helps society generate compassion towards the unknown miseries of women, their gender, and equal representation. As Ann Rigney (Dublin, 9 December 1957), an Irish/Dutch cultural scholar and Professor of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University, quotes, "Remarks of earlier texts and the remediation of earlier texts in new media also represent important means of keeping earlier narratives "up to date", that is memorable according to the norms of the new group" (The Dynamics of Remembrance 351). In the similar fashion of keeping the narratives 'up to date, the constant presence of women in the form of words and speech would help the culture to accept its deformity from the female perspective, in the age-old structures and will infuse the change, at the cognitive level of collective memory. For this Re-writing is a must; Repetition is mandatory; and Representation is the only way to liberate 'Language' and 'Ideology', of its patriarchal fixation.

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