

## YAJNASENI: Exploring Indian Mythology through a Feminine Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Portraying Krishnaa in the form of Yajnaseni, the author is placing her before the culture – loving readers of our country. The name of a lady known to the writer was Krishnaa. Leaving her debauched drunkard husband, she is living with her father. Everyone said Krishnaa should remarry. But in our society, today, the remarriage of one discarded by her husband is not that simple and easy. To divert her mind, Krishnaa went to her brother in West Germany. Sometime later, she married a young man there. She has two children now, one son and a daughter. Her conjugal life is comfortable. But the peculiar thing is that those who were advising her to get remarried started to comment saying – The Krishnaa of Mahabharata took five husbands, but still not being satisfied, was attracted to Karna and Krishna.

The incident mentioned above kept pricking the writer, hence the origin of this novel “Yajnaseni”. This kind of mockery and sarcastic comment brought about a deep grief and sorrow. The root of her sorrow was such thoughtless words for the unique, learned, devoted and powerful woman; **Krishnaa** of Dvarpayuga. This can be the individual view of someone. But how far do we know KRISHNAA? How much knowledge do we have of the majesty of the Mahabharata and of its noble culture? The writer comments thus saying :

**“THE BLIND HAVE GATHERED TO LOOK AT THE ELEPHANT “**

### I. INTRODUCTION

Strange as it may appear, Draupadi, the most accomplished heroine of the Mahabharata, happens to be the most suffering, sacrificing and yet the most misunderstood character from the epic. Pratibha Ray makes a determined effort for a balanced portrayal of the epic character and brings to the surface the broader and deeper aspects of Draupadi’s mind that lay submerged in the majestic sweep of the grand Mahabharata. Through her stories, Pratibha Ray has tried to unravel the mysteries of society. Her themes deal with :

- Innumerable strains of modern life
- Alienation of individuals
- Hedonistic philosophy
- Corruption
- Politics
- Moral degradation

Pratibha Ray was awarded the Bharatiya Jnanpith's 9th Moortidevi award in 1993 for this remarkable and particular novel.

### **Personality of Yajnaseni**

Yajnaseni is an award winning 1984 Odia language novel. It is translated by Pradip Bhattacharya in the English language – a retelling of Mahabharata from the view point of Draupadi ( a feminine perspective ).The name --- Yajnaseni means woman born out of fire. From the sacred flames of sacrificial fire, yajnaseni was born like *a blue – lotus colored gem*. People said of her as exquisitely beautiful, amazing, complexion like the *petals of blue lotus*. *Thick hair* like the waves of the ocean and large entrancing blue lotus – like *eyes* radiant with intelligence. Like *an image* sculpted by the world's greatest sculptor, with unblemished beauty of face and matching loveliness of figure. *Tall well – formed breasts*, narrow *waist*, plantain stalk like rounded firm *thighs*, *fingers and toes* like champak petals, *palms and toes* like red lotuses, pearl like *teeth*, a *smile* that shamed even lightning, moon like *nails*. The lotus fragrance of the body deluded even bees. The *serpentine* loveliness of *her hair* would imprison even the breeze into stillness. She was described by the poets as depriving even sages of their senses.

In white garments, wearing a white crown and holding a white lotus, when yajnaseni appeared like a *blooming blue lotus* on the sacrificial altar, every part of her body was resplendent with youth. The sages thought that perhaps *mighty time stood still* at that moment.

People described her as “Dark Beauty – “*Shyama*”.

A person born with this name loves freedom, self- expression and dislike restraints of any kind. They have quick intelligent minds which are particularly adept at *seeking out, finding* and *expressing* the truth. They are termed as *keen observers* with *deep understanding* and capable of *analyzing, judging and discriminating* facts from fiction in all situations.

### **YAJNASENI – THE STORY OF DRAUPADI**

In the original epic she is the wife of the five Pandava brothers, the protagonists. This book makes Draupadi into the protagonist. Readers who are unfamiliar with the original tale will probably find this book confusing .This tale is being told from a female perspective.It is written by an Indian for Indians.Therefore, it is expected that the readers should have some knowledge about the story and character of Draupadi.

Lord Krishna believes in love at its purest form. It is one consciousness that unites one soul to another and all together we unite towards the supreme being. The crux of this novel is mainly about Lord Krishna's love towards his creation. The beauty and grandeur of chanting his mere name brings peace and tranquility to the heart. When Draupadi initially asks her favorite sakhi Nitambini about Krishna, she describes him as

--- a person of wisdom and nobility

--- Far- seeing

--- Master of politics

--- Powerful and heroic

---he accepts with one hand and gifts with a thousand

--- A libertine (someone who is sexually immoral and do not care about the effect their behavior has on other people.

---adept in winning female heart

---enchanted flute

---receptacle of the finest qualities

---mesmerizing appearance

Lord Krishna is closely associated with the colour of blue .The writer describes Krishna as :

- --blue tamal tree
- --blue black clouds
- --eyes like blue lilies
- --hair of sapphire blue peacock feathers
- --lips curved, lovely like agastya flowers
- --hands and feet like lotus buds
- --chest, broad like the blue sky
- --voice like cuckoo's spring call
- --fragrance of his body like henna
- --height , tall like champak tree
- --embrace, honeyed and intoxicating.

Speaking about her first love, Draupadi talks regarding her immense love towards Krishna. There is poetry in the heart of every human being. Some pour it out in writing and others do not. She feels the scent of henna flowers filling the garden through a gust of breeze and falling of tamal flowers on her. The thrill of those subtle feelings was limitless and indescribable. Seeing the love of draupadi towards Krishna sage vedvyas suggests that she should be named "Thrishnaa" instead of "Krishnaa".When Draupadi immerses herself completely with the love of Krishna, things take an unimaginable turn.

Draupadi was born to conquer the enemies of her father. Her very birth has a special purpose – a purpose of vengeance but here she is immensely in love and lost by Krishna's invisible yet all – pervading presence.

"For conquering external enemies we need first to conquer the internal that is the senses"

Krishna advices Draupadi to give up:

- ----desires
- ----cravings
- ----mind
- ----heart
- ----intellect

For the establishment of Dharma, for the sake of nobler cause, selfish interests should be sacrificed. That is what establishes life's nobility. With this noble advice from lord Krishna himself, Draupadi transforms herself into a child like embodiment and wonders "*how pleasurable, delicate, delicate, simple, pure* ignorance of infancy is? "

These are the excellent and marvelous lines by the author describing the pathetic state of a woman's heart who is inexplicably in love with him.

In these modern times, will any women dare to accept this kind of advice from a person with whom she is truly in love with?

Of course, for a nobler cause, Krishna pacifies Draupadi by saying that he has a part of share in whatever Arjun is having. Just as he consumes his craving for food, when Arjun offers him food before eating, in the similar manner, Krishna promises to be with Draupadi where her subtlest essence is eternal and immortal. At that very moment, she splits into two. Her subtlest essence merged into his deep blue radiant essence. The other portion remains as the body of Draupadi, amid *earthly pleasures*.

Draupadi laments in her heart of hearts ---- "leaving dharma aside, what meaning will my life hold? Is there life without grief? Where there is sorrow there is Krishna. He is a friend of the sorrowful. Krishna was the life and soul of Arjun's body. Therefore she surrenders herself before his character and his soul.

Pg- 45 According to Krishna, any women, irrespective of age, caste, religion, country is worthy of man's respect. For, a women is formed out of SHAKTHI and without worshipping her, a man can never become successful. Tears have a value in life – there is loveliness in shedding of tears. These tear drops of yours are reflecting the vermilion rays of the rising sun, enhancing the beauty of her face. Draupadi is the epitome of a good Hindu wife following the path of dharma. It would be quite difficult to read yajnaseni if its *motive* was only to entertain its reader. Pratibha Ray portrays Draupadi as a tragic character because of the *faulty moral beliefs of her time*. e. *Dvaparyuga*. It is written for us to admire her for her ever- enduring qualities of *submission* and *adherence* to her wifely dharma.

Happiness is born only out of the mist of enigma. Our own happiness and another person's envy are inextricably linked together. Our own good fortune scorches someone else. Without knowing why somebody is laughing, another person cannot laugh. But seeing someone's tears and grief, even without understanding the main cause of his pain, a person can feel pained. Sadness affects others. In case of Draupadi, the queen of pandavas, she is forced into a polygamous marriage, thought out the story, she is forced to live in the forest, forced into scheduled patterns to spend with her 5 husbands, has her children killed in war and finally humiliated in court. She laments

***"How painful it is for a woman to have her beauty on display before scholars and priests, yet they were incapable of sensing this."***

### ***The cultural shocks in some of the literary writings of today?***

Mahabharata is a unique work conferred with the status of Dharmashastra or a moral code of conduct because of the high moral characters portrayed in it and the moral teachings imparted through it.

Character assassination is receiving active encouragement from very unusual quarters including connoisseurs of art and culture.

In the recent past, Yajnaseni was translated into Sanskrit from Odia and published by none other than the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan.

It is no exaggeration that the character of Draupadi in the original Mahabharata is an embodiment of goodness, morality and unusual strength of mind. Moral corruption in the character of Draupadi either in her pre-marital or post-marital life is beyond the ambit of all imagination.

Mahabharata, which is a code of moral conduct, can never portray its heroine having love for one and marrying the other. But Draupadi in Yajnaseni has no moral compunction and commitment and does not mind shifting her heart from one person to another in no time

Throughout the whole story, the Draupadi of Pratibha Ray laments every now and then about the wrong declaration of her brother. At one point of time she says with great lamentation that Karna would have been her most suitable husband had her brother not resisted Karna's hitting the bull's eye. She admits openly that her mind is attracted towards Karna and justifies her immoral wish by saying "***who in this world can keep his mind under control***" ?

The Draupadi of Pratibha Ray is overwhelmed with delight when Karna holds a blue rose in his hand to present it to her. "Till now my husbands do not know that I am fond of blue rose" she resents.

When Arjuna is out in a time-bound exile for twelve years and marries again, the Draupadi of Pratibha Ray is so upset that she goes out for a water sport (swimming) in the Yamuna. In course of swimming she is taken away by the current of the river and rescued by Karna. When lifted by Karna she enjoys the embrace of Karna to her heart's content. This is another fantasy of Pratibha Ray to destroy Draupadi's character.

There are many expressions of Draupadi which exceed the limits of morality of a married woman. On one occasion when she is waiting for Arjuna at night, she is asking to herself whether she is waiting for Arjuna or Krishna.

The writer in her introduction of the book claims that the love of Draupadi for Krishna depicted in the novel is a ***spiritual love***.

In spite of all these allegations and controversial theories by many writers, the character of Draupadi is very noble, born to fulfill a noble cause. There is yet another angle or perspective of yajnaseni purely from a woman's point of view that is her secret love for ***karna***.

### ***The Relationship of Draupadi with Karna***

- ***Sympathy*** - to ask forgiveness (During the swayamvar, in the hall, she laments saying what is the sense of being learned or scholarly if I did not honor the valiant appropriately. Therefore she decides to ask for his forgiveness for not allowing him to participate at the swayamvar for the only reason that he was not Kshatriya.)
- Karna welcomes Draupadi to Hastinapur with a huge lovely bouquet of blue roses. As soon as her sight falls on those blue roses, she feels extremely ***delighted*** and thinks in her heart that even though she has stayed long enough with Yudhishtir, he was completely unaware of many secrets of her mind.
- Karna feels a sense of ***remorse*** when a thorn from his bouquet of blue roses pierces Draupadi's tender feet letting a tiny drop of blood ooze from her leg. He tries to explain himself to Draupadi saying – I know what

the pain of being deliberately tormented in public is like. *Physical pain is much lighter than the agony of the mind.*

- Draupadi's mind becomes *weak, unstable and aimless* whenever she thinks of Karna.
- She says with great *lamentation* that Karna would have been her most suitable husband had her brother not resisted Karna's hitting the bull's eye. She admits openly that her mind is attracted towards Karna and justifies her immoral wish by saying "who in this world can keep his mind under control".
- In course of swimming she is taken away by the current of the river and rescued by Karna. When lifted by Karna she enjoys the embrace of Karna to her heart's content.
- Draupadi's *infatuation* towards Karna is further understood when Karna abuses and Draupadi shamelessly tolerates all the insults when Karna denies food from Draupadi since she is like a harlot. And surprisingly this insolence does not arouse Draupadi's anger for Karna but her heart is filled with hatred for her own husbands.
- When she is in Indraprastha, Karna comes as a guest and Pratibha Ray's Draupadi, at the behest of Kunti, cooks food for Karna and takes it to the guesthouse for him.
- Although in the whole Mahabharata there is not a single occasion when Draupadi has a dialogue with Karna, in her self-written Mahabharata, Pratibha Ray has created situations every now and then for an audience or a dialogue between Karna and Draupadi.
- After Karna's death, Krishna tries to console Kunti saying, Man is bound both by divine power and manhood. If either is lacking, then like Karna, despite having everything, one is frustrated in every act.

At the time of Karna's death, Draupadi says in comparison with Arjuna, an egoless life is impossible. But discarding the petty ego, nurture a noble pride. That petty pride of Karna was the pride of his own ego. Arjuna too is not devoid of ego, but his pride is noble. This is the only difference between the two. Otherwise in valor, prowess, manliness they are equal.

Beautiful women have been tormented and insulted throughout the ages by lust-blinded men. There are few such instances in the Puranas but in the history of the civilized world it is a goose-flesh raising event. On account of her *outstanding chastity*, Krishna remains one out of the *fivesatis*. But on account of having accepted five husbands for the sake of noble cause of dharma; she was and is still abused by the common man. But it is her *self-confidence, sacrifice, dedication and strength of character* that never gave way. In repentance for the wrong doings of her present life, she asks her beloved Krishna to annihilate her for her drawbacks. She laments at the time of her death to free her from the chains of worldly pleasures. He who is not separate from Krishna is a true devotee. Draupadi places her requests at the lotus feet of Krishna, thus saying...

- Whatever has happened in her life let it not be repeated again in any other woman's life. Lay down a rule that any woman will never have several husbands at a time. The pain of being divided is known to me.
- Do not let even the enemy grieve for their children. There is no grief in this world greater than this.
- The pain that she has endured in the court. Let no other woman ever go through this. Make women beautiful but do not make men lustful.

- Inequality is the variety of your creation. Let not the integrity, unity and purity of any country be destroyed by this.
- O Savior in distress, Krishna, on the destruction of this world, it is you who will labor for a new creation and civilization.
- Be the guardian for the welfare of creation, national integrity and world unity.
- I do not want MOKSHA, salvation, not even liberation. It is rebirth that I crave
- If anyone reaches SVARG in his own body, it will be yudhishtir. To go far from earth in order to attain svarg, is his life-long sadhana.
- Instead of undergoing the suffering of reaching svarg in one's own body, the effort to turn one's own motherland into a heaven will be preferable.
- For the faults of this life, give me rebirth and on this same sacred earth.

***YOU CANNOT LOVE GOD IF YOU DETEST MAN.***

- O greatest of lovers, let me be born as a lover, let me be born again and again as the beloved of Krishna and a lover of the world.

Draupadi realizes the *Krishna consciousness* of great Bharata. Spirituality and the feeling for dharma will touch the consciousness of all mankind. The meaning of KRISHNA is darkness. It is darkness that is the *womb giving birth to light*. Therefore a world enveloped in the darkness of danger and difficulty and error can only be uplifted through *spiritual consciousness*.

Draupadi pleads Krishna to be the path-finder of the whole world in friendship and peace. O creator Krishna! for the faults in my present birth, let me be born again and again in this land of Bharata. Even for a moment, with *the hand of a worker, the eyes of knower, the heart of a devotee*, let me be born for your sake, die for your sake ! It is you who are the world, the Universe. Living and dying for you means living and dying for the world. *More than attaining heaven in this body, it is the soul's attaining heaven that I like.*

On the way to death, instead of your name, it is the voice of your flute that is on my lips-----Om Shanthi, Om Shanthi, Om Shanthi !

Finally the writer ends the story of Draupadi saying that caught in the bonds of Maya, she did not understand the love of Krishna which was extended towards her at all times. In the realization of attaining the lotus feet of lord Krishna lies the fulfillment of mankind. May the sound of the enchanting flute keep playing in the inner being of universal mankind -----Om Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthi !.

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